

The Parkins Report

Events of 2009

This year brought many changes to the Parkins family, a year-long preparation for retirement, in which we passed on family heirlooms early, bought a house sight-unseen, retired in a recession with two house payments, and had many interesting but not lethal mishaps, boldly going where we hadn't ought.

We started the year with the purchase of a large cargo trailer, which we planned to use to transport our quilting and aircraft shops. The trailer store was next to a carpet store; we also needed to replace our carpeting, which was missing large chunks where we had removed a wood stove and wall heater several years ago. One thing led to another, and we soon loaded our furniture into our new trailer to prepare for the new carpet.

The uncluttered rooms looked so good, we decided it was time to scale down before our move. We made an offer to the children to collect their inheritance early, and got an amazing response. Within a couple of months, we were headed south with a load of furniture and books, which we distributed to children and grandchildren in Belen and Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Unfortunately, when we bought the trailer, we didn't do our homework: our tow vehicle, a 1994 Jeep Cherokee Sport, happens to have a maximum towing capacity somewhat smaller than the empty weight of the trailer. The trip back, empty, wasn't much less grueling than the trip out. To compound things, we ran into a blizzard in Idaho: after a scary skid on icy I-15, we stored the trailer in Idaho Falls and made it home safely, climbing Monida Pass in 4WD through 25 miles of packed snow and ice.

After replacing the clutch, brakes, water pump, and oil pump on the Jeep and waiting out a stormy spring, we retrieved the trailer on Mother's Day.

Meanwhile, we had been house-hunting in Western Washington for a suitable retirement home. In January, we picked a 30-year-old one-level house three miles from town on a dead-end road, the only house we had found that had a room big enough for the quilting machine and a garage big enough for a workshop. It was a short sale, and our bid was low: the seller's lender never got around to addressing the offer. Winter turned to spring, and we waited... As spring turned to summer, with retirement looming in the fall, and the prognosis for getting the house dim (the Seattle Times reported that 65% of short-sale deals failed) we started looking at the MLS on-line listings again.

After looking at other areas, in Snohomish, Skagit, and Island counties, we turned back to Mason County one Friday morning. One house, that had piqued Judy's interest early in our search, but was listed much higher than our target range, had been reduced in price. We called our agent, found that there was activity on the listing, but no deal yet. Since time was of the essence and there was no way we could have traveled to Washington overnight, we had her do a photo tour of the house the next morning. After looking at the photos, floor plan sketch, and satellite photos, we made an offer.

We got a phone call on Sunday morning that we had won the bidding wars. We cancelled the short-sale deal and were finally on our way to having a retirement home, committing ourselves to spending our golden years in an 80-year-old house we'd never seen in a neighborhood we'd never been to.

We put our Montana house up for sale, in a year when no used houses sold in Ravalli County, putting most of our remaining furniture and books in storage and staging the house with minimal furnishings, some borrowed. We began moving at the end of August, with an 18,000 pound moving van load, numerous carloads and two 4,000-pound trailer loads, using a borrowed pickup truck as the tow vehicle.

Judy spent some time at the new house in September, unpacking, while Larye returned to Montana, where he decided to ride his annual "Birthday Mile" bike ride (66 miles this year) solo. Partway through the ride, he met a couple from Olympia who were touring Montana, and rode with them for 25 miles. When they returned home, they invited Judy to dinner, our first welcoming committee.

Retirement came in late October, amid a flurry of activity. Perot Systems agreed to accept Larye's retirement letter only after he signed a year-long consulting contract, as his replacement would not arrive until November. Then, we made the first trailer trip over Columbus Day, loading the quilting machine and remaining books into the trailer, unloading at the other end, and returning empty.

With only two weeks before the scheduled retirement, the push was on to complete wings on the Waix homebuilt airplane project and get them ready to ship. By this time, Larye was hobbling about from weeks of heavy lifting, but shrugged it off and pressed on. A weekend of riveting on the wings and building a wing rack resulted in a definite gimpy outlook for his last week at work, and the workbench needed to be broken down and loaded on the bottom of the trailer as a base for everything else.

In typical fashion, Larye's last day at work started with a computer disaster, but not one that he caused or could do much about. He scheduled the afternoon off to finish packing. But, mid-morning, Judy, finishing up business in town, took an alternate, unfamiliar route home, missed a hidden stop sign and was involved in a collision, which totaled the other car, leaving the Jeep driveable but not roadworthy. Fortunately, there were no injuries other than PTSD. Then, at noon, Larye enlisted the aid of a couple of co-workers to help load the workbench into the trailer. In the process, the reason for his progressive gimpiness erupted with the bursting of a cyst in his right knee. He spent the rest of the afternoon getting checked out at the clinic, limping back to work on a cane instead of his bicycle to sign out.

Needless to say, with one vehicle out of commission, its driver traumatized and faced with a court hearing the next week, and the trailer partly packed with the loader out of commission, we weren't going to sail into the sunset on the last day at work.

The next week was a bit slower, but with the quiet frenzy of transition. Packing continued, slowly. Since telephone and Internet were shut off in Montana, we spent a lot of time in coffee shops and the library on the Internet, taking care of business. Finally, nearly a week late, we loaded the cat and ourselves into a badly overloaded pickup and trailer and headed west, into the oncoming fall monsoon season in the Pacific Northwest.

We spent a week unpacking, during which we watched with horror as a widening stream flowed through the garage, oozing up along the uphill wall, prompting hurried rearrangement of boxes to avoid the flood.

A mid-November trip back to Montana to recover the now-repaired Jeep--sporting a front-end transplant from a Laredo--saw us giving away most of our rather extensive house-plant collection, returning the pickup and retrieving our Honda del Sol. We packed both cars full, removed enough to fit the drivers in, and headed back to Washington. The next couple of weeks saw us taping plastic to the leaky single-pane windows and caulking leaky window frames in our 80-year-old "new" house as the rain gave way to cold and wind.

After a month of washing dishes in the charming but too-shallow 1920s country kitchen sink, we decided we needed a dishwasher. There was no practical way to install one in the old kitchen, which had been updated but not remodeled. However, there was space next to the laundry sink, so we pulled out the old laundry sink, moved the cabinet over a few inches, installed a new countertop, drop-in sink, and the dishwasher. Finally, after a week of playing whack-a-mole with crumbling iron water pipes and aged valve packing, we had a dishwasher.

Our plumbing project wrapped up just in time for our house guest and traveling companion to arrive. We raced off to Port Angeles, parked the car, and took the ferry to Victoria, BC for a week--of the coldest early December weather on record in the Pacific Northwest. The first day of our vacation was spent in a brisk walk to Bay Centre to buy warm hats. We took in the Butchart Gardens light display, three of only five people on a 60-passenger tour bus, on a bitingly cold night.

We returned home a day early because of threat of early snow and we feared broken pipes from the severe cold at home. However, the only casualty of the cold was a basket of potatoes that froze in the pantry bottom shelf, turning the thawing potatoes to leaky sacks. We cleaned up the last of the plumbing leaks from the dishwasher installation, just in time for warmer weather to bring more rain and basement flooding.

So it goes. Getting to retirement has been exhausting, and, after all that, we are as busy as ever. Judy has the quilting machine up and running, though we are still uncovering more boxes of fabric as we try to make space in the garage for the airplane project, which is still packed in the trailer. Larye has had a few busy days consulting, but mostly it has been busy minutes. We've met the quilting ladies at the Senior Center and are quilting their raffle quilt. Judy is waiting until January to join the Ladies of the Lake quilt guild in Hoodspout, and Larye will check on the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter in Bremerton in the new year.

And, best of all, the reason we moved back to the Pacific Northwest: family. Mark and family came for Thanksgiving, and we went up to Carnation the week before to help them pack. Candice has a new job in Olympia: by the first of the year, they will all move in with us for a few months, until their house sells or until the legislative session is over. If we get too crowded, well, we still have our house in Montana, and work to do in the spring for the summer house showings.

This year's news report is a bit denser than previous years' reports: we had a lot of changes in our lives, and some "interesting times" as we reinvent ourselves as senior citizens. Throughout the year, we post photos and text to the web, some in our public sites, and some in "by invitation only" areas of our own little corner of cyberspace. Below are links to these sites.

Best wishes for the new year, Larye & Judy

600 Turner Ave.
Shelton, WA 98584
Home: (360) 426-1718
Montana: (406) 369-4652
Judy: (360) 350-9284
Larye: (360) 350-9645
Email: larye@parkins.org
Email: judy@parkins.org

Web links:

- Family web site: <http://www.parkins.org>.
Check <http://www.parkins.org/personal.html> for links to current and past events
- Realizations Fabric Arts, Judy's Quilting site:
<http://www.realizations-mt.com>
- Judy's Fabric and Fiber Art:
<http://www.judyparkins.com>
- Information Engineering Services, Larye's Consulting Business: <http://www.info-engineering-svc.com>
- Larye's Homebuilt Aircraft Project:
<http://waiaex.parkins.org>
- Moving in to new home:
<http://woodrow.parkins.org/stoehr/index.php>;
<http://woodrow.parkins.org/stoehr/settled.php>;
- <http://woodrow.parkins.org/stoehr/utility.php>
- Canadian Vacation:
<http://woodrow.parkins.org/files/mvcoho.jpg>
- EAA Chapter 517 (Larye is the webmaster):
<http://www.eaa517.org>