

Chapter 9: A NEW ADVENTURE – A NEW HOME

As 2017 began, we had stopped publishing International Career Employment Weekly and Public Health Jobs Worldwide, and had closed down the Carlyle Corporation. We were now considering what we would do in “retirement”. I was now 78 years old, and probably old enough to retire even though I still believed I was about 18.

Lisa had decided to sell her house in Charlottesville, and she had a contract from a buyer. Lisa also had announced that she was resigning her position as Chair of the Fifth Congressional District Democratic Committee and her positions on the Virginia Democratic Committee and State Steering Committee. She continued to serve as Chair of the Greene County Democratic Committee, and I was still on the Board of Directors of the Greene County Free Clinic, but this was quite relaxed living for us. We were enjoying a bit more spare time.

SELLING THE HOUSE IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

It is worth commenting here about the rather frustrating effort to sell the house in Charlottesville. The tenant living in the house had been there for a few years and her lease was expiring at the end of June in 2015. After Lisa told her that she planned to sell the house, the tenant told Lisa that she wanted to buy it if she could get financing. Lisa agreed to let her stay in the house on a month-to-month basis while she was working to get financing. By November the tenant still had not obtained financing, so Lisa gave her notice to vacate by the end of December. Then the tenant informed Lisa that she had obtained financing, and she would sign a sales contract and make an earnest deposit. But the tenant then procrastinated on signing the contract until early January, 2016.

After signing the contract, she began demanding changes in the contract and insisted that Lisa pay for major repairs. On January 27, she informed Lisa that she was withdrawing from the contract because she had not received financing (even though Lisa had talked with the finance firm which assured Lisa that there was no problem with the financing). The tenant also demanded a refund of the full \$5000 earnest deposit.

It was now clear that the tenant had never intended to purchase the house, and was using this long drawn-out sales process to extend her time in the house as long as possible. After Lisa received advice from her attorney, she agreed to refund half of the earnest deposit. But Lisa still had to threaten legal action to have the tenant evicted before she finally moved out in February, leaving a major mess in the house and outside. The tenant had caused a great deal of damage to the house, and had failed to meet even minimum standards of cleanliness, so a substantial amount of work was required prior to placing it on the market. It was a lesson for us regarding

the time, expense and annoyance that an unscrupulous, disrespectful and slovenly tenant can cause.

For several months in early 2016, we worked to repair and clean the house. We had to remove or replace almost all the carpet because of dirt and stains; we sanded and refinished the hardwood floors; painted all the walls; repaired extensive damage to the master bathroom; and upgraded the second bathroom. I also repainted the exterior of the house, and repaired and upgraded the landscaping. In mid-2016, Lisa placed the house on the market. By late fall she had a contract, and the property was sold in January of 2017.



Outside and inside views of the house in Charlottesville.

SELLING THE FARM

In February, we started thinking about selling the farm and downsizing into a smaller place with less maintenance work. The farm was a lovely place, and we enjoyed all the benefits of having a country estate. But the place required almost constant attention to keep it attractive. I preferred to do most of the outdoor maintenance work myself, and I could take care of all small inside maintenance issues with plumbing, electric issues, etc. But even if I hired contractors to perform major tasks, such as clearing timber, maintaining the pond, maintaining the pool, applying new shingles to roofs, fixing the well, etc. I would still need to find and hire competent contractors and oversee their work, and pay their high prices. I found it difficult to accept the need to pay high fees to contractors to do things that I could do better and faster! So, we decided we would plan to get the property ready to put it on the market, later in the spring. I interviewed a few real estate brokers to assess their qualifications and to get their estimates of the current market for such country estates, and the likely sales price.



The big house at the farm, in the spring of 2017.



The view from the big house at the farm, spring of 2017.

In early April of 2017 we learned that one of our neighbors who had a larger estate was putting their farm on the market. We mentioned to them that we had been thinking about doing the same. A couple of weeks later, the neighbor told us that they had sold their farm, and that the person who bought it had asked if they knew of any neighbors who might be thinking of selling. The neighbor gave their buyer our names, and I was contacted by their real estate agent, and we arranged for the buyer to see my property. A few days later I received a contract offer. The price was a bit lower than I thought was acceptable, but I could avoid the fees of a selling agent, and the costs of preparing the property to place it on the market. And the buyer was willing to let us stay in the house rent free for two months after closing. After a couple rounds of negotiation, we reached agreement on a price, and the sale was closed on May 4. We had until July 3 to vacate the property. That was easy, and now we were “homeless” much sooner than we had anticipated.

Lisa and I decided that we were not going to immediately move to another place. We decided that since we would be homeless, we should use this unusual opportunity to travel and to consider where we wanted to live for the next phase of our lives. We thought we would travel around the country for several months and consider all the options – maybe take a year to travel before we settled down somewhere. We decided to put some of our furniture (enough for a three-bedroom house) in storage, along with personal possessions we wished to keep, and we would sell or give away everything else. This meant we had less than two months to dispose of or store all of our possessions, including everything in the six bedroom main house, several pieces of furniture in the log house, several pieces of office furniture stored in the granary; two tractors; several pieces of farm equipment; a pickup truck; a 2003 automobile; a large selection of tools; several pieces of lawn and patio furniture and toys; and a 12’ boat with motor we used on the pond.

I sold most of the farm equipment, the tractors, the pickup, the car, the boat and some of the furniture. We gave away to local charities enough furniture to furnish a three-bedroom house, and enough office furniture for two offices. We gave away many items to friends and acquaintances, and a few truck loads to Good Will.

The remainder of the possessions were loaded into two large moving containers, 16’ x 8’ x 8’, which were trucked to a warehouse in Richmond, to be stored until we asked for delivery to our new residence.

On June 23, we stored our second car in a friend’s garage, said goodbye to Jake and Pearl, our two cats (we concluded they should not be moved to another location, and the new owners agreed to adopt them), and drove off toward Maryland to begin our journey of exploration.

WHERE TO NOW?

Lisa and I agreed that we were not interested in living in any of the former Confederacy states except maybe Virginia, so we would not spend time considering those states. Our many years in Virginia had convinced us we did not want to deal with the white supremacy nonsense that tended to permeate many of the residents of the southern states. We kept open the possibility of remaining in the Charlottesville area where I had lived for 29 years, and where we had many good friends, and where Lisa's children still lived. Although I had spent some time in almost all of the 50 states, we decided to re-explore the northeast states and then head west through the upper Midwest, to the west coast and possibly to Colorado and Kansas. We agreed to at least consider the pros and cons of all these states, although I knew that Lisa had little interest in living in any of the northeast states, and I thought she still had her dream of returning to Kansas.

We drove to the Washington, DC area and visited with Greg and Marsha and girls, and Cindy and Ted and girls, and then spent a couple of days with Cheryl and David in Baltimore. We agreed that Maryland was a nice place to live, but it was expensive and too crowded.

We then drove to Bethany Beach, Delaware, and stayed at Cindy and Ted's beach house for a few days, over the July 4th holiday. I always enjoyed spending a few days at one of the Atlantic beaches, but usually tired of the sun, sand and salt fairly quickly. But I never tired of a good crab feast.



I'm nearing the satiated point in this crab feast at Cindy and Ted's beach house, with Cindy, Megan and Ted.

On our trip, we were driving our brand new Hyundai Sonata Limited, only a couple weeks old. We were sitting on the beach early on Sunday morning, drinking a cup of coffee and enjoying the sunrise, when Cindy came to join us. She announced that she had some bad news – Cindy had

borrowed our new car last evening to run to the grocery store and had parked behind Amanda's jeep parked in the driveway; this morning Amanda had to go to work early and while barely awake she backed up into our car, crushing the hood and maybe other parts of the car. OK, I agreed this was bad news, but at least no one was hurt.



We were enjoying the early morning sun, until we got the bad news, and I apparently went ballistic.

So, we had to change plans; I made arrangements to get the car repaired at a shop in the DC area, and to rent a car to use as we traveled up the East Coast, while our car was repaired. We agreed that Delaware was a nice place, with nice ocean beaches, but it was not quite what we were looking for; it was too crowded with people from DC, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Jersey, etc. during warm months, and it is relatively expensive for year-around living. And it seemed to be a dangerous place for a new car!

We explored New England, spending some time in the Cape Cod area, revisiting some of the breeding grounds of my several ancestors who had settled in the Plymouth Colony and then moved on to the Cape. A large number of my ancestors had lived in Eastham, out on the upper arm of the Cape. We spent a day at the lovely Cape Cod National Seashore park near Eastham.

We spent several days at or near Mount Desert Island, Acadia National Park, and Bar Harbor, enjoying fresh lobster right off the boat. It is a lovely place to visit, but there were about three times as many people there as the last time I visited, and the crowds really make it difficult to enjoy the area in the summer time.



Views of the Bar Harbor, ME, coastal area.

We then visited western Maine for several days, where we had some unexpected discoveries. Because we had not visited the area previously, we were relying on website descriptions of towns and on Airbnb ads for good places to stay. We found a B&B place in Rumford that seemed to be an attractive place based on the B&B advertising, and we made reservations in advance. When we arrived in Rumford, we discovered that it had been a major wood pulp milling town, and it still had a pulp plant, but the town had fallen on some hard times. The B&B was acceptable, but not up to its glamorous advertising, and there was still a faint smell of wood pulp.

We stopped by the Tourist Information Center in town to get information on things to do and see in the area, and the person in charge seemed quite amazed that we were there; “why are you here? The next town down the highway is a much more interesting place to visit.” When I asked what she would recommend we should see in or around Rumford, she couldn’t think of anything. I believe it is the only time I have ever been to a visitors’ center that seemed to be intent on sending us elsewhere. Maybe they were trying some reverse psychology? In any case, we went on to visit the next town, named Bethel, which indeed was much nicer, with better restaurants and some nice walking paths and nearby covered bridges.



One of the many old covered bridges in New England.

We also devoted several days to New Hampshire, Vermont and eastern New York. The area has beautiful lakes, mountains, streams, parks, hiking, unique villages, wonderful little restaurants, and way too many people. We took several hikes up mountains and along mountain streams in the White Mountain National Forest. We attempted to spend a nice afternoon at a beautiful mountain lake beach, but police were turning away people – there was no place to park a car and no place to put down a blanket on the beach. We moved on to the Killington area in Vermont for more hiking and exploring villages and restaurants, before moving on to New York. We reviewed early American history at Fort Ticonderoga, picnicked on the shores of Lake George, and dined in Saratoga Springs.

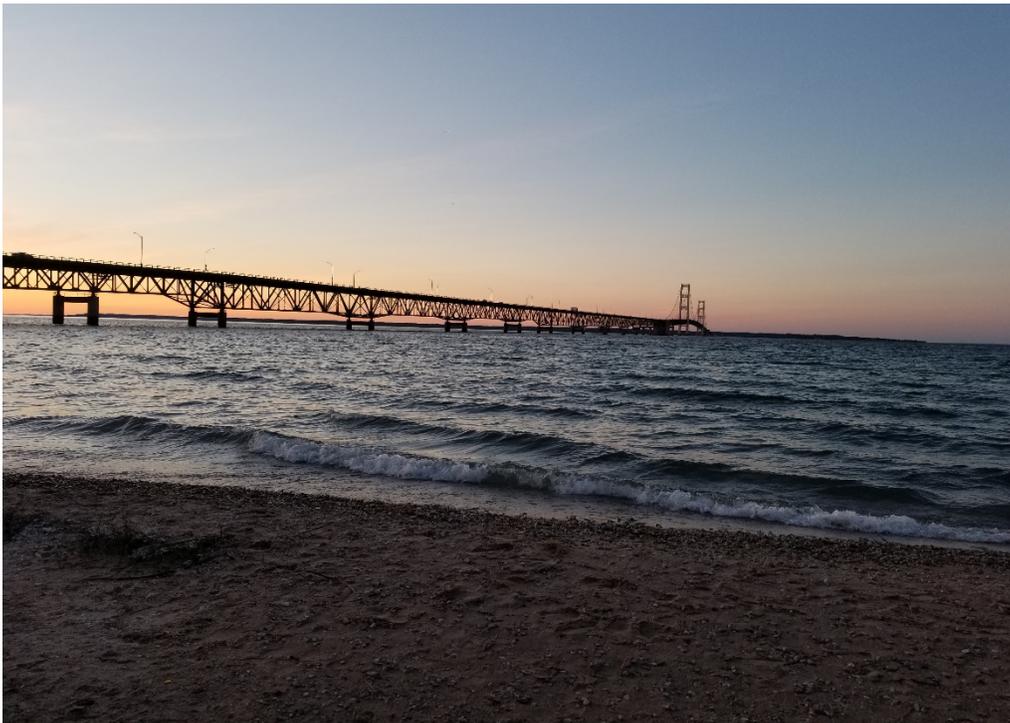


A special treat at our stay in New Hampshire.

I had visited New England and upstate New York several times in the past, and thought that a home in a village somewhere in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont or northern New York might be a good place to live. It would be relatively close to my kids and grandkids in Maryland and Virginia, and hopefully less expensive than houses in the mid-Atlantic area. I checked real estate listings throughout the area and was disappointed at the prices, and more disappointed with the crowds of people, on the roads and in the small towns, in the parks and on the hiking trails, and in all the good restaurants. And I was reminded that this area also is a destination in the winter, with several ski resorts attracting people from the cities of the northeast. As we were ending our three weeks in the area, we had not completely rejected this region as a new home, but we were not very enthused.

After returning to Maryland to pick up our repaired car and to return the rental car, we headed west to Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and then on to Minnesota in time for our usual two weeks at

Clitherall Lake starting at the end of July. We spent a few days in northern Michigan, including time in Mackinaw City, at the southern end of the Mackinac Bridge which spans the Straits of Mackinac joining Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. The bridge is five miles long, and the suspension portion between the two towers is over a mile long, the longest suspension bridge in the Western Hemisphere. Ship traffic between the two Great Lakes travels beneath the bridge. And in case you are uncomfortable driving over such a long and high bridge, you should know that as of 2020 only two cars have ever gone over the railing and into the water below; it appears that at least one of these was literally blown off the bridge.



The Mackinac Bridge over the Straits of Mackinac.

This area has some unusual and interesting features, including the surprisingly large sand dunes along the shores of Lake Michigan, views of the ships (and Lake Boats) on Lakes Michigan, Huron and Superior, old light houses at key places along the lakes, the Soo Locks at Sault Ste. Marie that permit the large iron ore boats to travel between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, and some good restaurants specializing in whitefish from the Great Lakes.

The Soo Locks, run by the US Army Corps of Engineers, claims to be the busiest locks system in the world, and handles ocean going ships that come through the St. Lawrence Seaway from the Atlantic, as well as the long iron ore and grain boats coming from the Minnesota and Wisconsin

ports. Ships as long as 1000 feet go through these locks. And there are convenient observation seats for visitors!

Our visit to northern Michigan and Wisconsin was interesting, but we decided we would scratch off this area as a place to live. Although home prices are reasonable in much of the region, the area doesn't have the attractive lakes and mountains of New England. It is not crowded like New England; rather, much of the region seems to be too desolate, with few attractive small towns, and heavy reliance on extraction industries, including mining and timber. And its location near the Great Lakes results in the region receiving high levels of "lake-effects" snow.

ON TO MINNESOTA

It was now time to get to Minnesota to start our two weeks at Clitherall Lake. We drove through Duluth and west to Otter Tail County, home of Clitherall, Battle Lake, and Henning, where I grew up. When I was a kid on the farm, this region was farm land, with a few towns along railroad tracks which supported farmers. There are over a thousand lakes in the County, but they generally were not important economically. Farmers viewed them as a nuisance; they interrupted good farm land, and the lake shores were worthless due to sandy soil and ragged terrain. There were a few "resorts" with rough cabins for fishermen from Iowa or Nebraska or somewhere without good lakes, but the tourism business was a minor part of the economy. That had all changed in the past 50 years. Now the County was part of what was called the Lake Region, and the lake-related activity was a major part of the economy. With the increase in disposable income by people in the upper Midwest, and the construction of the interstate highway system, people from the cities began building or buying "lake homes" on the shores of the lakes. Some were just summer cabins or even just small mobile homes, but an increasing number were large year-around homes, and some were mansions, with multiple garages for cars, boats, ice fish houses, etc.

Where there had been two or three summer cabins on the shores of a lake when I was a kid, there were now houses on every buildable parcel of lake shore, and on every lake in the county. And those who acquired lake property also were expected to have a dock in the water, and at least one boat, and a boat lift, and a boat trailer to transport the boat, and a pickup truck to pull the trailer and boat, and then a pontoon boat might become necessary, as well as a couple of jet skis and kayaks, and maybe a larger boat to pull water skiers, and probably an ice fish house, and then a larger garage to store all those toys. These lake shore homes created a wide range of new jobs in the area, to build the homes, to landscape the lots, to sell the boats, docks, lifts, skis, and other toys, and then to maintain, clean or manage the properties. Many of the owners of these new lake shore homes did not live in the area the year around. They came for a few weeks or a few months in the summer and went back home where they made their money. But over the years, some of them retired to their lake shore home, and lived here all year, except for maybe a few months in Arizona or Florida in the winter.

The occupants of all these lake homes provided customers for many new businesses in the small towns, particularly higher quality restaurants, gift shops, bait and tackle shops, and bicycle and kayak rental places, as well as expanded business for grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, hair dressers, etc. The desirable characteristic of these lake home occupants was that they were not typical “tourists” who would overwhelm a small town; they lived in their homes on the lakes, and came to town to shop maybe a couple times a week. They provided a major portion of the economic activity in the county, without overwhelming the towns or the parks or the bicycle trails, or the lakes.

In our previous summers at Clitherall Lake, we had looked at real estate in the area, mainly out of curiosity. We found that lake shore property generally cost two to three times as much as similar homes in any of the towns. And the property taxes on those lake homes were more than three times as much as taxes on a similar home in town. I had concluded that the added benefits of a lake home did not justify the added costs of being on the lake. And although the lake homes were nice in the summer time, they could feel very isolated on the shores of the frozen lakes in the long winter months.

When we arrived back in Otter Tail County, Lisa mentioned that she would not mind moving here. She was willing to give up her wish to move back to Kansas, if she could live in a place like this. I was surprised by this. I had not seriously considered moving back to my home county, but I was willing to consider the option. As we enjoyed our time at the lake, we began to scan real estate ads and websites, and I contacted a former school classmate, Milt Paulson, who now ran a real estate firm in Battle Lake, and asked if he could show us some properties that might be of interest. We looked at or read about every house that was for sale in the county. We decided not to spend more time looking at lake shore homes, but focus on quality homes in the towns of the County. We found that there was only a hand full of houses that were of interest to us, and after second visits to some, we found one that both of us really liked.

Now we needed to decide whether we wanted to make the leap to buy the house. We had planned to continue our trip across the US, to the west coast. Maybe we would prefer Oregon, or Colorado or some other place out west? Maybe we were not ready to face the long cold winters of Minnesota? Would we be too far away from our families in Maryland and Virginia? This was the first time in my life when I was able to make a decision about where to live, without being primarily influenced by my job or business.

After a few days contemplating the issue, and more detailed study of the house, we decided to make an offer. After a little negotiation, we reached agreement on the price, and signed a contract. We were to close the sale on September 10. (I describe the house in detail in following pages.)



This is the front view of the house.

The house is located in the town of Battle Lake which is on the southwest shore of the lake of Battle Lake. The town has a year-around population of just under 900, but when all lake shore houses in the town are occupied in the summer, the population probably doubles or triples. The house we bought is about two blocks from the lake, with a nice walking and biking path from our house around the lake shore and into a large state park nearby. The house is two blocks to “downtown”, with seven restaurants, a pharmacy, bank, post office, hardware store, lumber yard, liquor store, hair dressers, and a grocery store, as well as several shops catering to summer residents, including several gift shops, a bait and tackle shop, a bicycle rental store, a kayak rental store, and an ice cream shop (the most popular place in town in the summer).

I attended high school in the town, and some of my old classmates still lived in the area, and others came back for visits in the summertime. The majority of the buildings in the town looked much the same as when I was a kid, but almost all the people were different. The few classmates still living in the area were now old folks, and all the older folks I knew as a kid were no longer with us.

We didn’t spend all of our time at the lake looking at houses. We enjoyed kayaking, and all the other toys at the resort, and I caught some nice fish.

Below is a photo as I'm coming back to the dock after a couple hours of early morning fishing.



And here are the fish I caught that morning.



CONTINUING OUR TRAVELS

We had a month before we were to close on our new house, so we continued with our planned travel to the west coast. We were no longer looking for a new place to live, but were just enjoying the sights. We visited the Watford City area for a day, stopping at the Schafer Cemetery to say hi to many of my ancestors, including my parents, my Frazee grandparents, my Finley great grandparents, and several aunts and uncles and cousins. We also went to the Garden Lutheran Church cemetery out north of Watford City, and visited with my Hystad grandparents and several of my father's brothers and sisters. In Watford City, we stopped by the home of my cousin Curtis Frazee, but his wife (or bodyguard) said he couldn't be disturbed, so I didn't see him.

I had not previously driven over the continental divide in the Rockies, and had imagined that there would be a steep climb to the top of a mountain pass before dropping down the other side. It was a bit disappointing and surprising that the continental divide on Interstate 90 in Montana, near Butte, was barely noticeable; I would have missed it except for the roadside sign. I have later discovered that the continental divides (two of them) on I-80 in Wyoming are even less impressive, and the divide in New Mexico on I-10 is less impressive than a highway overpass in Kansas.

We devoted a couple of days to seeing Glacier National Park and the area between the Park and Missoula, MT. Unfortunately, many of the glaciers in the Park have shrunk or disappeared in recent years due to global warming, but it is still a lovely place to visit and to hike. Unlike New England, the crowds were not overwhelming in the park.

The drive between Missoula and the Park also was very interesting, as the road follows along the eastern shore of Flathead Lake for several miles, and the mountain slopes near the lake contain hundreds of cherry orchards with thousands of trees. Apparently, cherries thrive along the shores of this largest fresh-water lake in the United States west of the Mississippi. The combination of a northern climate and winter temperatures moderated by a huge water body, provide ideal growing conditions for many varieties of cherries. By July the tree branches are heavy with red fruit. We were a little late for the peak, but there were still many fruit stands along the way.



Two views of Glacier National Park. Note the small remaining glaciers, and the smoke rising from a forest fire, in the right photo.

Throughout our trip to and along the west coast, we saw or were redirected as a result of massive forest fires. As we were returning from Glacier to Missoula, we saw a large forest fire in the mountains to the east, and witnessed helicopters carrying large buckets of water from Flathead Lake to dump on the fire. The bucket, which can hold up to 2600 gallons, is suspended under the helicopter and was being filled by lowering it into the lake. The helicopter crew controls the drop of the water onto the fire.

From Montana, we crossed the neck of Idaho, which consisted mainly of national forests and mountains and a few scattered towns named Canyon and Wolf Lodge, and Coeur d'Alene. This contains the most exciting (or terrifying for Lisa) portion of the mountain highway on I-90, with some steep declines, and sheer drops along the highway. Lisa was relieved as we dropped onto the plain of eastern Washington at Spokane.

The trip across eastern Washington, with its long vistas of apparent desert, reminded me of why the Manhattan Engineering Project officers had picked this place to locate one of its main plants to produce nuclear fuel for the first atomic bombs during World War II. Large reactors to produce plutonium from uranium were built in the "wasteland" near the Columbia River north of Richland, Washington, at what was known as Hanford. The Atomic Energy Commission (where I worked in a previous life) assumed responsibility for these facilities after WWII, and several nuclear facilities are still operated there, now under the US Department of Energy.

We were looking forward to spending a few days in Seattle; this was one of the few major cities of the country that both of us had missed over the years. We stayed in a Marriott hotel on the south end of Lake Union, within walking distance of downtown, and near the space needle. Over the course of a few days we walked many miles around the city, enjoyed a cruise around Elliott Bay (part of Puget Sound), and evaluated the food and service at several good restaurants.



A photo of the Seattle downtown from our tour boat in Elliott Bay.

We had two primary observations about Seattle: 1) it appears that no one older than about 30 lives in Seattle, and 2) there seemed to be hundreds of homeless people camped out all over the city parks and under all road overpasses. The city clearly is dominated by young professionals, who apparently have many good employment opportunities in the tech companies located there, including Microsoft and hundreds of smaller tech firms, as well as with the headquarters of companies such as Amazon, Costco, Starbucks, Eddie Bauer and REI.

After we wore ourselves out walking, we drove north to see the San Juan Islands, tucked in the very northwest corner of the United States, south and east of Canada. We took an auto ferry from the terminal at Anacortes, to Friday Harbor on San Juan Island, and stayed at a nice B&B in the town. We explored the town and the island, including several hours “whale watching” on the west coast of the island, which is on the Haro Straits between the island and Canada to the west. These straits frequently are a hangout for Orca (killer whales), but they were off on vacation or something while we were there, and we did not see any. But we did see many seals, and there were lovely views of fishing boats, sea birds, and Victoria, Canada across the water. While at San Juan, the eclipse of the sun took place in the US on August 21, with a full eclipse only a couple hundred miles south, in Oregon, and almost a full eclipse in San Juan, which we were able to view for the few minutes that it lasted. While on San Juan, we were able to do taste testing at most of the restaurants on the island.

From San Juan, we went south to Oregon, and visited with Lisa’s sister Carolyn and her husband Ken, who live a bit southwest of Portland, in Tigard, in a nice community built around a golf course. Lisa had the opportunity to get to know her older sister better; she had not known her while she was young. Carolyn and Ken provided pleasant entertainment, excellent food, and gave

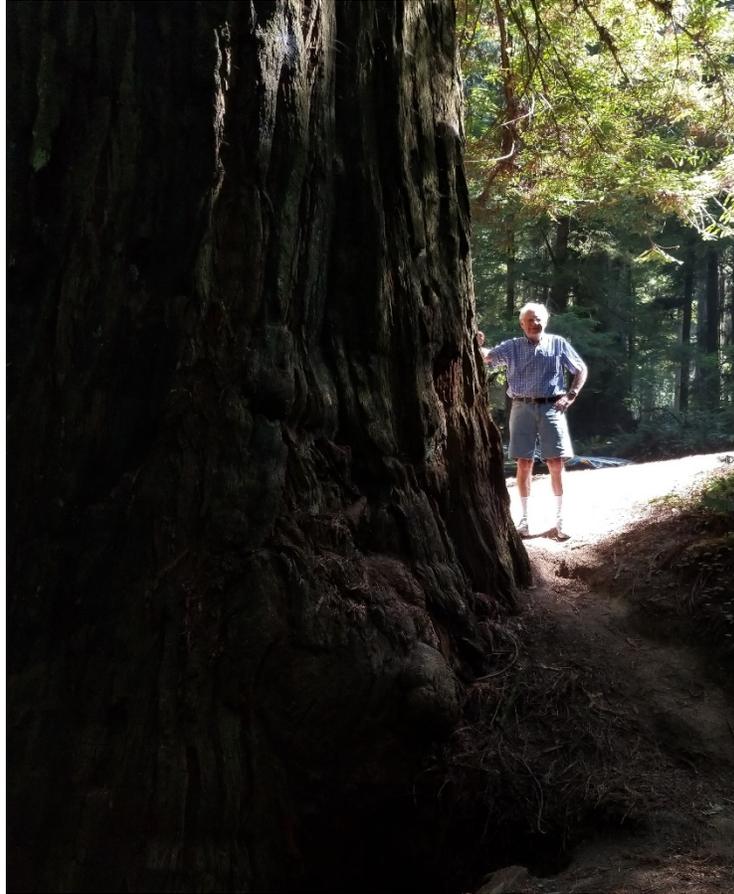
us tours of the area, including of some good vineyards and wine tasting rooms in the region. The region is noted for its excellent pinot noir wines. They also gave us tips on places to see along the coast of Oregon as we went south.



Lisa and her sister Carolyn, at a winery in Oregon.

From the Portland area we headed to the coast at Lincoln City, and followed the coast south, with several stops, at Lincoln Beach, Otter Rock, etc., where we found the killer whales that we didn't see in the San Juan islands. We saw several groups of whales, close to the shore all along the portion of the coast we visited. We had a nice seafood lunch in Newport, as recommended by Carolyn and Ken, and enjoyed walks on the beaches in scenic spots as we continued down the coast. Unfortunately, we learned that we could not continue along the coast to California due to major forest fires which had caused the closing of the coastal highway. To get around the fires, we drove inland to Corvallis, south to Grants Pass, and then back west to the California coast at Crescent City.

We made this rather long detour to be able to go to the Redwood National Park in the area. We took a long hike in the Lady Bird Johnson Park which is part of the Redwood National Park, near the California coast. The redwood trees in the Park may not be quite as large as those in Muir Woods north of San Francisco, but the park was not crowded and the trees were quite magnificent. We also had the bonus views of more Orca along the coast south of Crescent City.



One of the giant redwoods in the Lady Bird Johnson park.

Once again we were forced away from the coastal highway by major forest fires, so we decided to give up on seeing more of the California coastal area, and we began our way back toward Minnesota. First, we had to cross the small but rugged coastal mountain range, as we headed for Redding, CA. That short trip of only 140 miles took over four hours, with repetitive switchbacks, steep inclines, partially washed out roadways, etc. Lisa was wanting to be teleported directly back to Battle Lake by the time we made it to a better highway at Redding. And the 113 degrees temperature in Redding was a shock after the nice cool weather on the coast.

From Redding we drove through the Lassen National Forest, and visited the Lassen Volcanic National Park, on our way to Reno, NV. I had been unaware that California had such a park, or that there were recently active volcanoes in the state. Actually, the last eruption in the area was in 1916 at Lassen Peak, but there continues to be volcanic activities, including steam and gas venting, thumping mud pots from hot water connected to the volcanoes, and entire lakes warmed to 125 degrees by the volcanic activities. It is a slow drive through the Cascades from Redding to Reno, but it includes some unique and interesting features.

At Reno, we did not participate in any gambling, but observed some of it at no cost, and Las Vegas is a more interesting place to observe. From Reno we drove east through the Great Basin, across Nevada, into Utah, to Salt Lake City. The Great Basin is a fascinating place, but it is so vast and so unobtrusive it gets little attention. The Great Basin has no drainage outlet to the ocean. Unlike all the remainder of the country, there are no rivers carrying water from this area to an ocean. The few rivers in the Basin either simply dry up or they end at a lake which has no outlet.

The Great Basin stretches from Death Valley and the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Ranges on the west, to the Wasatch Mountains in the middle of Utah, on the east, and from the Snake River Plain on the north, to the Colorado Plain on the southeast. It covers over 200,000 square miles, including most of Nevada, about half of Utah, and a portion of California, Idaho, Oregon, and Wyoming. Much of the basin is desert or near desert, and has a large temperature variance from very hot in the summer to very cold in the winter. Much of the Basin is open range, with privately owned cattle and sheep ranging without fences, and it contains substantial herds of wild horses. Because there are no river outlets to the ocean, some of the water ends up in saline lakes or salt flats, as the water evaporates and leaves a salt residue. The lack of fresh water rivers and lakes also results in toxic water, not suitable for drinking, in many places. The lack of fresh water sources made the Great Basin a very dangerous place to cross for the first European-Americans trying to reach California.

The drive across the Great Basin can be long and boring unless one notices and appreciates these unusual features. And the most obvious and unusual feature is the Bonneville Salt Flats of western Utah, which stretch as flat as a floor for mile after mile, covering over 30,000 acres. There is a visitors' observation place out in the flats where one can observe – nothing – just what appears to be white rock. It is a great place for speed tests and races at the Bonneville Speedway, and the area has been used for attempts at setting new land speed records.



A few miles east of the Salt Flats is the Great Salt Lake, and the metro area of Salt Lake City, UT. Of course the city is known as the place the Mormons settled after they were harassed out of the Midwest, and it continues to be the center of this religious group's culture. Note: in Salt Lake City the group is known as The Church of Latter Day Saints. We visited the key Mormon "attractions" in the city, including Temple Square, where the primary buildings are located, including the Salt Lake Temple (not open for tours), the Assembly Hall, and the Church History Museum. As you visit these places, there will be proselytizing by volunteers from around the world who would love to have you as a member of the church. Fortunately, we found that Salt Lake City also has some good restaurants, with good wine selections, and with beer from some good local breweries.



The Salt Lake Temple

Heading east from Salt Lake City, we were quickly in the Wasatch mountains and then on to the high plains of Wyoming, just skimming the northern border of Colorado. The Wyoming plains seem to have thousands of antelope but not much else. The state has the least population of any state in the Union, with about 560,000 people, or about 1.5% of California's population, (but they have the same number of US Senators as California). They do have some substantial oil fields, and Sinclair has a major refinery there, and there are some ranches with thousands of acres, but the GDP of Wyoming is only 10% of Colorado's, or 1.3% of California. After visiting Laramie, we headed on to Lisa's home town of Smith Center, KS; actually this is the town where she went to high school; her home town is Cedar, KS, with a population 14 as of the 2010 Census.

We spent a couple of days visiting Lisa's old stomping grounds in Smith Center and Cedar, Kansas, and surrounding area. Lisa was able to visit with several of her classmates from high school, and with one couple who still lives in Cedar. Unfortunately, most of the folks she knew in Cedar have relocated to the Cedar Cemetery. One of her classmates is now the Police Chief in Smith Center, and is a font of information about everyone who has lived in or near town for the last 40 years or more.

After Kansas, we went straight back to Battle Lake, to prepare for our closing on our new home, on September 10.

THIS OLD HOUSE

We were now proud owners of a "new" home. The house was one of the original homes in Battle Lake. It was built in 1904, and it had been upgraded a few times since, but it still retained its Victorian charm. One of the most attractive features was the fact that it had not been modernized throughout. The original oak woodwork around doors, windows, base boards, stairway, etc. still had its original stained oak appearance; it had never been painted. The walls and most of the ceilings still had the original lathe and plaster coatings. The floors were the original maple hardwood that had never been painted. Many of the windows still had the original glass. The heating system was the original hot water radiators in each room.

Fortunately, the house had been upgraded and modernized in some critical ways. The exterior walls and attic had been insulated very well with blown-in insulation. The furnace that heated the water for the radiators had been upgraded from coal to oil and was now natural gas. The ceiling lights were originally gas lamps, which had been replaced by electrical lights, but did need further modernization. Most electrical outlets had been modernized. The roof had recently received new asphalt/fiberglass shingles.

The main floor of the house has a large living room with a fireplace and an open stairway to the upper floor. On the street side of the living room is what we call the "observatory" because it has three large windows facing the street, with the two side windows set at angles to provide views to the right to downtown, and to the left to the lake. There is a lovely, large pocket door which

opens up between the observatory and the living room. This room also serves as our tv and music room. To the north side of the living room is the master bedroom, with an adjoining small room that we use as the walk-in closet. And there is now an entrance from the bedroom to the bathroom, which also has an entrance from the hallway in the living room. The dining room is on the northwest corner of the house, with a second entrance from the pantry and kitchen. The kitchen is on the southwest corner of the house, with access from the hallway, and a door to the backyard which goes through the pantry.

The upstairs consists for three large rooms, and two of them have large walk-in closets; the third has a smaller closet. There is a smaller fourth room that could be used as a bedroom, which has a walk-in closet; we use it as Lisa's office. There also is bathroom upstairs. The basement is under all of the house except the observatory. It has four separate rooms, including a laundry room, a furnace room, and a large storage area, all with concrete floors, and a room with a dirt floor which we use as a wine cellar.

During our first viewings of the house, we had identified a few key changes that we would make, and we started on those immediately after closing on the house. All the floors in the house, at the main level and the upstairs were covered with carpeting. We planned to remove all the carpeting and refinish the wood floors underneath, assuming the floors were in condition to be refinished.

The kitchen was outdated and not very functional because of the four doors in the room, including one from the living room, one to the basement, one to the backyard, and one to a pantry, which left little room for kitchen counters or cabinets. We had mentally redesigned it to close two of the doors to double the available wall space.

The bathrooms were outdated and needed to be expanded and modernized. The stairway to the basement was old and unsafe and needed to be replaced. And direct access from the master bedroom to the bathroom needed to be opened.

After closing on the house, we immediately began pulling up the carpet on the main floor to determine the condition of the floors underneath. We had already determined that there was maple flooring, but we did not know its condition. After a few hours work we had removed the carpet from three of the rooms and found the maple wood to be in good to excellent condition, with no major repairs required.

As we were celebrating our good fortune, a woman from next door walked in the back door and screamed in horror; we were destroying that beautiful carpet that the previous owner had installed! She introduced herself; she was Carol; she had been good friends with the previous owner, Bette Smith. We explained what we were doing and why, but she was still skeptical about why we would waste all that nice carpet.

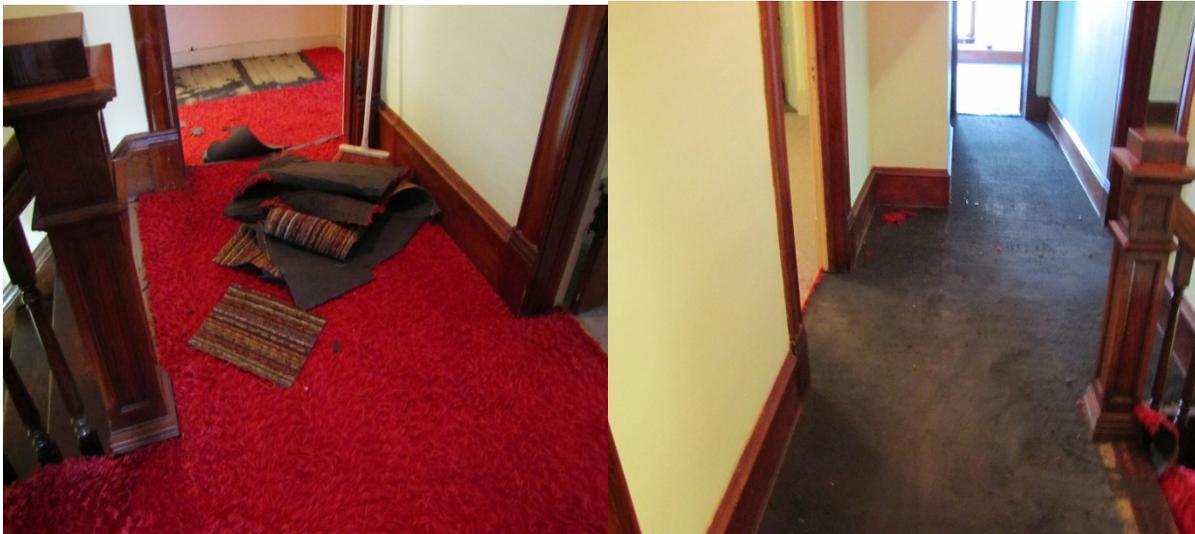


We planned to get the floors redone before we had our furniture delivered. It would be much easier to refinish the floors without all of our furniture in the house. I began gathering recommendations regarding good floor refinishers in the area. I had refinished several hardwood floors over the years, but decided I didn't want to do this myself if we could hire a competent person. I interviewed and got quotes from two refinishers, and contracted with the one who clearly was superior. Luckily, he had a few days open before starting a large job, and was able to refinish all the main level floors (except the kitchen) within the next ten days. We needed to quickly prepare the floors for him, including pulling up all the carpet tack boards, staples, nails, etc., and removing two layers of old linoleum under the carpet in the observatory. Removing the linoleum was a huge effort which Lisa volunteered to tackle; I was prepared to just leave the carpet in this room, rather than try to remove the linoleum, which probably contained asbestos. Lisa used a tool designed to scrape ice from sidewalks, to slowly peel the linoleum up and scrape off the black backing and glue that had tightly pressed into the maple floor. After a couple days of hard work, she had it clean enough for the contractor to sand away the remaining glue.



After the floors were sanded twice and had received three coats of polyurethane, they were beautiful, and much better than the carpet. I think even Carol next door agreed.

We then started working on the floors upstairs. They were all covered in shag carpeting with rubber backing, glued to the floor. The wood flooring underneath was fir. We decided we would paint these floors rather than sand them down to apply polyurethane. We proceeded to remove all the carpeting, which left a rather thick layer of rubber backing and glue over most of the floor. This black goopy mess needed to be scraped off with a sharp blade or sanded off with a power sander.



The left photo shows the carpet to be removed. The right photo shows the black backing and glue left on the floor after removing the carpet.

At this point we decided we would have our furniture delivered so we could move into the house, rather than wait until we had spent another couple of weeks scraping and sanding the goop off the upstairs floors. We could live on the main level comfortably while we finished the upstairs floors.

I made a call to the company who was storing the containers of our furniture. It was a company called PODS. They had the two large containers with all our furniture, presumably stored in a warehouse near Richmond, VA. I asked that our two containers be delivered to Battle Lake as soon as feasible. I was told that they did not deliver their containers to Battle Lake. They only delivered within 50 miles of one of their warehouses, and the closest warehouse to Battle Lake was in Brooklyn Park, a suburb of Minneapolis, which was about 170 miles from Battle Lake. I protested that I was promised that they would deliver to anyplace in the lower 48 states, and that I had just seen a TV ad of theirs that claimed they delivered throughout the US. I called the PODS corporate headquarters in Florida to protest, but to no avail. I offered to pay the cost of delivery from their warehouse to Battle Lake; surely they had the equipment to do this! No, they couldn't do that; they didn't have drivers who could drive that far! They had our furniture and

they had our money and they clearly didn't care if we didn't like their service. I was told they would deliver the containers to the Brooklyn Park warehouse (for a price) and I would have to come there and unload the containers into one or more trucks to haul the stuff to Battle Lake. WARNING: don't ever use PODS to store or move your belongings.

My classmate friend, Milt Paulson, recommended a moving company owner who might be able to move our things from the containers to our house. I hired them and arranged to meet them at the warehouse in Brooklyn Park the next Tuesday morning. They would bring a large truck and three workers to move everything from the containers to the truck. So rather than an easy move from the containers into our house as anticipated, everything was first repacked into the truck, driven to Battle Lake, and then unloaded again into our house. By late the second day, everything was in our house and garage, with over a hundred boxes stacked all over. We discovered that although we had given away much of our furniture, we still had more than enough to fill up our new place. Now all we had to do is get things distributed, setup or unpacked, which would take months.

This is a photo of the observatory and living room after the floors were finished and the furniture received.



Since returning from our trip out west we had been staying at Oak Park Resort. Jim and Theresa Swanson were extremely kind to let us stay in one of their cabins that were not in use after the summer season. They had us move a couple of times, to cabins that had some heat, as the weather got colder. We finally moved into our house during the second week of October, as we continued to dig through boxes to find linens, kitchen items and other necessities.

Now we could work even longer hours at renovating the house to meet our requirements. We first focused on finishing those floors upstairs so we could organize at least one guest bedroom up there. It took several days on hands and knees to remove all the rubber backing and glue that remained after removing the carpeting. But we finally had two rooms and the bathroom floors in shape to paint, and Lisa applied two coats.

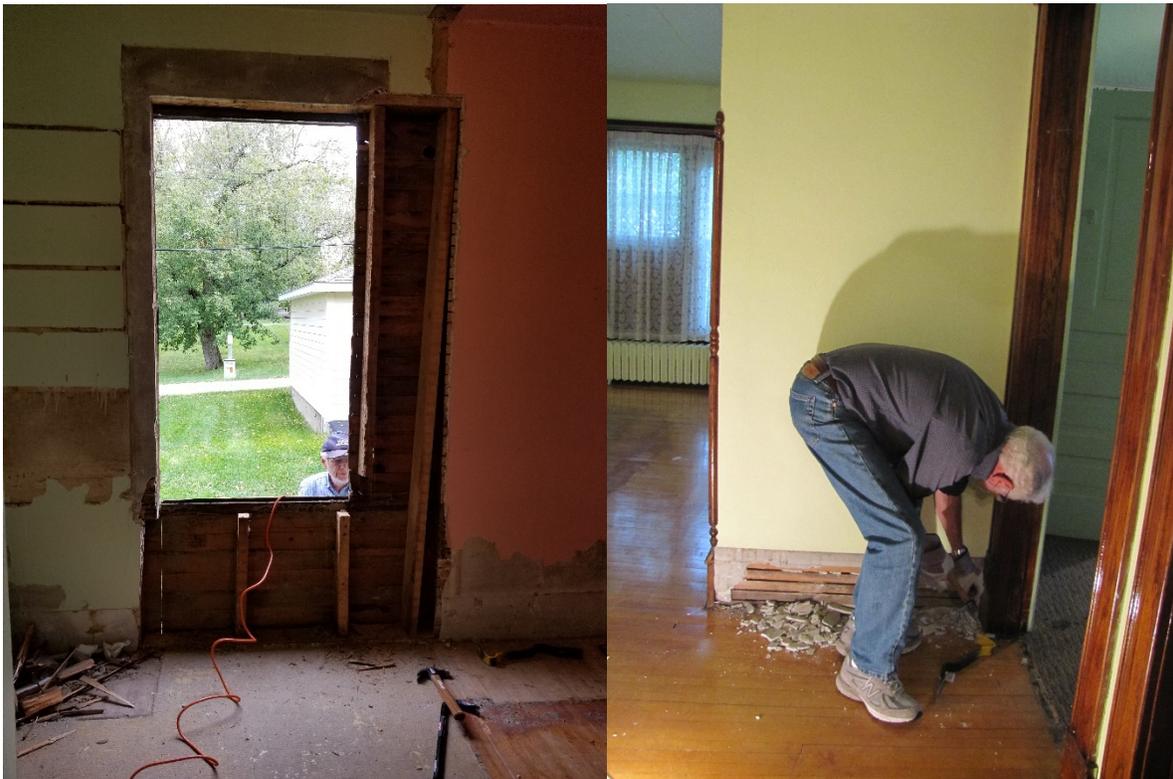
We wanted to get a guest bedroom ready because Mark and Ruth Walkup from back in Virginia were going to be delivering our second car to us some time in November. They volunteered to drive the car all the way out here, and we would cover their expenses and the cost of the flight back. They enjoyed road adventures, and took the scenic route into upstate Michigan, across the Mackinac Bridge, and on through the Upper Peninsula, Northern Wisconsin, and from Duluth to Battle Lake. There was some snow on the ground by the time they arrived in mid-November. We enjoyed having them as guests for a couple of nights, and then drove them to Minneapolis to the home of Ruth's uncle, from where they later flew back home. I was very grateful that one of us would not need to drive that car back here ourselves. Such friends are hard to find!



Here is the upstairs after our efforts.

Before the weather got too cold, I began working on our largest renovation project: completely renovating the kitchen. My first tasks were to change the doors, to remove two of the doors leading from the kitchen to permit expansion of counter and cabinet space. I first removed the window and part of the wall in the back wall of the pantry, leading to the back yard, and installed a new exterior door in the place of the window. With this change, the back door of the house would come in through the renovated pantry/mud room, and I could close up the other exit door that was taking up a large portion of the west kitchen wall. I had the new door installed and the old doorway closed up, with finished drywall on the inside, by early December.

Then I changed the access to the basement, by opening a new doorway from the living room hallway directly to the basement stairway, and closing the doorway from the kitchen that led to that stairway. This was a great improvement, making the stairway much safer, while also adding much needed wall space to the kitchen. We were now ready to begin the major renovation of the kitchen after the Christmas holidays.



The photo on the left shows me in the process of making an opening for a back door. In the photo on the right I am starting to make an opening for a door going to the basement from the living room hallway.

CHRISTMAS BACK IN MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA

In mid-December, we drove back to Virginia and Maryland, to spend time with our kids and grandkids. We also visited with many friends in Greene County, and enjoyed some Christmas parties with them. We spent Christmas eve and Christmas morning with Greg, Marsha, Anna and Claire. We went to see the National Christmas tree located south of the White House, on Christmas Eve, and enjoyed watching Anna and Claire open their gifts Christmas morning.

Christmas afternoon we went to Cindy and Ted's home for the extended family Christmas celebration, with my three kids and six of my grandkids. It is the time when I give my gifts to my kids and grandkids, and my kids exchange gifts with each other and their parents. The celebration is topped with an excellent dinner, with main courses of beef tenderloin and Atlantic salmon. We visited with Cheryl and David for a couple of days, in Baltimore. And we had a second Christmas with Lisa's children, Lisa and Will, in Charlottesville.



Megan, Anna, Claire, Amanda and Cindy, opening gifts.

After New Years day, we started back to Battle Lake, bringing Lisa's son Will with us. Will was looking forward to seeing the new house, and to visiting with some friends from his times at the lake. The drive back to Battle Lake convinced me that making that drive in January was not a good idea. On two different days we were extremely close to being crushed in a multi-vehicle pile up on the interstate highway, as a quick flurry of snow created a slippery road and reduced visibility, while vehicles continued at high speed. One vehicle can cause a massive collision in those circumstances, and it is very difficult to avoid such unpredictable snow squalls. Even when local forecasts are for bright and sunny days, such snow events can occur. Since then I have been reluctant to drive on interstate highways for long distances during winter in the northern states.

KITCHEN RENOVATION

Back home, we began the kitchen renovation. We moved the stove and refrigerator to the dining room so we could continue to use them during the renovation, then we removed all the cabinets and counters, and the old carpet on the floor, in both the kitchen and the adjoining pantry. There was old linoleum remaining on the floor, which we decided to leave and repair with leveler, in preparation for installing ceramic floor tile. I applied drywall tape and mud to repair all damage to the walls and ceiling. We made detailed plans for the placement of cabinets and appliances, and ordered the cabinets, the granite countertops, and the appliances, including a gas range, a microwave oven and exhaust system above the range, a refrigerator, a dishwasher, and an extra-large sink. I installed electrical wiring, outlets and switches for the appliances and counter spaces, and I hired a firm to install a natural gas line for the gas range.



Left photo is of the original kitchen. Right photo is the same area after removing the cabinets and closing the doorway that went to the basement.



Left photo shows closed doorway to basement, and repaired wall. Right photo shows closed door to outside, to left of stove, and new door in pantry on right.

When the empty space was all prepared, we laid the ceramic tiles for the kitchen and pantry floors. Lisa and I took turns applying the tiles, so that we can't blame each other if we made any mistakes. In the process of preparing the floor, I discovered that the floor was very uneven, with low places almost two inches lower than the highest places. I concluded that it was not practical or necessary to pull up the entire floor and rebuild it in order to make a flat surface; we could live with such unique characteristics. After all, this is an old house, and we need to expect some abnormalities; we just need to appreciate the special characteristics of an old house!



By the time the floor tiles were laid and had set up, the kitchen cabinets were delivered, and I was able to start installing them. I started with the wall cabinets so I could work easily under them without the base cabinets in the way. I first needed to determine precisely where the base

cabinets would go, to make sure the wall cabinets were correctly placed above them; this was particularly key for the location of the short cabinet over the gas range and microwave on the west wall, and the short cabinets over the sink and the refrigerator over the east wall. And I needed to find the exact center of each stud on both walls to make sure the cabinets were firmly attached to the studs. Because the walls in this old house are not perfectly flat or perpendicular, some creative shimming was required to make them all fit together in an exactly even, level row.



Then I did the base cabinets. This is where that uneven floor became a problem. I had to make sure the top of all the base cabinets were exactly even with each other and level front to back and side to side, because granite countertops would be laid on top of all of them. This required a great deal of adjusting; some had to be trimmed on the bottom and others were shimmed. And the walls were not all straight and perpendicular so cabinets needed to be shimmed in the back also before attaching them to the wall. And I needed to leave exactly the right space between cabinets for the gas range and the dishwasher. Two of the cabinets were damaged in shipping so I had to wait a week or two for replacements to finish the installation.

I also installed the cabinets in the pantry/mud room, including base and wall cabinets on the south wall, and two large, tall cabinets to be used for outdoor jackets, etc. and bulky kitchen items, on the opposite side.

Then the granite countertop installers came and installed them. And the appliances were delivered. I hooked up the gas range, and wired the microwave, and prepared the floor under the sink to receive the water lines and the drain line. I had Jim and Theresa's son Don come and install the water and drain lines and hook up the sink, faucet, dishwasher, and refrigerator ice maker; I normally would have done this myself, but it was much easier to have Don do it. He is much faster at doing this, and I was trying to use local trades people for some of the work.

I cut and installed board trim around the windows, doors and baseboards, and I installed new light fixtures in the ceiling and over the sink.

We were done. Lisa was in business, and immediately began loading the cabinets, and emptying many boxes that were just waiting for this moment.



Now Lisa could prepare those gourmet dinners again. And, more importantly, I would be able to enjoy them.



A NEW BATHROOM UPSTAIRS

Our next project was to completely rebuild the upstairs bathroom. The existing bathroom had an old claw foot bathtub that had been painted a few times, and an old flimsy vanity and small sink, as well as an old toilet. We stripped everything out.



This is the remains of the Pepto Bismol Pink bathroom before we started rebuilding. The wall to the left was moved back to make room for a shower.

We gave the bathtub to a friend who came with help to take it downstairs and into their truck. We decided to install a shower rather than a tub or a tub with shower, but the bathroom was too narrow to accommodate a shower. I decided to expand the width by moving the west wall back into the existing closet behind the shower. I also discovered that the floor was so uneven, with over two inches of difference from one side to the other, that I could not install a shower or a toilet properly. I built a second floor on top of the existing one, to level it. Then I installed a new shower, which came in four pieces to get it into the house. I applied drywall around the new shower area, and applied tape and mud, and repaired the existing plaster on the walls and ceiling. Lisa painted the new room with two coats, and then we laid the ceramic tile on the floor.

I had Don come back to hook up the water and drain for the new shower, and to install the new toilet. I installed a new vanity and sink, a new ceiling light, a light over the vanity, a new mirror, a GFCI outlet by the vanity, and new towel bars.

We now had a brand new bathroom upstairs. See photo below.



FINISHING UPSTAIRS ROOMS

Next, we focused on finishing the rooms upstairs. This was important because my three children had told me that they were coming to visit us for several days in late July and early August. We needed to prepare a second guest room upstairs. The room we were to use for the second guest bedroom upstairs had been used as a kitchen and dining area back during the Great Depression and World War II and through the 1950s, when the upstairs had been a separate apartment. I removed the old kitchen cabinets, removed the plumbing pipes that had been installed for the kitchen sink, and repaired the walls and floor. We finished preparing the floors, with several days of scraping and sanding and painting. We finished repairing cracks in the plaster on the walls and ceiling, and Lisa painted everything. I installed new electrical wiring from the circuit breaker to both guest rooms to safely supply air conditioners for the rooms.

We now had two nice guest bedrooms, and Lisa had her office room. And the front room over the observatory we designated as a “library” and my office space, with book cases, desk, file cabinet, a music system, a small television, etc., where either of us could retreat to read or watch tv, etc. This is where I am writing these words.

FRIENDS FROM VIRGINIA

In June, we were delighted to have guests who came all the way from Virginia. Ted Crackel and his wife, Mary Jo, were on a driving tour around the country, and made a special detour to come visit us here in Battle Lake. They only had a day to spare, but we took them out to Stella’s for dinner, and enjoyed catching up with their busy lives. Ted and Mary Jo are a couple of the people in Greene County who we recruited to get active with the Democratic Committee there, and Ted became a Precinct Captain who does a great job promoting Democrats in his precinct.



Mary Jo Kline and Ted Crackel,
wearing their “Democrats of Greene County” shirts.

KAYAKS OF OUR OWN

Lisa and I enjoyed kayaking, and had kayaked in Florida and every summer at Clitherall Lake, always using borrowed or rented kayaks that often were not the finest. We decided to buy our own kayaks that we could use whenever we wished. These would be our “boats”. We bought two new ten-foot long kayaks that were sit-on-tops with a back rest and adjustable foot rests. We initially brought them to Oak Park Resort where we could leave them in an unobtrusive place so we could easily use them whenever we wanted. I later purchased a trailer that I can hitch to our car and use to carry the kayaks to other lakes or rivers. We store them in our garage in the winter. This was our first purchase of lake toys. I am not tempted to compete with many of the lake people here, who are likely to have multiple large boats and jet skies and kayaks or canoes and paddle boards and maybe a paddle boat.



MY CHILDREN AND THREE GRANDCHILDREN VISIT

My children, Cheryl, Greg and Cindy, and Greg’s wife Marsha, and three of my eight grandchildren, Julia, Anna and Claire, all came to visit for almost a week in July and early August of 2018. This was a major treat for me, because back in Virginia they never spent more than two consecutive nights at the farm, and usually only one night, and that was only once a year at the weekend of my birthday.

They were here during the two weeks that we had the cabin on Clitherall Lake, so everyone was able to enjoy time at the lake. Greg and Marsha and girls decided they would like to stay in the cabin for several days, while Cheryl, Cindy, Julia, Lisa and I stayed at our house in town. They all had an opportunity to fish, to swim, to enjoy time on the pontoon boat, to ride on the float bouncing over the waves behind the pontoon boat, to kayak, to try the standup surf boards, and to enjoy picnic dinners by the lake, including some nice large-mouth bass that Greg and I caught. They enjoyed dinners at Stella’s, barbecue ribs from Stubs, and ice cream cones from Granny’s Pantry.

Their stay flew by much too quickly, but it was a lovely time for me. And I guess I should mention that they celebrated my 80th birthday while they were here. I had turned 80 on July 17th, but I don't really believe it.



Julia, Cheryl & Grandpa on the front porch of the house



Cindy and Anna



Julia, Greg, Anna, Cheryl, Marsha, Cindy and Grandpa, waiting for the food.



On the left, I'm taking several of the clan out for a boat ride. Photo on the right is of three very nice large-mouth bass; Greg caught two and I caught one



Julia and Claire riding on the float behind the pontoon boat.

BUILDING A NEW PORCH

In August I began the next big project, which was to build a new screened porch onto the west end of the house. It would be about 19 feet long and 10 feet wide, and would cover the back entrance to the house. I needed to get a permit from the city, and to show that I could do this without increasing the impermeable surface on the lot. The city had established limits on impermeable surfaces in town to help slow pollution of water draining into the lake. I had to remove some concrete walk ways and stepping stones around the house to offset the area to be covered by the porch. I poured six concrete pillars to hold the beams that would hold up the porch; the pillars needed to extend below the frost line, about five feet deep. The pillars were topped with plates for bolting the beams to the pillars. Then I built the wood structure on the pillars, with a flat roof.



Photo shows the basic structure of the porch, before painting and adding screens.

LISA'S MOTHER DIES OF CANCER

I was in the process of building the porch when Lisa received a phone call telling her that her mother, Nadine, had been admitted to a hospital in Kansas City, and she had been diagnosed with colon cancer. Lisa immediately left to drive to the hospital. Lisa was her mother's oldest child and was expected to be the person responsible for such an emergency. After a few days at the hospital for examinations, Nadine was discharged and Lisa and her sister took their mother to her home in Pleasanton, Kansas, to await test results. They learned that Nadine had terminal colon cancer. Doctors gave her only a couple months to live. All agreed that treatment was not going to be helpful. Lisa also learned that the cancer had spread to the liver, and the toxins were causing Nadine to drift in and out of lucid thinking. Lisa's sister Kathy and Nadine agreed that Nadine would go to live with Kathy for her remaining time, and that Lisa would stay and close up Nadine's apartment. Lisa went through a very difficult time helping her mother decide what she wanted to take from her apartment and what to give away, because Nadine was not thinking rationally. After Kathy and Nadine departed, Lisa worked for several days on her own going

through what seemed like a growing mountain of Nadine's belongings and decided what to save and what to give away or send to the trash. After over three weeks there, Lisa drove back home, emotionally and physically exhausted.



Lisa's mother, Nadine.

Nadine's condition quickly deteriorated while at Kathy's place in Texas, so Lisa and I drove down there in October. We were able to visit with Nadine, but there was nothing we could do other than help make her comfortable. At times Nadine did not recognize Lisa. After ten days we came back home. Shortly thereafter Nadine was transferred to Hospice care, and she passed away a few days later. Lisa helped organize a funeral for Nadine in Pleasanton, KS. Lisa and I drove there to finalize arrangements and attend the funeral, along with Kathy and her husband, two of Nadine's brothers and families, and many of Nadine's friends from the area.

While Lisa was in Kansas caring for her mother, I continued to build the porch, and by the time she returned I had all the main structure completed, with the roof installed and the decking laid. The remaining work would need to wait for next spring because I needed to paint the structure before applying the screens, and it was getting too cool to paint outdoors.

MAKING THE ELECTRICAL WIRING SAFE

I had discovered that much of the electrical system in the house was still the original wiring that had been installed in about 1917 when electricity first came to Battle Lake. This original wiring was known as “knob and tube” because the wiring consisted of two separate strands of wire; one was the hot wire and the other the neutral wire, and the wires were lifted away from building materials by placing them on an insulator “knob” when running along or between timbers, or by running them through an insulator “tube” where the wire passed through a beam or board. The wires were coated with a cloth-like material, which was relatively easy to damage to expose the bare wire. Electrical engineers advised that this old wiring should be replaced with modern wiring if possible, but that it was not terribly hazardous as long as the wires were not covered with insulation or otherwise not in direct contact with material which could trap heat and start a fire. I discovered that much of the old wiring remaining in the house was completely covered by insulation. I needed to replace all of that old wiring before the house burned down.

In November, 2018, I undertook the task of removing and replacing all the knob and tube wiring. I found that all the ceiling lights in the house, both on the main floor and upstairs, were still wired with the old wires, and that about one-third of the electrical outlets in the house were still on that old wire. I started replacing all the old wiring that was in the attic, wired to all the upstairs lights and most of the upstairs outlets. I spent a week or so living in the attic as I removed the old wiring and connected new wiring to all the lights, switches and outlets that were wired from the attic. To do this, I needed to run a new supply cable from the circuit breaker box in the basement up to the attic, snaking it through the wall on the main floor and the upstairs floor, into the attic, where I could connect to all the new distribution lines.

Next, I began rewiring all the ceiling lights on the main floor. This was more complicated because I had no access to those wires from the attic or the basement. I was able to snake wires through walls and ceilings to most of the lights, including the front porch light, to replace the old wiring. In two cases it was not feasible to snake wires through walls or ceilings and I had to install surface metal raceway channels to carry the wires from switches to ceiling lights.

I also had a few outlets that had been installed sometime in the 1950s, using wires without a ground wire. Rather than replace all that wire, I replaced the old outlets with new GFCI outlets. The GFCI outlets are much more expensive than regular outlets, but they can be as safe or safer than having a grounded regular outlet. The GFCI outlet immediately detects a disparity between the hot and neutral wire, indicating a potentially dangerous loss of current, and cuts the power from that outlet. It is important to periodically test these outlets to make sure they have not failed.

After a few weeks of work, we now had a modern and safe electrical system throughout the house. I can sleep easier now.

BACK EAST FOR CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

A week before Christmas we flew back to Maryland and Virginia to spend about three weeks over the holidays. We decided to try flying this time, to avoid the long trip on the highways. We flew into BWI airport, picked up a rental car, and drove to Cheryl and David's place where we enjoyed two days with them. Then we drove to Charlottesville to visit with Will and Elizabeth, and then back to Alexandria, VA to be with Greg and family on Christmas Eve, where we had a nice dinner at a restaurant in DC, and visited the National Christmas Tree.

On Christmas morning we enjoyed watching Anna and Claire open their large haul of gifts, before going to Cindy and Ted's place in Chevy Chase, MD, for the annual family Christmas party, gift exchange and gourmet dinner. After staying overnight at Cindy's we headed back to Charlottesville where we visited with old (and not so old) friends for several days, and Lisa got to spend more time with her children. In early January we drove back to the BWI airport and flew back to Minneapolis, where we made the mandatory stop at Whole Foods to stock up before driving back home.

As one can plainly see, this was a whirlwind tour. It was enjoyable but exhausting, and expensive, particularly the rental car. It was nice to avoid the three days on the road each direction, but the two days navigating the airports and car rental places and parking lots were not something to look forward to. If only there were a way to be teleported there and back. Visiting different places is enjoyable; it's the traveling part that I can do without. I guess I did too much traveling when I was younger, and there is no novelty or excitement to it anymore.

ANOTHER BATHROOM RENOVATION

Now that we were back in the frozen tundra of Minnesota, and all rested from our travels, it was time for a new project. We renovated the bathroom on the main floor. We decided to retain the existing shower stall. It was fairly new and in good condition, and it was a large one-piece stall that was too large to go through any door in the house – it had been brought in through an enlarged bathroom window when it was installed, and that window was now gone, so I would need to break the shower into pieces to remove it. And the bathroom really was not large enough to easily accommodate a large shower.

We did change everything else. The entrance from the master bedroom was completed; the door from the living room hallway was reversed to open to the wall, and new surrounding trim was added; a custom-designed seven drawer storage unit was built and installed next to the shower; ceramic tile was installed on the floor and baseboard; a new light fixture and electrical outlet were installed; a new vanity and toilet were installed; a granite vanity top and new sink and faucet were installed; all walls and the ceiling received at least two coats of paint; and a new mirror and multiple towel bars and hangers were installed. That doesn't seem like much work, but believe me, it was, and by the time we were done it was already mid-February.



The renovated bathroom

We better be careful or we will soon run out of projects, and then what will we do?

A NEW STAIRWAY

Oh, here is another project: I need to tear out the old stairway to the basement and design and build a new stairway. I had built stairways previously, so this was not a difficult design job, except that there was a large granite wall at the bottom of the stairs that was partially blocking the area where the stairs needed to go. What to do? The wall was not moveable. And it was not feasible to turn the stairs prior to hitting the wall; there was not enough head room. About 60% of the stairway could miss the granite wall where it was set back about three feet farther. I decided to build a full stairway, with about 40% of it dead ending early at the granite wall. There would still be 60% of the stairs going all the way to the bottom. The upper 85% of the stairway would be full-width, with a hand railing on each side, and the last 15% was still wide enough for a normal sized person to navigate, and it was close to the bottom so the danger of a long fall did not exist.



The old stairs, with unique curvature, and very unsafe.

As I started tearing out the existing stairway I discovered that it was just barely hanging together. We were lucky it had not collapsed as we carried heavy loads down those stairs. I designed and cut the new stringers and installed them firmly, and then installed the 5/4th inch steps and the handrails, and then stained and polyurethaned everything. We now had a safe, sturdy stairway to the basement. Actually, we also had a second stairway to and from the basement. It was on the exterior of the basement and came up into the back yard, with the old fashioned cellar doors covering the opening.



The new stairway

Genealogy Book

I used the opportunity of winter days in Minnesota to update the book I had written back in 2008 detailing the information I had collected about my mother's ancestors. In that book I had traced her ancestors from Europe, mainly England, Wales, Holland and France, to the first American colonies of Jamestown, Plymouth and New Amsterdam. I followed them through the generations as that they gradually migrated from the east coast to the Midwest and then settled in western North Dakota.

I had subsequently done additional research and obtained new information about her ancestors, and I wanted to update the book accordingly. For example, I had learned that her great grandfather, Samuel P. Smith, had served in the Civil War as an enlistee in the Indiana Militia. And I had found more information about my Finley ancestors who had migrated from Ireland to Canada, and then to far northern New York state, and then to Otter Tail County, MN (where I now live) where A.T. Finley met and married the daughter of Samuel P. Smith who was an original homesteader here in the county.

A GARDEN PLOT

Now that spring had come again, it was time for more outdoor fun. We hired a person to come with a stump grinder and grind up several stumps that were in the area Lisa planned to use for a vegetable and flower garden. Apparently there had been several apple trees and a large ash tree in this space which had been cut down some years before, but most of stumps and roots were still there, and the roots were sending up a new supply of little apple trees every summer. With the garden now rid of wood, we built a fence around the plot which was designed to keep out rabbits. There was a large colony of rabbits living in the area, and they loved almost every kind fruit and vegetable. We planned to use a three foot wire webbing fence that would be dug down eight inches in the ground to prevent tunneling under the fence. I pounded in steel posts, five feet long, every six feet, and we dug a trench at least eight inches deep between the posts in which we placed the web fencing which was wired to the steel posts. I built a wooden gate at the center of the plot, with a sunken plate under the gate. I also built a compost bin in one corner, with wire and wood. We now had a nice garden plot that was safe from rabbits.



The garden plot, with birdbath and assorted perennials, ready for more plantings.

FINISHING THE PORCH

Next, we finished the porch. We first painted the entire structure with two coats of white paint. We also replaced the old siding on the interior wall of the porch (the house wall), with vertically placed tongue and groove boards, and painted them white. Then I stapled the screening to the structure, including screening underneath the decking to keep out flying or crawling insects that might come in from below. I applied narrow trim strips over the screen junctions and staples, after painting the strips white to avoid getting paint on the screen. I installed a new screen door; installed electrical wiring and an outlet and two lights and a ceiling fan, all which could be controlled from inside the house; I installed green plastic lattice on the framework underneath the deck to hide the crawl space underneath; and I installed three floor-to-ceiling shades which could be cranked down or up as needed to provide shade and/or privacy. We hunted through antique shops and yard sales to find a nice old oak table to use for our dinners on the porch, and we purchased four black steel chairs with cushions for the table area. We also added two of our comfortable lawn chairs to the porch. And we were all ready for summer.



Death of Eloise

In the spring of 2019, we heard the terrible news that our good friend, Eloise Giles, had been killed in a car crash. She was a month short of 98 years old, and was still in good health, and was still conducting painting classes for a group of students. She had been driving down the highway in Greene County when someone failed to stop at a stop sign and pulled out right into her car. She died a short while later in the hospital.

Eloise had lived with us for a couple of months, a few years ago, after she had suffered a broken leg. We both had become very fond of her. She had a wealth of experiences around the world, and was a noted water color painter. Fortunately, we have several of her paintings hanging on our walls.



Photo of Eloise taken on Easter Sunday, 2017, at the farm.

WILL'S GRADUATION

Before summer came, we traveled back to Virginia to attend Will's graduation from the University of Virginia at Wise. He also was receiving his commission as a Second Lieutenant in the US Army; he had gone through the ROTC program at the university and would now spend at least four years in the Army. UVA at Wise is a relatively small university, so the graduation ceremony was not like the massive events that I had at the University of Minnesota, or that Cindy had at the University of Maryland. The ROTC graduates received special attention, recognition, and standing ovations; one might have thought they were going off to war the next day.



Lisa's son, Will, the new Second Lieutenant

The Sunday after the graduation, Lisa and I hosted a large party at the hall at the Episcopal Church in Stanardsville. We had invited over 100 of our friends from our days living there, and pretended that it was a graduation party for Will, but it really was a great way to see our friends without needing to arrange to see all of them individually. Lisa had organized catering of good food and drinks, and we all had a good time. I had time to chat with almost everyone. And I think Will actually appreciated "his" graduation party.

SITTING ON THE DOCK AT THE LAKE

In late July and early August we spent our two weeks at Oak Park Resort on Clitherall Lake, back at Cabin 8. We had our kayaks, as well as all the other resort facilities, and enjoyed lots of time on or in the water. I was up early most mornings to try to catch fish, and came back with some large bass and northern pike, but no walleyes. A school classmate, Russ Alberg, who still lives on Clitherall Lake and has probably spent more time fishing that lake than any person alive, told me that he doesn't even try to catch walleye that time of the summer – they don't like the warm water and are hiding in deep cooler water. As usual, we spent time catching up with the other guests at the resort, who return at the same time every summer. Most of them have been there since we started coming those same two weeks in 2008.

In addition to those two weeks, Lisa and I made a few long kayaks trips on the lake at other times during the summer months.



Early morning fishing just at sunrise when the mist is still rising from the water

READING, READING, READING

One might get the impression that I don't do much now that I'm retired. But I do have a "hobby" that consumes a good part of my waking hours – probably averaging a couple hours a day. I read. I read primarily nonfiction books, but occasionally will read fiction when I run across an interesting author.

Several years ago, my three children gave me a Kindle reader, along with a gift certificate for Amazon books, as a Christmas present, and since then I almost always read on the Kindle. I now have over 200 books in my Kindle library. Prior to my Kindle, my bookshelves were overflowing and I would periodically deliver some of them to the local library, or encourage friends to help themselves to those I didn't expect to read again.

My nonfiction reading tends to be histories, biographies, and analysis of political or economic issues. Since I've had the Kindle, I have read over 30 books about US Presidents or other leaders, a dozen or more about the Civil War, over 40 about political or economic issues in the US, and about 20 about other countries or international issues, including about Russia and its change from communist dictatorship to kleptocracy dictatorship.

As a one-time specialist in Russian politics and economics, it's not clear that things have changed very much since the days of the Soviet Union. It seems to be a bit like what happened in the US southern states after the Civil War; the same privileged few continue to rule over the downtrodden, the way that slavery morphed into segregation and new exploitation.

RATING PRESIDENTS

I recently realized that I knew almost nothing about some of the US Presidents, particularly those between Jackson and Lincoln, and between Grant and Teddy Roosevelt. I came to this conclusion because I was wondering whether there was really any competition for Trump being the worst President of all time. So I read biographies on each of those Presidents: Van Buren, W. H. Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland, B. Harrison and McKinley. I had previously read biographies or histories about the other Presidents (or I was well aware of the performance of Presidents since Eisenhower). This additional reading easily confirmed that no previous President comes close to Trump in competition for the title of worst President. Trump is the worst in virtually all reasonable rating categories, including: Character (honesty, integrity, morality); Competence (experience, knowledge, fast learner); Leadership Qualities (widely accepted vision for the nation, crisis management skills, wise appointments, ability to work with Congress).

Trump easily beats other candidates for worst place, such as James Buchanan and Andrew Johnson. Buchanan's actions helped initiate the Civil War, but he was not considered to be immoral or uninformed or dishonest. Andrew Johnson assisted in the development of a new

form of slavery in the old Confederacy, but he was not considered to be a moron, or a liar, or corrupt, or an incompetent manager.

It is frightening that a person such as Trump could have been nominated as the Republican candidate, and elected President by the Electoral College. That this actually happened is due to the demise of any effective adult leadership in our political process. The political parties used to retain control over the selection of the party nominee for President, and that party nomination process prevented the selection of really terrible candidates. (Richard Nixon turned out to be morally lacking, but he at least knew what he was doing.) Now the parties have lost all control by relinquishing that power to the primary election process. Now a candidate such as Trump, with enough money, and a willingness to use fear and hate to attract uninformed voters, can win the party nomination even though the vast majority of the party activists oppose the nomination. We can expect to see more such horrible candidates in the future unless the parties act to regain control.

MY SISTERS VISIT

One of the advantages of moving back to Minnesota is that I am nearer to three of my sisters who live in the state. My sister Eileen and her husband Paul came by to greet us in Battle Lake on the day after we moved into our house, and they came back for a longer visit in the fall of 2019. And my sister Phyllis and her son Darin came to visit for a couple of days in the early summer of 2019. My sisters are all younger than I, and they moved away from here when my parents left the county in 1956, so they do not have as many memories of the area. But they still enjoy coming back and reminiscing about the old days on the farm and at the restaurant in Henning.

LOSING SOME OF MY CHILDHOOD CLASSMATES

I've learned that one of the negatives of moving back to Otter Tail County is that I am in touch with some of my classmates from elementary and high school, and I am learning that some of them are dying. Since we returned here in 2017, at least four of the guys in my high school class have passed away. In the fall of 2019, Duane Koep, who was in my class in the little school on the prairie, and in Battle Lake High School, was killed in a car crash in Arizona as he was returning there from a visit back here in Battle Lake.

About the same time, Milt Paulson, who was two years behind me in elementary school and High School in Battle Lake, passed away as a result of lymphoma. I attended his funeral at Nidaros Lutheran Church, where we had attended Sunday school together many years ago. Milt's brother, Clayton, who was in my class at school, was at the funeral. I had not seen him since High School days, but we recognized each other, and had a brief chat. As I should have

predicted, Clayton got a PhD and had become a university professor, at the University of Oregon, where he still lives.

HERNIA SURGERY, AND ADDING TO THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In late October, 2019, I had surgery to repair an inguinal hernia which had gradually become larger and more uncomfortable. I had a similar surgery on my left side several years earlier, so now I had a matching pair of surgical scars. The surgery was performed by a doctor at the Lake Region Hospital in Fergus Falls, and it was an easy event. I checked in at 6:00 am, went into a prep room, was rolled into the operating room at 7:00 am, took a nice nap, woke up in the recovery room where I had a nice breakfast, and was discharged by 10:30 am.

I was instructed to avoid any strenuous exercise and not lift more than ten pounds for at least six weeks, and longer if possible. Therefore I could not undertake any major construction or renovation projects for awhile. I was taking pain medication for a few days, but was soon almost pain free as long as I was careful in my movements. The surgery involved placing a surgical mesh in the abdominal wall to help prevent a future rupture, and I could feel that mesh for several months after the surgery.

I used this enforced downtime to add to this autobiography. I had started this memoir back in 2007, and had covered my first 40 years, but had not focused on it since. So now I was trying to remember what happened in my life in the 1980s and the 1990s, and the 2000s, and beyond? I needed to do a lot of research of records and photos to try to reconstruct 40 years of history. I had remembered most of the events in my life that were worth remembering, but I had forgotten many of the details of those events, and the sequence of many of the events. When was my first grandchild born? And how did I feel about that? When did I start that new business, and who was involved with that?

After much research and a good deal of reminiscing, I was able to complete three additional chapters, covering 1980 through 2016. These were written from November, 2019 through February, 2020. Now it is April, 2020, and I am working on this chapter, with no completion date established.

GETTING A SNOWBLOWER

Almost everyone here has a snowblower to remove snow from driveways and/or sidewalks, but through two winters here I had resisted buying one. There is nothing wrong with a good old fashioned snow shovel, plus it is good exercise; helps take off some of those excess pounds. But after my hernia surgery, I really could not do much snow shoveling, so I gave in and bought a snowblower; not one with a noisy engine, but a battery powered one. It certainly makes snow removal easier, particularly when the snow banks start making it difficult to shovel snow over

the top, and I think I convinced Lisa that it was really fun to use that snowblower. Following is a photo of Lisa clearing the driveway with the new snowblower; it looks like fun to me! And the second photo shows what happened to Lisa when she blew snow into the wind.



STAYING IN BATTLE LAKE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Because of the surgery, and my enforced downtime, we decided not to go back east for Christmas in 2019. It was a difficult decision. I greatly enjoyed spending some of the holidays with my family, and I would miss that time with my kids and grandkids. However, we planned to go to Maryland and Virginia in May of 2020 to coincide with Amanda's graduation from college. In addition to celebrating her graduation, we planned to spend a couple weeks with my offspring there, and Lisa could visit with her Elizabeth, and we both could visit with friends in Greene County.

Since we were staying in Battle Lake for the holidays, we decided to host a small New Years Day party, on a much smaller scale than those we had back at the farm in Virginia. Rather than over 100 guests, we would have maybe a dozen guests, but still provide a good spread of food and drinks. We had several of our neighbors here in town, as well as Gene Smith and wife Sandy (Gene grew up in this house), and Russ and Elaine Alberg (Russ had been one of my neighbors when I was a kid on the farm by Clitherall Lake). It was a nice, rather sedate, party, with more time to actually visit with the guests.

TRAVELING TO COLORADO AND ARIZONA IN MARCH

We knew that we would get a little bored with the Minnesota winter, so we planned to spend most of March farther south. We would first visit with Will who was now stationed in Colorado Springs, and then go on to Arizona for about three weeks of sunshine. And we planned to stop to see my sister Judy who lives in Las Vegas.

As we were leaving Battle Lake on March 3, there was starting to be some concern about the coronavirus spreading through the country. It had infected some people in Washington state, and several in New York, but there had been no cases yet in Colorado, and only one in Arizona, so we decided it would be safe to continue with our plan. And of course, our great misleader in the Nation's Capital was assuring everyone that everything was under control and there were only 15 known cases in the US and 10 of them had already recovered, and there would be no remaining cases in a few days, and there was nothing to see here.

We visited Will at his home in Colorado Springs for four days. He gave us a tour of his Army base, Fort Carson, and showed us his very attractive neighborhood, with walking trails, great views of Pike's Peak, and some good restaurants. We also visited with my niece Tara (Norris' daughter) and her husband for a few hours; they live in a northern suburb of Colorado Springs.

From Will's place, we drove to Santa Fe, NM, where we toured the old town, visited artists shops and museums, and ate some good Mexican food. We also visited the National Military Cemetery in Santa Fe, where my brother Norris is interred. I was quite surprised when Tara informed me that Norry was interred there; I had been told that he would be at the National Cemetery at Fort Snelling, near St. Paul, MN. My guess is that Norry also would have been surprised, if he had known where he was headed. Apparently, his daughter Karen made the decision to select Santa Fe. She lives in Albuquerque, and Norry had been a guest at her place when he passed away; possession wins again.



From Santa Fe, we drove to Tucson, by way of Albuquerque and Las Cruces, NM. While we were on our way there, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak to be an international Pandemic. But there were still only a few cases identified in Arizona, and mainly in the Phoenix area. So we decided to spend a few days at a “resort” north of Tucson, in the Catalina foothills. The resort was named El Conquistador, and the description on their website was quite attractive: tennis courts, bicycle and walking paths, heated swimming pools, several restaurants, etc. The reality was somewhat more modest. There was a nice large swimming pool, with lounge chairs for catching some rays, which we enjoyed. But the tennis courts were not really a part of the resort – we had to pay to play on some neighboring courts; we tried to remember how to play tennis, and got a lot of exercise chasing the balls around the court. And there was really only one restaurant, although they served the food in three different locations; but the food was good.

We devoted much of one day to seeing the Arizona–Sonora Desert Museum, located west of Tucson. They have some excellent exhibits of Arizona wildlife, including an exhibit of wild but somewhat trained raptors (birds of prey including falcons, owls, eagles, and some hawks) that swoop down to grab pieces of meat from the handlers. The Museum also contains Javelinas, which are almost impossible to see in the wild, and difficult to find even in the Museum.



Evidence that we actually made it to Arizona, and it was a cool day

As we were enjoying the sun, we occasionally watched TV to follow the increasingly alarming news about the rapid spread of the coronavirus, and the actions by several states to require social distancing, including closing sit-down restaurants, and some were talking about

restricting travel into their states. And then the resort started restricting food service in their restaurants. After five days in Tucson, we decided we should head back home before it became difficult to find places to eat and sleep along the way. I informed Judy that we would not be able to come to see her. We stopped at a grocery store and stocked up with food to take on the road with us in case we did not find restaurants open. We drove back in four days, and noticed many vehicles going our direction with license plates of northern states – people like us rushing back home from Arizona. We did not have a problem finding hotels along the way, but several places had already closed restaurants except for carry out, and most hotels had stopped serving food. The last two nights on the road the hotel clerks informed us that about their only customers now were people like us who were traveling back north from their southern adventures.

We arrived back home on March 20, twelve days earlier than planned. It was not what we had expected; too many days on the road and too few in the sun. And that light suntan we picked up in Arizona had almost disappeared already. We immediately went into 14 days of self-quarantine to avoid the possibility of spreading the virus if we had picked it up during our travel through ten states on the way back home.

[To be continued]