

Once again I am stealing some time away amidst the familiar familial hurly-burly that is our Stinson New Year's tradition to do some reflection on the past year and record it for posterity. 2016 will definitely be a memorable year in my book, mostly for purely selfish and personal reasons (helloooo cancer! And also, goodbye!) but also because this past year has definitely felt like a turning point in history, especially with the election of Donald Trump and all the accompanying upheaval in American life. We are certainly living in some interesting times and I am doing my best to stay solid in my values and my determination to keep loving and creating and making the world a better place for everyone.

But before I get too far down the rabbit hole of predictions and solutions for what kind of looking glass country we seem to be dealing with, let me go back to the point of this post, which was to record and reflect on what happened to ME in the year just past (because after all this is my solipsistic storytelling space). With the able assistance of my calendar and my photo log, I ought to be able to at least remember the highlights in vaguely chronological order.

January started off quietly, which was definitely welcome after so much upheaval (cancer surgery and treatments, holiday hoo ha) in the previous months. For my birthday weekend Josh and I got all dressed up and went to the Edwardian Ball in SF for two nights with a bunch of friends and had a terrific time. A few days later we also went to see the Wood Brothers in concert but it turned out to be kind of a bummer show since the band was sick. The week after that I had my first chemo treatment, at which I did not have a terrific time but at least it turned out to be less horrible than I had so fearfully anticipated.

In February I got my hair cut short in anticipation of its impending demise, which turned out to be a good idea since it started coming out in handfuls right around Valentine's Day while we were at Dundracon (one of our annual gaming cons here in the Bay Area). After Dundracon we had a gaggle of teens over for Eli's traditional birthday gaming sleepover. By the time I got to my second chemo treatment in February I was pretty much bald so I began to fool around with wearing different brightly colored wigs (I had blue, green, pink, auburn and purple but my favorite was the purple). One thing I was determined not to let chemo spoil was my trip to Joshua Tree in late February for Pantasia (a handpan gathering). I drove with my teacher Judith and a couple of her friends and we all shared a room and even though I was tired and queasy a lot of the time, I had a truly amazingly great experience there. I got to geek out and play some soul-lifting music with some incredible people in a gorgeous setting (including the trippy and wonderful Integratron nearby), and I even won the lottery, which meant I could acquire a new handpan (my CFoulke Aether, which is still my favorite). I made new friends and grew as an artist and I can't wait to go back again this year, especially now that I'm feeling so much better.

In March I had my last two chemo treatments so that's pretty much what I did all month. Friends and family were wonderful during my chemo treatment months and brought us food and helped schlep the kids around, although I was also able to keep doing some of my usual activities. I did have to let go of my desire to go to FOGcon (local writer's con that I always go to) and instead stay home and lay low. I did manage to go see my brother and his friend Matej play a fabulous, intimate concert as the Pull-String Duo at the Maybeck House in Berkeley, participated in the Purim shenanigans at our synagogue, and helped throw Isaac a sleepover "Pi Party" for his birthday. My last chemo treatment was the last day of March and I celebrated with bubbles.

At the beginning of April I was still feeling pretty crappy trying to get over the final chemo treatment (plus I got a cold), but not so crappy that I couldn't start making freak flag blanks and getting ready for Maker Faire (which I was determined not to miss because of cancer treatments). Josh and I stole away for a rejuvenating spa day at the Sonoma Mission Inn, I went to a party at Adrienne and Jim's house where I got to hang out with my Dickens Fair buddies, and Mom and I took a trip to the De Young Museum for an art day and to see the "Flowers to Art" exhibit (which was awesome). We celebrated Passover with family, which was lovely as always. The Lucas Valley hills were amazing in springtime so I went for walks with various people at various times and even shot a music video with my brother where I played handpan while surrounded by green and wildflowers (it was very pretty). The biggest event of April though was that at the end of the month I had double mastectomy surgery, which though physically challenging was even more challenging to deal with psychologically. But I got through that (again with the help of my wonderful family and friends) and was feeling pretty good after about two weeks.

Other than recovering from surgery, the two big things that happened in May that I was determined to do were Maker Faire and Wiscon. I am happy to report that I managed to participate in both. Once again I had a terrific team of friends who helped me run the Fly Your Freak Flag High booth at Maker Faire, and it all went really well (it certainly helped that I had run it so many times before and so I kind of had a system down). I even won Best In Class/Editor's Choice awards which made me feel glad I'd made the effort. It was also good to be at Wiscon and re-activate my dormant writer identity by being around all the smart geeky people talking about all the craft and philosophy of writing...one thing the chemo definitely took away from me was the brain-power and discipline necessary to write, but the desire was still there and I was glad to be feeling better enough to want to start writing again. (Though as it turned out I didn't actually start writing fiction again until Fall, because things got too distracting with all the cancer treatments and self-care, and then Burning Man.)

June was a pretty good month for the most part. I continued to run around doing lots of self-care appointments and all the usual end-of-school stuff. Our nephew Jonah graduated from high school and we went to Chico for the weekend to help celebrate that momentous occasion. The

following week Isaac graduated from our beloved elementary school, which marked the end of 10 years of our time at that institution. I was sad to say goodbye to that place and those people after so many good experiences there, but it was also kind of exciting to be entering a new era. Isaac and I went to the Pirate Festival in mid-June, and then a few days after that our family foursome went on a quick 6-day trip to NYC (Josh had a conference to go to and the rest of us decided to tag along). We stayed in the East Village and had lots of fun being all touristy (Empire State Building, 9/11 Memorial, 1 World Trade Center, the Met, Central Park, Statue of Liberty, etc), watching Broadway plays (Lion King and Les Miserables), eating delicious food (mmmm bagels) and visiting friends. We walked a lot and finally taught our kids how to ride the subway. We packed a lot into a short time! After we got back we took the kids to see one of our favorite bands, Flight of the Conchords, in concert. We had a flat tire on the way there but still managed to make it in time to see most of the concert. At the very end of June I went back to a different UCSF campus to have my DIEP flap breast reconstruction surgery, which went successfully but was definitely tough to recover from (the toughest so far).

I declared July the month of Julaxing, where theoretically all Julia would do was relax and recover from reconstructive surgery (Josh and the boys were all caught up in Adventure Gaming Camp). Luckily for at least the first three weeks or so I had lots of people visiting and bringing food and helping entertain me while I sat around and healed up (which was harder than it sounds).

In August I helped my mom with her booth at the ACC Craft Show, and then the week after that the kids went off to sleepaway camp once Adventure Gaming Camp was over and Josh and I snuck away for our traditional belated anniversary trip to Ashland to see some great plays and eat some yummy food. Then we came back and hit the ground running trying to get ready for Burning Man. (Josh built a new water bar for our camp, which I helped with a little bit, and I made myself a new scallop vest and an art piece about my breast cancer saga to burn at the Temple, but mostly there was just the usual craziness of prepping and packing). Isaac started middle school, and then Josh left early to help with build and I drove up to the burn with Mom (who was back for her second year.) I had a really great burn...saw lots of art, danced and partied and met new people and gave away lots of things. I played my first handpan concert and got to spend some important "year of living cancerously" processing time at the Temple, which helped put a lot of things in perspective.

In September Eli started his second year at The Marin School and got his braces off. He'd also cut his long hair over the summer so he had a whole new look. We finally got our foam roof recoated and some new electrical work done (it was a big project involving coordinating with multiple tradespeople). I helped mom with her booth at the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival. In late September Josh and I went to South Lake Tahoe for the weekend to celebrate with Josh's family at the wedding of his cousin Robert and Lisa, then came back to visit with my extended

family in honor of my cousin Rich and his wife Kim and their kids who were in town from Colorado.

In October we celebrated the high holidays with family (and I did a lot of reflecting on the one year anniversary of my cancer diagnosis). Josh and I saw Ani DiFranco in concert. We helped set up and hold down the Pink Heart Camp space at the SF Burning Man Decompression event. We met up with Dave and Keri and Zinnie in Placerville at the Hangtown Music Festival, where we dressed in fun animal costumes and saw lots of great music including the Wood Brothers (actually only two out of the three Wood Brothers, as the third was out sick, but it was a great show anyway). Then I flew out to Columbus, OH for the World Fantasy Convention. I got to hang out with my writer buddies yet again and this time I actually even did some writing, which felt great. I got back from that just in time for Halloween, although this year I hung out at home with the teenagers watching movies and handing out candy rather than running around with Isaac and his buddies trick-or-treating.

November was the start of Dickens Fair workshops and performances, and my friend Robin came to visit for a few days. After she left it was finally election day and I think it's safe to say that most of the country was pretty surprised and slightly more than half the country (including me, the one who was positive we'd finally have our first woman president) was pretty upset that it turned out that Donald Trump had won the election through the electoral college (not the popular vote). While still reeling from the election results and what felt like a new, more frightening and less friendly America, I went in for my final "fix-it" surgery to finish out the breast reconstruction. (Compared to the previous surgery, this one was a cakewalk—I didn't even have to stay overnight in the hospital and I was back up and at it relatively soon afterwards.) Later in the month we went to go see Cirque du Soleil (Luzia) with our friends Janet and Todd and Audrey and John, and as usual it was an amazing show and we had a fantastic time. We had a quiet couple of days of Thanksgiving at my parents' house. The only other thing of note this month was that I fortuitously acquired another new handpan (an original 1st Generation Hang that had been retuned to the Kaffa scale, which I love).

In December Eli and I finished out Dickens Fair (we had a great run overall, and I especially enjoyed getting to model 4 times for the Dark Garden corset windows and leading my own shanty during the Paddy West Shanty Hour) and we went to go see our friend Mark and the SF Gay Men's Chorus sing their annual holiday show. Josh and I once again threw our annual Black Turkey Party—this year was the 20th Annual, which we celebrated by awarding a turkey trophy and knit, turkey-shaped "crown" to our friend Rebecca, who had attended all 20. We took the kids and met up with a bunch of friends to see "Rogue One" (the new Star Wars movie) at the Corte Madera Cinema, as is tradition. We celebrated Christmas Eve at Josh's parents' house, and Christmas Day at Brandi and Quinn's with the extended Archer/Gomes families. And we ended the year as we always do, with my parents and my brother's family out at Stinson

Beach.

Looking back at my admittedly incomplete and largely on-the-bright-side list of all the big things that happened in my life this year, I am struck by the fact that even though there was a lot of difficult and unhappy stuff (and I haven't even gone into the fact that 2016 also saw a horrible humanitarian disaster continue to develop in Syria, the exit of Britain from the European Union, the massacre in Orlando, far too many police shootings of innocent black folk, some huge natural disasters, a huge fire in an Oakland warehouse, and what felt like an unusual amount of celebrity deaths...Bowie, Prince, Alan Rickman, Gene Wilder, Muhammad Ali, Leonard Cohen, Fidel Castro, George Michael, Carrie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds, and many more), there was also a lot of good stuff: trips and adventures, time with new friends and old, music and art and food and celebrations of all kinds. I feel I can say without exaggeration that on the whole 2016 was one of the hardest and most challenging years I've ever seen, both for me and for our country and our planet, and I am more than happy to wave farewell to it as we begin afresh in 2017. Here's hoping that this newly-minted year will be kinder and gentler for us all than the last one was.