



AROUND THE PLACE

December 2014

The calendar tells us that December is about to begin, but our weather to date, with one or two exceptions, has been unusually mild. A daytime high in the sixties is not uncommon this year, and the fall storms which have hit many areas of the country so hard this fall have bypassed us completely.

This means that we haven't received much precipitation. However, it also means that we have received many "bonus days" to work outside and make final preparations for winter, when it finally does arrive.

The rock walls on either side of the upper root cellar have been given a face lift. Several days were spent rebuilding the rock walls. Time and the elements had taken their toll, and many of the rocks had fallen to the ground or slumped out of place. Now the root cellar wall is structurally sound and the door is artfully framed.

Across from the root cellar sits a fine new compost pile. After we harvested the vegetables, we pulled up the spent plants and piled them outside the garden fence, along with weeds, prunings, and other organic material from the garden. This was shredded, along with some spoiled hay, and then the pile was constructed layer by layer, with a generous amount of water added at each stage. Within a day or two, the pile had heated up above 130 degrees, plenty hot enough to cook the weed

seeds and start the almost miraculous process of transforming the separate ingredients into rich soil.

Only once, in mid-October, did the overnight temperatures really dip. That afternoon we took the winter squash out of the garden and stored them down in the food room, along with all the onions, which had been drying in the carport. We even picked the mortgage lifter dried beans, since we were afraid the frigid temperatures would damage the not-quite-dry beans.

Once that front passed, our mild days returned, delaying winter's onset and giving us a bit more time to work outside comfortably.

Even though we know that erosion and gravity are always in play, we aren't always aware of the small changes that occur consistently over time. These small changes add up as the years pass.

Two years ago, to help control drainage behind the Main House and seepage into the basement, the drainage ditch was dug out, leaving what seemed like a huge canyon. Since then, the continual seep of water, along with the instability of the soil, have led to the "Big Dig" reverting again to a simple drainage ditch.

The downward movement of our mountainside has become evident in two other places as well. One is by the woodshop door (the woodshop was originally the school house where Vitvan gave his lessons when he moved to Baker in 1957). The

door and original cement landing are now a full eighteen inches below the surface of the road. A berm is now in place to keep water and dirt from entering the woodshop.

The other area is along the side of the old tractor shed facing the south unit. Over the years the soil has 'flowed' downhill and piled another several feet of dirt along the foundations of the tractor shed, up to the lower sill of the windows. This has now been dug out to allow for proper drainage which will help preserve the timbers of this historic building.

Other preparations for winter are underway, since we do know that at some point cold weather and snow really will arrive. Woodpiles have been stacked and covered. Holes along building sidings have been closed both to keep out cold and also critters such as skunks who might be on the lookout for a protected winter home.

The deer have moved down from their summer browsing areas higher up on the mountain, and we routinely see ten or twelve deer grazing in the orchard or resting in the meadow. In fact, our headlights catch multiple pairs of reflectors shining back at us as we drive past the meadow after dusk.

Our resident owl population has become more visible, probably because the leaves are off the trees, as well as more vocal. We hear them hooting on a daily basis now, and we see them perched on tree limbs, telephone poles, and TV antennas, surveying their domain. It is quite a thrill to see the majestic shape of a great horned owl silhouetted against the sky at dusk.

We had a lovely Thanksgiving this year. The tables were beautifully decorated, the food was delicious (with squash, beans, and Brussels sprouts from the garden), and the company delightful. We have much to give thanks for.



Daylight doesn't last long at this time of year, but the dawns and sunsets are spectacular and the days are filled with the special light of this time of year – pale and thin, with long shadows that stretch north even at noon. The long nights come early and reveal truly stunning splendor, with moonrises that take one's breath away and stars that shine like diamonds across the endless skies.

I hope that your autumn has been as fruitful as ours. May the Blessed Ones lead us from darkness into light, now and always.

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