



December, 2023

Hello family and friends, and happy holidays 2023/4 to everyone. This year has been another busy one on the farm. Before we get into that, last year's holiday letter from us was written early because we were on vacation almost until Christmas last year. The vacation was a trip of a lifetime for us... a cruise from Florida up the Amazon River to Manaus, Brazil, and back. We were on the ship for 28 days, and I'd say it exceeded our expectations. I've published a narrative about the trip on my blog which you can find here:

<http://tedsoldan.com/?p=3383>

Alice and I made several trips to Morgantown, WV in 2023. Every trip involved working on projects at Steve and John's home. They are fixing things up so they can sell it, and it happens I have some skills and work cheap 😊 We did some plumbing, electrical, and carpentry projects while there. On one of the trips we drove the

pickup truck to Morgantown. Since the guys lack truck transportation, several large items that were no longer useful were hauled to the dump. In addition, we hooked a lift unit up to it that we'd rented locally so

Steve could paint some otherwise inaccessible parts of his house. I got a kick out of watching Steve figure this lift out, and how his confidence grew as he worked on his house 20+ feet from the ground.



*Ted and Steve consulting*

One of our trips coincided with my birthday, and John made me a fancy birthday cake. John is an exceptional baker.

Early in the year, Alice became aware of a fundraiser that a local woman was running to support her bird rehabilitation facility. So Alice, big heart that she has, decided to invest some money in native plants to help out. In passing, she asked if I'd be willing to help her plant a few native plants on our property. I think I agreed to help, so that was all she needed. When we were told the plants were in, we took a nice drive up north following the GPS instructions. We were fortunate that the lady in charge was not busy, because she gave us a nice tour of the place. She accepts birds with all manner of injuries, rehabilitates them, and releases them back into the wild. Then came time to pay for and collect our plants. There were several flats, and it soon became clear to me what I'd gotten myself in for. Over the course of a week or two, we managed to get them all in the ground. Water loving plants near the ponds, and others along the powerline right-of-way on our property. Each plant got some good dirt, a drink, and patted down. After that they were on their own.



Alice and I continued our project to get as much as we can on one floor in the house. We had 2 small freezers in the basement, which we replaced with one large "garage ready" freezer in the entryway of our house. My research indicated that garage-ready freezers are specially designed to withstand cold weather down to zero degrees. Even on our multi-degree below zero days, the entryway stays above zero, so we should be ok. Now we have our bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, and freezer on the first floor of our house. Hopefully this will allow us to stay in our own home as we get older.

We took one long trip in the motorhome this year, and, as usual, towed our car behind it. When we got home from that uneventful trip, we had a heart-to-heart talk. I expressed my concern that driving such a big vehicle

was becoming difficult for me, and we eventually decided to try to sell it. We had it for sale on multiple sites, and had a lot of people inquire, some of which stopped by to look things over. I'd hoped to sell the car and motorhome as a package, since I'd engineered them to work together. Weeks grew into months, and still no sale. Finally, one fellow made me an offer on just the car, which I reluctantly accepted. I rewrote the ads to offer just the motorhome for sale. Months went by, and I resigned myself to the fact that we would need to store the RV for another winter. At about the last minute, a woman from Iron River, MI, contacted us, came out to see it, and gave us a down payment. What looked to be an impossible situation was over in a matter of minutes. I guess we were just looking for the right person to come along, and she finally did.



*A growing stump pile*

stump. There were 3 big stump piles by the time I was done. I worked steadily on this part of the project for several months. I'd hired a young man just getting started as a heavy equipment operator to move the dirt for me. I had to keep putting him off as I plowed through this part of the project. When I was finally ready for him, he dropped off his equipment and over the course of several weekends, he pushed enough dirt to make the dam. Often when it rains or snows, I hike out to the pond to see if the water level has increased. It will hopefully fill up this spring so we'll be able to see what we have.

Besides the usual chores of gardening, firewood, maple syrup, lawn care, etc., I took on a major project on a 40 acre parcel we own just down the road from the house. The place has a good site for a pond, and this summer I decided to develop it. I'd never built one myself, but paid attention while the others were constructed so I felt I could handle it. The first order of business was to obtain the necessary permits, which was surprisingly easy this time. The next job was to remove lots of trees and brush that were in the way of the proposed dam. If the tree was big enough, I'd push it over with my bulldozer, remove the tree and haul off the



*New pond dam*

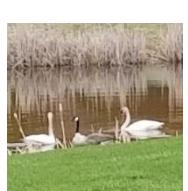
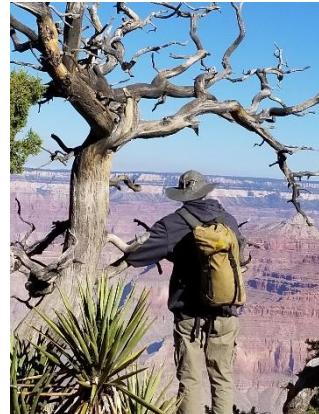
In October, Alice and I embarked on a different sort of vacation that we'd ever done. We decided to drive our car to Lansing, MI, where my brother agreed to store it for about a month. We then jumped on the Amtrak and took the train to Chicago for a few days, then back on the train to Flagstaff, AZ, rental car to the Grand Canyon for 11 nights, then Los Angeles, Dallas, and then back home. It was a great trip. It was not glitch free, but what ever is? I've written an account of the trip on my blog if you'd like to read more and see some pictures. It is available at <http://tedsoldan.com/?p=3440>



*Ted's 71st birthday cake*



*Pond overflow concrete form*



*Critters in our yard*

*Ted & Alice*