

January 2004

It is 2004. 04, 04, 04, I need to get that down. I am not concerned about the date on checks but rather about getting the correct year on the bottom of pottery. And there will be a lot of beautiful pottery in 2004 as Billy and I continue with a strategy we designed for the 2003 show season.

We participated in five fewer shows than we participated in during the previous season. The idea was to do fewer shows but to have a large inventory at each event. We felt our plan worked quite well. Less time traveling meant more time to be in the studio and more time to work on the house. Well...a bit more time to work on the house.

The house is still a long way from being done but it is noticeably further along than it was at this time last year. And it is this time of year, when winter gets serious, that we become very interested in having a house. We are over three years into this project and I have recently become aware that Billy and I have developed a line of 'When we have a house' stories that we tell each other.

Cold winter mornings always inspire 'When we have a house' stories. Like "When we have a house, we can get out of bed in the morning and it won't hurt!" Sleeping in an unheated greenhouse, in the winter, is made bearable by using an electric blanket and lots of wool and down bedding, but the transition from warm bed to cold clothes through skin-biting near zero temperatures is really tough. My solution is to stay in bed until March when the weather warms up. Billy, however, correctly points out that a more realistic solution to cold mornings is for us to build a house and I am not getting much construction done in bed.

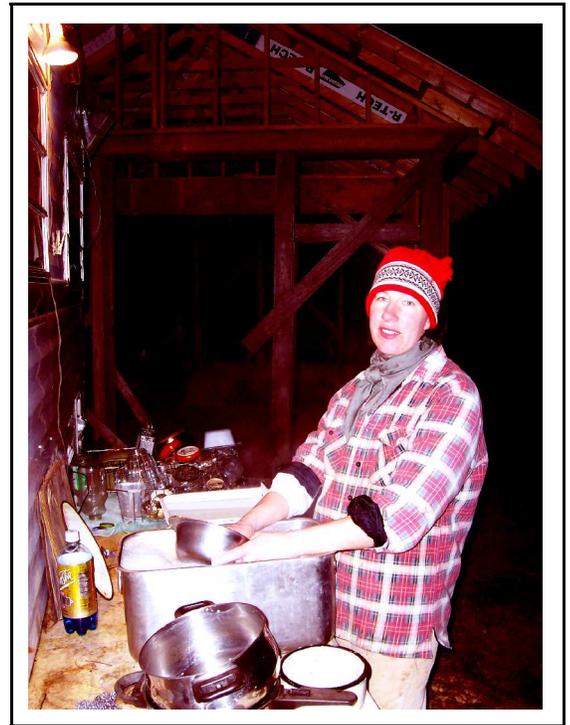
Another cold weather inspired 'When we have a house' story involves the pleasures of an indoor bathroom. I promise you there is no lingering at the outhouse over the latest *Ceramics Monthly* when the temperature is only 18F. Having an indoor bathroom will also eliminate the little surprise we get when we reach over and discover, a bit too late, that the squirrels have unraveled and removed all of the toilet paper to use for nesting material.

Doing the dishes, especially when the temperature refuses to rise above freezing for days at a time, will get us going on the 'When we have a house' stories. The tiny 15' camper trailer we use as a kitchen and living room has a single sink and only about three square feet of counter top space. Reluctant to give up any of the limited space to dirty dishes, we built a wash table just outside the trailer door.



We allow the dishes to collect in order to make the energy required to heat dishwater really count. A five gallon bucket full of hot soapy water serves as a pre-wash. The dishes then go into a big, deep stainless steel tub, once part of a restaurant steam table, to be washed. Pre-rinse and rinse are done through two metal hydrator drawers. Three dish racks, with a towel for overflow, receive the clean dishes. It's a great system and works well, but it's not fast. We definitely aim for those windows of warmer temperatures for winter dish-washings, but sometimes we just have to buck up and put on more clothes.

I know it's rural Arkansas and I know the meter reader for the electric company sees a lot of weird things. I really wonder, though, what he thinks when he pulls up the drive and Billy and I are outside dressed in our insulated overalls, stocking caps, and snow boots, clouds of steam from the containers of hot water swirling around us, doing the dishes. He just waves.



Along with a small fridge in the camp trailer, we have a full-size refrigerator in the greenhouse. In the winter the big fridge takes a vacation. It senses that the temperature is quite cold enough, so it quits working. On sunny winter days the greenhouse temperature will reach 80F. So, no matter the temperature outside, the refrigerator will begin to cycle again, but occasionally the weather will be cold and cloudy long enough that we have to pull food out of the freezer and put it outside so it stays frozen. So 'When we have a house', no more vacations for the fridge.

I noticed that our neighbor had her own 'When we have a house' story. About twice a year we go visit our neighbors specifically to watch a televised news event. On one such occasion this past October Mary said "Well maybe when ya'll have a house, ya'll can have a television."

A good friend came over from Oklahoma to visit us this past May. We had a fantastic time. The guest cabin, also known as the other camper trailer, was decked out in new curtains, seat cushion covers, and it's own electric blanket. We floated the nearby Buffalo River, hiked on our place, played at the pond, and thoroughly enjoyed each other's company, conversation, and the natural wonders around us. At one point during the visit Brenda said something to the effect of "It's not as hard as I thought it would be," She's right, life in the greenhouse is not hard. It is different and sometimes difficult but it is what we do now and it is tremendously fulfilling.

I recognize that if I wrote the New Years letter in June instead of January, it would have an entirely different tone. There would probably be no mention of a house. Nothing could be better than sleeping in the greenhouse on warm, soft, moonlit summer nights with the frogs at the pond and the cicadas in the trees singing us to sleep. Who needs a house? January, though, yes, a house would be nice. And it will happen. We just don't know exactly when. I don't think the 'When we have a house' stories are fairy tales but they may be legends by the time we are done.

Pottery is a different story. We can do pottery. I was thrilled with the quality and beauty of the work Billy and I produced in '03. We will continue with our strategy of less time traveling and more time for potting and custom work and we will keep you posted on our show schedule. We sincerely anticipate seeing or hearing from you this year.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Rebecca and Billy