



What's New?

It's been another terrific year. We've really started to settle into our home-schooling lifestyle and everyone is having a great time. We've had lots of interesting adventures and we're all busily learning, all the time!

Good-Bye Cottage!

This spring my Dad sold his cottage at Dickey Lake so we had our good-bye visit in February, spending a week up there enjoying the snow.



Now that's a snowball!

One day we spent the entire afternoon on the lake, rolling a huge snowball, hiking across the lake to "Daddy Island", and eventually making a snowman big enough to see from the cottage!

Our Western Expedition

This past June we took an adventurous two week trip out west. It started out with a flight to Los Angeles, then an overnight train ride to Tucson, Arizona where we picked up our RV. First we spent two nights at Kartchner Caverns State Park where we hiked and toured the caves. Next we made our way north to Grand Canyon National Park, stopping at Montezuma's Castle along the way.



Sharing the view with a small friend

We spent three nights there and hiked some of the many trails. Breathtaking views! Alyssa and Michael completed the Junior Ranger program and received their Junior Ranger badges. Not to mention Michael receiving 2 black eyes in an encounter with a concrete patio!

As we made our way south again, we stopped for our last 2 nights in Black Canyon City. Then we returned the RV, took the overnight train back to LA, and flew to Calgary, Alberta. From there we rented a car and traveled the 3 hours to Fernie, BC.

The condo we rented from friends is at the base of the mountain at Fernie Alpine Resort. During the week we hiked the trail along the river just behind the condo, watched movies in the outdoor hot tub, (mainly the "Back To The Future" trilogy - lots of time travel discussions!), and hiked up the mountain along a ski run accompanied by a pair of deer on the way up and a field of prairie dogs on the way down!



Rocco and Michael walking the river

Joseph's Favourites for 2003

Movie: Castle in the Sky

TV Show: The Simpsons

Book: Nintendo Power magazine

Event: getting online with Phantasy Star Online Episode I and II

Activity: playing video games!

Quote: "I pity those poor suckers on the freeway: Gas, brake, honk gas, brake, honk honk, honk, punch gas, gas, gas"

- Homer (in a sing-song voice)

The Great Blackout of 2003

Well, I don't know about you but we had a wonderful time! Nonna and Zia Anna were over for dinner anyway so we BBQ'd, enjoyed the ice cream cake

Nonna brought (it survived!), and made espresso on the BBQ side burner. As the light faded we lit the torches and spent a marvelous evening by the pool. We swam, relaxed on the swing, and chatted the night away outside by torchlight. We even got a great look at Mars! Later Alyssa, Joseph and I took a midnight stroll around the block. The moon was so bright everything had a soft, peaceful glow about it. Beautiful!

Pam's Favourites for 2003

Movies: The Princess Bride, Winged Migration, LOTR Two Towers

TV Show: The Simpsons

Books: Teach Your Own by John Holt, The Zen Commandments by Dean Sluyter, and Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix by JK Rowling

Hobbies: learning about learning, writing, yoga, wire jewelry making

Events: Kaua'i (of course!), staying in the mountains in Fernie, and the Live & Learn conference

Activity: reading with the kids ... we powered through Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix in 3 days!

Quotes: "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." -Albert Einstein
"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Live & Learn Unschool Conference

This past August we trekked down to South Carolina to the Live & Learn Unschool Conference. In a nutshell, unschooling describes us homeschoolers who don't follow a set curriculum, but are constantly in awe of all the natural learning that takes place as our kids live a varied and interesting life alongside us.

While Rocco and I enjoyed a number of terrific speakers, next door in the funshop room the kids found their own friends quickly. Alyssa had brought all her Harry Potter stuff (her most passionate interest!) since there was a Harry Potter fan club funshop, and soon there was a group of them. We hardly saw her most of the weekend! They put together a few Harry Potter skits for the talent show Saturday night and were often rehearsing.

Michael met up with Harrison, another boy his age from South Carolina and they ran and played together all weekend. He did stop by the coin collecting funshop (one of his interests) and gathered a number of the coins they had out for the taking. In fact, he was so thrilled when he discovered and collected some Canadian coins - foreign to the American collectors - that he

came charging next door to show us and explain ecstatically that he could bring them home to spend!!

Joseph also managed to meet up with a couple of great gamers and they played the weekend away together - even in the van during the list members' picnic!

We all enjoyed the weekend and on the drive home the kids were energetically informing us that we must go again next year! Next year it's in Boston and I've been in touch with the organizer. She's asked me to be a speaker next year so we are definitely going!

Michael's Favourites for 2003

Movie: Scooby Doo and the Monster of Mexico

TV Show: most Scooby Doo shows

Wonderland Rides: The Bat, The Fly, and Vortex (he made it to purple!)

Events: Halloween, riding in the RV, learning to dive, hiking at Kortright

Activities: going to Wonderland, playing video games & Neopets, and writing with his glass quill & ink pots

Quote: "Eeeeex-cellent" - Mr. Burns

Mema's End of Summer Bash

The 3rd annual end of summer bash was great fun again this year. My Mom decided to make it a camping trip so we packed up and spent 3 days / 2 nights at Sandbanks Provincial Park. The first afternoon we spent making camp - and rescuing our keys from the locked van! That evening we hiked with our flashlights down to the river's edge where we laid back and stargazed. It's always surprising to be reminded of the level of light pollution in the city - so many stars were visible that I finally understood why our galaxy is called the "Milky Way"!

During the days we hiked the forest trail a couple of times, visited the Nature Centre, and spent an afternoon at the beach.



Hiking at Sandbanks

The second evening after dinner I brought out a book called "The Magical Worlds of Harry Potter" and we all sat around the fire and went through it. It's set up in a question and answer format and Joseph amazed us with his extensive knowledge of mythology (one of his keen interests).

President's Club in Kaua'i

Rocco made President's Club again, and this year the trip wasn't cancelled! So in October we took the kids to my Mom's for the week and off we flew to Kaua'i, known as the Garden Island.

Once we arrived they treated us like royalty with all our food and drinks included, gifts on our bed when we returned each night after our evening festivities, and lots of first-class entertainment.



Rocco and his luau buddies!

For our outing we chose snorkeling and had a wonderful catamaran cruise around the south and west sides of the island to a secluded coral reef. Along the way we came across a school of dolphins and the captain stopped and followed them for at least 20 minutes. They played with the boat and we got to see them up close - though it's illegal to swim with them so nobody jumped in!

Rocco's Favourites for 2003

Book: Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand

Movie: Bad Boys II

TV Show: Everybody Loves Raymond

Wonderland Rides: Vortex, Wilde Beast

Hobbies: down time!

Event: Kaua'i and our western road trip

Activity: censored ;-)

Family Hobby - Science Centres!

One of our family hobbies is to visit the local Science Centres wherever we travel. This is made easier since our membership at the OSC is valid at most Science Centres across North America.

During our trek out west we stopped in at the Arizona Science Centre where, though small, we did spend some time at an interesting exhibit on how rivers are formed.

And during our stopover in North Carolina on the way to the conference,

we visited Charlotte's Discovery Place. There Michael was entranced by a system of pulleys, conveyor belts, pumps, and chutes that were all hand-operated and moved small plastic pellets around. We also came across an amazing exhibit on time ... or rather changes over time including some really incredible stop-motion photography hands-on displays. We were captivated, staying until closing time.

Of course, we visit our local Ontario Science Centre on a regular basis - except for the busy summer months. And we bring along anyone even remotely interested!



Joe & Bedstemor at OSC

For those who are curious, Bedstemor is Danish for great-grandmother. You learn something new every day!

Alyssa's Favourites for 2003

Movie: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, The Princess Bride, and The Chronicles of Narnia

TV Show: The Simpsons

Book: all the Harry Potter books!

Wonderland Rides: Wilde Beast, Skyrider, Top Gun, and Vortex

Hobbies: sewing & crafting while listening to the Harry Potter audiobooks

Events: the Live & Learn conference,

guide trip to The Royal Winter Fair

Activities: sewing and making Harry Potter props and badges for next year's skits at the Live & Learn conference

New Year's Eve in Orlando

This year we've decided to book our timeshare in Orlando, Florida for the week after Christmas. We thought it might be fun to ring in the New Year in a t-shirt! We don't plan to have a park-filled vacation - Christmas Break is NOT the time for that - but a relaxing time. Maybe getting in some mini-golf, and maybe seeing if they have a Science Centre nearby ☺!

And last, but not least, to all our family and friends, thanks for another wonderful year and best wishes for a marvelous 2004.

Merry Christmas!