

Gripper Labor Day 2012 Weekend Recap

A perfect ending to Sumer 2012 was enjoyed by many at Trinity Village (and the Gripper Estate) during the recently observed Labor Day Weekend. We were blessed with perfect weather, a large contingent of locals (plus Grippers), and a slate of parties that will long be remembered.

Friday was convergence day: The Chairman and his family had earlier settled into the Ruby Creek and Maple Creek suites. David Quinn and friends (Larry & Kelly, Troy & Kimberly) arrived in style with a trio of "S" model Porsches – two Caymans and a Boxster. The general agreement: Those machines looked quite classy in the Gripper courtyard. Dave Murray and his friend from Munich (Karsten Kepper) rode in on a pair of touring motorcycles (Suzuki 850 & BMW R100R) around 5:00 pm. (Just in time to enjoy the outdoor shower adjacent to the recently completed Maple Creek Suite). Things were looking a bit full at that point, so Butch stepped up to host Dave and Karsten down by the river.

We all were soon joined by the Smith family (Walter, Leann & Natalie) and Cousin Barry's brother John (accompanied by the lovely Sylvia). Jan, Macey and Trinity were on the way from Mill Valley, but stayed over at Benbow, leaving Butch and Lucky (ably assisted by Kevin Seeley & son Duncan, "The Ducanator") to Serve and Protect the premises. Cousin Stuart was also present, but was until that point, keeping a low profile.

As good fortune comes to those who stumble upon it, (if not wait for it) TV residents Jens and Clare were hosting the perfect kickoff to the weekend: A barbeque dinner featuring generous quantities of freshly caught salmon, (with garlic and herbs – yum!) ribs, salads and huge platters of smoked salmon was presented. A sizeable group shared the great meal as we were enjoying live Bluegrass music poolside. Quite a few of the younger crowd (notably, Jen's daughter Gina, & friends) were also on hand, and they interacted with everyone as if there was no generation gap of any significance. (Could be because we remain up to speed on matters of current relevance, but it may just be our general awesomeness...) Also, the tone for the weekend was set: Everyone wanted to get to know Karsten better, and he soon gained many new acquaintances.

Friday night also included a ritual swine sacrifice in the Mathews Garage/Temple. Larry and Kelly were convinced that we marinated a live pig in a rubber raft before dispatching it with a single gunshot, but it was more complicated than that. (Details redacted to avoid any possible blowback from PETA). In any case, much marinating took place, some of which involved beer applied to the stomach linings of party planners who were on hand.

Early Saturday, Butch, Stuart, Jens, Mellissa and Walter set up the rotisserie on the beach, and the pig roast was under way. Point of interest: The roasting spit was constructed by Sam Merriman many years ago, and was regularly used at the Moonstone Beach House and restaurant. Mellissa wisely saw that TV would be a good location to redeploy the spit, and went so far as to have the electric motor powering the chain drive rotator rebuilt to ensure future reliability. Thanks, M!

Monitoring the pig progress throughout the day was essential, so a roster of volunteers was recruited for one-hour shifts. Some overlap occurred, a few absences were inevitable, but Karsten stayed steady by filling in for several stints. Meanwhile, the usual river activity took place: Semi-guided rafting trips, beach volleyball, swimming, - etc. as the weather remained warm, but not too hot. The river water was on the brisk side, which was great for the fish population, but meant only the hardiest types (Quinn and those too young to know better) spent much time off-shore. Danny Walsh and Tracy led a Village bike ride up to the bridge, which may have induced the only effort-generated sweat until the night of the street dance. At some point it was noted that there is a fine line between goofing off and taking it easy and the consensus was to conserve energy by opting for the latter.

Larry Kluck made an appearance via mountain bike, joined by his grandson Phoenix. This kid is already keeping up at age nine, so the rest of should be looking over our shoulders on the next TUC. Larry is on the rebound from recent back surgery, and at only six weeks removed from the knife, is showing remarkable progress.

Bank president Pat Moty with wife Eva and daughters Minda, Tesa and Hana came over from Redding – a 100-mile jaunt away from the smoke generated by the forest fires underway in the Mount Lassen area that were hazing most of north central California. They were happy to get out of the 95 degree weather, which is fairly mild by the local standards in early September.

Around mid-day, Captain Mathews organized a river flotilla and got Walter, Kimberly, Troy, Karsten and Stuart out for a float in the ever-durable Wing Inflatables. Kevin and Dave assisted with the shuttle, and raced back to photograph the paddlers as they came past Founder's Beach. As luck would have it, there was some contact with the rocks, and some spillage of passengers. Troy held up quite well, as he admitted to being "not much of a swimmer". We all met up at the Minuth take-out spot – just in time for an adult beverage. Reed had clearly adopted the "take it easy" mode, but was game for supervising our load-up and departure.

Afternoon naps augmented the recovery for some, while others made final preparations for the pork feast. Soon, the good citizens of TV arrived at Founder's Beach (where picnic tables, etc. had been placed for the evening) with generous helpings of salads, desserts, and side dishes. Bill Wing stopped by to check out the scene. We caught up on his recent business dealings, and were happy to experience his unique perspective on Life, Gripperdom, and the Way of the World. Butch revived the CD player just in time to spin some dinner music. Jens and friends expertly carved the pig, the volleyball players paused to dine, and everyone had plenty to eat. Few yellow jackets were on site and there were no pesky mosquitos at all. The stars played second fiddle to a bright moon as the sun dipped out of sight, and it was a warm, pleasant evening along the river. (If this imagery doesn't tempt those of you who couldn't make it for 2012 to be sure and attend next year, you seriously need a break. We'll stage an intervention if we have to – you know who you are).

Cleanup was the work of many hands – everything that would burn (plates, bones, toothpicks) was consigned to the fire pit. Note for future: The pig skull did not fully combust. Lucky snagged it the next morning. (Must be the opposite of pig's feet). Also, the ceremonial apple, which miraculously worked its way from the mouth of the pig to the other end during cooking, somehow didn't burn. If any apples result from planting of the remaining seeds, don't try to cook a pie with them. We capped the night off with a few conversations around the Mathews patio fire, reflecting that a good time was had by all.

Sunday got off to a mellow start – except for Quinn, who again insisted on going for a run and then hopping into the river for a morning bath. The rest of us enjoyed a low-key breakfast cooked by Jan, Leann, Walter, Sylvia and Eva. Again, cleanup was a group effort, and the conversations flowed in meandering courses. This all went on at “River Pace”, which is to say we had reached full relaxation mode. No hurry, no worry. Life is Good!

Preparations for the pending street dance required rounding up the tables, benches, etc. from the beach and relocating everything to the cul-de-sac by the Fire House. Fortunately, Karsten was fully up to speed on his new duty as the Designated Pickup Driver. Considering he had only learned to drive an American truck (don't have those in Europe - with an automatic transmission, sans gear indicator) the previous day, it went smoothly. This new skill will serve him well when he resumes his job at the historic Mill Valley Lumber Company. Most tasks were completed before the heat of the day (it was getting warmer as the weekend progressed) reached a peak, and Mellissa was able to monitor the situation from poolside.

Once again, the afternoon was enjoyed with river trips, volleyball and a few well-earned naps. The Quigley family had a run to Eureka and back. Another great dinner – seems that all meals served along the river are above average - (ribs, salads, bread, etc.) was expertly whipped out, (Walter manning the grill is always a good call) and everyone had plenty to eat/drink before heading up for the dance.

Before departure, however, a fashion show broke out. Dave put on his best Spiderman shirt, and Butch felt compelled to up the ante. Soon, the secret stash of TV apparel was on display: A Police Department polo, “Mayor of Trinity Village: Not!” t-shirt, and the ultimate Lounge Lizard accessory (a martini-themed, faux Zebra-fur trimmed, short-sleeved beauty) that capped all. Stuart won (lost?) the right to sport the coveted shirt, and looked beyond dashing – right down to the martini-glass buttons. Karsten was happy to be “Mayor” (Not!) for the evening, though was later repeatedly nagged for improvements to the Village. (Better road surface down to the beach, sidewalks, bike paths, improved drinking water, etc.). Most all of these requests were summarily denied, (Nein! Wir haben keine geld!) but the suggestion of a bocce court was tabled until an environmental impact statement could be produced and reviewed. Power corrupts; Absolute power means decent martinis...

Arriving stylishly late meant missing the first set from Dr. Squid, but it made no sense to proceed without first stopping at the Gripper Estate to round up any stragglers and fill a few “sippy cups” from the Holy Keggerator, which was dispensing Pacifico Clara. (Thanks, Butch)! This proved to be a good call, as the subsequent dancing made for Big Thirst.

Dr Squid really had things rocking by the time we arrived. Who would have thought a cover band from Arcata anchored by a police detective drummer (Bob) and fronted by an Australian lass (Bridget Monahan) could be so cool? Well, the residents of TV who invited them back after previous successful shows – that’s who. Bridget has a voice with perfect range and pitch for classic rock, and seems to have emerged from the same gene pool as Nicole Kidman, which is to say WOW! (The rest of the band was quite talented also, but they put the best face forward).

Anyway, Bridget was not the only one looking great. Wade and Kathy Bray sported western wear, (nice hat, Wade) Mrs. Mathews had on a Black Dress of some note, and Natalie absolutely tore up the street with her dance moves. (Walter didn’t wear it that night, but his t-shirt proclaiming “Guns don’t kill people – Dads with pretty daughters do!” – has a basis in fact). As always, the grand tradition of the younger TV girls (now not so little, but still cute as ever) joining up for a line dance to enjoy what it means to “Feel Like a Woman” had everyone smiling.

Things reached a (figurative, Hank/Steve) climax when the band broke into an encore of “We Are Family”. At that point, the crowd had dwindled, but the Gripper contingent was in full force – and we got every last ounce of fun out of that number. Nothing left to say or do after that. Just thank the band and adjourn to the Gripper Estate.

Oh, yes. There was an after-party. With that outdoor kitchen (and keg) beckoning a mere few steps away, we had little choice. Again, the younger set (all of legal age) followed the Gripper lead and wrapped things up in a convivial fashion. Jens broke out for the first time his Rasta hat with built-in dreads. Gotta wait for the right moment to deploy the best party accessories, and he did. If you are going to drag something that ridiculous back from Belize, it has to get used at some point.

Anyway, we did the best we could to contain things without a velvet rope, but we will need one to screen potential guests in the future. Sometime after midnight it was decided that the Fun Meters had been pegged, so we shut it down.

Monday was a day of departure and travel for most. Lots of affectionate goodbyes and promises to get together again at the next opportunity were shared. Everyone involved in this group realizes just how important it is to share the good times, so the sentiments rang true. Next Labor Day seems a long way off, but it will be here before we know it, if the ever-accelerating pace of life holds true to form.

On the other hand, there were still a lot of season-ending tasks to perform, which required special effort. Butch and Walter took down the tee-pee, for example. Also, there were a few remaining beers to consume, so those of us staying one more night pitched in.

Last men standing: Butch, Stuart, Karsten, Dave and Lucky. A bit of organizing was needed at the Mathews property (stash the outdoor furniture, store the watercraft, load up the trash, etc.) We decided a lunch of leftovers was appropriate, and dined accordingly. A bit later, an evening “Cocktail Cruise” of the river was on the agenda. The patched-up purple “Barney” raft was pumped up once more. If there is ever an inflatable boat Hall of Fame, this rig deserves a place of honor.

We put in at Founder's Beach as the afternoon was waning. A few beers later, our destination of the swing over the river (just past the Minuth property) was reached. Everyone had their moment of childlike fun, and if you can't enjoy a good swing into the river, you should just keep drifting until you come to your senses.

A bit of personal cleanup was done as well. For those who don't experience it, an outdoor shower should be on your "Bucket List". Having those available makes the routine task of bathing something to savor. Along with sleeping outside at night, we really have it good when spending time on the river.

The next move was Margaritas and snacks at the Rock House. As we were down to the "Final Four" (plus Lucky) not much needed to be said, but we reflected on just how great the entire weekend had been. At some point, that little (thank God) bottle of Patron was empty and the sun had set. We adjourned to the main house to knock off more leftovers and chat the evening away. A big part of this was reviewing everyone's photos. Stuart's commentary was freakin' hilarious, and there was no shortage of material as Karsten had some 600 shots on his phone. (That is a "Handy" to the Germans, as they call them hand-helds – as opposed to the "MoBILE" favored by the Brits). Things wrapped up (again) just past midnight out of deference to Dave and Karsten's need to ride those bikes 400+ miles the next day.

Somehow, an early, orderly departure was arranged, though it was later reported that Butch and Lucky ended up leaving around mid-day and had to stop a few times for a short snooze on the way back home. Stuart headed over to Eureka for business, while Karsten and Dave elected to run up Highway 96 to Happy Camp, before riding over the "Grayback" route to Cave Junction and on to Beaverton. Highway 96 is rated as one of the top motorcycle roads on the West Coast, and is favored by enthusiast drivers too. (Be sure to ask Dave Quinn and friends how they liked it from the seat of the Porsches).

In closing, please keep in mind that this edition of "The Gripper Chronicles" is subject to dispute, editing, revision and contention. All named parties can plausibly deny any and every report of their behavior, attitudes and actions. Any broadcast, depiction or reproduction of these materials is expressly encouraged. If you don't like how this particular version of events is reported, show up and make your own history and share it with all. Just be sure to share the good times as often as possible. These are not Limited Offers, and have no Expiration Date.