

February 05

Last February I was visiting, by phone, with my youngest brother James. I asked him "Did you like our New Years letter?" "That was your New Years letter?" he asked. "I thought it was a solicitation, something like, for a few pennies a day you can support a poor family in the third world country of Arkansas." I protested that I didn't think the letter was that pitiful and besides if he thought it was so bad he should quit laughing at me and come help us work on the house. James just laughed harder.

Living in the Ozarks in an unheated greenhouse continues to be both joyful and in the winter, challenging, but the day we get to reside in a more conventional abode is inching very slowly closer. Last spring the inching went a bit faster when, thanks to our friend David backing his truck into our car, we got the roof on the house.

Last March Billy and I spent the night with some friends in Stillwater, Oklahoma while on our way home from a visit with Billy's family in the Oklahoma panhandle. The next morning Vicki had to leave early for work but David, as a self-employed carpenter, had a bit more leeway in his schedule, so he sat and visited with us as we finished breakfast. Finally, he too had to take off. We said our goodbyes and Billy began cleaning up the breakfast dishes while I finished packing.

A minute later Billy hollered down the hall "David backed into the car". We went out to view the damage. The bumper of David's full-size pickup cleared the rear bumper of our Buick Regal and hit the trunk perfectly in the middle, snapping the trunk key off in the lock, popping the trunk lid up, and folding it into a V, David was very upset, in part because he had done almost the exact same thing to his stepdaughter's car the month before. He hunted up a piece of rope so we could tie the trunk lid down, and asked that we send him a bill for the repairs because he didn't dare turn in another insurance claim.

A few days after we arrived home we took the Buick to town and got three estimates for repairs. Wow! We were completely taken aback. The estimates ranged from \$1600 to \$1800. We weren't exactly sure of what to do, but we knew we weren't going to ask David to pay that much money for repairs on a thirteen-year-old car with 200,000 miles on it. So we went to talk to Jimmy.

Jimmy had been our mechanic, but had recently sold his business to his brother and opened a body shop. We told Jimmy the story, adding that the car didn't have to be 'insurance claim perfect'. It just needed to look okay and the trunk had to close.

Billy, Jimmy, and I began reviewing the other estimates to see what could be changed. The trunk lid could be replaced with a used lid instead of a new one, the taillight cover priced at \$119 could be repaired with silicone, and if a dented rear panel could be popped back into shape without losing paint, it wouldn't need to be painted. Down the list we went. Jimmy made a couple of phone calls and went over the revised estimate with his shop foreman. The verdict . . . \$500.

We called David with the news and he was very relieved. The insurance claim on his stepdaughter's car had been close to \$2000 and he was afraid that he would be paying the same for the Buick. The situation worked out well for Billy and I, too. The previous fall we had traded Jimmy an older Chevy pickup for \$500 toward future repairs and we still had a \$300 credit to apply to the Buick.

While David was busy being relieved, we pitched him an idea. He is a skilled carpenter, and we were getting ready to put the roof on the house. Maybe he could repay us by coming to Arkansas and working with Billy to frame up the roof. David thought it was a grand idea, however, he felt he wouldn't have time until the first of May.

Meanwhile, between shows and working at the studio, Billy began preparing for David's arrival. Billy had been building trusses since January. He finished those, seventeen in all. He also bought more lumber, rented some scaffolding, ordered and picked up the metal roofing, and sent a series of detailed photos of the house to David so he could visualize the next step.

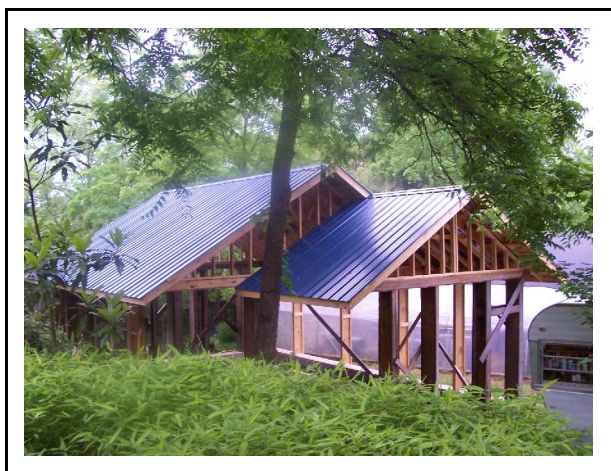


The night before David arrived, Billy securely fastened a large, tall beam to the south end of the house and attached a pulley to the top of the beam. The next morning Billy and I began carrying the trusses into the building, suspending them upside-down on the roof plate and pulling them upright using a rope run through the pulley. The trusses were big, heavy, and awkward and I was thrilled when David showed up and I was demoted to truss tie-er. I stood on the roof plate and when a truss was pulled upright I tied it to the support beam.

It was exciting to see the profile of the house change so quickly and I really wanted to stay but Billy and I were preparing for a show in Oklahoma City and I had to get back into the studio. The guys worked exceptionally hard, long hours. I even stole a few hours from the studio to help, for we were all aware that David couldn't stay long and his expertise had to get Billy to the point that he could continue on his own. We did manage to squeeze in a little fun, though, like our traditional huge bonfire in celebration of having a guest and, of course, lots of good food.



David stayed for about three days. By the time he had to go, the roof was framed up and ready for Billy to get the plywood on. The house is small, only 620 sq. ft., but because of a steep pitch and large overhang, the roof is huge, 1160 sq. ft. Billy hauled every bit of that plywood up on the roof by himself, 34 sheets in all. David had left an air compressor and a nail gun for this step which, time and energy wise, helped a lot. Still, after two days of lifting and nailing plywood, Billy was exhausted. Unfortunately, he wouldn't get a break. It was threatening to rain and we couldn't risk getting the plywood wet, so I stayed home from the studio for a day and helped Billy get the metal on the roof.



Having the roof on gives real definition to the building. That definition makes the house feel like something we might someday actually live in, and we are very thankful to David. He brought not only his skill and expertise, but also tools of the trade that made a huge difference in how quickly some steps could be accomplished. I am very sure that if David had not been involved we would not have the roof on yet. But because we had to work with someone else's schedule we couldn't wait for those magical, elusive windows of enough time and money to get something done. Now if we can just get one of the neighbors to sideswipe

the pickup we might get the bale walls up by spring.

Our work at the studio is affected in much the same way, in that all of our efforts are geared around the day you come to see us at an art festival. Because we know that you are going to come to a show and you are going to expect lightweight work that is beautiful and interesting and some like it's always been and some that's new, we'll get on it. We'll do the work to make sure our booth is well stocked and looks good, and in the meantime . . . we'll do a little house building.

Sincerely,

Rebecca and Billy