

Happy Really, Really, Really Belated Thanksgiving! (2010 Newsletter, Published October 2012)

Sorry it has taken so long for me to get back to publishing these newsletters. As those of you left standing know, the last couple of years have been quite dreadful for all of us. Even now, after the fact, it is very hard for me to look back over these past couple of years, to write the newsletter for this year.

After I closed the 2009 Thanksgiving Newsletter and posted it on-line, our second youngest sister, Linda, lost her long battle with cancer and passed away on December 19, 2009. I'm very thankful for the opportunity we had to visit with her and the nice long uninterrupted chat we shared together.

In previous newsletters, I kept everyone abreast of the progress we were making with our home renovations. This takes a lot of money, so I finally agreed on March 3rd, 2009, to accept an offer to return to writing part-time for a large publishing house. It didn't pay a lot, but every little-bit helps.

The last entry in the 2009 Newsletter showed the two new room additions and the completion of the outside with a high quality grade of vinyl siding. I intended for the rear addition to become a mud room and utility area; however, it was back to the drawing boards, as Debi and I felt it would be more beneficial to use this space for enlarging the kitchen.

In an old house like this, you never know what to expect, until you take down the walls to find out what is behind or in them. Our house is concrete block/stucco and the particular wall we are considering removing is an exterior load bearing wall. This wall, supporting the gable end of the roof, was previously modified to relocate the door and an existing window removed and blocked.

Regardless of when we could afford to renovate the kitchen, it was winter time and I knew this room needed to be insulated before I could remove the wall. I also needed to find out what modifications and supporting structures were required to ensure the roof did not come tumbling down. It goes without saying, this will be a major modification, normally requiring a careful study by a structural engineer.

I insulated the roof and walls of the room addition first, and then proceeded to knock out a small section near the ceiling to see what existing supports were already in place. Right image.



It was looking good until I removed more blocks to find a seam that would require strengthening before any more of the wall could be removed.

The lumber used in the old days were normally full sized timbers, impossible to match today.

In the Left image, you can see the beam ended and only a stringer was above the lenti. The attic has a heavy floor over the ceiling joists which made getting to this area considerably harder.



I installed 2x12 in the attic above the floor and across the gable wall, to facilitate removal of the old beam and installation of a new beam with a sheet of steel sandwiched between two 2x10's and capped on the lower side with a 2x6. Afterwards, I could begin removing the remainder of the block wall.

If you recall, at the beginning of this newsletter I said it was a dreadful year! Before you ask, No, the roof did not fall in on me as I was removing the blocks, it was something worse than that.

I suffered a massive heart attack on February 10, 2010, which naturally put everything on hold. At first I just thought it might be a simple wake-up call to take it easy. However, the doc informed me it was very serious, if he was not already scrubbed up to work on someone else, I would not have made it. Even now, two years later, I still have to be very careful, just raising my arms above my head could kill me instantly. I also tire out very quickly if I expend any energy, which is not a part of my lifestyle.

After a month plus one week of going stark raving mad doing nothing, except working at my writing job, I felt strong enough to work on tearing down some more of the wall. Not using the heavy sledge hammer, but rather a small cold chisel and hammer was getting the job done. My brother-in-law Everett would come by and help with the heavier work and moving the pile of broken blocks outside.

I chose the image on the right because it shows one of the heavy poured concrete lentils that Everett took down for me, and the slats once affixed to the blocks that amazingly still hold the kitchen drywall up.



Debi and Laverne's mother, Ruth, had taken another downturn and it was necessary to call in Hospice. With Laverne there every day to help watch over her mother, I was able to trim the floor level blocks down to flush with the concrete floor, and with Everett there, we decided to get that kitchen drywall down. This opened up the room addition and exposed the kitchen.

Although the new room ceiling is perfectly level, the original kitchen ceiling has sagged over the years, in more directions than one, which created quite a challenge. The floor also needs raised to align with the kitchen floor. The number of problems discovered and the unexpected obstacles we encountered upon after removing the drywall seemed almost unsurmountable.

However, Everett is an expert when it comes to dealing with crooked things and alignments so far out of plumb, one wonders if it will ever be able to be corrected enough to blend in.

After making several careful height measurements across the concrete floor, Everett cut floor joists so professionally that the new floor turned out perfectly level. He also trimmed lumber to the right thickness to lower the ceiling joists down so the final new ceiling would be in perfect alignment with the existing kitchen ceiling, which was very tricky as the kitchen ceiling is not level. After I installed the electrical wiring and pull boxes in the new room addition, a neighbor came over and installed all the drywall in the new room. I completed the taping and painting at a rather slow pace.

In the existing kitchen, at a location where the original ice box used to sit, the floor was considerably deteriorated. New sub-flooring was placed over the entire kitchen floor in past years, then a counter prevented this weak area from being walked on.



After cutting and removing the flooring we then removed some of the original sub-floor and replaced both layers with new floor sheathing and installed ductwork where it would align with the end of the kitchen base cabinets, it is a breakfast bar with stools.



Although I mentioned it above, the image to the right shows the transitional pieces used between the perfectly level room addition ceiling and the existing kitchen ceiling.

Notice how Everett cut the lumber to lower the existing room addition ceiling down to align with the kitchen ceiling. He made the span between level and not quite so level wide enough that the change of the finished ceiling is barely noticeable. We also did some work in the attic, adding cross members above the areas where it sagged heavily, to help pull the existing ceiling up closer to level with the new room addition ceiling.



Outside the room addition, Everett constructed a ramp, to make it easier to take Ruth to her many doctors appointments. Sadly, Ruth's condition continued to decline rapidly and before another week elapsed, she passed away March 28, 2010.

A couple of days after Ruth's funeral, the rear end went out on Debi's car. Then the following week, our water heater burst. It was not an easy task to install the new plumbing not being able to raise my hands above my head, very tricky. As I said, it has been a dreadful year and it continued to get worse.

Debi and I did enjoy our 9th wedding anniversary, June 1st, and two weeks later took a one-day bus trip to Scottsboro, Alabama to visit the Unclaimed Baggage Center. My writing work was helping me keep my mind off things, and providing some much needed income. Word from home was keeping me abreast of my mother, Mary's, failing health, she too was suffering from cancer that was now spreading.

We decided to go to St. Louis a month early, so visited mom on my birthday, October 26; although she shouldn't have, she prepared my favorite dinner, stringy roast pot. We were back in Knoxville when we heard my daughter Melanie had a baby girl, Alyssa's sister was born November 16, 2010. I turned down a rather large product order, but hearing from home that mom was holding her own, needing the extra funds, I committed to it. No sooner than I started on the order, I was summoned to St. Louis. After a short delay here, Debi and I managed to get back to St. Louis in time for mom to recognize us before she drifted into a coma. Our mom, Mary, passed away on November 23rd, 2010.

2010 was a very hard year for our entire family, and for our relatives who lost loved ones as well.