

In 2015 Mark and I caught more big bass and pike than any previous year. One of us out-fished the other, as perhaps depicted in the photo.



In July we flew down to Miami, swam in a pool and photographed baby Muscovy ducks, only to be called at 10:20 p.m. to learn the rest of our trip to Brazil was cancelled because the natives threatened to shoot outsiders who fished their waters. The outfitters reimbursed us for most of our charges and we are scheduled for another try at this trip in February, fishing what we hope are friendlier Amazonian waters. We will take blow dart guns just in case.



In August, Becky and her fiancé Eugene flew in from Germany for a shower for a baby named Sofia who is expected to arrive any `ole day now. In October Mark and I flew to Germany to see Becky and Eugene get married. En route, in Hamburg, I got pulled aside by several humorless German airport security guys who X-rayed a 50-caliber, bullet-shaped bottle opener I had in my carry-on, a gift from my father I'd forgotten about. I stopped 4 lines of airport security for my transgression, and they only moved again after I donated my bottle opener to the unsmiling brutes. On a friendlier note, we got to meet our new Russian-German family, who are fun, fantastic people. After Germany, we went to Prague with our dear `ole friend Jack, whose son toured us around and told us about the bad things bad people did to good people back in the day.

In September I took a trip with three pals to Bois Blanc Island, which is an island just east of Mackinaw Island and lacking fudge, horses and lots of people. We spent three days befriending deer, hunting mushrooms and turning over logs to look for wee rattlesnakes, supposedly abundant on the island. We saw one. And he was not happy to see us.

December started with the demise of our washing machine, which occurred the same day our floor drain burped up in the basement. Mark called the plumber for the floor drain. For the washer, I took an afternoon off and we drove to our new favorite store—the Sears Outlet Store in Novi. We put the new washer in the back of my Honda Element, rented a dolly at our local hardware store, rolled the new washing machine to the basement, hauled the old one up, put the old one in the back of my Element, drove to the dump and dropped it off. We returned the dolly, hooked up the machine and closed our wallet for the day.

It was about that time I noticed a thumping noise at the front of my Element was over-powering a thump-creak noise at the rear of my vehicle. As a result, I am the proud owner of a new ball joint, two rear struts and a drained and refilled rear differential. There remains the matter of a rear brake that goes clank, clank, clank when I stop, but that will just have to wait until after the new year. Meanwhile, I figure if the other three brakes work, surely I'll stop sooner or later.

Within days of "spa day" at the Honda dealership, our unlucky streak continued when our Internet and landline went off and back on and off



again. We called AT&T and the kind technician said that rodents had chewed the line into our house. This seemed quite rude to us because we support numerous rodents with sunflower seeds and peanuts. We got a new router inside our house and several cute tiny flags in our yard and in our neighbor's, suggesting a new line will be planted soon.

And yes, we did try to get rid of our landline. While a kind AT&T lady saved me \$17 per month due to a state of MI discount, dropping our landline meant our Internet service costs would increase...which is about as unfair as the chewy, chubby rodents eating our line. So, we kept our landline.

Meanwhile, I made enemies at Best Buy trying to get our two new cell phones to actually function. Mark's was fine but mine kept telling me I had "NO SERVICE." My first trip to Best Buy resulted in having my phone reset. The next trip resulted in the replacement of the SIM card. The third visit resulted in them telling me they didn't have any more of the type of phone I'd purchased and them asking: "Would you like to go across town to the Apple store to see if they have one?" Instead, I suggested *they* call the Apple store and that they call *me* when my new phone was in hand. I also suggested that *if* I have to wait an hour in line like I had the last three times, I would likely break out into a snit-fit that would make national TV.

This month we also learned our dogs' Bordetella shots were only good for six months instead of one year. And because Winston had started limping on again and off again like my phone service, we not only paid for shots and for the vet to sorta postulate what ails him, we also purchased a new harness so Winston's neck doesn't get all out of sorts while walking.



This year Preto chose to nest in our Christmas tree instead of on his Taj Mahal cat platform. We know this due to the branches knocked to the floor and a distinct opening in the tree at eye level. To ensure he didn't strangle himself, we removed the lights we'd hung prior to discovering his preference for the tree; we also removed the tree topper, which we didn't really like anyway. Mark has purchased a \$35 cat-tree defender product, which I'm betting Preto will love as much as the tree itself.



The kids are all over the world--Becky is in Germany; Arthur in Japan; Holly in New York; and Willi in Ann Arbor. This year, to celebrate kids' birthdays when they couldn't be here, we made their favorite birthday cake, Skyped with them, and ate their cake in front of them while going "yum, yum" the entire time. The dogs even got a bite. Now, if only we'd thought of that in regards to Christmas presents, we'd have a lot more gifts to open this year.

We hope you had a good 2015 and a have a great 2016!

