

**Happy 2004!** 2003 was not much of a climbing year because of roofing work and rotten weather. A “three hour tour” of a local ice crag turned ugly when Doug fell and hit himself in the head with his ice axe (see photo). He now proudly sports a small smiley-shaped scar. He did do a trip to Katahdin with The Boys. A highlight was one friend hiking down in his briefs ala Captain Underpants because his trousers were wet. (*That* picture was too scary for inclusion in the collage.) We RV-d to Rochester for a Snoopy-themed wedding, did some spelunking in Scoharie Cave, and visited the Cornell campus. (Although Doug got his degree from Eastern, he now thinks he can truthfully tell people “I went to Cornell.”) Softball was less pathetic than last year. Doug’s team actually made the playoffs. (Usually their goal is to have 10 players left by the last game who are not on crutches or out for pacemaker installation.) In pursuit of a foul ball, Doug did a 180° flip over the fence, landing flat on his back in the stands. Even the opposing team was high-fiving him, and the umpire couldn’t stop laughing, noting “That guy is an idiot.”

Speaking of which, Doug can recall the original marshmallow shapes of Lucky Charms cereal (pink hearts, orange stars, yellow moons, and green clovers) even though he has not eaten them in 35 years, but cannot remember to close the shower curtain. When I remind him of this sorry situation, he mumbles something along the lines of “I married a screech owl.” At which point I once again patiently attempt to educate him on the fact that the only reason women nag is because men don’t do the things they are supposed to do when they are supposed to do them (as defined by the women of course.) Then he reminds me that he’s been slightly busy with a few minor projects, such as fixing the foundation of the house so it doesn’t collapse.



I did get him a backhoe for his birthday. Apparently all men need one. Doug says even if you don’t need one, you look cool riding around on it. He finished the third and final roof of the homestead (the shed), a task that evolved into replacing an entire side of the barn it was attached to, and creative use of an abandoned telephone pole for structural support. We’ve learned that projects at an historic home require a 100% contingency on time and materials. Speaking of learning, I took a bunch of computer courses on website design and coding. Doug learned that ponies do not turn into horses when they grow up. (And you’re wondering “How *does* Doug stand her??”)

We lost our little dog Binky last winter in an awful accident. But it seems it’s true what they say - when one door closes, another opens. We made an excellent addition to the Z-Zoo: a Cornish Rex kitten, named Tenzing after the Sherpa who summited Everest with Hillary. The breed descended from a mutant feline living in a tin mine. They have wavy, non-shedding fur; bat ears, a rat tail, a body like a Popsicle stick, the longest legs of any cat, and two modes: snoozing and bouncing off walls. Although Tenzing has been referred to as an “unbelievably hideous creature,” his photo *did* make the November issue of Cat Fancy magazine. He is quite the hilarious, personable lap-cat with a motorboat purr. Note to self: \$500 litter boxes that automatically flush themselves don’t work if the cat refuses to go near them. Another lesson learned: even if your house is 99.9% hardwood floors, a cat will seek out the only rug you own and yak on it, preferably in the fringe. And if you want something knocked over or eaten, get a goat. Peanut and Mac continue to wreak goat havoc, and occasionally duke it out with Puzzles the Duck. Our neighborhood bluebird trail fledged 4 bluebirds, 13 tree swallows, 2 chickadees, and several titmice. It was fascinating to watch the fledgling blues at the feeder sitting on top of a mound of mealworms, begging the parents to put some into their gaping mouths. Doug helps install and repair the nestboxes, and patiently endures endless Bluebird Blather.



With regard to work, Doug survived a stressful 20<sup>th</sup> year at DEP, due to well contamination issues in southern CT. I finished a 4-month stint at Brookhaven National Lab in February (and 10 years with Battelle), and then spent the next 8 months recovering and chunking out to the point that I’m wishing burkas were in style in the U.S. Working part-time from home does have its own special challenges—e.g., getting motivated to not stay in pajamas all day long. Ken Brog once asked me at what point in the day it no longer makes sense to get dressed -- I’ve determined that doesn’t happen until around 3 p.m. Doug and I continue volunteering for the Historical Society, conservation, bluebirds, and open space. I’ve spent so much time working on nonprofit websites that I dream about formatting and broken hyperlinks at night. (The portal to the websites and my movie blog is [www.elizaduck.com](http://www.elizaduck.com).)

All family members are doing well. My sister Tina is still in Cuba—why someone would choose to live in a country where people are not free is beyond me. And if you think our menagerie is bizarre, she has pet crocodile that tried to eat her dog. This year she produced a CD of her husband’s African “Bembe” music, which our neighbors claim must be Cuban for “steamy pile of dog sh\*t.” When we forced them to listen to it, their baby cried, and three year old Brendan clapped his hands over his ears and yelled “That’s AWFUL, turn it OFF!” Doug only made it through 0.5 songs. (You can experience it for yourself at [www.kabiosile.org](http://www.kabiosile.org).)

Best movie we saw this year: The Transporter. Worst movie: Shakes the [alcoholic] Clown. Best book: The Lovely Bones. Favorite website: [www.stupidvideos.com](http://www.stupidvideos.com) (watch Snake News, Shocked, and Funny Cats.) Looking forward to hearing from YOU – if we don’t, you might get axed from our holiday card list. Hope you enjoy a wonderful, safe, healthy holiday!

