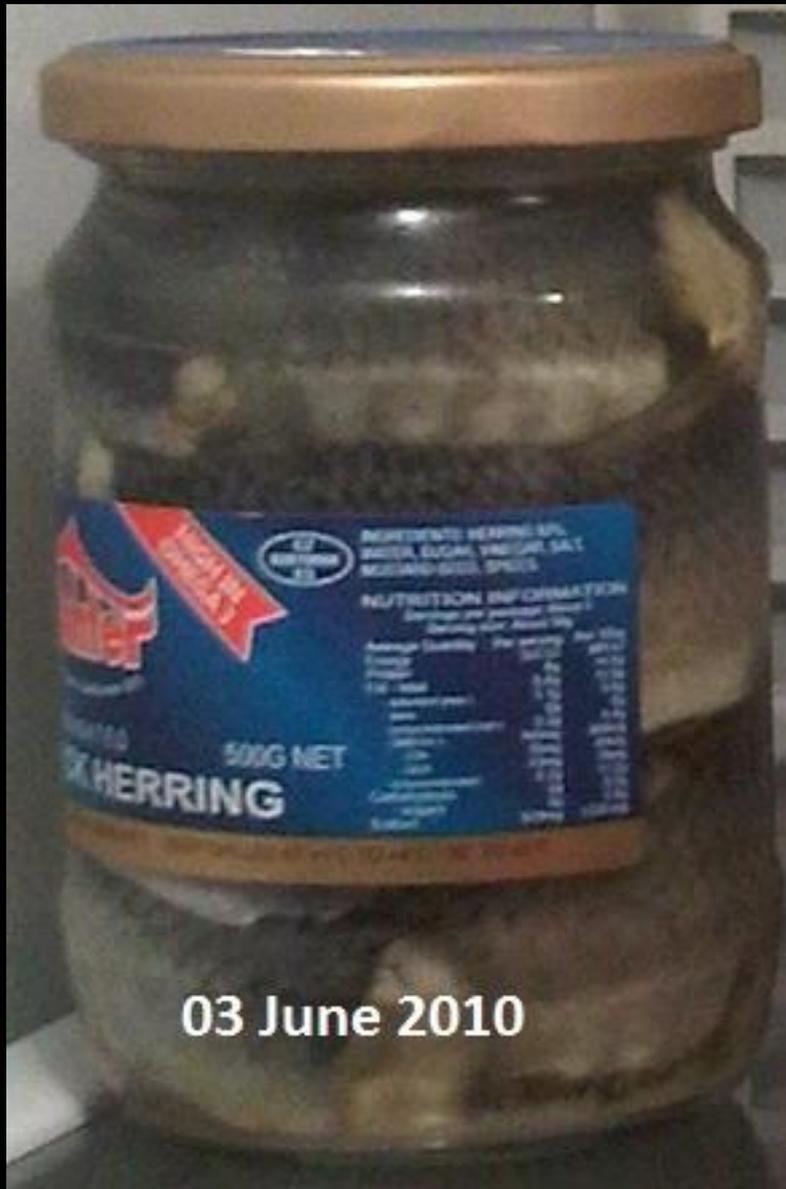


It takes more than tights to make a

HERRING VIGILANTE

from *2012. The year in pictures*, Cathy Marshall



I found the jar of pickled herring on the 3rd of June, 2010. It was on the top shelf of the refrigerator at work, way in the back. Perhaps it was hidden. Perhaps it was forgotten.

“Whose herring is this?” I asked back then.

“Oh, that’s Ulfar’s herring,” one of my co-workers said.

“But doesn’t Ulfar work at Google now?” I said.

“Yeah. He left a couple of years ago.”

Ulfar had in fact decamped to the greener pastures and freer lunches offered by the Big G, the new millennium’s Evil Empire. Ulfar is Icelandic; he presumably knows his herring.

I closed the refrigerator door .

The herring wasn't the only old-timer in the refrigerator. Although the sign on the door says that the refrigerator is cleaned every Sunday, the only things that are usually missing are leftovers in their clamshell trays.

My leftovers in their clamshell trays.

The herring's pals, a canister of ancient coffee beans, a half-finished bottle of Tejava artisanally-brewed iced tea, and some Kraft non-fat American cheese singles, were fellow old-timers.

I celebrated the herring in Twitter, in talks, and in casual conversation. The first thing I did when I had a visitor at work was to pull them into the kitchenette and show off the herring.

“There it is!” I'd say. “There's the pickled herring! I bet you thought I was kidding!”





As the months rolled by, the herring didn't look appreciably worse.

Oh, maybe the herring juice grew a trifle cloudier. And perhaps additional bits of unidentified matter circulated in the jar.

But really the herring looked fine.

Every week—usually on Friday—I'd tweet news of the herring. Afterward sometimes I'd notice a drop in my followers. For example, Harvard's Berkman Center seemed uninterested in the doings of the pickled fish. Of course I felt hurt, but herring's not for everybody.

The herring celebrated its second anniversary on June 3, 2012. This candid was taken mid-August.

Last June, I hallucinated the herring on Missouri's vast empty green horizon.

Did you know that Columbia, Missouri is almost as far from St. Louis as it is from Kansas City?

Drivers there still know that they should cruise on the right and pass on the left. It is a convention that's a relic of simpler times.

Did you know that if you stare at an unfamiliar landscape long enough, you'll see pickled herring?

At least I do.





In July, 2012 I made my mother a herring birthday card.

I don't necessarily think she was as pleased with my handiwork as I was.

I thought she liked pickled herring. I thought EVERYONE liked pickled herring. Even old pickled herring.

Sure, Mom is allergic to fish. But that doesn't mean she doesn't *like* fish. Mark has in fact suggested that she's addicted to the rush of histamines that flood her system when she eats fish.

Fish allergies be damned: it was an age-positive message.

The 5th of November (aka Guy Fawkes Day) and The Day the Music Died have NOTHING on the 13th of September, 2012.

That's the day the herring went missing.

I canvassed the refrigerator. Could someone have stashed the jar in the vegetable crisper? Perhaps the herring was nestled among the elderly condiments or behind the wilted celery.

The American cheese singles lingered. The half-consumed bottle of Tejava tea—still there. But the pickled herring was gone.

Wasn't there a bestselling novel, *Gone Fish*?





Or perhaps it's a business book cliché:
Who moved my herring?

Technically, it's not my herring, but I doubt Ulfar cares about the herring anymore. He has no doubt been corrupted by Google's 25 cafeterias.

Between you and me, Google is just trying fatten up its employees so they're trapped in their cubicles like so many high-tech veal calves. But perhaps I'm just jealous. After all, **SOMEONE TOOK MY HERRING**. Maybe it's now on offer on one of Google's sushi stations. Maybe it's hanging out on the wheat grass juice cart in a Google lobby.

Don't it always seem to go/that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone./Take Pickled Herring, put up a parking lot.—Joni Mitchell

It didn't take long for me to realize that there was only one good way to avenge the herring's untimely and mysterious disappearance:
REPLACEMENT HERRING.

A herring surrogate, so to speak.

Haig's in the Richmond had just what I wanted.

Look at the crystal-clear herring juice!

I bought the jar on the 29th of September, more than two weeks after the herring-nap, and put it in my home refrigerator to prepare for repatriation.

Cathy Marshall, Herring Avenger. I picture myself with a purple cape. I'm probably too old for the leotard and tights, but I can wear a cape like nobody's business.





The refrigerator at work was barren. Nothing had survived the Great September Purge except the Kraft American Cheese Singles and the stale coffee beans.

From a historical perspective, I'm sure fingers will be pointed, blame assigned, and a cloud of regret will descend on the kitchenette.

Who could've done this? What monster swept through our refrigerator? Did he or she invoke a phantom health department? Or was this atrocity committed in the name of boredom and OCD? Were someone's meds miscalibrated?

We will never forget!

To test the waters (so to speak), on October 10th, I taped a picture of the new pickled herring into the proper corner of the refrigerator at work.

No reaction. Nothing.

I found the bottle of iced tea (which may have had as lengthy a tenancy as the original herring, or OH) and replaced it on the top shelf. Now the tableau was complete.

I don't need to tell you, it turned out to be a wildly successful experiment. No-one said A THING.

I began to feel confident that repatriation could begin.





1 November 2012: The new Pickled Herring is ensconced in the corner of the refrigerator's top shelf, where it belongs.

I left the photo in place, as a memorial to OH.

Coffee beans, Tejava tea (off camera), and Kraft American Cheese Food Singles stand at attention.

I was tearful, but composed. It's a wonderful day for us all.

Postscript

I'm sure we're all ready for a 'happily ever after' ending for the herring saga.

Not only did 2012 close on a successfully reintroduced Pickled Herring, but check out the new fish in town...

Pickled Herring, meet INSTANT NATURAL JELLYFISH.

Popular taste!

Same great package!
Thumbs up!

See you in 2013.

