

In Cod We Trust

Bergen, Lofoten Islands, Oslo - Plus the Netherlands



Left to Right: (top) Bergen's Bryggen, view from Reine rorbuer, Ellen's response to cod liver oil, Reine; (middle) Patagonia-like vista and white-sand beach of Ramberg, lefse feed, getting our Viking on, post-rowing the Viking ship with our captain; (bottom), Bunesfjord and Vinstad, me near Munkebu hut, living history at the Oslo Folk Museum, biking at the Kinderdijk Unesco Site

Introduction

Despite a rockier family trip to MT/WY last summer, we started planning this more elaborate trip in late 2012 – the goal being to visit Norway and Ellen's latest home in the Netherlands, and celebrate my mother's retirement after over 50 years of teaching. Alas, just planning this trip caused a few potent debates: namely, my mother did not want to put out the likes of Asbjorn and Gro, who have generously hosted and coordinated many multi-day family trips (e.g. my 2008 trip/report). Although I respected my mother's request, some folks were worried this decision would come across as impolite. In the end, we did stop in Oslo one day to visit Asbjorn and Gro before moving on to the Netherlands. Before continuing, though, I have to state that – as with Patagonia earlier this year – this report is hard to write up because 10 days after returning, my mother broke her ankle while hiking with me near Mt. Rainier. Thus, my mental hard drive feels like it was partially erased – despite AMAZING impressions of traveling with Ellen and my mom. Indeed, looking at all the pictures of my mother standing and walking are both astounding and jarring given what we've been through since July.



Left to Right: business class lounge, the Columbia in Canada, excellent food (and Hangover II), Yellowknife Lake, flight in progress

June 25-27: Bergen

Although my mother and I initially purchased Icelandair economy seats for our international flights (Seattle to Bergen, and then Amsterdam to Seattle – with plane changes in Reykjavik) in November 2012, I was so agitated by my flying experiences to/from Patagonia that I upgraded to business class in February. Shockingly, the fares were not horrible – about \$2,200 apiece (note: all \$ values in this report are American equivalent values). Arriving at Sea-Tac airport 3.5 hours early, there was no line at the ticket counter and security took less than 30 minutes. Unfortunately, the gate was a mess; after 15 minutes listening to too-LOUD boarding calls for an adjacent Korea-bound 747, we used our business class status to find the AMAZING sky-lounge: comfortable chairs, quiet, a TON of

free food (including chicken soup). Around 4, we headed downstairs and boarded the small plane (ours was a 757, with a 2+2 business and 3+3 economy seating configuration). We took off on time, heading northeast over the North Cascades and Canadian Rockies. Although our seats were large, they were not as fully-reclining as those on larger carrier business class flights. But the food was spectacular (even though Sylvi will tell you that we were skipped in terms of our berry and hot nut snack): shrimp cocktail, beef short ribs, potatoes, carrots, broccolini, and tiramisu. And we had individual entertainment screens and a decent selection – although Sylvi will tell you that Hangover II was not as good as I. I was more content to watch the scenery, although there was not as much snow on Baffin Island or eastern Greenland... and then everything grew cloudy. Unfortunately, I slept 2 combined hours before they served breakfast (a ham and cheese croissant with cantaloupe) – 90 minutes before our 6 a.m. Iceland-time landing. Not surprisingly, it was windy and rainy at Keflavik – our approach turbulent, our landing bumpy. Unimpressed with Iceland, Sylvi was further disappointed by the lack of escalators, the terrible toilet situation (a line of 20+ women for 2 dirty stalls), and the lack of order at the next gate. Adding insult to injury, said flight to Bergen (~2 hours, half full) was late and we had to board on the tarmac – in FULL rain and wind.



Left to Right: Iceland tarmac board, outer islands near Bergen, jetlagged Sylvi on Flybus, Bergen hotel, Sylvi and cod at Bryggen

Said flight fed us breakfast AGAIN, causing me to nod off for 45 minutes. But then the views of Norway's rocky outer islands became too interesting. Landing in Bergen at noon, we were surprised to find relatively clear and sunny skies, damp luggage, and NO security. Given that my mother was exhausted (almost to the point of stupor), I considered hailing a \$100 cab – as opposed to plan A: \$30 for the SAS Flybus. Given how efficient the Flybus was, though, we went back to plan A, watching this able-bodied older woman load our luggage as we sleepily climbed on board. Although the Flybus was also only half full, we made many drops en route to the final stop: our \$350/night hotel (the Radisson-Blu) adjacent to the Bryggen. Although we arrived well before the stated check-in time, they let us have our room early – probably because we looked terrible. In 2008, this hotel was the meeting place for my Lindblad/National Geographic (LNG) cruise; my impressions back then – based on the classy lobby and lunch – were favorable (indeed – why else would I choose to pay \$350/night?). Unfortunately, things have changed since 2008 – most notably: some tasteless person has been allowed to redecorate everything. Sylvi was also disappointed because the key system did not work well, the room was VERY small, and the bathroom was scary slippery after my shower (alas, Sylvi never bathed, probably because she was too scared of falling). Although the beds seemed small at first, we LOVED them (especially the sheets and down comforters) – particularly after our 2.5 hour nap. The 40-inch screen TV was also good, although there was only 1 channel with spoken English (BBC). We were lastly disappointed that such an upscale hotel did not have a private-area business center with more than one internet-accessible computer.

Following our nap, we headed out on foot through the quiet Bryggen (the cruise ships long gone). At the stone building that bears the Unesco World Heritage sign, we enjoyed this new dried cod sculpture made from a tree trunk. We considered eating at a few places within the Bryggen but no one had salads to our liking; Sylvi, who abhors alcohol, remarked that there was a lot of beer being openly consumed. Hmm – if she was having a problem with Bergen, how was she going to respond to Amsterdam? In no time, we found ourselves at the still-buzzing fish market - more dominated by non-fish items these days. Sylvi decided she wanted a fruit salad cup, which cost a staggering \$20. I wanted berries for \$10. Unfortunately, I forgot my wallet and so we had to go back to the hotel. After eating on the wharf, we strolled behind the market (past a derelict church and the empty McDonalds) before heading back towards the hotel. Given still fine weather, we continued to the park-like Bergenhus – Hakon Hall and Rosenkrantz Tower shrouded in construction projects. A bunch of 20-something LARPer were engaged in Viking-style swordplay, attracting a fair number of onlookers. Unfortunately, the public toilet was atrocious (broken equipment, no toilet paper, smelled like piss), the WORST I've ever seen in Norway. Although Sylvi was full, I was still hungry – so we patronized a bakery with seating in front of the Bryggen, enjoying a chocolate croissant and ice cream for \$17. Returning to the hotel around 8:30, we were both ready for bed. As usual, I was up 2:30 every night with jetlag, tossing and turning (Sylvi was likewise up around 4 – but she never really fell back asleep).



Left to Right: market, Sylvi eating fruit on the pier, beloved McDonalds, walking at the Bergenhus

We finally decided to get up at 6:15, fully enjoying the amazing breakfast buffet. Still suffering from food sticker-shock, we agreed that the hotel breakfasts would have EASILY cost us each \$75-100 on the street, partially justifying the STEEP hotel cost. Although Sylvi was in total awe of the buffet, I have done enough high-end travel that it was what I was expecting. Only the bread section (featuring

over a dozen different styles of flatbread) was exceptional. Nonetheless, Sylvi's love of food on this trip was astonishing given that she hates dealing with food, and eats like a bird in her normal life. Where she ate a small bowl of oatmeal and one small plate of extras, I ate a big bowl of granola/yogurt and two large plates of extras (plus all the fruit and rolls I scavenged into my plastic-bag-lined purse for snacks later). Although it had been raining on and off since we awoke, we proceeded to the funicular station (3 blocks away) – the plan being to ride up Mt. Floyen and walk the trail down. Leaving at 8 a.m., we were VERY lucky to have started this trip early. After buying our funicular tickets, we waited 10 minutes for the 8:30 a.m. run. In contrast with the 2008 trip (where LNG chartered all the cars), all priority this time went to several groups of school-children; we also made multiple stops along the housed portion of the hillside, picking up additional people en route. Climbing 1000 feet, we arrived at the quiet summit and enjoyed the overlook; the weather was not as pretty as in 2008 – but way better than I had been expecting. From here, we followed the easy path back down to Bergen – this time taking a longer route than Karin and I hiked in 2008. Despite my mother's recent assertions that she will never hike again, she will be the first to admit that this walk was – for her – the highlight of Bergen: peaceful, easy, and prettily in the woods most of the time... although fellow walkers were "not as friendly" as hikers in the US (IHO).



Left to Right: (top) on the funicular, looking down funicular track, Mt. Floyen overlook, troll playground, upper Floyen; (bottom) lower descent, live music, near museum, favorite painter,

She also was not thrilled by the many steep stairs that had to be navigated as we descended through the neighborhood portion of the walk. Passing the funicular station, we were shocked to see a block-long line of people. Given that it was now noon, the Bryggen was also a MADHOUSE of cruise people. Needless to say, we retreated to our hotel room for snacks (mostly me) and a light nap (Sylvi) – before walking across town to the big lake (Lille Lungegdrsvann) and the art museum complex (Bergen Kunstmuseum). En route, we came upon an impromptu performance by this group of tall-ship sailing musicians we'd seen arriving in the harbor last night (they were notably playing a jazzy version of Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King"). The art museum complex was confusing, represented by 4 buildings (\$18 fee per person, covering all buildings); most of the buildings seemed internally disconnected (especially the first one – a weird mix of modern sculpture, home décor stuff, and a conservative silver display). En route to the second building, Sylvi started bonking (because she didn't eat enough lunch!) and we had to make a pit stop for coffee and cake. The second and third buildings featured a lot of landscape art and Munch –the latter focused on his happier post-depression work. We did not make it through the final building, focusing only on this fabulous collection of Nikolai Astrup. For 20 minutes, I also lost Sylvi when she tried to find the bathroom on her own. In a drizzle, we headed back to the Bryggen, enjoying an OK salad/quiche at the bakery from last night (\$50). Come 4 p.m., it was time for another 90-minute nap. Although we made one last walking tour of the Bryggen, and one last pastry and ice cream stop (complete with a show by a bucket-wielding homeless man), we were back at the hotel and in bed by 9.



Left to Right: Bergen to Bodo plane, the little plane to Leknes arrives in Bodo, view descending to Leknes, yes – our Prius!

June 28: Lofoten Island Magic Part I – Rorbuer

Few people I know had any idea where the Lofoten Islands were or what they were about; indeed, I have never seen the Lofoten featured on any major US travel show. I learned about them during my 2008 LNG cruise – and even though we had shitty weather during our big day there, I KNEW they were worth revisiting. They did NOT disappoint. Getting to the Lofoten requires a chunk of time

and money and we chose to fork out for 2 flights: the first was in a 48-seater prop plane between Bergen and arctic Bodo, the largest town in Nordland (~50,000 people); the second was in a 28-seater prop plane between Bodo and Leknes, the westernmost airport IN the Lofoten. It is possible to go cheaper – but that means a longer ferry ride with a different set of logistics. Our goal was – as fast as possible - to get to a place where we could rent a car and proceed to our Reine basecamp for the next 6 days. Anyway - following another excellent breakfast, we were on the 9:30 a.m. Flybus back to the airport for our afternoon flight to Bodo. Alas, Sylvi did not making it through security well: her shoe grommets set off the alarm, causing a slightly humiliating full-on pat-down. I was pleased to find a good gift shop with blank journals, something I had failed to find at Sea-Tac. The 2-hour flight to Bodo was only OK, a thick blanket of clouds obscuring Norway's many mountains (including Jotunheimen National Park). As we flew out over the water for the landing at coastal Bodo, some impressive mountains did come into view – which was promising. Landing around 3:30, we had a 2-hour layover and were HUNGRY... thus explaining the substantial salad, pizza, and waffle lunch. Fortunately, food prices dropped 20-30% as we headed north – and they would only get better once we were able to do our own grocery shopping. The final flight to Leknes lasted 20 minutes and was all over water – distant views of the toothy granite-peaked island chain. The tiny Leknes airport reminded me of small-town Alaska. As I strolled past the one-desk car rental area, this friendly Norwegian called out: Sarah Boomer? He then took me out to a white Prius parked right out on the empty curb. I was FLOORED we got this car, worried I'd have to recall my old stick-shift skills. Although Allison owns/drives a Prius, she has only allowed me to drive it once – so I appreciated that the rental car agent sat down with me and gave me a quick lesson in the parking lot. We appeared to be the ONLY people renting a car. Since I'm sure some folks will wonder, renting this car cost about \$120 a day; when I originally made this reservation, I had chosen a lower-end VW equivalent and my impression was that they gave us the Prius at a \$20/day discount.

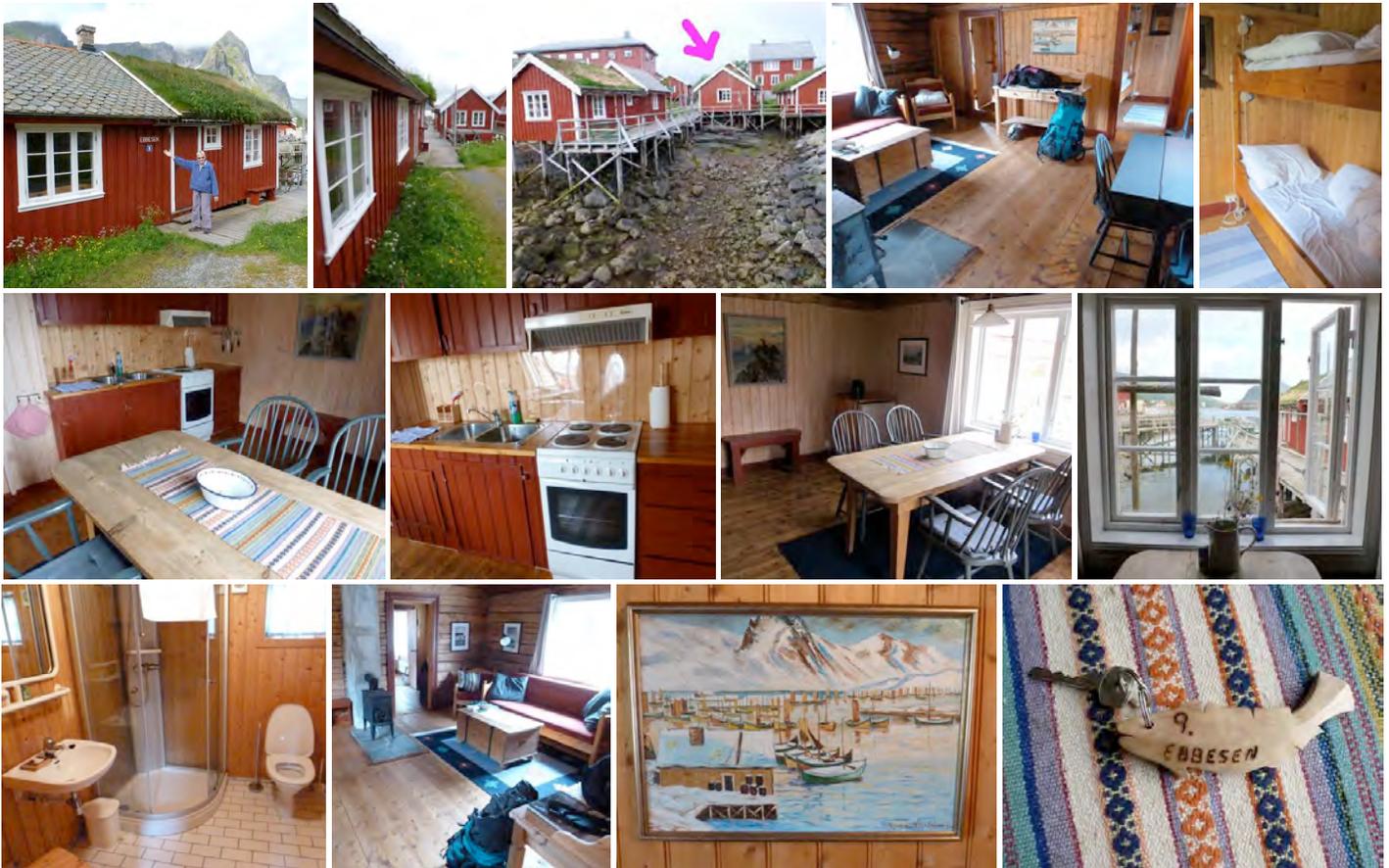


Left to Right: Sylvi in the Leknes grocery, Ellen and Sylvi in Leknes airport, a small sample of Lofoten roads and views

Since Ellen was not scheduled to arrive for 90 minutes, we headed to a nearby grocery store and bought basics to get us through tomorrow. Prior to this trip, we had a hard time finding information about how well-stocked Lofoten groceries were. Although all were acceptable, the big one in Leknes was the BEST. Back at the airport, I remember asking my mother: in your wildest dreams, did you ever think you would be waiting for Ellen at an airport in the arctic circle? No – never. Our dad would be proud. Ellen arrived on time and we headed out into the blustery landscape. The Lofoten are an archipelago consisting of 4 major islands. We visited 3: eastern Vestvagoy (home to Leknes and the Viking Museum), Flakstadoy (Ramberg and Viknes), and western Moskenesoy (Reine and Å). Some people were surprised we didn't bother with easternmost Austvagoy – but we were fully occupied and satisfied with the places we saw. Within 15 minutes of leaving Leknes, the road narrowed and the center-stripe disappeared. Most of the time, the road was 1.5 lanes and basic cars, public buses, and smaller trucks could narrowly pass; sometimes, however, the roads narrowed to just one lane with intermittent pull-outs – and you had to wait, regardless of vehicle size/type. With ENORMOUS tour-buses, trucks, and RV's, though, it didn't matter how wide the road was – you had to pull over. Of course, being in Norway, we also had several tunnels, including the under-the-sea Nappstrauman tunnel between Vestvagoy and Flakstadoy. Overall, I did enjoy driving the Lofoten – but there were stressful moments where I was worried I would sideswipe neighbors, or get sideswiped. And Sylvi said she would NEVER choose to drive here on her own. My only regret was not being able to fully enjoy the jaw-dropping scenery; indeed, it was like driving through the Sierras or Wind Rivers at 12,000 feet – the sea lapping right up to the granite walls and meadows. Only Patagonia comes a little close in terms of comparable granite plus water type scenery. Driving between the airport and Reine took just over an hour; it would have taken just under an hour – except there was some MAJOR tunnel construction just before Reine, complete with 2 VERY rough gravel sections - each partially down to one-lane (i.e. you waited, sometimes in long lines, controlled via a light or flagger).

The best decision made in planning this trip was the decision to stay at the Reine Rorbuer, something I selected based on liking Reine (from 2008) and reading the Lonely Planet. Rorbuer are historic fishermen's cabins that have been refurbished for tourist rental. Most are like large cabins, with multiple rooms and a full kitchen – so you can cook for yourself (important because my mom and I are not big fish people... and most Lofoten restaurants were highly fishy). The Reine Rorbuer complex consists of over 30 rorbuer; when I booked in fall 2012, few were taken and so I got to pick which one we stayed in – based on a combination of sleeping capacity (ours said it slept 5) and views (ours was fucking amazing... although I don't think ANY had bad views). Had I been more clever, I would have been able to see the bed layout – but I apparently missed that function on the website (probably because I was blinded by the incredible views). Of course, rorbuer are not cheap; ours cost nearly \$400 a night (few were cheaper than that). Anyway – we pulled up to the laid-back main office and were handed keys to rorbuer Ebbeson. Walking down the granite-slab and meadow flower lane to our cabin was stupefying; I later emailed friends/family that everything about where we stayed was like a fairy tale. Ellen likened the place to staying in a living museum given the beautiful attention to local art and fishing paraphernalia; of course, Ellen also warned us many times during this leg of the trip that the rorbuer was larger than her apartment in the Netherlands (that's a fact!). From the mid-point of the half slate/half grass roofed cabin, you entered a small foyer with benches, coat-hangers, shoe-brushes/horns (remember – Reine is open YEAR-ROUND, in the snow!). The modern bathroom (complete with ceramic, heated floors) was directly across the foyer; the kitchen (all necessary cooking tools, small refrigerator, stove, oven – but no microwave) was to the right; the massive living room - with a wood-burning stove, 4 sitting chairs, a full desk, another table, a TV (NO English channels!), and a full couch (where Ellen slept) - was to the right. Leading off from the far wall of the living room were 2 small bedrooms – each with 2 bunks. I claimed one (sleeping in the lower bed, storing my junk on the upper) and Sylvi used the other likewise for herself. That we could spread out SOOOO much, each

with our own room, totally improved our interactions on this trip relative to MT/WY 2012. That we enjoyed cooking meals and sitting down to eat together in that kitchen – with that view – will always be one of the highlights of the whole vacation. Both ideas will guide ALL future trip planning involving all us old, independent women.



Left to Right: (top) Sylvi and our cabin from different views, living room looking into 2 bunk rooms; my bunk room; (middle) all kitchen views; (bottom) modern bathroom, living room couch where Ellen slept, original painting, our key on kitchen table runner

Arriving around 8, we settled in and unpacked – and then enjoyed some lefse, thin potato pancakes. Here in the US, you are LUCKY to find lefse for sale anywhere... but in Norway, they are sold like tortillas. We bought, like, 12 in Leknes – and ate half that evening: warming them between steaming towels in the oven to soften and then spreading them with butter and sugar. The other cooking chore of the night was to pre-boil all these small yellow potatoes, anticipating frying them for breakfast and as a dinner side later in the week. After chores were done, Sylvi tried to go to bed while Ellen and I took a walk out onto the picnic pier; although it was always light out, the direct sun did temporarily disappear behind the mountains to the north – the light becoming more golden and sunset-like. Although Sylvi's main priority on this trip was to visit Ellen's new home in the Netherlands, she was also interested in seeing the midnight sun – a first for her. At first fascinated by the constant light, it bugged her after a few days given that she – despite a very healthy daytime napping habit back home - had a hard time sleeping without some darkness. Although this was an outstanding vacation, it was my worst for sleeping issues: I NEVER got rid of my jetlag on this trip – due, on this leg of the trip, to the midnight sun.



Left to Right: lefse, lefse, lefse, on the pier, potatoes cooling in the windowsill, breakfast the next day, Ellen's early morning shot

June 29: Lofoten Island Magic Part II – Å

Ellen will be the first to tell you that Sylvi and I slept until 10 a.m., leaving her wandering around the rorbuer grounds with her camera FOREVER. The truth is: Sylvi was up around 6 a.m., did her morning exercises, ate a bowl of cold cereal, and then went back to bed... where I truly did sleep until 10 (after waking up between 1 and 2 for several hours). Despite the late wake-up, we still enjoyed a full-on hot breakfast: scrambled eggs (some of my best work... I am usually not good at eggs), fried potatoes, lefse, and yogurt. On the docket today was a short drive to the road-end town of Å (pronounced as you would say a long "o" in "lord" – to quote the Lonely

Planet). I'd been to Å in 2008 and looked forward to a quieter tour of the famous cod-fishing village (given that the LNG cruise version of today's itinerary was something of a big CF). Given that Å was less than 6 miles away, the original plan was to spend the morning/early afternoon there, then return to Reine for food/shopping, and then consider visiting scenic Ramberg after dinner.



Left to Right: (top) heading out, sign to A, Stockfish Museum, Sylvi & curator; (bottom) lounge, all kinds of cod, Ellen & curator

We arrived at Å around 11, visiting the Stockfish Museum first. Stockfish refers to air-dried cod, the most famous Lofoten product. When I was here in 2008, I visited the Fishing Village Museum first, liked it better, and then was bored with the Stockfish Museum. Today was a partial reversal of that impression. We arrived at the roped entrance of the Stockfish Museum (a note requesting that we wait for someone in charge). After 5 minutes, Sylvi grew impatient. At the precise moment she deliberately stepped over the rope, the curator arrived. Unfortunately, this is where I have to say that our mother sort of embarrassed us by LOUDLY going right up the guy and asking: DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH... and then going on about how we'd been waiting too long. Fortunately, the curator was a clever and socially ept man who handled my mother with great skill; indeed, normally if she perceives that she is being handled, she responds negatively... but this guy calmed her down and engaged her in the history of cod. I mention this story because we did struggle more than once with my mother coming across as a loud and demanding American – expecting people to part the seas, speak/understand English (particularly if spoken LOUDLY), approach everything with that dehumanizing attitude regarding time and service. After paying our entrance fees, we received a LONG one-on-one presentation by the curator, and were then shown a great video (not seen in 2008) about stockfish, starting with the fishing, which takes place in the late winter/early spring – when the islands/mountains are gorgeously snow-clad. I learned more in those 30 minutes than I ever picked up on in 2008, the most interesting new facts: (1) stockfish cod are air-dried (not salted, like other kinds of cod) – and then pressed into big squares; and (2) the biggest consumers of stockfish are Italians, owing to some a ship being stranded in the Lofoten – and then bringing the stockfish home. After the video, Ellen and I enjoyed complimentary snacks in the lounge, a new and pleasant addition since 2008. The funniest thing up there, though, was the dried cod full of cookies next to the coffee and tea station. And, no, the cookies did not taste at all fishy.



Left to Right: new Fishing Village Museum logo, our guide, tran/cod liver oil, Ellen tastes the tran, the tran-making building

After 90 minutes of stockfish, we walked to the Fishing Village Museum, represented by several historic buildings. At times, this museum was more confusing than in 2008 – even though the site has become touristy: e.g. there is now a clear main office with a fancy sign/logo, paying visitors are given logo stickers to wear, and the historic bakery is now a working facility where you can buy bread/pastries. After paying our entrance fees, we were handed maps and a tour schedule (the English tour started in 90 minutes). Sylvi was not interested in a tour even though my guidance was poor – half because I forgot/misread which buildings were open, and half because we were all bonking (hence, a trip to the bakery). After visiting the open blacksmith cabin and family house, I insisted we take the tour. Led by this young Polish girl, the tour focused on the fishing-related buildings – good because we hadn't visited those yet: the dock-house with all the boats and fishing gear, the cod liver oil press house, and then an original fishing cabin (notably NOT open to the public or included on all tours). Compared with my 2008 experience (a complete CF – with 1 guide for 30-40 people), this tour was amazing: just us and an older couple from the Netherlands. The little old man was HILARIOUS (he can be seen with Ellen in the opening pictures). Even the cod liver oil – tran (which means tears) - tasting was substantial, although I was the only one in our

party NOT to taste the stuff. The highlight of the fishing cabin was the two-thumbed mitten – which our guide said was well-known by people who knit; she had been asked a few times by visiting knitters to specifically see the two-thumbed mitten – the idea being that when the first thumb wore through, you flipped the mitten over and used the second thumb.



Left to Right: (top) dock-house sea-monster, fishing cabin, two-thumbed mitten; (bottom) all things related to BLT meal

By 2:30, we were done with Å. Hungry for real food, we stopped at the Reine co-op (they had an OK selection, but were always out of chicken). After failing to find mayo in Leknes, I learned from Ellen that Europeans sell tubular condiments in the refrigerated section. We also bought a mini-packet of 6 bacon slices (for BLT's) and lunch items for the next few days. Finishing our meal around 5:30, Ellen and I dragged Sylvi back out, returning to Ramberg's white-sand beach, which we'd been in awe of on the drive in. Of course, returning to Ramberg meant driving the construction zone – which Sylvi HATED. We also underestimated how long it would take - but it was REALLY beautiful. Having said that, I was disappointed the area was so developed. We parked at this overlook just beyond "downtown" and walked a wooden path to the sand. A few families were out playing in the sand and even swimming in the ocean. We spent 45 minutes walking around and/or sitting in the sun – and Ellen walked the whole crescent of beach, with us picking her up on the other side. On the drive back, we stopped along this big meadow cirque (Ramberg visible in the distance) to pick arctic flowers. Arriving "home" around 8, we enjoyed more lefse and berry-yogurt parfait desserts by an amazing pseudo-sunset.



Left to Right: (top) Ramberg; (bottom) Sylvi's shells, Ramberg from meadow, flower stop, pseudo-sunset – flowers, parfait, harbor

June 30: Lofoten Island Magic Part III – Lofoten Viking Museum

The weather did not start out great - but cloudiness was OK because today was about the Lofoten Viking Museum, 90 minutes east. Although I was confident said museum was going to be a hit, my traveling companions were not sold, thinking it was going to be small and cheesy. And re-driving the construction zone annoyed my mother right out of the gate. Although the museum is technically in the town of Borg, the museum was right along the highway in the middle of farmlands. Indeed, Vestvagoy seemed much more geologically tame than Flakstadoy and Moskenesoy. One of the reasons we picked today – Sunday/family day - was because it was the only certain day for activities like rowing the Viking ship and throwing weapons. Contrary to concerns about hoards of kids, most visitors

were groups of adults, including an American family from Minnesota (one of the few such parties we saw in the Lofoten). The museum complex consisted of 4 areas: reception building (cafeteria, gift shop, ticket counter), original exhibit room with movie theatre, the longhouse replica (living history exhibits – in-costume workers and replicas you could touch, put on, or eat), and outdoor lakeside activity area (Viking ship, weapons throwing, etc.). Although the museum was well-rated, 20% commented that when they came, none of the outdoor stuff was running because of bad weather. We can understand why – but fortunately we did not have that experience.



Left to Right: (top) construction; museum reception, wax Vikings, to longhouse; (bottom) longhouse replica, real site, living history

After obtaining our tickets and audio systems, we entered the original exhibit room, choosing to watch the “Hollywood-style” movie first; this was the only cheesy thing – as it was not a documentary but a creatively romanticized story about what might have happened: the first longhouse chieftain being asked by Norway’s king-equivalent to move to a new post in Iceland, and then some new chieftain taking their place - their respective daughter and son falling in love as one moved out, the other in... and then eventually finding one another as adults. Although it is accurate that one longhouse chief did move to Iceland, everything else is just cheesiness. Returning to the exhibit room, we learned that a field-plowing farmer discovered this site in 1981; his tractor was on display. Interestingly, this site remains the largest Viking site in all of Scandinavia. Having said that, the objects on display did not seem extensive – and when you saw the real longhouse site (adjacent to the replica), it takes a creative mind to “see” all the things the living history museum touts. Nonetheless, we moved on enthusiastically from the exhibit room, walking up the hill to the longhouse area. En route, we passed model gardens and domesticated animals representing likely food the Vikings would have farmed. Had Sylvi not flagged down an in-costume worker, though, I honestly would have missed the non-descript field where the original longhouse was found.



Left to Right: (top) longhouse – living quarter food, bed, costumes; (bottom) dining hall wooden carvings, lamb stew, costumes

The living history longhouse exhibits were all very interesting. Like all Scandinavian museums these days, there were many hands-on displays, with in-costume workers always close by to answer questions or demonstrate something. The first room was divided into many open sub-sections, all devoted to living quarters/activities: grain-milling, yarn-spinning, fabric weaving, representative clothes and shoes, a typical Viking bed, a table with food. From here, we went into the middle room – the dining hall, with its central fire burning

high... heating kettles of lamb and vegetable stew. We knew from on-line pre-trip searches you could buy and eat a bowl of stew here; given that we were not going to pass up the opportunity to eat a Viking meal in arctic Norway, we paid through the nose (\$20 each, not including my Viking-style beer) for a moderately large – and tasty - bowl of stew, bread, and sour cream topping. The final room of the longhouse was a mix of the Viking “spirit world” and various arts and crafts. An in-costume female woodworker was busy at the far end; all museum woodwork was simple but lovely – with many wood and fabric/embroidery pieces adorning the spirit world display. Next to the work area was a display about the building of the Viking ship, which we next visited. Also at the far end of the room was a diagram of the normal contents of this room: the barn for the animals during the winter, its floor sloped appreciably downhill to allow the waste to run off. By this point, it was 12:30 and the first Viking ship rowing was at 1 p.m. Initially, we weren't sure we were going to go for it – particularly it involved a 1 mile walk down to the lake. Given the time and weather, though, we decided to run for it.



Left to Right: woodworker, approaching the Viking ship, rowing positions, the motor-driver, ship, Sylvi shooting arrows

Shockingly, there were less than 10 people (all adults – most represented by the Minnesotans) at the ship when we arrived. After waiting 5 minutes, we were given some history and a short rowing lesson by the friendly captain. My mother and I were in charge of one oar; Ellen and yet another hilarious old man (British?) were in charge of the other, opposite us. To move us out away from the dock, the caped second-in-command deployed a gas-powered engine as we rowed. Eventually, it was turned off and we moved by oar-power only. Although we didn't, like, row all over the lake – we were worked out for a full hour, even with the power-assist to/from the dock. By 2, a substantial line of people (with more kids) had formed and was waiting to take our place. Fortunately, I quickly asked the obliging captain to take a picture with us – it is one of my favorite from this trip. Now in need of sustenance, we patronized the snack shack – enjoying waffles, cookies, and hot beverages. Across the path, the weapons-throwing area was occupied by a small group of kids. Available weapons included bows/arrows and four-pointed axes – all monitored by one of many in-costume longhaired blond dudes. Amusingly, Sylvi was the first to interrupt the kids and try the bows/arrows, insisting she had taken some archery in college. Alas, we observed no evidence of remnant skills. Although Ellen and I weren't much better at bows/arrows, I was shockingly good at throwing four-sided axes, hitting the target 75% of the time. The most outgoing of the children was excited to both help us and try out his English, which he claimed to have learned by watching the internet. Every time he dropped his weapon or missed his target, he yelled out: OH SHIT! Definitely watching the internet too much.



Left to Right: (top) waffle, nearby Borg “ski-jump” church, Buksnes church, Ellen’s walk back through Reine; (bottom) more walk, Ellen’s recreation of kittiwake poop incident (more about location recreation later), Ellen’s “OH SHIT” shitty jacket!

Knowing it would take Sylvi longer to ascend the big hill, we sent her ahead while we made a few side-trips: first to visit the blacksmith, a less-into-his-job longhaired dude (i.e. I caught him “out of character” on his cell phone); Ellen and I were both unimpressed by his lack of interest in communicating anything to us as he pumped his bellows, blew sparks, and hammered on his rod. Ellen and I then walked this short side-path (I swear it was called the “love trail”) that offered some botanizing and lake views: the new Viking ship crew looking more impressive than we felt. We finally headed up the hill, catching up with Sylvi near the top. After a shopping trip in the gift shop and a little arguing about some Viking claims, we hit the road around 3:30. Although we'd had decent views of Borg's modern “ski-jump” church during the walks to/from the lake, I insisted we drive right up to it for a few unobstructed pictures. Having been to

Tromsø's elegant and modern Arctic Cathedral in 2008, I can only call Borg's circa 1983 version the poor man's version. Nonetheless, finding something so weird in the middle of the arctic felt very Norwegian and I appreciated that. Heading back, we briefly stopped at the Leknes shopping complex; unfortunately, the big grocery was not open on Sunday, leaving us to patronize a nearby mini-mart for bratwurst, lefse, and this light and airy olive bread. Across the street, we also pumped our own gas. Unfortunately, we somehow got lost just beyond Leknes (i.e. took, like, the ONE wrong turn possible!), winding up in a different town called Gravdal. At the time, I was FAMISHED... requiring a mandatory pit stop (given that we had bothered to pack a shitload of picnic-style items for lunch). Somehow, I pulled into this random driveway leading up to this very cool wooden church (Buksnes, ascertained later from a guidebook) that happened to have a traditional wedding getting started. Alas, none of us had the balls to photograph the adorable mothers and children wearing regional bunads, slightly embarrassed to effectively be tailgate crashing their parking area. Oh well, the pepper cream cheese on flatbread and bananas hit the spot, allowing me to drive back to Reine in a more reasonable state. At the far/east end of Reine, Ellen asked to be let out of the car so she could walk through town – a feat that took her over 2 hours, involved 3 dangerous miles (because there were few sidewalks), and cost her a very expensive Patagonia jacket (thanks to her scrambling up a rock with angry kittiwakes, one of whom unloaded her colon-equivalent all over Ellen). I also don't think Ellen was thrilled with Sylvi's dinner choice: pan-fried bratwurst medallions and potatoes with too-sweet beans (Norway's equivalent of "pork & beans") with salad. Only the olive bread and light salad made her a little happier. Knowing tomorrow's plans included a hike, most of us went to bed somewhat early.



Left to Right: beans & dogs, ferry to Vinstad, crowd admiring Olstinden, weird peaks along Kjerke-fjorden - shot during return

July 1: Lofoten Island Magic Part III – Bunes Hike

Initially, I was not sure whether we were going to tackle taking Sylvi on any kind of hike in the Lofoten. We'd toyed with a so-called midnight sun cruise – but it was not until we were in the islands that we realized said cruise required a hike over Bunes pass (to get an unobstructed view of the midnight sun) and the over-priced charter boat did the same route as the cheap local ferry. Given that the Bunes hike was 3 miles and rated easy, we decided Sylvi could handle it. Given only 2 daily ferry runs between Reine and Vinstad (the Bunes trailhead), we arrived at the dock at 9:20 for the 10 a.m. departure - the crowd gathering. Turning no one away, they crammed us on board. Thankfully, Sylvi was able to get one of the few proper chairs. Given fine weather, the ~30 minute ferry ride was scenic, offering incredible and new views up the Kjerke-fjorden – to this different chain of toothy granite peaks that had been largely eclipsed by massive Olstinden. Indeed, when I return to the Lofoten, there is a great trek up that fjord that I'm going to need to do. In addition to Kjerke-fjorden, we also hiked along new Bunesfjorden, and disembarked adjacent to highly scenic Fjorsefjorden.



Left to Right: (top) disembarking at Vinstad, view up Fjorsefjorden, looking up hike route to Bunes pass, on the trail, oystercatcher; (bottom) Ellen and road-to-path junction, lower views of Helvetestinden, flowers, Storskiva near pass, old road at the pass

Vinstad was said to be home to only 1-2 permanent residents, with ~12 vacation houses. There were no facilities, although some enterprising seasonal residents had set up a "donation" toilet and were selling waffles and drinks to coincide with the afternoon ferry wait (we did not know about this until our return from the pass). The hike from Vinstad to Bunes pass was 60% on a dirt road along Bunesfjorden. The hike would have been awesomely scenic were it not for the ever-present power-lines and a couple burnt-to-the-ground house foundations. Most vacation houses seemed occupied given laundry hanging out to dry, a flock of lambs grazing, and

even an unattended baby carriage. At the end of the fjord, a sign pointed up a footpath leading through high grass and flowers – climbing (sometimes steeply) to Bunes pass. Starting up ahead of Sylvi and Ellen, I was concerned that a few lower sections (which would have benefited from switchbacks) were going to be hard for my mother. But she did fine. En route, we passed a cemetery – headstones dating back to the early 1800's. As we climbed, the views over Bunesfjorden were breathtaking... as were the soaring granite peaks on either side: Helvetestinden (to the right) and Storskiva (to the left). About 50 vertical feet below the pass, the trail became a Roman Road-like path of stones, one of the final remnants of the former settlement at Bunes proper. At the broad grassy saddle, we ate our respective lunches and, given the steep trail down the other side, Ellen and I ditched Sylvi – leaving her in the shade of a large boulder next to a bunch of old Norwegians who later chatted with us all and took a group picture. The descent to Bunes beach was OK – but Sylvi could NOT have managed it. Ellen and I made it down in less than 10 minutes, taking separate routes across the WIDE and LONG beachfront to reach the surf (said trip took 15-20 minutes – with mine interrupted by the discovery of a scenic and clean pit-toilet). Several parties were tenting on the higher dune plateaus. Various sea debris, including metal floats and a whale vertebrae, littered the lower area. Ellen and I briefly convened at the water's edge – but then made respective ways back.



Left to Right: (top) Bunes beach – right/ Storskiva and left/ Helvetestinden, pit toilet, metal floats; (bottom) whale vertebrae, Helvetestinden's MASSIVE face, arctic avens (not cotton grass), friendly Norwegian, group shot.

After talking with the Lofoten-frequenting Norwegians, we headed back down around 1:30. Part of our conversation involved how great a snack shop would be in Vinstad - and how impossible it was for us to believe that no one had been so enterprising. But the Norwegians stated there had never been any services in Vinstad; we were SOL on the food fantasies. As we neared the dock, however, it became clear that a Vinstad-ian WAS selling waffles/drinks out of the old, defunct schoolhouse. Although the claim was that they were trying to raise money to convert said building into a simple trekkers' lodge, I'm not sure that was the big motive. It was cool, though, because all the tables and chairs on the big deck were little kids' school desks and chairs – each adorned with simple vases of pretty flowers. I think we were their first customers of the day – although the throng soon arrived. Indeed, it felt like ANY high-end food hut in the Alps out there: sunny, beautiful, and MANY European accents (especially the loud French group!). I cannot say the waffles were the best, though; they'd been made too early and left to steam/soggy the pile FAR too long.



Left to Right: hiking back, Sylvi and her flock, waffle on school desk, Alp-like deck, Sylvi denying she's just as sneaky as her mother

After an hour, we headed down to the dock for what would be an annoying wait – the ferry an hour late. According to the schedule, the return trip would take us up the scenic Kjerke-fjorden for a pick-up there – before heading back to Reine (I was looking forward to that side-trip). Instead, the captain went up Kjerke-fjorden first and THEN picked us up. Like I said to Ellen at the time: he probably was trying to save fuel because Bunes was clearly the more popular area and hauling all our weight up the Kjerke-fjorden would have been less cost-effective. Back in Reine, Ellen and I could not find any chicken at the local co-op – and thus cooked up OUR dream-dish: spaghetti (so dreamily inhaled that we never photographed it!). I say "our" because Sylvi hates pasta; to this day, none of the sisters understand this clear mutation. Sylvi put up with it, though – although her plate had more salad and meat/mushroom-sauce and few noodles. Being that it was still early, Ellen and I then got into a skirmish because the forecast for tomorrow was breaking down – and so there was pressure to try this famously steep trail up the back of Mt. Reinebringen, which defined the western cirque above Reine. For

an hour, Ellen and I seriously discussed doing this tonight. Unfortunately, the so-called trailhead looked very poor – to the point I refused to drive it because I did not want to put my ass/insurance on the line with the Prius. Not to say anything of the insane trail, a 1700+ feet/mile grade route up loose grass and rocks. Alas, Ellen was definitely mad at me for seemingly renegeing; she actually left the cabin for a stiff walk through town. After everyone calmed down, we pulled out the games (travel Scrabble and Uno). At some point there was some kind of discussion about Sylvi being just as sneaky as her famously sneaky mother... probably spurred by some kind of "innocent cheating." Indeed, she even LOOKS like her famously sneaky mother in that denial picture above!



Left to Right: Sorvagen and Lake Sorvagvannet, trekking sign, chain climbing above Lake Studalsvannet

July 2: Lofoten Island Magic Part IV – Munkebu Hut Scramble

As with yesterday's itinerary, this one was hatched the night before. Plan A had been to drive 2.5 hours to Svolvær – and take a half-day cruise to Trollfjorden (which I'd enjoyed in 2008). Short-lived plan B involved another hike with Sylvi around Lake Sorvagvannet (in the small town or Sorvagen, 10 minutes away). But the weather and Sylvi being tired made Ellen and I dream up plan C: scrambling the climbers' route to Munkebu cabin. Although I had researched this hike on the internet before arriving in Norway, I erroneously thought was, like, 15 miles. Well – I don't know what I was smoking... it was only 7-8 miles. Even so, Ellen didn't appreciate my waking her up at 7 and rushing to get us moving – my gut feeling being that we needed to boogie to beat the weather. Of course, Ellen DID appreciate that call when it started raining as we arrived back at the car – and dumped hard much of the rest of the day. Needless to say, you aren't going to see shorts and clear skies – but it was a cool hike and the chillier conditions definitely made us hike faster. Although there are other (and longer) ways to Munkebu, this route began at Sorvagen, 10 minutes up the road (between Reine and Å). Although hike descriptions said to park by and start at some obvious main street gallery, we discovered (yet again – my gut feeling) that driving a few blocks in and parking by this sports club (labeled SOIL – another story) yielded the actual trailhead. From here, we climbed along Lake Sorvagvannet. Eventually, we started hiking away from the lake and up this first hill, a prominent waterfall cascading through low shrubbery. After crossing a small stream on a flimsy bridge, we hiked through brush and then along Lake Studalsvannet. At the low point, we crossed the lakeshore – the first actual sign indicating we were, in fact, on the route to Munkebu. Within 5 minutes, we were scrambling a steep brushy hillside and then ON this long steep granite section with sustained chain-assist sections. Below, narrow Lake Tridalsvann made me a little dizzy. For the next mile, we hiked on granite sidewalks or through muddy meadows/marshes (the Djupfjordheia Moor?) – all on this high shelf between the higher mountains and the plunging lakes below.



Left to Right: (top) granite sidewalk and meadow marshes, OMG right turn UP hill (seriously?!?), looking back down during climb; (bottom) social path to Lake Djupfjorden, back on trail – Reinebringen massif, ptarmigan, Munkebu hut in distance, Monkey-boo

In the distance, we could see the final lake – Fjerddalsvann- and we assumed we would just proceed/contour right to it. But then we came to several cairns along a boot-beaten path that went due right and straight up the hillside. Ellen asked me if I was comfortable continuing, the concern being that this was not an official trail and we did not have a proper map. I remember saying we'd continue – but if we could not find a trail for more than 10 minutes, that was it. The first part of the climb involved some granite scrambling, but then the way then started cutting more reasonable switchbacks through meadow. At some point, we passed our first party of the day:

4 WOMEN who had just climbed Moskenesoy's highest mountain, nearby Herrmansdahlslinden. Indeed, Munkebu owes its existence to such climbers (although this party carried full backpacks and had definitely been tenting). At the sort-of top, we did get briefly lost – at first following a faint path toward some mountain features (including the backside of Reinebringen – which I only figured out after coming home and studying a real map). When said path began descending towards this different huge lake – Lake Djupfjorden (its outlet bridged by the highway we drove en route to Sorvagen) – I knew we were on some kind of scenic side-trail. So we backtracked 5 minutes and found the correct path to Munkebu – which took another sharp turn right, up another moderate hillside.



Left to Right: Munkebu close-up, Lake Fjerddalsvann & Lake Krokvatnet, channeling my grandfather above Samnanger

Eventually, we climbed along a broad ridgeline with massive views in all directions – including the Reinebringen massif again. Our only obstacle was a ptarmigan family who, despite clear terror, was determined to stay on the path. Within 15 minutes, we descended a little – Munkebu visible in the rocky meadow and next to a small tarn below. Ellen and I elected not to hike all the way down, content with our view and accomplishment. Because said view included this impressive granite mound that reminded me of a sentimental photograph of my grandfather in Samnanger, I attempted to recreate the pose. After various other photograph experiments, we made our way back down – not running into anyone until halfway up the first unexpected right-turn hill-climb. Said descent took as long as up given that we had to down-climbing a few things carefully – and there were a few uphill climbs along the marsh and granite section. We arrived back at the trailhead at around noon, raindrops falling as we put gear away. Indeed, although the weather wasn't great and I wouldn't call this the most spectacular hike in the world, we kicked some ass in terms of beating the stated time (5-7 hours - we took just a hair over 4) and route-found where others (including a few highly unprepared-looking Norwegians) had trouble... as noted on the trip down. Driving back, we stopped at this different grocery chain in Sorvagen. Although the outside looked more "quickie-mart" than the Reine co-op, the food/selection was great, including better produce, a better bakery, AND fresh chicken. By this point, though, Ellen was going to pan-fry salmon from the Reine fish-market and I was going to do leftover spaghetti.



Left to Right: (top) Viknes cliff-side beaches, Lofoten design logo, glass facility & wares; (bottom) Reine fish-market, sign for fish AND whale burgers, shopping the produce area, the fish area, Sylvi and her salmon dinner, our first windowpane rain

Back at the rorbuer, we cleaned up and ate some real food for lunch... but then it was off to Viknes (an hour away), a north-shore artist community flanked by soaring cliffs. Of all the things we visited in the Lofoten, Viknes was the only place that didn't fully live up to its hype – half because it was at the end of the trip (i.e. after seeing so many other spectacular things, it was hard to compete... plus, the rainy drive was a little long and – by this point – slightly monotonous). And half because I've seen better glass art and blowing facilities (e.g. Tacoma and Italy). The glass on display was, IMO, too thick and clunky – and lacking color or intricate detail. There was a good display about the incorporation of Lofoten quartz into some glass – but that was about/by a different artist than was blowing today. I did buy one thing – a slightly tacky glass waffle – to remind me of my favorite snack. The building and grounds were unique and artful. Across the street, the ceramics facility seemed to have fewer pieces (none worth purchasing) – and was more interesting for its extensive gardens and snack shop (more waffles!) with scenic sitting nooks – all adorned with local art. Driving back to Reine, we visited one of the popular fish markets (I cannot say if it's the only gig in town – but it seemed to be the one most visited by tourists). Of course, right out of the gate, one was confronted by a prominent sign advertising fish AND WHALE burgers. Although our Polish guide

back at Å strongly denied that the Lofoten was associated with whaling (something my mother inquired about, given a recent NG magazine story about whaling in the Lofoten), these data suggested otherwise. Inside, the blood-red whale steaks were impressive and delicious-looking – although not even I was going to photograph them up-close. In addition to many fishy items (including the salmon steaks Ellen bought for her and Sylvi), the market had kittiwake eggs (which I REALLY wanted to try), some deli salads and dips, and a farmers' market section of produce. In addition to the salmon, we bought some Lofoten stockfish for Asbjorn and Gro (although I'm not sure they were thrilled to be handed this supposedly prized delicacy!). Our big purchasing error, though, was not buying Lofoten cod liver oil – which, we have since discovered, is hard to buy in the US. Back at the rorbuer, Ellen did her best to pan-fry the salmon – but IMO she murdered it (hence my mother's glaring thumbs-up as I no-doubt commented about the many pieces of broken salmon... right before she ate it with a 1:1 ratio of fish:butter). Outside, the rain continued to fall.



Left to Right: morning walk to say good-bye to Reine – around rorbuer, neighborhood, etc.

July 3-4: Leaving the Lofoten for Oslo

The next morning, though, provided a beautiful send-off. After eating as many leftovers and extras as possible (lefse being our biggest challenge) and packing, we took a short good-bye walk around our neck of the town. And then we made the drive back to Leknes, our only challenge being filling the car at a different station that rejected all credit card insertion attempts. The car return, airport check-in and wait, and flight were all painless. In Bodo, we did a repeat performance of lunch during our 90-minute wait – before the 70-minute flight to Oslo. Alas, it was overcast and raining across much of the country – meaning no views whatsoever.



Left to Right: small plane view near Bodo, big plane sleepers (even the guy across the aisle), Oslo airport hotel, Asbjorn, Sylvi, & Gro

As we arrived in the terminal, I zoomed by Asbjorn and Gro – who had come to surprise us. Ironically, Sylvi recognized them before me. We walked about 2-block equivalents to our airport hotel (also a Radisson, but cheaper than that in Bergen). After checking in and dropping our luggage off in the spacious room (consider – we paid for an add-on rollaway for Ellen... and there was STILL ample room), we enjoyed some time and snacks in the lounge. Of course, I think Asbjorn is still shaking his head about how it is that all of us asked for juice instead of coffee; as noted in 2008, Norwegians drink strong coffee and/or tea multiple times a day, including deep into the evening... something none of us can handle. After securing plans for the next day, we said our goodbyes for the evening. Within an hour, we indecisively decided upon a menu-based dinner in the non-buffet hotel dining room. Unfortunately, they hotel has changed its menu since my last visit – when they had several really good Asian-style noodle dishes and appetizers (which, of course, I had been dreaming about!). Instead, it was all BIG Norwegian-European, which was sort of disappointing. Only my dessert fruit plate – complete with decadent passion fruit and all kinds of unusual berries – was memorable, light, fresh, and delicious.



Left to Right: Folk Museum - village, barn, live dance performance, how they make a grass roof. Can you tell it was raining?

The next day, the weather was terrible: overcast, gray, and drizzly to outright rain. Hard to believe it was worse here than in the Arctic – but it was. After a breakfast buffet that was 80% as good as the Bergen Radisson, we met Asbjorn and hit the highway for Oslo, the traffic moving but heavy. Of all Oslo's famous Bygdoy peninsula sites (e.g. Viking Museum, Kon Tiki Musum, etc.), I am most partial to

the Folk Museum - a sprawling park of traditional museums with displays, relocated buildings from all over Norway representing different temporal or regional styles, and living history activities/demonstrations. Because Sylvi indicated she'd never been to this place before, I requested that we focus on this place. Arriving around 10, we made our way first through the indoor-focused village sites; I don't think we visited these in 2008 – as I probably would have remembered the fascinating displays on alcoholism, tobacco abuse, and reformation attempts. Despite the rain, we waited for and enjoyed a wet dance performance with a large crowd of umbrella-holders. We then walked through the outdoor farm- and home-focused buildings representing many Norwegian regions and eras. En route, a living history bakery was selling flatbread (flour-based, not potato lelse) – and we ducked in and paid for several pieces (another new thing relative to 2008). After that, our interest in being outside waned – and so the remainder of our visit was focused on indoor displays showing Norwegian folk objects like house-wares, toys, and clothing, as well as culture - including an excellent new area devoted entirely to the Sami, a current exhibit about women's history, and a gallery of contemporary photography (a subset of pictures focused on the response to the horrible mass-shootings outside Oslo last year).



Left to Right: (top) Sami wear, one of the current exhibit photographs for Allison, rainy view of opera house; (bottom) Asbjorn explains to Sylvi our Swedish ancestry, dinner, the BEST wedding picture ever, pseudo-family reunion

By this point, it was coming up on 12:30 and we were all a little tired and hungry... so we visited the small cafeteria RIGHT as it got crazy. Although I would have benefited from a more substantial meal, this HUGE group ahead of us bought out all the pre-made plates (most of which were fishy). In the end, none of us ate more than pastries, fruit, and a drink. Before leaving, we ransacked the gift shop, spending far too much money. By this point, I was ready for some quieter conversations the country – but Asbjorn really wanted to drive us around Oslo, despite POURING rain and heavy traffic. I recall we drove by the university, the hospital, the government buildings, some new waterfront construction, and then to this across-the-water view of the iceberg-like opera house (which had just opened in 2008). Now coming up on 2:30 p.m., we then hit MAJOR traffic heading back towards the airport and Asbjorn/Gro's country home... indeed, I don't think I've been in such a mess in over 10 years. Coming back to Asbjorn/Gro's beautiful home was lovely – and I confess that I wish we'd convinced Sylvi to have stayed there last night - enjoying a relaxing breakfast and the long conversations I'd loved in 2008. In the end, we visited for about 4 hours (joined briefly by one of Asbjorn's nephews and his young son – featured in the BEST wedding photo ever)... talking over a long meal of delicious chicken and rice, and strawberries with cream. Of course, Sylvi's lasting revelation (which she still talks about) is learning that she is (we are) actually descended from some kind of Swedish war prisoner who was freed in the Samnanger-area valley where our Norwegian ancestors farmed.



Left to Right: flying over the Netherlands, Schipol, waiting for the train, on the train, on the tram, living room set-up

July 5-6: Leaving the Norway for the Netherlands, Big Day in Leiden

Given an early flight the next morning, we returned to our airport hotel by 8 p.m. and prepared for a 5:30 a.m. wake-up. Although the weather was not improved in Norway, things were looking up as we headed south – a thinning layer of low clouds revealing Holland's extensively diked and canalled farmlands below. Landing at Amsterdam's Schipol International Airport around 10 a.m., we were all anxious about comfortably getting Sylvi and our luggage through the airport, onto the train, and then onto whatever secondary vehicle was necessary to get as close as possible to Ellen's apartment in the Hague. Ellen was still considering a few options as we trekked

across the airport. After Norway's roomy accommodations, Ellen was also nervous about cramming us into her accurately-described small apartment. In the end, we rode a smaller commuter train back to one of the Hague stations – and then boarded a bus-like tram 4 blocks to Ellen's place. Thinking back now (from the perspective of navigating cityscapes with my mother either in a full-on wheelchair or with a walker) on the discussions we had in the Netherlands is ironic: e.g. Ellen didn't want Sylvi dragging her luggage the last 4 blocks because she thought the curbs or uneven sidewalks would be too challenging. Oh – the good old days. Despite all efforts, we still had to wheel the luggage 2 blocks. Ellen's building looked industrial from the outside but the interior was nice – and she was up high enough so you looked into trees from her deck. Of course, now I have to report something that still shocks Allison: it was decided that I should sleep in Ellen's bedroom because I was the lightest sleeper, and the crabbiest if I didn't get adequate sleep. Also – the toilet was off the living room, and Sylvi needed to use that more than any of us. And so Ellen's living room grew crowded with 2 inflatable mattresses (one of which had to be replaced, owing to the discovery of a bad hole) - Sylvi's less than 8 feet from the bathroom. The rest of our afternoon was spent doing simple things: visiting Ellen's nearby shopping market, going to a local sports shop to replace the aforementioned air mattress, and visiting Ellen's workplace/school. Now a 3-year veteran, Ellen just earned tenure last year. Alas, we could not see her classroom, owing to a then-in-progress expansion project. After returning to Ellen's apartment for a homemade dinner, we headed out for an evening stroll around the Queen's forest, a lake-dotted park with many kinds of pathways (foot, bike...). Everyone slept well – except for the fact that we all seemed to be sneezing and blowing our noses since arriving in the Netherlands... Sylvi more initially than us (but, as always, my sinuses went crazy and I was sick the longest!). Of course, the first joke was that Sylvi was allergic to the Netherlands... and then, as noted below, the recommended treatment: a "coffee house."



Left to Right: Ellen's school, evening walk at Queen's forest/park, Sylvi and "coffee shop," coots, De Valk windmill – outside and in

The next day was spent meeting up with Ellen's friend-gineer, Bruno, in nearby Leiden. Scientifically, Leiden connotes several things to me: Van Leeuwenhoek (microbiology), Tinbergen (animal behavior), and all sorts of botany. Largely at my request, we visited the Boerhaave Science Museum (which neither Ellen nor Bruno knew about) and Hortus Botanicus, one of the oldest botanical gardens in the world. Our first stop, though, was unplanned: as we arrived in Leiden, we (Sylvi and I) saw our first windmill (De Valk) – and Ellen could not resist taking us over there (even though we would be visiting, like, 19 historic windmills on our last day); only Ellen and I paid to enter the windmill, climbing scary stories (all via steep ladders). At the Boerhaave, which we visited next, Ellen hired a guide for an hour-long general tour. Dutch Joey (Ellen and I dubbed him, after the Friends character) confessed it was his first tour in English – and he was NOT a scientist. Not surprisingly, Bruno and I made him sweat with all our technical questions, none of which he could answer. Even so, we enjoyed the tour – and there were enough English placards that we could glean additional details if need be.



Left to Right: (top) Boerhaave – cadaver dissection gallery, botany text/drawings, Van Leeuwenhoek display and microscope, early electron microscopy, Dutch Joey and the Zander poop machine; (bottom) paper mache models, Dutch pancake house

For me, other great museum surprises included all the historic anatomy and physiology stuff (including a cadaver dissection viewing gallery, wax sculptures of the human body used for teaching, and – MOST INTERESTINGLY – paper Mache teaching models, complete with hinges to open things up, etc.), and all the science and/or medical technology (e.g. a TON of microscopes – from Van Leeuwenhoek's original hand-held scope to early electron microscope consoles, and many historic medical devices – like iron lungs,

medical/dental tools , early dialysis machines, etc.). There was also an especially funny display about Zander, who built historic exercise equipment – including a mechanical bull-like riding machine meant to stimulate bowel movements. Dutch Joey, who clearly did not know the term “bowel movement” cracked us up by stammering through his description and finally just saying: it made you go poop. Lastly, it should be noted that the Boerhaave sells hand-crafted and functional replicas of Van Leeuwenhoek’s original microscope; needless to say, I pre-ordered one... it was NOT cheap!

After our jaunt through the Boerhaave, we walked a few blocks to Ellen’s favorite Dutch pancake house – which was just starting to get busy for lunch. Dutch pancakes are pretty much just crepes (based on my apparently poor memory of some old Globetrekker episode, I thought they were going to be bacon with American style pancake batter poured over them). After lunch, we slowly walked several blocks to the university-affiliated Hortus Botanicus – passing several scenic canals, another windmill, and some kind of Rembrandt memorial. By this point, the day was very hot and Sylvi was getting sleepy (i.e. saw the garden café and decided she needed coffee, like, right now!). For reasons that escape (but still surprise) me, Ellen decided that Bruno and I should proceed on our own while they rested/drank. But for the record, I didn’t ask Bruno any provocative questions about Ellen and his relationship as we strolled the grounds. Meeting up an hour later, I cannot say any of us were over-the-top enthusiastic about the gardens (many parts of which closed for renovation) – but it would have been hard to top the Boerhaave, and I’m sure our pancake-filled bellies and the heat were not helping. Only the collection of insectivorous plants was impressive, IMO.



Left to Right: (top) unusual canal house on the way to the gardens, gardens - entrance, hot-house, promenade, insectivorous plants; (bottom) canal debauchery, gelato parting shot, heading out to the dunes - yes, those are actual hills – and North Sea coastline

Although Ellen tried to take us through more historic areas, I cannot remember many details (although one was a Mayflower-affiliated church) - and I apparently did not take any meaningful photographs. I do recall how raucous the canals were, though: many boats full of people well on their way to drunkenness. I also recall Sylvi awkwardly stopping in front of this obvious head shop, asking Bruno to explain what a hookah was and how it worked. And, finally, I recall our mandatory gelato stop – and our goodbyes to Bruno. From there, we walked a few blocks back to the car (which was in a parking garage on Leiden’s outskirts) – and then we returned to Ellen’s apartment. Following a simple and early dinner, Ellen and I assumed we’d all be up for an easy 3-mile walk to the coastal dunes – especially given that Sylvi had enjoyed a late coffee. But no – she was closing down shop for the night. Undeterred, Ellen and I drove 20 minutes (through very wealthy-feeling neighborhoods) to this state-park-like area nestled among shrubby hummocks (mind you – seeing ANY topography other than flat was highly unusual-feeling for the flat Netherlands!). We then hiked through similar terrain, eventually walking along and then through the grassy dunes to the coastline and North Sea.



Left to Right: driving to outskirts of Amsterdam, tram into the city from stadium, walking to Van Gogh Museum, bedroom painting

July 7-9: Amsterdam, Kinderdijk, Flying Home

Today was our one big day in Amsterdam. As with Leiden, I made the most specific requests – which included keeping things simple and focused on the Van Gogh Museum and the Anne Frank House. Perhaps that sounds depressing – but I’ve always loved Van Gogh’s vibrant style the most (plus, Jenn – who’d visited Amsterdam many times – said this was one of the best art museums in the

world), and I'd only recently read the Diary of Anne Frank. While I did want to say I'd walked through part of the famous red-light district, I knew long before we ever got on the plane that that wasn't going to happen. To this list, Ellen had booked a 2-hour canal tour to coincide with lunch. As with Leiden, we drove to the city outskirts (45 minutes away) - but then relied on trams for moving through the city proper. After much thought (mostly, again, concerned with Sylvi's comfort and ease), Ellen determined that the best target was this park-and-ride-like facility by the Olympic stadium; this option was very economical, providing us a limited-use tram tickets on top of a minimal whole-day parking fee. Having said that, we had to drive around the stadium twice before finding the underground garage. As can be seen above, Ellen also had to train Sylvi how to use/swipe her tram ticket - given that the city would be very busy... and we didn't want to be holding up any public transportation. While the trams were quiet in the morning, they were completely full at the end of the day - and Sylvi was VERY tired of crowds and public transportation (I, on the other hand, found Amsterdam to be relatively small - the crowds less than expected). Our tram ride to the museum area took less than 20 minutes; Sylvi and I disembarked first and found our way to the Van Gogh area (as there are several big art museums near this one stop) - while Ellen rode one more stop to the canal tour area so she could confirm our lunchtime reservations... and then walked back to meet us. Thankfully, Ellen had pre-ordered our Van Gogh Museum tickets, allowing us to bypass the huge lines. After watching a short movie about Van Gogh, we proceeded at our own pace through the museum - variably using digital head-phone sets that were, at times, annoying and inconsistent. Although it was crowded, I felt satisfied with the experience and thought the museum was just the right size; nonetheless, Van Gogh aficionados will be disappointed that a few big paintings are NOT here, including Starry Night, some of the more famous sunflower and iris studies, and one of the Arles' collection (Flowering Gardens) - my personal favorite. Although it was interesting to see the evolution of Van Gogh's work, I was surprised to learn he had sort of copied/adapted a fair number of Japanese woodcuts - and I cannot say I found these very compelling. After putting away some dough in the gift shop (including my mother's luxurious purchase of a handbag adorned with one of his many blossom studies), we enjoyed a small picnic along the park-like grounds outside the museum.



Left to Right: mapping the plan, shopping booty in front of the Rijkmuseum, Sylvi in the "m," canal boat, on the boat

From the Van Gogh Museum, we walked about 6 blocks to our canal tour launch-point, including passing the famous "amsterdam" sign in front of the Rijkmuseum and the Heineken flagship brewery. Despite our earlier picnic lunch, Ellen and I were still hungry - and shared a hot dog and ice cream from a cart on a nearby bridge. Sitting down along the long dock, we waited 40 minutes for our tour, all the while the LONG boats (as well as dozens of smaller private vessels) making their way up and down the busy waterway. Even though we were there first, we were displaced by a large private charter tour - who was allowed to board before all the individual ticket-holders; this annoyed Ellen to no end... although we ultimately got the best seats: in the small outdoor seating area at the back of the boat. Given soaring temperatures, EVERYONE soon wanted to be outside - the indoor seating sweltering, the views limited to one side or the other, not to mention by the hazy/dirty windows. Overall, I enjoyed the tour - and we definitely got to see Amsterdam under beautiful (but crazy) conditions - but I cannot say I captured great images on film. A lot of the problem was that views of the buildings were often obscured by trees, by the extensive houseboats moored along most edges, by other moving vessels, or by going under Amsterdam's MANY bridges. Of course, one view that was NOT obscured happened early on (although I did not capture it on film): namely, we passed a public park and one of the locals totally dropped his pants, willfully mooning the boat. For some reason, Ellen missed this; I don't think my mother, though, will forget it - not to mention all the public partying and drunkenness (oh Bergen - you were so tame!). Our tour was 80% through narrow scenic canals and 20% on the more open harbor area, which was choppy. Alas, I cannot recall which canals we focused on - sufficed to say, they were some of the big ones.



Left to Right: canal boat views, on the way to... Anne Frank House, the "Dam" square

With the canal tour wrapped up around 3, we headed on foot (about 6 blocks) to the Anne Frank House, stopping for gelato en route. As with the Van Gogh Museum, Ellen pre-ordered tickets for a 4:15 entering time. Being late in the day, the line of non-reservation folks waiting for limited entry time blocks was MUCH worse here. Despite such blocking, though, the Anne Frank House felt more crowded... although that feeling was exacerbated by how stark the building was (i.e. all the people seemed that much more present). But it was a privilege to visit this place. Needless to say, no pictures were allowed inside and you had to carry your belongings close to your body (I was asked to carry my backpack front-style) - mostly to make it through the crowds and up the many narrow, ladder-like stairs. The Anne Frank House consists of a newer building that serves as the public entrance and display areas; the first part of the

very regimented tour begins here with a preview of Anne's life. After these introductions, you enter the original building where the Franks ran their business and then lived hidden on the upper annex floors. Few original furnishings have been maintained – but the things that have been preserved are powerful and sometimes eerie: the bookcase that hid the secret door, the kitchen sink, the porcelain toilet, Anne's bedroom wall (adorned with magazine cut-outs and memorabilia)... You then re-enter the modern gallery – to a viewing room of all her original diaries - and then proceed to a holocaust style remembrance area. The tour took us just over an hour, including a visit to the gift shop. Afterwards, Ellen insisted we walk a few blocks (passing the Homomonument, which seemed disrespectfully close to one of Amsterdam's famous outdoor urinals – not to mention disrespectfully small) to the "Dam", a famous square that was right on the edge of the red light district (promising me there would be tacky gift shops with red light district snow globes... alas there were none). Although we considered walking a couple more blocks for said spectacle, it didn't seem right after the Anne Frank House... plus Sylvi was completely pooped out. And so we caught an insanely crowded tram back to the stadium – and drove home for a quiet dinner. Later, we met one of Ellen's friends/co-workers for another walk in the Queen's forest/park.



Left to Right: a more public beach walk, now I am sick(!), garden center with "trendyplant," a short canal ferry near Rotterdam

The next day was our last full day in the Netherlands. As should be evident above, whatever allergy Sylvi claimed to have acquired between Oslo and the Netherlands had now mysteriously transmitted to me – and would linger for several weeks (a la cold to sinus infection). Meanwhile - Sylvi was feeling much better and, given that she regretted missing the dunes walk Ellen and I took without her the other night, she insisted we begin the day with a beach walk – this time driving pretty much right up to the sand. Today's public nudity moment happened early on: a leathery old topless woman was totally lying out on one of the blue lawn-chairs (see above) as you strolled to the shore (these set-up's were commercially run; if you wanted to lay your own things out, you had to walk a reasonable distance away from said facilities). After 20 minutes walking down the beach, we headed back. Our next stop was one of the large Dutch garden centers; although it was sprawling, it didn't feel much bigger than large nursery complexes in Washington or Oregon. Its one unique feature (aside from the than the hilarious "trendyplant" signs) was the full-on aquarium area, the latter more clean and impressive than most fish stores in the US (there was also a small pet area – mostly rabbits, guinea pigs, and gerbils/hamsters). Because the café area looked inviting, we enjoyed a fine lunch here – soup and desserts. Shockingly, I purchased nothing... but that was mostly because everything I might have wanted was big and breakable.



Left to Right: (top) renting the bikes, getting used to the bikes, bikes on dikes, among the Kinderdijk windmills (bottom) more Kinderdijk, Don Quixote herself (no-doubt being quixotic!), on the ladders, windmill shoes

We then drove to Kinderdijk, a Unesco World Heritage Site consisting of 19 historic windmills along grass-lined canals (notably named for some folk-tale involving a broken dike, a flood, and a cat-manned cradle with a baby). Getting there required that we pass Delft (home to the Netherlands' famous blue & white pottery... and another famous microbiologist, Beijerinck) and industrial-looking Rotterdam. Somewhere between Rotterdam and Kinderdijk, we rode a 2-minute canal ferry. Before this trip, Sylvi – to both our surprises – had one big request: to ride a bike in the Netherlands. At the time, Ellen and I discussed this, concerned she might fall and break something (famous last thoughts!). Although Ellen considered renting bikes nearer to her home, Kinderdijk was THE perfect place to fulfill Sylvi's vehicular fantasies... even if it was a totally tourist thing to do and the shoddy bikes were over-priced. Stepping

into the all-purpose gift shop near Kinderdijk's seeming main entrance, Ellen and I initially only did some shopping – but then saw the bikes, did the math, and determined this was the way to go. Although Ellen and Sylvi were satisfied with their bikes, my seat was dreadful; as retold in later emails home, my Netherlands felt like any number of inflamed STD pictures I am famous for showing in class. We rode no more than a couple miles (if that) down the wide, paved bike-walk that paralleled the windmill-lined canal. To say we felt as though we were truly in quintessential Holland is an understatement. Although Ellen and I wanted to explore a different route back (i.e. it seemed as though we could cross a bridge and ride along the opposite side of the canal), Sylvi did not want to take any chances. Given that we did not have a map, we relented and returned the same way we came.

Of course, the argument Sylvi did not win was skipping the one windmill that was open for public tours because it cost, like, \$10 (mind you, Sylvi skipped the previous De Valk windmill tour in Leiden). As stated at the time: after all the money you have already paid to come all the way over here, you are NOT going to skip on such a low-cost windmill tour! Even then, all she did was make up illogical excuses: oh – I have to stay with the bikes because someone might steal them (to which we responded by demonstrating that the bikes had a locking wheel security system). After finally dragging her to the windmill museum (a 5 minute walk from the bike-walk), I left her and Ellen to explore on my own. Probably the coolest thing about the site was the fact that the windmill was actively turning – the HUGE sails flapping loudly with every rotation. In contrast with the De Valk site (which milled grain), this windmill's job was to pump water by turning an impressive waterwheel screw, effectively emptying the sea from the low-lying land. Aside from said waterwheel, this site was less elaborate than the De Valk site – neither as tall, nor as filled with things like fancy living quarters or grain-milling paraphernalia. After a short ride back to the gift-shop where we rented the – in my case – now-crotch-burning bikes, we returned to the Hague and Ellen's home. Unfortunately, I don't remember much about our last evening – other than we spent a fair bit of time packing. The next morning, Sylvi requested a driving tour of the Hague's downtown area – which I skipped. Shortly after she and Ellen returned, we headed for the airport, our afternoon flight departing around 2. All our flights were reasonably on time.



Left to Right: good-bye Kinderdijk, my messy room, Ellen waiting for us to leave so she can have her apartment back, Sylvi on deck

Epilogue – Legends of the Fall

Ten days after our return from the Netherlands – and, ironically, the day before I was to finally return to my home in Oregon (and head to Montana and then raft the Colorado/Grand Canyon) – Sylvi agreed to do a short hike at Mt. Rainier: Naches Loop near Chinook Pass. Although the park website accurately described a few lingering snowfields on the north side of Naches, Diane and Brendan had done the hike a few days before, sending easy-looking pictures of the 3 mile loop. Indeed, the day we set out was gorgeous – not a cloud in the sky. Although we had enjoyed glimpses of Rainier during the drive, we set out on the hike from the east side of the pass, heading up the PCT behind Naches Peak – which eclipses Rainier during the first half of the hike. Although our dad took all of us on this hike a few times, Sylvi had no recollection of the trail; even without Rainier, she thought the flowers and subalpine terrain were magnificent. With Sylvi resting a lot (but not eating enough), we were doing only about a mile per hour.



Left to Right: setting out across PCT foot-bridge over Chinook Pass, first major snowfield (no problem!), GORGEOUS meadows!

After successfully crossing 3 small, flattish snowfields, I was hopeful we were finishing up with the white stuff. In the distance, though, looked to be our longest patch yet – not to mention one that had a little incline at the start. At the time, the thing made me a little nervous – but not nervous enough to turn around. I did give my mother a pole and mostly cover her during the 4 steps up – although I did snap the fateful picture below, less than 1 minute before the fall. Just after we were on the “easy” flat section and I turned around, I heard what I can only call a whimpering call behind me – and catch the final moments of my mother crumpling to the snow, her legs in an obvious twist. It was 11:29 – almost 90 minutes since we set out. I knew immediately that the accident was a major ankle break. Her pain level and the appearance of her foot (severely bent outward, with a walnut-sized ankle protrusion that – in retrospect – was probably a chunk of displaced fibula) were BAD. After being passed by DOZENS of hikers pre-fall, we were suddenly feeling alone – although it would be less than 10 minutes before a woman with a working cell phone arrived and called 911. She then hiked back to the trailhead and waited there an hour to ensure the EMT/mountain rescue team knew where we were. Meanwhile, we worked on moving Sylvi off the snow – a process that involved her butt-scooching back down the tracks... and me trying to keep her from slipping or moving her bad foot. Once we were back on the trail, she basically lay down in this slightly muddy flat area and I tried to keep her

ankle iced – and to get some sugar in her... because she was in shock, shaking a LOT. After 20 minutes, this group of guys – including 3 park concession employees on their day off, and an Iraq war veteran who was some kind of ROTC program instructor/coordinator – arrived and sat with us for the hour it took for the EMT/mountain rescue team to arrive. The veteran, I could tell, was not impressed with my rescue skills, my inability to say reassuring but ultimately false things (e.g. you ankle might not be broken) in an effort to calm her down, and my inability to generate light small-talk (which was mostly the result of my own quiet state of panic). If I haven't said it before: I was not a good rescue leader when I took all my basic wilderness first aid back in the 1990's (although I was good at playing the victim). By 1, the EMT/mountain rescue team arrived, spending an hour checking her vitals and gearing up for the one-wheeled gurney ride back (the idea of which scared the crap out of my mother). Indeed and much to my surprise, my mother agreed to being sedated for said ride... which ended up taking less than 30 minutes. From there, it was a 70-mile ambulance ride to Tacoma, a 6-hour ordeal in the ER, and a 2-night hospital stay surrounding serious ankle surgery resulting in 1 plate and 8 pins.



Left to Right: one step from the fall, the rescue area, the one-wheeled gurney, the ride out, the hospital

Driving alone back to the hospital, I was acutely aware that what had just happened was going to change everything about the next 3-4 months – time I had immediately planned to spend with Roger/Susie in Montana, rafting the Colorado River/Grand Canyon with Allison/Marshall... time I needed to finish my new course in immunology. But I was also aware of how challenged (and challenging) my mother was going to be given that she had managed to disdainfully avoid doctors for nearly 20 years, that she was JUST changing insurance plans (which she didn't fundamentally understand), and that she lacked motivation when it came to physically pushing herself (something I view as essential to the recovery process). What I was not prepared for was the fact that I thought I could manage the situation by staying with her the first 5-6 weeks before I had to go back to work. Ultimately, though, I had no idea how trapped and upset I was going to feel actually executing this – particularly after canceling all my other plans. I also underestimated the level of grief and trauma I internalized while being with her that first day, through the hospitalization/surgery, and then that first week at home when she could barely get out of bed. And all the while, I felt like she fought me on every front (eating, exercising, doing breathing exercises to avoid hospital-acquired pneumonia setting in... all while fixating constantly on low-priority household chores). Like Roger and Bryan and I would discuss those early days: some people simply are not care-givers and I – as a very single person who has actively chosen not to have children – am not a care-giver. My patience wore thin within the first 10 days – to the point that plan B was developed: moving Sylvi to an assisted living facility in my hometown in mid-August, greatly assisted by Ellen – who flew home for a week before returning to her work. Although things were better in Oregon, it did become more challenging when Allison/Marshall left for the Grand Canyon – mostly because, once again, it felt like I was the only one involved with my mother. Although I would be lying if I said I didn't resent giving that trip up, Allison/Marshall's experience – 12/14 days of rain, lightening, and flash-flooding; wet sleeping bags pretty much every night; and a serious boat-flip (had I been in that, I would probably never raft again) – almost convinced me there was a higher power making sure I was NOT on that trip after all. Despite everything, though, the remaining summer was not completely lost. Although I'm sure the following will sound totally selfish to some people, the fact remains: I was going to lose my mind if I didn't get out – not to mention the fact that I was really scared of the idea of hiking on snow... and so it was super-important that I get over that.

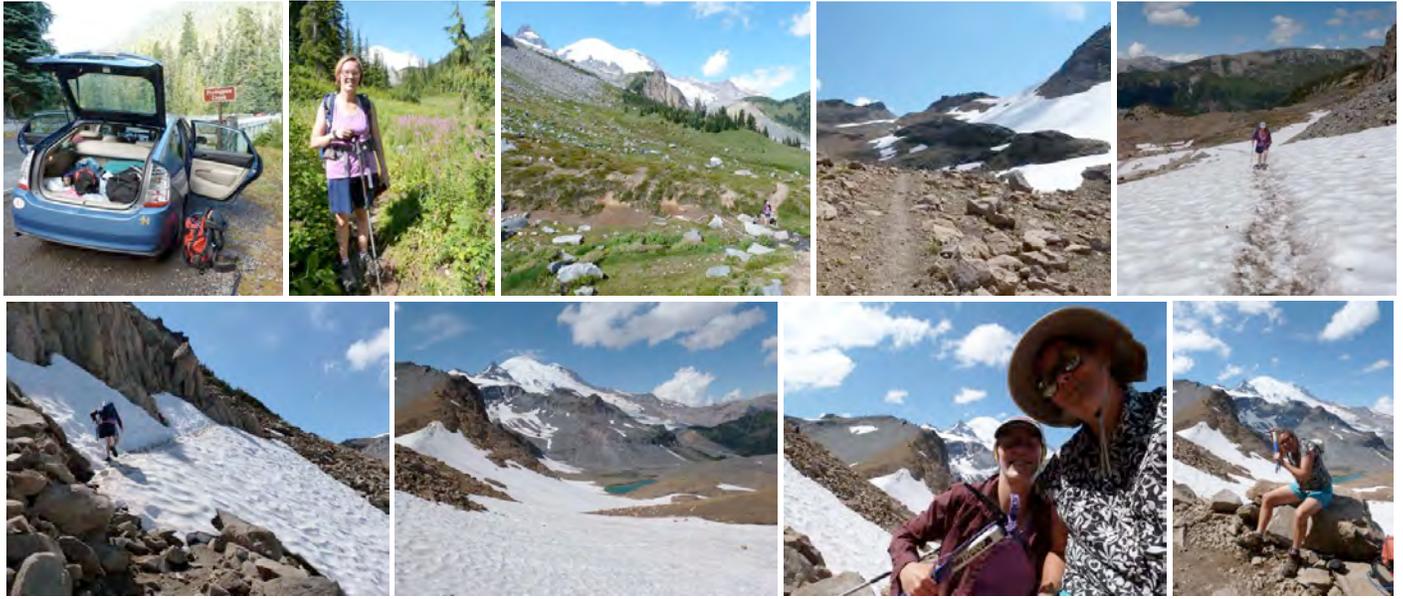


Left to Right: near Glacier Vista looking back on first big snowfield crossed, climbing up and at Panorama Point, flower madness!

Thanks mostly to Sylvi's neighbor Joan, Allison (who tirelessly made multiple drives back and forth between WA and OR those first weeks) and I were able to head up to Paradise on August 3 for a 5-mile hike up to Panorama Point and across the upper Skyline, a classic hike we've done together every year for the last several years. Although we did this year's version a little earlier than last year's, the snow was about the same, owing to a lighter winter. In total, we crossed just a couple snowfields – most at the base of Panorama Point, or along upper Mazama Ridge where the Golden Gate bypass trail (which we took) heads down. When we set out, it was pretty clear – but the clouds arrived around noon, ultimately socking in the mountain as we arrived back to the car.

A week later, Ellen arrived and we temporarily moved Sylvi to Oregon. Said move required two trips – the first with Ellen, Sylvi, and I; the second involved Allison and I returning to Washington to retrieve another car-load of belongings. Not wanting to waste the weekend (even in the face of questionable weather), we headed first (Friday night) to a cheap hotel in Packwood, WA – driving through one of the more dramatic lightening and rain storms I've ever experienced. After sharing a queen-sized bed, we got up early and

headed to the Summerland/Panhandle Gap trailhead. Despite epic storms the night before, the skies were promising and the parking lot was so full we had to park road-side, just past the bridge over Panhandle Creek. This was, like, my 9th or 10th time doing this hike; in contrast, Allison had been to Summerland once, but no higher. At the time (right after our dad passed away), she was unimpressed with Summerland – but I was convinced she needed to give it another chance... if only because it was one of my dad's favorite places on the mountain. Worried about what were accurately forecast thundershowers around 2, we boogied up to Summerland and did not even pause... continuing up through the rubble. Thankfully, the snow did not begin until high up – the first patch long, shallow, and easy. But then came two final short patches, each no more than 100 feet long... but each on steep slopes with narrow, slick foot-print pockets. Of course, I had been here under such conditions before and KNEW the gap was literally 5 minutes away. Although I had knowingly carried my ice axe and mini-crampons, Allison had no such gear. In the end, I sent her up with all my gear first – and said I'd think about it while I ate my sandwich. Watching her (and others), I initially was, like: I've done this before, I don't need the stress today. But then I was, like, yes – I HAVE done this before and I've never given up. So I did it with all my gear after Allison returned. Even though there were many clouds obscuring the big gap view, not giving up on Panhandle was worth it.



Left to Right: (top) Fryingpan Creek trailhead, Allison in lower meadows, climbing up from Summerland proper, rubble, first snow; (bottom) freaky-freaky snow, Panhandle Gap, women with ice axes

The one plan that thankfully was NOT lost to all this was the rare opportunity to see Jenn/George and family, who moved to North Carolina 3 years ago (I hadn't seen them since). Back in May, they called and said they'd be in the Sisters area for a wedding and asked if I'd be interested in meeting up. At the time, I was skeptical – but penciled it in because it did, in fact, fit between my Montana and Colorado trips. Driving out late Wednesday (and staying in Sisters), I was both nervous but relieved to be fully getting away... the first trip that had nothing to do with my mom. The next day, Jenn/George and I headed up Black Crater (George's parents generously taking the kids into Bend for the day) – a McKenzie Pass area hike Allison and I had vowed to do several times but always bailed on given that it sounds rather brutal (8 miles with 2500 feet gained/lost – to around 7200 feet). While it was grueling, Jenn and George are always in top shape – and clearly motivated me up that thing. Having hiked many nearby McKenzie hikes and smaller summits, I honestly didn't think Black Crater would offer anything new – but it was a very cool approach (with plenty of shade – great given 80-85 temp's in Sisters) and the summit views included ALL three Sisters (South is obscured from most other vantage points in the area). But the most memorable part of the hike will always be the fact that George carried/played his artisanal, home-made ukulele and Jenn wrote/performed a song for my mother ("The Rankled Ankle") – which, yes, we videotaped at 7200 feet for her pleasure. Although I didn't originally plan to stay in Sisters a second night, it was SOOOOO great to be with Jenn/George that I found an available room at a cheaper hotel and joined the whole family for dinner. Wish we could do this every summer!



Left to Right: Jenn/George on final summit approach, Three Sisters, Black Crater with Mt. Washington, Rankled Ankle song

Right before Allison/Marshall left for the Colorado, she and I got in a hike up to Jefferson Park via Whitewater – a hike I'd done half a dozen times but she had never managed. It was blazing hot and, being a weekend, there was a shitload of people up there. Even though the spec's on this hike seemed relatively easy (10 miles, 1800 feet) by comparison with Panhandle Gap or even Black Crater, both of us were pokey and tired most of the way, probably given that the stress of all the recent events were finally catching up with us.

The coming weeks were challenging with Allison and Marshall gone. Thankfully, Roger/Susie made a detour to Oregon during their annual trailer voyage – and Sylvi was treated to a “trailer-park” dinner. Roger/Susie and I also did a sweltering hike at Silver Falls, one of probably 3 hikes there – the others with Bryan/Emma and Allison – in the last 3 months.



Left to Right: (top) Jefferson Park via Whitewater – cliffy trail, in park, at lake, sign-of-fall gentian meadow; (bottom) trailer-park dinner, Jefferson Park sign taken for Sylvi and her BAD swelling, Allison and I on Broken Hand looking across to Broken Top

Allison/Marshall returned in mid-September. We managed to get in ONE good (but windy) high alpine hike (Tam Mac Rim) before a very early week of severe cold and mountain snow generally shut down mountain hiking for the season. Despite lots of commentary and opinions to the contrary, Sylvi only began PT in mid-September – and, as you can see – her swelling level rightfully scared her physical therapist a lot. Although I took a partial leave to help my mother with ongoing DR and PT appointments, fall term has been really hard and there have been times I questioned whether I should have taken more leave... the biggest complication being what I have deemed the “five-part” unending root canal – which, for the record, is still not capped. Through this, my mother has reminded me that her first root canal happened during the stressful period when her father passed away. Well, mommy, that big gold crown will be remembered as the “Sylvi-ankle” tooth from here on out.

Sylvi finally returned home on November 2nd, following a sometimes-bumpy PT experience and plenty of ongoing discussions and disagreements about recovery, long-term planning, safety, and the future. While many friends have liked to say things to me like – well, don’t you think this was a good wake-up call in terms of important considerations for managing your mom in the future? My response is: my mother is a very stubborn woman and, while I certainly have ideas about what I think should happen, I remain unconvinced that my mother is – or ever will be – willing to have a serious talk about these sorts of issues again. Alas, I think she believes that this was an accident that she can avoid by never hiking or going into the mountains again. She is already fighting me about scheduling an annual physical, despite all the problems exacerbated by her lack of a physician/medical records during this mess. In my mind, there have been only two positive outcomes of this experience: (a) I have learned that I cannot care for my mother so she – or other family members – will have to factor in that new reality into future events; and (b) despite everything, I think my mother has a new and positive lease on freedom and life. Indeed, all the sisters have perceived ongoing motivation issues with my mothers these last few years: a period of likely depression after our dad died, a lack of purpose or goals this past year associated with her pending retirement. Watching her return home and embrace her life again – volunteering at her old school, taking up yoga, going back to her yard-work – we have been happy to see her genuinely enthusiastic... because excitement and Sylvi have often seemed mutually exclusive entities for awhile. Hopefully, too, she will make good on a discussion in Norway: that we will go back to the Lofoten in five years with the whole family... because Ellen and I definitely saw glimpses of enthusiasm during that trip too.