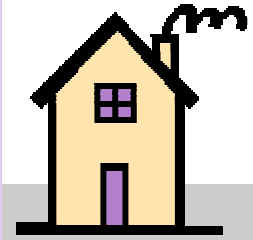


the hallway



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So.

Been awhile.

Any news?

Yeah, us neither.

...

...

...

Okay, so that hiatus thing? Ended up being just a smidge longer than originally planned. Our lives kind of, um, exploded, and the update I'd started last spring had to be put on hold, and when I came back to it a few months later, there was much rewriting to be done, because of course there was three more months of life to tell you about, and then life happened again, and it was another few months and at that point I gave up on trying to keep it to our maximum of five pages, and then life just continued happening! Seriously, what's up with that? Like, could we just put things on pause for a moment please? Because I really, really need a nap.

And in the meantime, *your* lives kept happening, and there were babies being born right and left, and people graduating from the long hard slog of high school and college and graduate school and the school of hard knocks, and people getting married, and moving all over the place, and moving again, and some of you insane people did many of those things at once!! Can you

insert clever title here

please just slow down? Honestly, it's like you all had stuff to do or something, and just who do you think you are, going on and having a life like that? I don't recall ever granting permission for these goings on, all this *change* nonsense, and I'm inclined to suspect you're all conspiring against me.

But in the event you're *not* conspiring against me, and instead just having a, you know, life, I figured it was long past time to get back into this updatey thing. To save time, I've boiled down our update to answer the ten most frequently asked questions to bring you up to speed:

Yes.

No.

Maybe.

Haven't decided.

Only when it rains.

The cat chewed it up and then puked it on the floor. Ew.

OMGSOAWESOME!!

Eh, not so much.

Once, in an ill-advised bout of drunk dialing.

42.

Oh...you wanted details? Alright, *fine*. You're such demanding people, always with the wanting to know details and whatnot. Honestly.

Well, we're both still working at the same places as before and driving the same cars. We still have our house and our cats, and neither of those things have killed us. We haven't taken any trips to Europe yet and we aren't expecting any little bundles of joy for the foreseeable future. There have been house projects and new cat diets and fannish obsessions and job angst and non-profit organizations and vacations at the ocean.

But that's the short version. For the long and boring play-by-play, pull up a seat, my child, and let me tell you a tale. An entirely-non-chronological-decidedly-non-linear-completely-non-abridged-retelling-of-recent-history-on-crack...tale.

picking up where we left off...

When last you heard from us, we were looking forward to GeekFest 2004 – in which we would be viewing, for the first time, all three super duper extra-extra-

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

extended editions of the LOTR trilogy in one very loooooong marathon. And nearly all of the extras I'd wished for the previous year for the extended footage was indeed part of the extended additions, and I composed a song called "Peter Jackson loves me so, for my collector's-special-extended-edition DVDs tell me so". Sigh. Best. Christmas. Ever.

After the holidays, Sal surprised me with a laptop, to be used exclusively for writing, so that I could give in to the compulsion whenever and wherever the inspiration struck. Including our soon-to-be completed attic reading nook. And to that end, he also got me a wireless router, all the better to surf the internet in slacker comfort, my dear.

I still had my desktop computer at that point, and I kept my work and recreational computing activities strictly regulated (using my laptop only for writing and creative stuff, never for work). But then in August my desktop computer committed suicide. The note it left was indecipherable:

```
STOP: c0000218 {Registry File Failure}
The registry cannot load the hive (file):
\SystemRoot\System32\Config\SOFTWARE
or its log or alternate.
It is corrupt, absent, or not writeable.
```

Apparently, the thought of going on any longer simply scrambled its brain, making it incapable of coherent communication and depriving it of a more appropriate "goodbye, cruel world!" final message. Unfortunately, it botched its own suicide, and rendered itself into a permanent vegetative state. Heroic measures were taken to resuscitate it, but in the end, I had to pull the plug. Literally.

Anyway, the computer had passed on, it was no more, it had ceased to be, it'd expired and gone to meet it's maker, it kicked the bucket, it shuffled off this mortal coil, run

down the curtain and joined the bleedin' choir invisible – *this* was an EX-computer.

[note to self – time to switch the Monty Python CD out of the car player]

It turned out to be a blessing in disguise, despite the monumental pain in the ass to get everything ripped off the hard drive. Because buying a new computer wasn't in the budget at that point, it meant my laptop, despite original intentions, became my only computer. Sure, I didn't have my big monitor anymore, but in the scheme of things? Really not a big deal. And I got used to it. And then I forgot what it was like before. And then I wondered how I'd ever gotten along otherwise.

Well, that led to a plan to get Sal a laptop, too, so we could be up in the nook together while we worked or surfed or just generally computed until our brains turned into phosphorous mush. Since his computer was still in perfectly fine shape and we'd never get more than a few hundred dollars out of it, we decided to turn it into a server to network all the computers in the house into and provide lots of storage space (to keep our laptops from getting clogged), along with being able to use our printer on a network connection. We sold our monitors and peripherals, installed the remote viewing software I use for telecommuting, and bought a high-capacity external hard drive for file backups. Found the perfect cabinet for the server and printer and other technical stuff at IKEA and now, all evidence of our technological wonderland is quietly and cleanly tucked away. No more cords and wires running all over the place and we can surf and print from anywhere in the house. Or the yard, for that matter.

You wouldn't think so, but it's actually caused a not-insignificant lifestyle change. As much time as

we spend tethered to our computers for work (and, let's be honest, play), we're now free to move about wherever we like. And with the proliferation of wi-fi throughout the city, we can go pretty much anywhere to work and play.

In fact, my work-at-home Fridays consist of moseying up the street a few blocks to Anna Banana's (funky coffeehouse), ordering "the usual" (chocolate-orange scone and chai for me, rosemary croissant and latte for Sal), and sitting at one of the window tables while I work and he reads up on all the latest food industry news. Between my remote viewing software, highspeed wi-fi, a laptop, and my cell phone, I can work from pretty much anywhere.

You may commence hating me.

Through the spring last year, we pushed hard on the attic to get it wrapped up and ready for us to move in. Remember that several other projects were on hold until it could be finished. And since we really, *really* needed to get the house refinanced, it was even more important to get the room done. It took several months, and the last details took an agonizing month or so all by themselves, in which I wasn't sure either of us were going to survive the frustration, but finally – finally! – we were ready to move in by the 4th of July. It took a few more months to pull the look together – time to find all the right pieces of furniture and artwork and the like, but we've been luxuriating in our stupefyingly fantabulous and pamperific master suite ever since.

So much so that we actually took a break from house projects for awhile. Oh, we did some work, and had lots and lots of work done, but we really took our time before

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

plunging into another major project. You can see all the pictures online, of course, and if you haven't already, do take a moment to look through the project in all its phases, or even just the final product. It turned out, well, *spectacularly* to be perfectly honest, and we're pretty much over the moon about it.

Speaking of moons...our starry ceiling? On a scale of meh to

fabulous, our starry ceiling is so far *past* fabulous that the *light* from fabulous would take 2.5 light years to reach it. Just to beat the astronomy metaphor to death.

But seriously...we've got the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper, and Orion and the Seven Sisters, and two comets, and an arm of the Milky Way, and a quarter moon, and more stars than we can count. After a particularly stressful day, we'll "charge up the stars" (a black light helps get them glowing faster and longer), then go upstairs, put a favorite CD in the stereo, turn off the black light, lie on the bed, and let the stress fall away.

By the end of the summer, we decided to explore our refinancing options, even though a couple of our larger projects – the yard and the bathroom – weren't done. We figured we could at least find out how much further we'd need to get before we could refinance. Since our real estate agent had been such a tremendous help when we'd first gone house hunting, Sal rang him up and asked him to come out, give us an idea of what needed to be done and what could wait until after the refi.

So we worked on the list of things we thought we could and should get done before an appraiser came out in anticipation of a refi, with the understanding that we weren't trying to get the big projects done. Jacking up the porch and replacing the support posts? Not on our list. Finishing the bathroom renovation? Also not on our list. Turning our yard into the welcoming European retreat we've envisioned from Day One? Yep, not on our list, either.

However, we *could* get the yard straightened up and put down the gravel for the hard surfaces and clean the house within an inch of its life. So that's what we did. Including hauling 16 tons of chipped granite gravel from the street and up the stairs, to be put down for all

of the walking spaces of our yard plan. And if you think that didn't involve the generous and selfless manual labor of some good friends, you, gentle reader, are high.

More pictures and details online, natch, but suffice to say that we are hoping – fervently – that's the last of any item to be hauled up those god-forsaken stairs that can be measured in tons.

But once that was done, we were ready for our agent to come and give us the skinny. Not only did he think we could go ahead and push for refi right away, but he made a guess on the appraisal that put a big ol' grin on our faces. He called up our mortgage broker, and wham bam boom, we had an appointment with an appraiser by the end of the week.

Which meant holy crap, time to get the house clean! And did I mention that we'd just hauled 16 tons of rocks up our stairs in 5-gallon buckets, and that we could barely bend over, let alone clean our house within an inch of its life?? Well, we did it, though it took an all-nighter and copious quantities of painkillers in possibly lethal amounts. So worth it, though. The house looked great despite the partially-finished projects all over the place. And our appraiser, a nice and very friendly man who loves Old Portland style bungalows like ours, was both complimentary and full of terrific information. So not only did we get an outstanding estimate out of the deal, but we also got some great ideas for how to solve some of our knottier DIY problems we hadn't yet tackled – a twofer!

Our mortgage broker was great... the process was quick and painless and we were able to set aside enough money for the bigger project budgets we need to do

shameless pimpage...

Last May, an editor's assistant at *The Oregonian* contacted me about blogging on the home improvement section of their site, oregonlive.com. She said a friend had pointed her to our website, and she particularly enjoyed the "This Old (Hall) House" section of the site, so when the editors started looking for a home improvement blogger, she showed them our site and they told her to find out if I'd be interested. Well of course I wasn't going to pass that up, crazy roster of other commitments be damned, and right around Memorial Day weekend last year, I officially became an OLive blogger at "Bungalow, Sweet Bungalow".

I blogged for them until January, when the things on my obligations list needed to be seriously trimmed and the BSB blog was one of the casualties. I thoroughly enjoyed doing it, and the reader and website traffic response was mind-boggling, but posting four to five times a week is a hard pace to sustain if you've got a million other things going on. If you missed out on my BSB posts, they're still up (and I see they haven't yet found a replacement), so you can see them at

<http://www.oregonlive.com/homeimprovement/weblog/>

(Continued on page 4)

the hallway

(Continued from page 3)

(getting the house painted, having the porch support structure replaced, relocating the bathtub plumbing, etc.). In the 39 months since we'd bought our house, it had almost doubled in value despite its not-quite-completed renovation. Without question, the best financial decision we ever made.

It's remarkable how much of a difference it makes to have your finances all in order and to know how you're going to fund the large budget projects on your list. And we didn't waste any time, let me tell you. Within two weeks, we'd hired our painting contractor and scheduled the back porch repair. The rainy season started by that time, so we couldn't have the house painted, but part of our contractor's package included winterization work – priming where there was bare wood, making the necessary small carpentry repairs, reglazing windows where needed, that kind of thing. And it put us in the queue for being one of the first on their list in the spring.

The contractors who did the porch had it jacked up, the insect-damaged support beams out, and the new cement pier blocks installed by lunchtime. By the end of the day, our porch was resting on new, treated support beams, bolted into the cement pier blocks and braced with Simpson supports, and the porch “skirting” of particle board that we'd inherited from the previous owner was replaced with wood siding to match the rest of the house.

Other smallish projects we had done over the winter to prepare for the House Painting Extravaganza:

(Continued on page 5)

the cats from hell...

In cat news, their ongoing quest to turn this household into a furry tinpot dictatorship continues apace. They love the attic *almost* as much as we do and the top of the cabinet that now holds our server and printer, and on top of which we placed two big purple (of course) seat cushions, has become their mostest favoritest spot evah. It's a prime location, situated right underneath the big dining room window, which gives them an excellent vantage point from which to survey their domain. It's a hard knock life for those two.

In other cat-related news, we have a confession to make: we've become *those* kind of pet parents. It started innocently enough. We suffered through not one but *three* urinary tract infections in Hobbes in the course of about five months.

When Hobbes suffered his second UTI, the vet told us that we needed to switch from dry food to canned and change from (their previously recommended) feeding three times per day to feeding twice a day. We did the schedule switch, but decided to do half dry food, half canned.

Enter the third UTI – which sucked by the way – and we decided okay, canned it is. But around that time, we'd heard from friends about the advantages of organic and raw food diets, so we started doing some research about alternatives.

I admit we were skeptical – raw food diet? For the *cat*? Start down that road and we were sure it would take us to bad places, like “Dressing Our Cats Up In Jaunty Sailor Outfits” and “Designer Collars That Cost More Than A Washing Machine”. We love our cats, but dude seriously. And then we remembered that we'd gone to a franchise pharmacy and filled a prescription for feline insulin, taken it home, and proceeded to inject it into a diabetic cat two times a day for six months, at which point we realized the high horse we'd been riding had long since thrown us to the ground and kicked us in the teeth.

A dear friend of ours, who is decidedly normal for also being one of *those* kind of pet parents, and who's a smart and level-headed lady, swears by raw food diets for cats. She'd unfortunately lost her own cat to a tragic accident and she offered us the remainder of her raw cat food so there was no reason not to give it a try.

Turns out, there's something to it, after all. We had to do some experimenting because Hobbes had a hard time holding down the raw food after awhile and we were worried their teeth would suffer if they stayed on an entirely soft diet. We bought a few cans of organic canned and small bag of organic dry to see what worked best. Next thing we knew, we were weighing out different portion combinations of all three types on Sal's food scale. As I said: *those* people.

But I have to say, the benefits are noticeable. Both cats are more energetic (not that they weren't already whirling dervishes of destruction already) and their cat box leavings are considerably less pungent, not to mention a new silky softness in their coats.

Which is a good thing, because we absolutely draw the line at sailor outfits.

the hallway

(Continued from page 4)

having the leaded glass window releaded, having the five broken windows replaced, sagging gutters reattached to the rafter tails, and two of the downspouts rerouted (for both aesthetic and practical reasons).

Well, we had one of the rainiest winters on record (so awesome!), but it was the first winter since we'd moved in that I didn't lay awake worrying that our poor, unprotected house was surely going to start suffering rot any day now, which is thanks solely to our painting contractor understanding how important it was to us that the house not go through another winter unprotected. Well, that and the plump contract he had with us. Obviously.

The weather finally cleared and warmed up, and the painting crew was out powerwashing, and scraping and sanding, and scraping and sanding some more, and power washing again, and filling in and feathering out, and then priming, and then cutting in the accents, and then cutting in the trim, and then finally, FINALLY! painting the main house and oh, glorious day! Our house, our poor, neglected house that so desperately needed love and adoration and attention came alive. In a little over a week, it went from This Old (Crack) House to This Old (Hall) House.

Pictures, of course, will soon be on the website. And no, I'm not going to tell you the colors, because hello, website, and also you must see them.

To save money, we opted to paint the porch floors and front door ourselves and while the door is finished, the floors aren't (the reason the pictures aren't up just yet). We also opted to paint the screens, mainly because most of the windows didn't even have screens anymore and those that did had

frames that were rotted or broken. Since we had to make all new frames anyway, we opted to paint those ourselves. So we're currently working on making screen frames for all of our windows, and then we'll get the porch floors painted.

So now we're focusing on the yard, trying to instill some sense of order and finally start landscaping. We've installed two raised planter beds, 8'x4' each, that we'll use for growing vegetables. There's a little berming to be done, and still some gravel left to spread, but the majority of the work now is the fun part of landscaping, like mulching and actually getting to dig holes to put living things into the ground, and we're excited about the prospect. Also, there's a fence to be built, that may or may not be built this summer (though we'd very much like to).

We also have the bathroom renovation to finish, which includes some plumbing work to hire out before we can finish our part of it, but that'll come sometime this summer (we hope). Once the bathroom's done, then we can refinish the floors in the two downstairs bedrooms and connecting hallway, paint all of those rooms and then set them up and they're finished. We're also working on a massive organizational project in the basement, getting rid of all kinds of stuff, and sorting through the stuff we're keeping, delineating "zones" for all the uses we have down there, and just generally making it easier to find everything.

Really, we've got a very definable end in sight to the last four years of home renovation. It won't be The End — we're planning to do a mostly-cosmetic kitchen makeover next year, for one thing — but for the first time since we moved in, we'll actually be able to live in every room of our house, on every floor of our house, and both inside and outside our house. We'll have all of our tools put away instead of

piled up in the corner of whatever room we're working on, and not have to figure out what proportion of our weekend will be dedicated to the project du jour. I tell you, the excitement at the prospect is almost as much as our excitement for the LOTR movies, so you know how big a deal it must be.

On the work front, Sal's made the transition from working fulltime at Crema to working there part time and working at Li Li Patisserie (café in Sellwood) part time. He was looking to shake things up a little, and ready to try his hand at some new skills in a situation where he gets to do more creating and less kitchen managing. So when the opportunity to work with Li came along — whose passion for food rivals his — he jumped at it. The split part time thing works quite well, surprisingly. It makes his schedule more flexible and a little easier to take a day off here or there without throwing the kitchen at either place into complete disarray. He still has to get up at the asscrack of dawn a couple days a week, but we've learned to work around it.

He continues to get rave reviews at Crema, of course — they were just featured in the Portland Mercury a few weeks ago, and Sal even appeared on one of the local morning shows. He was on TV and they interviewed him and had him do a demonstration and everything! Our very own celebrity, right here in Hall House.

We've had lots of big goings-on at NWCM in the last year and a half. Early last summer, we began scouting for new office space in anticipation of moving in October. Yours truly got handed the gargantuan task of overseeing the whole affair, everything from helping scout out possible locations to coming up with a procedure for moving the various departments

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

and their components. Our new office came with cubicle dividers and furniture for them, which made the task of moving considerably easier than it would've been otherwise. But those of us moving into offices were taking our furniture with us, and all of that had to be inventoried and labeled and mapped out. We also decided to use the opportunity to inventory all of our computers and other hardware, and scan them into a tracking database, which of course meant setting the whole thing up well in advance of the actual big day. And then there were all the construction and aesthetic details to deal with, picking out carpet and accent wall colors, deciding what kind of baseboard trim we wanted and what color to paint it, having the sign people make vinyl lettering and logos for all the doors, getting quotes from security vendors and having that system installed, and upgrading our copiers to handle our increasing demand. A million trillion details to sort out and stay on top of, and frankly, I've blocked most of it out just to keep my sanity.

During the height of the pre-move insanity, our Vice President, who's also a chaplain for one of the local fire departments, was called up by FEMA for an indeterminate tour of duty in the Gulf after Katrina hit. We were proud of him, to be sure, and he went with our blessing and unbelievable support, but no one knew how long he'd be gone. There were some big shoes to be filled by pretty much everyone at NWCM, in one capacity or another.

This was also during the middle of a merger of NWCM with five other property management companies on the West Coast to form an ESOP (Employee Stock-Owned Plan), which, while infinitely awesome,

(Continued on page 7)

damn fool idealistic crusade*...

*know your *Star Wars* dialogue, people

Late in 2004, we joined a small group of very good friends to start a small grassroots organization. Our focus was to help other states adopt Oregon's vote by mail system, a project we called Export the Oregon Vote. It's "vote" spelled in reverse, and our tagline was "because everyone else has been doing it backwards". I know, right? So awesome.

Anyway, our little group researched every state's current voting system, history, and statistics, and we compiled it all on a website, then started looking for ways to share our idea with like-minded people and groups in other states. We heard about a voters' rights conference here in Portland in October, so we signed up to do a presentation there to get the word out about what our group was doing. We figured it would be a great opportunity both to network with other voters' rights groups as well as to learn more about all the different issues related to voting.

The conference was the first weekend of October, which meant we spent a good portion of September preparing our presentation. We burned all of our state information packets, voting statistics, a 7 minute video about how Oregon's voting system works, and lots of other information onto CDs, created custom labels for them and then used those for handouts instead of paper handouts. We also had sample ballots to demonstrate the different steps, and put together big display pieces that listed Oregon's advantages and statistics. We put together a damn fine presentation, if I may say, especially for our very first one.

We learned a lot at the conference, got to meet some famous people, and took pages and pages of notes. Our presentation was a resounding success and when we introduced ourselves to one of the speakers, he told us about a friend of his, Adam, who was working on a project similar to ours. He put us together with Adam, and from that point forward, everything got kicked into high gear.

While we'd been working the research and idea side of vote by mail, Adam had been working the financial side, putting together funding for a non-profit. To say it was a perfect fit would be an understatement: we had the substance but needed the financing, he had the financing but needed the substance. Like the Brady Bunch, without the bell-bottoms!

We had to change our name as part of the merge since the focus was now on a nationwide organization, not an Oregon-centric one that worked at the grassroots level in a few nearby states. Kind of a bummer about the name thing, but in exchange for taking our idea and organization national? So worth it. Export the Oregon Vote became the Vote By Mail Project.

votebymailproject.org

Adam has lots of experience forming non-profits, and all of the contacts to give the new organization the credibility it needed. In February, he got the backing of the National Letter Carriers Association – the perfect organization for an issue revolving around, hello, mail – and everything

(Continued on page 7)

the hallway

(Continued from page 6)

was demanding every spare minute I had. And I'll note, I didn't have spare minutes, really. For legal reasons, Marshall couldn't disclose these plans to anyone who didn't need to know about it while he/we were working on it, which meant only a few of us could work on everything that needed to be done for NWCM's part of the merger, and with Steve gone and the move in the works, and the fall being the busiest time of year for our company, well, you can guess the stress level here. Not to mention a million billion *other* things going on my life around that time, which I'll get into more later, but some of which included: getting the house refinanced, vetting painting contractors, getting ready for a presentation at a voters' rights conference, and celebrating the arrival of our long-anticipated Firefly movie in right proper Browncoat style. Big things, and they were all going on simultaneously from approximately September until November.

But I'm nothing if not adaptable, and I can seriously hold my shit together under multiple and competing pressures. I was juggling it all, and managing to keep everything from crashing to the ground and then, just because Fate is a vindictive Bitch Goddess, my billing assistant – whom I'd *just* gotten trained and pretty much handed over the corporate billing to after juggling *that* fulltime job on top of my regular job for almost a year – quit. QUIT. Not because of me or anything I did – because of something entirely unrelated and which she needed to grow the hell up about, but *ANYWAY*, she QUIT three days before the start of a billing cycle and two weeks before our move was set to start and how in THE HELL I didn't succumb to a nervous breakdown is minor mystery.

So if you're in the market for the perfect combination of triggers for

an ulcer of epic proportions, I have a tried and true recipe for the exact conditions needed. Because not only will such a combination absolutely give you an *ulcer*, but it will also give you massive hair loss, chronic insomnia, moderate digestive problems, and brittle fingernails. It may also cause mood swings and a tendency to mumble incoherently.

I think there was some concern at that point that I would perhaps arrive at work with a colander on my head and all my clothes on inside out, or possibly claiming to hear messages from the Grand Emperor Glebot of the planet Plstzrgpf, and I'll admit it was a close thing for awhile, but I'm happy to report that I arrived on the other side of the Work Stress from HELL relatively intact and what hair I lost during that time grew back. Eventually.

I did get a nice new office and other generous compensations out of the whole ordeal, though. My new digs include great big windows along one wall and a nice heavy door that closes whenever I feel the urge to squish heads, a la Kids in the Hall. I chose a soft, calming sage green as the accent wall in my office; I needed all the help for my sanity I could get. I also indulged in a little art therapy, creating a mixed media art piece for one of my office walls. So with the exception of the occasional nervous tic and the tendency to flinch at the sound of, among other things, moving van backup alarms and the words, "We're running out of space, it might be time to move", I'm pretty much back to normal.

We were smack in the middle of our house refinance during all of this, and vetting painting contractors and Sal's work insanity was its own special circle of hell then, too. He was working a

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 6)

became all official. Suddenly there was funding, and a Board of Directors and the website launched and there were features in *The American Prospect* and *The Economist*.

We were all thrilled with the direction of the organization and Adam gave each of us the opportunity to play as large or small of a role as we wanted in the organization. But since we'd started our group with the idea of something grassroots that would work around us and our disparate lives instead of the other way around, we chose instead to help get the organization off the ground and ready to hand off to people hired to work fulltime for the VBM Project. Well, except for one of the members of our group, who'd long been looking for an opportunity in the nonprofit sector and when Adam said he wanted us to help him run the organization, it was the perfect situation for her. Like I said, the perfect match. She's taken the ball and is running with it, and will be our connection to the organization we helped found.

Anyway, we're incredibly chuffed about the project, and about the role we played in helping it get off the ground. And we're so proud of our co-founder friend, who'll be helping take it even further. So keep an eye peeled and an ear open...you may just start hearing about the Vote By Mail Project where you live, or read about it in the months ahead, and you can say, "Hey! I know some of the people who started that!"



(Continued from page 7)

maddening schedule, going weeks at a time without a day off while he pulled the bakery through the firing of a pastry chef and a complete reworking of his staff's schedules just as the bakery hit another growth spurt. The soap opera that had become of Sal's workplace turned into a Lifetime Movie starring the Melissa Gilbert of the culinary world (hence the pastry chef firing). Seriously, it was like reliving junior high, and I'm not talking about any of the good parts. Things finally leveled out to the low-level melodrama you'd expect with a bunch of flaky creative types who wouldn't know Dependability if it walked up to them, introduced itself, and smacked them upside the head. But not before the poor guy was working 14 and 16 hour days for weeks at a time without a break, all of that spent on his feet. We did manage to see each other here and there during that time, but honestly, I look back at those months a little mystified that we both survived them.

We did get to fit in some fun things, believe it or not. In September, we scored tickets to the Lord of the Rings Symphony, in which the Oregon Symphony, the Oregon Choir, the Oregon Children's Choir, and a guest soloist from Wales performed music from all three movies, in order, whilst drawings, paintings, and sketches done by Alan Lee and John Howe moved across a screen overhead. I'm here to tell you that the human body can only withstand about two hours of high-intensity squee before it spontaneously combusts into a million little pieces of fannish delight. The whole thing was an amazing, amazing experience and just an absolutely perfect coda to our LOTR saga.

The day of the LOTR symphony was actually a whirlwind of activity in its own right because we'd spent the

(Continued on page 9)

and you thought lotr was our only obsession...

Somewhere in the middle of working on the attic and other pastimes, we picked up two new addictions, *Veronica Mars* and *Battlestar Galactica*, both of which are gloriously cracktastic. It's our friend's fault. She's our resident TV crack pimp ho and she pushes the stuff like candy, seriously. But that's why we love her because let's face it: there's no crack like TV crack.

And even if we didn't love her, we would still owe her our firstborn because last May, she scored us tickets to not one, but two! pre-screenings for the movie of our oh-so-beloved *Firefly*. Our little group joined a long line of fellow devoted Browncoats to see the not-quite-finished version of the movie (*Serenity*) and get cool movie swag. There were some effects shot still undone, and the score hadn't been written yet, but dudes? SO AWESOME YOU HAVE NO IDEA AND SERIOUSLY HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE A MOVIE THAT EXISTS OUT OF THE SHEER FORCE OF WILL OF A SMALL CULTISH FOLLOWING OF FANS AND THE DEDICATION OF ITS CAST AND DIRECTOR AND IF YOU DON'T THINK THAT'S SO MIND-BOGLING AWESOME THEN YOU ARE DEAD TO ME OMG.

There were ten prescreenings across the country that night and we found out later that each of the nine main cast members and the director (Joss Whedon, Master of the 'Verse) surprised the fans at the screenings. We were supposed to get Alan Tudyk (Wash), but he'd gotten the nod for the lead in *Spamalot* the day before the prescreening so he could be there. So cool for him, a little bit of a bummer for us, but honestly, we were so high from the movie that I'm not sure any of us could've stood ratcheting up the endorphins any higher.

The finished finalized officially for really reals movie came out September 30th, which was the first day of the voters conference and don't think *that* didn't present a dilemma since everyone in our EtOV group was also a Browncoat. And the finished finalized officially for really reals movie was *even better* than the prescreening, which I wouldn't have thought possible because the prescreening had kicked ass, frankly, but indeed it was, all angsteriffic and squee-inducing and ripping our hearts out, mixing them into a custard, baking them into heart shaped pans, and shoving them back into our chests. Sigh...Joss bless us, every one.

I heard from my Browncoat converts over that weekend that I am indeed the Queen of All That Is Way Awesomely Awesome and that the movie is every bit as kick-ass as I promised them it was. So now aren't you just a little bit curious to find out what all this *Firefly* squee is about, and possibly considering adding the DVDs to your Netflix queue to find out if it really rules like I say it does or if perhaps I've finally gone a bit daft in the head? Of course you are. And I forgive you for doubting me, by the way. But only if you go and rent the DVDs RIGHT NOW. And I'll ignore that you ever questioned my judgment on TV shows and/or movies that are worthy of your adoration.

Speaking of TV shows worthy of your adoration...this year we bid a sad goodbye to yet another of our cracktastic obsessions, *Arrested Development*. Sometimes it's hard not to feel like kryptonite to underappreciated shows. God bless the invention of brilliant but cancelled TV shows on DVD, where they can live on in our hearts forever and ever amen.

(Continued from page 8)

day down at Oktoberfest in Mt. Angel with two dear friends

Drank ourselves some awesome beer, rocked out to alpenhorns and accordions (it can be done, I swear), and generally reveled and frolicked and raised da roof, as I hear the Kool Kidz used to say. Our friends introduced us to the joy of oompah bands and the ridiculous fun that can be had flapping your arms in time to an accordion while under the influence of your favorite German draft. I'd blame the alcohol, but I wasn't drinking so I guess it doesn't take being liquored up to voluntarily act like a drunken idiot.

Around Sal's birthday last May, Sal's dad was out to visit for over a week. It was the first time he'd stayed with us for any length of time, so we of course had to make it worth the trip! We hit the Saturday Market, and the beach of course, and Multnomah Falls, and Forest Park, and took Sal out for a nice dinner at Jake's (historic seafood restaurant). His dad graciously offered to spend part of his visit helping Sal with the front porch, building rails and stair support posts reusing the stuff that was already there and using the design I'd come up with. It's thanks to them that we now have a fabulous-looking front porch, and one that looks very much like the original probably did.

Anyway, we enjoyed his visit and he was a good sport to let us drag him every which way for nine days or so. Although I'm sure he probably needed a vacation from his vacation when he got home.

Lots of big anniversaries happened in the past year, including 15 years that Sal and I have been together

(June 2nd, 2005), 5 years that we've been in Oregon (August 17th, 2005), 5 years working at NWCN (April 2nd, 2005), and this coming July, we'll be celebrating our 10th Anniversary. I officially feel old. (Yeah, I don't know what my thing is about dates and anniversaries but I've always had it so we just roll with it around our house. Rolling with it may possibly consist of Sal mocking me mercilessly, but anyway.)

We unfortunately didn't do anything terrifically major for any of these milestones, although moving our master bedroom into the attic was a nice anniversary gift, along with the fantastic dinner at McCormick & Schmick's – which, seriously, if you want a good place to celebrate an anniversary, is THE best place to do it because they print up special menus and comp your desserts and even dining room manager serve you complimentary champagne. By the time my birthday rolled around, we were loooong overdue for a getaway, so we decided to take a mini-vacation to celebrate my birthday, Valentine's Day, and our very belated anniversary. Sal scored a fantastic deal at a hotel right on the beach and our room was seriously pimped out, yo. We had an oceanside view *with* a balcony *and* a fireplace. And dudes, check it out: half of the balcony had a hot tub, completely enclosed in one-way glass. For three days and two nights, we did nothing but relax. Read a lot, surfed the net for entirely recreational purposes (thanks to the free wi-fi), took a scenic drive or three, strolled the beach (thanks to the surprisingly temperate weather), watched the sunsets, hot tubbed ourselves into wrinkled old prunes, slept in late, ordered room service, and did absolutely nothing productive. In other words: the perfect vacation.

and this concludes our program...

Well, I think that's everything. I'm sure there's other stuff I'm forgetting, and I know there's stuff I'm leaving out on purpose, but that's all our news that's worth knowing and lots more that probably isn't. If you made it this far and read all of this, I applaud you. If you didn't, don't feel bad...I didn't either. Which might explain its incoherent structure and rambling nature.

As you've read on the website, there are a lot of updates there, too. Lots and lots of pictures all over the place, and pretty much everything mentioned here has pictures associated with it somewhere on the website.

Also as mentioned on the site, we've added an RSS feed so you can add us to your aggregator if you have one. We're going to be posting random blog-type posts there from time to time, although the fact that our site is setup as a straight website, not a blog, means it's not terribly handy for frequent blogging (and we blog plenty in other places anyway). But do check it out from time to time, as it'll fill in the gaps between site updates and newsletters.

As for the newsletter, I've been missing it for quite awhile. I'd like to get back into a routine of doing one, but I don't think a monthly newsletter is in the cards. I'm thinking quarterly at this point, but rather than promise anything, I'll just say that you'll get an email notification when there's another one up. In the meantime, there'll be other additions to the sites, more pictures of the house projects as they progress, and who knows what else. Should be fun.

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