

Like most people, we raised a domestic duck in the spring of 2007, and like even more people, kept our domestic duck inside the house while it got big. Bumpkin's story is told in a kid's photo book called *Bumpkin Gets Big*, which, in your spare time, you will find on my web page at www.amylpeterson.com. Feel free to email me with your story of your duck.

After locating a permanent home for Bumpkin in May, I found myself on a boat in Mexico with Mark, his buddy Denny, and a fishing guide. As told in the October issues of Pacific Coast Sportfishing in an article called "The Old Men and The Me," Mark

and Denny each caught striped marlin on the

first day; mine came within the last hour of the last day. It was quite a thrill to catch a fish bigger than me, and I suspect by the containers of lures under my bed that it is something we might attempt again.



killer whales that were far, far away. We threw snowballs at the base of Mt. Rainier, watched a banana slug uncurl in the Hoh National Forest, and photographed the sign in front of our Seattle Ramada Inn that read: "Drug and prostitution zone. License plates are being recorded."

We put Aby on a plane in Seattle, sped around Mt. St. Helen's, saw the Columbia River Gorgeous, a few lighthouses, and mole crabs on the Oregon Coast. I was standing knee-deep in ocean water with a bright orange starfish in hand to show my mother, only to meet the glare of a Haystack Rock Nazi whose words were: "Please replace the starfish where you found it." As I carefully replaced the starfish in the water, I noticed that my Mom and Mark had walked away--both had seen the Haystack Nazi coming my way and had abandoned me. You learn a lot when traveling with "friends."

In Portland, we stuck Mark on a plane to Los Angeles to catch another plane headed to Chicago. Turns out, Chicago had some bad weather, so Mark ended up in Kansas City. Airports surrounded by wheat fields apparently close at 10 p.m., so my hungry husband waited for the midnight plane to Chicago, which offered one minuscule bag of peanuts. Several hours later, he took another foodless flight to Lansing, discovered that Arthur had long given up on the 11:30 p.m. arrival the night before, and took a taxi home.

Meanwhile, Mom and I finished up our journey by way of a couple of National Parks and returned to find that all was well in the Lansing area, less the constipated state of the legislators, all of whom should be flogged for making unnecessary drama out of the state's budget. Not that I, as a state employee, deserve the salary I have, or need to save up money for mundane things like a new furnace.

It happened like this: our pilot light went out and the 20-something technician that came to return warmth to our lives said our manifold was cracked, that that's like bad. Thankfully, we have a



carbon monoxide detector and our 11 animals are like canaries in a mineshaft--if one dies, we'll know we need to invite the technician back real soon.



Now, that may sound cruel given that we love our animals so much. But this wasn't a cheap year for animals, and frankly, some of them owe us their lives. Purrkins started out the mishaps by approaching us one evening with this deep, long, plaintive meeeeeooooow that we'd only heard before on the Discovery Channel when a baby cheetah got separated from its mother. Mark and I teamed up to force what suddenly became a sprawlly-legged creature into the small opening of a portable cage. First the back legs had to be brought together and stuffed inside the small cage, then the front legs, then this suddenly wild-eyed head. En route to the MSU Vet Clinic Purrkins made a moaning noise not unlike that made by the Discovery Channel alpha male cheetah snarling at his underlings to stay away from the freshly killed gazelle. It was 10 p.m., and two hours later, after two 20-somethings poked and prodded and found nothing wrong with Purrkins, we coughed up \$105 for their trouble. An hour later, Purrkins coughed up his first hairball.

After purchasing ointment and hairball preventative food for Purrkins, it was Dusty's turn. It was 11 p.m., Dusty was lying next to me in bed, when all of a sudden, he started shivering and panting at the same time. After thinking, "Wow, a free bed vibrator," we realized this wasn't normal behavior and found ourselves back at the MSU Vet Clinic where Dusty was poked and prodded by a 20-something. He said it would be two hours before they could poke and prod any further, and that if we left right away, there would be no charge. Well, call us cheap, but we ran back home, let Dusty outside and sat around watching our beloved dog through the frosty front door. At last, his apparent indigestion passed and we all went off to bed. It took two more bouts of shivery-panting for us to figure out that Dusty's middle age gut was no longer able to process fatty meat scraps.

In December, days after fixing our no-longer hot hot tub, and replacing our cracked manifold because people didn't think our animals should really be canaries in the mineshaft, Magic the rabbit stopped eating. I called a vet who said that after going two days without food, my rabbit needed Vitamin B injections and something that would make his tummy right again and an antibiotic just in case...and 6 hours and \$150 later, Magic still refused to eat. I took Magic home, ignored the vet (who called to encourage me to return the poor rabbit for another day of torture and to force-feed him in between), and called two rabbit owners, both of whom suggested that perhaps my rabbit was more constipated than the legislators. Armed with anti-hairball lucky ointment and canned pumpkin (totaling \$10), I approached the white fuzzy, only to have him stomp off in a snit. I returned with several small plates containing ointment, pumpkin, canned beans, apple sauce, canned spiced apples, Cheerios, lettuce, raisins, Pop Tarts and this awful green concoction that I was supposed to have force-fed my little pal. A week later, Magic was still hopping around, having nibbled a little of this and that, as if he'd been on a hunger strike while waiting for me to figure out that all he wanted was a bunny smorgasbord.

In other news, my father won 15 skeet shooting medals in 2007, and *The Organized and Inspired Scrapbooker*, which Aby co-authored, was published (see www.simplify.com). My brother was so busy in 2007 that I plan on sending him an 18-month calendar for 2008 so he has more time to get things done next year. Holly's' swim team was 9-2 and she survived being captain at only her second (and last) year at Haslett High school. Arthur is a junior at MSU in telecommunications, Willi works in Lansing, Becky in Milford.

Oh, I got carded by a 20-something nine days before my 45th birthday. And she was not blind. Best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy new year.