

Christmas 2002

Well, the holiday season has snuck up on us yet again. This happens every year now, where it seems like we've just gotten past Labor Day and reluctantly said goodbye to the summer, and in the blink of an eye WHOOSH! There goes Columbus Day, Halloween, Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving rushing past us in the wrong direction. Every year I try to dig my heels in to slow it down, but it never works. You'd think I'd learn by now!



The VOGT Family has had a good year, overall. We've had our ups and downs like everyone has, but overall we're about to come out of 2002 (a palindrome year) relatively unscathed. The menagerie has grown a bit, but Sir Buddy of Dogdom still rules the roost – sort of – at least as much as a wimp dog can rule....

I had two major projects for the spring/summer/fall work season; rebuilding our deck, and starting a multi-year kitchen upgrade and renovation. The deck work was mostly out of necessity. The original deck (as old as the house – 17 years or so) had been built in an odd way, and because of that the support posts had deteriorated to the point where they needed immediate attention. We never liked the construction style or the color (chocolate brown), and the railings and decking wood had dried up and curled so badly as to be extremely ugly, so we decided to rebuild. We got prices from contractors last fall for having the deck rebuilt, but after we got up off the floor where we had fainted, we decided to do the work ourselves and save a bundle. The joists making up the deck were fine, so we set out to work around those and rebuild everything else. I started out below, where the four metal in-ground posts were replaced by seven solid wood posts sitting on deep concrete footings. Then a lattice skirt was installed to shield the under-deck clutter from the neighbors. Topside work then began, where all the railings were removed and replaced (including the installation of giant 9-foot corner posts for all our bird feeders), and then the old decking was pulled up and new boards were laid down on a diagonal. Final finish was to skirt the entire deck where the old joists showed with new wood.



It seems so straight-forward and simple when I describe the process in a single paragraph, but the project took the entire summer to complete, and even now its still not done – the stairs have to wait until next spring to be replaced. Part of the delay or tediousness of it all was the fact that we wanted to be able to use the existing deck for the summer while it was under construction, so the under-deck post work was extra tedious because of the extra supports I had to build which were only temporary. I can appreciate how road builders feel when they have to rebuild a highway without shutting it down!

The kitchen upgrade isn't quite of necessity, but we've never been in love with the cabinetry (budget stuff that's 17 years old now), and there was a large portion of the kitchen that was meant as a breakfast nook but was totally wasted on us (the dining room table is only 3 extra steps away). We decided to install cabinetry in that disused

corner, and use that as the start of a multi-year upgrade to the kitchen; new cabinets where there are none this year, replace some of the old cabinets next year, replace the rest of the cabinets after that, replace the appliances after that, and somewhere in there redo the floor and lighting.

We started by ordering a new style of cabinet (it definitely doesn't match the old stuff) and then we set about installing it ourselves. First up was doing some rewiring in that corner to reposition outlets and add some where there were none (the new cabinets included a microwave shelf so an outlet needed to be placed there). For that I was a gopher to my licensed and capable electrician-brother-in-law, and the two of us pulled two new circuits from the breaker panel for the outlets.



Once the cabinets were delivered, I set about installing them. Setting and leveling the lower cabinets (starting with the corner cabinet) was a lesson in patience. Once the corner cabinet was leveled, I started adding cabinets on each side and bolting them to each other and the wall. With the L-shaped lower set in place, then I had to build a cardboard template for what we wanted for a counter-top. The angle in the corner was about 91 degrees, so a stock counter would not fit properly. Six weeks later, the counter-top was delivered and set in place (luckily, it was a perfect fit), and then I could begin installing the upper cabinets. The upper cabinets don't just hang on the wall, they extend down to the counter-top (makes that side of the set look like a hutch), so that was why we had to wait for the counter-top to continue.

They're all in place now and being used extensively, and we think they look very nice. They are indeed quite different than the older cabinets, so you can get an old and then new view of the kitchen just by standing in the middle and spinning around to look at first one then the other side.

This summer also saw the first of the next generation of visitors arrive from out west. Our niece's two daughters (our GRAND-nieces!!) came to visit from Wyoming for three weeks. We all tried to show them as much as we could of New England, including trips to our White Mountains (tiny hills compared to their mountains), Cape Cod, Boston, Historic Lexington and Concord, Salem (home of the Witch Trials), various beaches and ocean scenery on Cape Ann, and even a tour of "historic" family houses and landmarks around Woburn. We had a grand time hosting them, we just hope they had half as much fun being here as we had having them!



This Halloween was celebrated in traditional fashion at the VOGT house. I was on a business trip most of the week, but got home just in time to set up the traditional audio equipment and help with the other decorations we do around the front door. The weather report when I left on my business trip was for snow and sleet Halloween night, so I wasn't anticipating many ghoulish visitors, but the weather pattern changed during the week and it was a crisp clear night for the goblins to make their rounds. The music and sound effects were scary, and the additional PA system rigged up to make the witch talk to visitors as they came up the walk made more than a few visitors (big and small) jump. Some little ones went running back out the front walk so fast we had to

deliver the candy to the street for them! Initially, we weren't seeing many visitors (they started dribbling in around 6pm), but one wave of clumped trick-or-treaters delivered about 30 costumed little people at once to the front door; they were lined up down the front stairs!



Megan's first full year living out of the house has gone well, mostly. Life's lessons don't always get delivered between the covers of a book. She's had room-mate troubles, and the challenge of stretching finances from month to month is a bit harder than she expected. She's had to juggle utility bills, and rent, and other expenses, while keeping the house from falling down around them. Her school work has gotten more challenging, and the logistics of scheduling performances in the studio and getting people to show up and perform so she can record and complete her studio projects has been frustrating to say the least. The schedule calls for her to finally graduate this year (yay!!) and to do an internship somewhere in the field (Sound Recording Technology) this summer.

This past summer she worked the stage crew for the Boarding-House Park concerts in Lowell, which we attended on a mostly regular basis. It was great for us because she had to get there early to set up, and she could set our blanket and chairs out in a great spot, ready for us to arrive later! Megan's also acquired a dependent of her own; a little coal-black kitten named Hannah. She's frisky and cute, and strikes terror in the heart of big bad Buddy (she looks like a Mini-Me to Buddy; they're both all-black).

Audrey's menagerie has grown as well beyond her two ferrets; she rescued a hamster named Winston from a friend who was neglecting him. After getting Winston home and settled, she discovered he needed a name change to Winnie; he was a she! Audrey also has been raising and trying to breed beta fish this year. It's a lot harder than breeding guppies (something I did in the past, usually by accident) because of the propensity of beta fish to fight (hence the nickname "Fighting Fish").

After a bit of a rocky spring at Middlesex Community College, Audrey decided to take a semester off to figure out what she really wanted to do. She's been working as a pet groomer in Stoneham for most of the year and loving it, and recently (since she isn't in school this semester) she's picked up a second job as a hostess at the Rainforest Café in Burlington Mall. She also has a new beau, a classmate from Woburn High. Jake is a friendly easy-going guy who dishes out the teasing as much as he puts up with it from us.

Lynn has spent the year taking good care of us all and continuing to be a nanny for twins in a neighboring town. She enjoys the twins immensely, and is fascinated by the observations she gets while watching the twins (a boy and a girl) grow and develop their own personalities. She has been the creative force behind the kitchen work we have done, and with Megan vacating the house, Lynn has inherited the extra bedroom as a long-coveted sewing and craft room.

Her gardens this year were impressive as usual, but the long stretches of oppressive heat we had this past summer made it difficult to spend long hours preening as much as she would have liked. In spite of it, nothing looked bedraggled or neglected.

Lynn's also been working hard at discovering the cause of a persistent and periodic cough and other symptoms she's had for almost seven years now. Through a barrage of allergy tests (nothing significant), MRI scans for ear canal or nasal problems (none), and other tests she's discovered that she has a severe case of Candida, an amino acid deficiency, a severely high level of mercury in her system, low mineral levels and low adrenal levels. The mercury is possibly the cause of a myriad of symptoms she has had, including the cough, her migraines, her irritable bowel syndrome, under-active thyroid, increasing fatigue, and others. She's working with her doctor to get it all under control but it takes time so we will try to keep you posted.

I'm still doing my thing at MITRE. They keep giving me a paycheck every two weeks so I guess they're not too displeased with me. The heavy load of summer house projects has kept me from getting too involved with my genealogy research, but hopefully with the coming of the winter some time will be freed up to pick up again. I've also re-connected with an old hobby; coin-collecting. As a boy, I collected pocket coins and really enjoyed it, but through the years I lost interest. For the past few years (inspired by my mother-in-law Marga's collection) I've been re-introduced to the hobby. I've picked up where Marga left off; buying yearly coin sets for the girls and others in the family as well as for myself, and I've really enjoyed gathering uncirculated copies of the new state quarters (Missing any? Check with me!).

I've also had blood pressure problems lately, and an episode back in September got me thinking that maybe it was time to shed some of these pounds that have accumulated over the past 15 years or so, so I gave up coffee (caffeine is not good for high blood pressure) and all other drinks except water and an occasional glass of red wine or a beer. I've also managed somehow to give up most all sweets and any eating between meals without going absolutely stir-crazy. I eat two normal meals a day, and drink lots of water – that's pretty much it. So far I've dropped about 4 pant sizes and an inch of my neck size. We're not sure how much that works out to in pounds, since I neglected to weigh myself before starting the process, but we'll know once the doctor gets me on a scale and compares it to the last visit. I figure this is a long-term process; it took 15 or more years to get up to this size, it'll take a few more to get rid of it all.

So the holiday season is in full swing. Alas, these festive occasions come in still-troubled times, and many of us are still unsettled by the changes we have been forced to take on. Evil is still alive and well in our world, and evil in the name of justice or vengeance is still evil. Our wish for you, your family, and all the families of the world is for tolerance, peace, understanding, and good will toward all men. May the leaders of the world find wisdom beyond their years and experience, to find a way through these dark times to a solution that gives all people dignity and freedom.

From the VOGT family to you, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and best wishes for 2003!

