

## February 2011

December 11, 2010

“Whoa!” Billy exclaimed. “It’s here. It’s really here.” “What?” I asked. “What’s here?” “Winnterrr” he said, dragging the word out for emphasis. “It’s going to get down to 6 degrees tomorrow night.” “And that’s Springdale’s forecast.” I noted. “ We’ll probably be at 2 or 3 degrees here. If you want to think about sleeping in the house, the bed is made up; nice sheets, good pillows, down comforter. It’s ready.”

We considered that night to be our first night in the straw bale house. True, in past winters we’d taken refuge in the house when ice storms caused us to lose electricity. Those nights were spent on makeshift beds with the strong feel of ‘construction zone’ all around. This night was quite different. We were in a real bed, surrounded by finished walls hung with long stored art work. The clean floor was festooned with throw rugs instead of mud globs, and there was furniture instead of scaffolding and ladders. Two nights later, though, when the low was a balmy 20 degrees, we were back to our bed in the unheated greenhouse.

The real draw of the greenhouse is simply that it’s what we are used to. Residing in the greenhouse was not a premeditated decision. When Billy and I decided to live on this place, the greenhouse and two old camper trailers were what we had, so that’s what we used, and over the past eleven years we’ve learned how to live in the rhythm of the seasons. But, as much as I love the extended camping trip this lifestyle emulates, I’ve always known that it was not a sustainable situation.

This past October, when Billy pulled the shade cloth off of the greenhouse, the beginning of the end was undeniable. The splits visible across the top of the greenhouse were not in the seams of the shade cloth, as I had hoped, but in the outer layer of plastic.

The greenhouse is covered by two layers of heavy, UV resistant plastic. It’s UV resistant, not UV proof. The deterioration was not a surprise. The plastic has been in place five years longer than recommended by its’ manufacturer. As I stood on a ladder looking over the top of the greenhouse, I realized that time and the sun were not the only factors causing the damage.

Our two young cats love to chase each other up the side of the greenhouse and then run back and forth across the top. From the ground I could clearly see the multiple punctures left by their ascents and descents. Evidently, their claws were still extended as they loped across the top, for their path was becoming a clearly defined perforation pattern.

We had decided some time ago that when the plastic went, the greenhouse would go, too. To me, moving out of the greenhouse was going to be one of those daunting, mind-boggling projects you just can't imagine tackling. But I knew after our last show in December, the 'GREENHOUSE PROJECT' would have to be addressed.

The bulk of what was in the 30' x 48' greenhouse would go to the 16' x 24' shed. Fortunately, the greenhouse has always been more of a working place than a storage place. Still, this action was going to take some very thoughtful planning.

We moved everything out of the shed and evaluated it. Do we keep it or not? If it stays, does it go back into the shed or somewhere else? All of the shelving from the shed and the greenhouse was cleaned off and reorganized in the shed. Once the shed was back in order we began in the greenhouse. Again, everything was evaluated...Go? Stay? Stay where?

We hauled a lot of stuff to the recycling center. Every time we had a pickup load, we would throw on some scrap metal to sell. In this manner we sold copper, brass, aluminum, lead, and over a ton of steel. These small sales more than covered disposal fees and gas, and the majority of the metal had been on the place before Billy and I moved here.

We are not completely done with the 'GREENHOUSE PROJECT'. Billy is finally building kitchen cabinets so the table saw, work tables, and necessary tools are still in place. The shed needs to be wired for electricity before we can move the washer, dryer, and freezer. A made up and ready to sleep in bed is still there, but the day it rains cats and cats as they crash through the last layer of plastic, we'll be able to finish the job in a few hours.

With the 'GREENHOUSE PROJECT' under control, we could finally spend some time on the house. The last major job in the house is to build storage. This entails not only the vanity and kitchen cabinets, but also a 10' tall, 7' wide, 2' deep storage unit.

This space will be the pantry, utility closet, linen closet, clothes closet, basically storage for everything that is not in the kitchen cabinets.

I won't feel that we are living in the house until we are cooking and eating there and that won't happen until the kitchen cabinets are built. Still, we do spend a lot of time there. The solid density of the straw bale walls with their rich colored mud coat, the art work, and the furniture have come together to make the space a little jewel that is nourishing and comforting to be in.

January 24, 2011

"It's going to be 30 degrees tonight do you want to sleep in the greenhouse?" I asked Billy. "No" he said, "I don't want to sleep in the greenhouse again. I like having it be warm when I get up."

Two days later I was in the trailer working on this letter when Billy came in and said, "You know, if you really want to sleep in the greenhouse, I'll sleep wherever you are." "Well," I hesitated, "I do miss the greenhouse. I really miss hearing the birds in the morning, but I love the house, too, and we did spend a lot of time, money, and effort to build it. So let's stay in the house for the rest of the winter and if we still have the greenhouse this spring, see how we feel about sleeping there when it's warm."

With the major construction done, there's just not much to photograph but I have added a few more photos to the HOUSE section of the web site. I did not put anything new in the GALLERY because I hope to completely redo it throughout the year. The SHOWS section is current through June and NEWSLETTERS go back to 2000. As always, we enjoy hearing from you and hope to see you at a show this year.

Sincerely,

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