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Dear Friends,

I want to bring you all up-to-date on my life, with Simon, in Perth.

First, just last week, I got my **driver's license**! This was the best present I could give myself for my **40<sup>th</sup> birthday** which we've been celebrating this week. Celebrations have included Simon making me a napoleon pastry! And tonight we're going out to dinner with 25 of our nearest and dearest. Learning to drive has been a great experience for me. As Barbara said, it requires me to be present and calm, a great exercise for me.

This Autumn (May-June) Simon and I took a **two-week adventure in Western Australia's Pilbara**. This is the first trip I've ever taken where a car hire was the most expensive element of the trip, but it was also the most important since much of WA's outback isn't navigable without a four-wheel drive. We spent less than a quarter of the cost of the car on everything else.

After leaving suburban Perth, we drove for hundreds of kilometres before running into anything at all. Since I didn't have my driver's license yet, Simon drove solo -- about 800 kilometres the first day before we reached **Cue**, a very small town. Although I must say that "small" takes on a very different meaning in a state where, outside of Perth, a thousand or so residents can constitute a city.

After Cue, we made **Newman**, the company town of BHP Iron Ore. One of the amazing parts of living in WA has been the fact that people here work, overwhelmingly, in some aspect of natural resources -- mining, natural gas, land, forestry. That includes miners, engineers, financiers, geologists, botanists, chemists and, in Simon's case, information technologists involved in research and creation of, for example, graphic, 3-D and other software for these industries. In Newman, I got a much better picture of what that looks like. We went on a tour of one of the mines and I was amazed at the scope, not just of the mine itself, but of the project. Western Australia's biggest iron customer is Japan which makes 20-50 year purchasing contracts. I came away wishing that those of who work in social change could develop projects based on a fifty-year plan, and imagine how much more we could accomplish if we didn't have to do everything in a week or a month or a few months or an election cycle. And I so admire those of us who do have such vision and take steps toward it.



Driving in WA is very much about the journey. If you're too eager to get to where you're heading, you'll be very frustrated. Fortunately, if you're not too eager, you're in for treasures. A dingo in the spinifex. (A dingo is a wild dog; spinifex is prevalent in the desert -- a tall, dry, very spikey "grass" that grows in circles.) Kangaroos lurking at the side of the road or --



just missed! -- Boing! Boing! Boing! across the road when the sun is horizontal in the sky. Lots of eagles preying on unlucky roos who didn't make it. It's sad, but it's common enough to hit a kangaroo (we didn't!). And, it may sound callous, but in addition to killing the roo, it's so damaging to the cars that cars have "roo bars" on the front to limit the damage. Egad.

We spent three days at **Karijini**, a national park of gorges. After setting up our tent, we went right away to Fern Pool where we skinny-dipped in the late afternoon, sitting under the almost-hot waterfall pouring out from the rocks. We got dressed again on the new deck designed by one of our Wednesday morning swimming mates – we meet friends for a run or walk every Wednesday at 6:30 am, summer or winter, rain or shine, then go for a swim and breakfast then to work – by 8:00 am.



The next day, we hiked through Weano Gorge down to handrail pool, a small waterfall leading to a natural pool. Being someone who has to do things my own way, I tried a science experiment: what happens if I opt for sliding down the fall on my left hip, and punctuate the event by hitting my head on the rocks at the bottom before landing in the pool with hiking boots, backpack and all?



Answer: I emerge with a small egg on my head which develops into a black left eye the next day, right eye the next day, and I was scaring children throughout the Pilbara for the rest of our holiday. Simon, bless his heart, has documented the experiment with daily photos of the progress. Other memories of Weano include holding a teeny weeny pookie dragon with a face like E.T. in the palm of my hand.



Later that afternoon, we walked along the flat rocks, finding each next foothold, of the gorge above the water at the bottom. The gorge is usually quite dry, but the cyclones brought the Pilbara twenty years' rain this year, so the water was deep. We waded through it in parts – up to our waists. Simon has done loads of hiking and mountain climbing so was a good deal more confident in these excapades than was I, but I did it just the same and am really pleased with myself.



From Karijini, we drove to **Millstream** where we camped by the side of a river we swam in at dusk. This place was so serene we stayed an extra night. The Pilbara is a beautiful place to stargaze. Our first night in Millstream, I saw two satellites in addition to the usual array – the Southern Cross (opposite to Orion!) and a full spill of the Milky Way. We cooked our dinner over an open fire we shared with some of the campers at the nine other sites – a very small campground. It's remarkable how well we ate – usually rice, pasta, fresh vegetables. Just because you're camping doesn't mean you have to eat "camping" food! At the nearby



**Chichester Range** we took a walk along an old, rather elaborate rock-built Cameleer's

Track – In the early days supplies to the interior settlements were often carried in on Camel trains run by "afghans". The hills there are spectacular, and a little eerie – the landscape features piles and piles of red rocks that look just like they've been dumped from trucks.



Our second day in Millstream we followed my impulse to an Aboriginal community we were directed to by the Aboriginal ranger of the Millstream Homestead and park. We drove about 30 kilometres from our campsite, passing the Fortescue River (sic) pictured left. Can you believe this is what can pass for a river in Western Australia? And, believe it or not, the Pilbara had 20 year's rain in this one year, due to the cyclones

After a short drive, we found the **Ngaraawana Alcohol Diversion Project**, a small village of about 25 people. As with many indigenous communities, alcoholism is a plague in Aboriginal communities, so many have made themselves alcohol-free communities to keep the blight at bay. The government also uses the community as an alternative to prison for some individual Aborigines arrested for crimes related to alcohol. A more recent substance abuse problem for Aborigines in the central desert is petrol sniffing, for which there are virtually no programs.



A huge puddle kept us from driving straight through to the community, even with a 4-wheel drive, so we waded through in our Tevas. We were directed to ask for Ricky or Donny, for permission to hang around the tiny community. All we found at Ricky's house were about two dozen puppies and kittens leisurely inhabiting his family's porch. We found Donny who chatted with us for a few minutes, but then met a few women sitting on their porch with their children and animals. Simon asked them if they had time for visitors and they did, so we talked with them a bit. They'd come to Ngarawaana from Geraldton, Onslow and other towns in the Pilbara. The older woman spoke an Aboriginal language, but we got the impression that she'll be the last in her family. You can't just barge in and ask all the big questions you have; some of the questions we could have asked didn't occur to me until after we'd gone.

At **Dampier**, we camped with a view of the ocean and the Archipelago. We finally got to do our laundry, after having been at campsites that were much more primitive, supplying only pit toilets. Pit toilets, mind you, were not at all unpleasant. I had imagined those rank outhouses and had prepared myself for "holding it in." Quite to the contrary, the National Park



Service in Australia is extremely environmentally conscious and uses this enzyme that digests the bacteria and bad smell. You simply dip the toilet brush into the bucket with the enzyme and scrub the bowl a second. At Millstream, however, there was an extra feature: I dipped the brush into the enzyme and boing boing boing boing! Out came the tiniest little frogs from the bucket. They really dig that eco-zyme. Just out of Dampier is the **Burru** peninsula, another pile of rocks, many



many of which feature traditional carved rock-art. We did our second industrial visit – to a huge gas liquification plant, which compresses and refrigerates the gas so that it can then be sent by ship to Japan.

From Dampier, we drove to **Coral Bay** and the Ningaloo Coral reef. Our first day, we took a snorkelling trip to go swimming with manta-rays – big, graceful rays. Simon actually swam 15 or 20 metres with them, which was no mean feat as they are furiously strong swimmers and

hard to keep up with. The guides had taken us out into the ocean but the rays turned out to prefer playing in the surf. I was struggling – ultimately in vain – to keep down my breakfast. so didn't jump off the boat in time to keep up, but saw them from the ship. Over the next few days, we snorkelled in the amazing coral reefs which are a few feet off the beach. We tried to capture their beauty with our disposable underwater camera, but didn't come close.



Our last remarkable site was near the **Pinnacles** which we visited in the early morning – a great time to catch the shadows and the kangaroos.

Australia is very interesting. People have a much closer relationship with nature than I've ever experienced. This is due in part to the more civilised allocation of annual leave. Nearly everybody gets a minimum of four weeks paid leave every year. In addition, if you work for the the same employer between seven to fifteen years (depending on the employer), you earn "long service leave" – a sabbatical of at least three months at full pay which you can stretch out to six months at half pay.

## Life in Perth

*Work.* Simon has been successfully attracting quite a lot of money into his project so his work has more than stabilised.

The conference I have been organising will be a success, due in part to my good mates Paul and Jen in Washington, D.C. – thanks again! -- who helped to get Peter Edelman to be the keynote speaker. Over the next two weeks, as well as bringing the conference to fruition, I'll complete a book to help the community sector learn to work with the media. In addition, I've compiled a collection of websites useful to the community sector, and the State Department of Commerce and Trade have just agreed to subsidise its publication. In exchange, we will print copies for the Department and give them access to the electronic version of the book for access through the library on their website.

My contract at WACOSS ends after the conference and I've been looking for new work to begin once the conference is over. One possibility is a joint project with a new colleague developing a project to educate the community sector statewide about how to work with the media. It's just that I would so like to find a place to work and be able to settle in there.

*Health.* Some of you know that a few months ago, my doctor found that I was almost completely iron depleted. This was, "ironically" good news because as many of you know, I've been extremely low energy – needing naps all the time -- for a few years. Well, a look at my old blood tests revealed that given a healthy ferritin range of 40 – 150, my iron was at 90 in 1993, only 44 in 1997 and a mere 12 a few months ago. So, I've been taking iron supplements and eating steaks and feeling heaps better -- "heaps" is a technical medical term.

*Simon and I* recently celebrated the **first anniversary** of our first wedding and are continually amazed that we managed to find a marriage in a size large enough to grow into.

**The Americans are Coming!** Mom and Hal are coming to visit in October. We'll meet them in Sydney and then fly together to Perth. Very excited.



**Iko** is gorgeous. She continues, at twice her weight in this picture, to scale the screen. We worry that she may actually be a pod-cat, however, because she seems uninterested in fish or meat. She'll only eat her biscuits. Not only that, we've discovered that she doesn't acknowledge the presence of food in her bowl unless it makes noise (i.e. being poured in). It's a worry.

Please stay in touch. Don't be fooled by the group nature of this letter. I miss each of you very much and am sorry I've been out of touch so long. I'll try to do better. You too?

Love and hugs –

Amy, with love from Simon and Iko ("protected by Voodoo")

(For a better look at the pictures, go online to <http://www.ned.dem.csiro.au/CoxSimon/private/gallery/pilbara2000/> )