



Another year has zoomed by and it doesn't seem like we did much besides work. Doug finished restoring the bathroom in This Old House. The project spanned three calendar years (partly because I went through 16 paint colors) but turned out awesome. Then I came up with the really bad idea that we should buy a couple of houses to renovate as rentals. If you enjoy painting for weeks on end, mounds of dirty laundry, gargantuan bills, stressful days and sleepless nights, flipping real estate might be just the thing for you. Thank goodness for Doug and his father Larry, Handyman Extraordinaire, who did all the hard stuff. I was mostly gopher and panicker.

We finished House #1 in an unbelievable five weeks. The guy we ended up renting to looked relatively good compared to the other applicants, which included (and I am not making this up) a rock band, a toothless stoned family from the Ozarks, an extended family of 6+ Brazilian adults, and a number of bankrupt smokers with large breed puppies. Unfortunately our new tenant neglected to inform us that he was Satan's Second Coming.

Mr. Mental Rental taped black garbage bags over all the windows, and called us five times a day to hurl expletives and rant about how the government sent the hurricane to Louisiana. He also decided to unplug the sump pump in the midst of northeast Connecticut's 200 year flood event, and then freaked out when his basement accumulated two inches of water. (OUR basement racked up two FEET of water blended with backed up septic system stew. At first I just thought Doug had really bad gas. The sight of his beer stash floating in the putrid pool practically reduced Doug to tears.) Fortunately the voices told Mr. M he needed to move elsewhere in January.

The second house we bought had been inhabited by 34 feral cats. Ever sand a floor soaked in cat urine? Then there were those unexpected expenses, like replacing the brand new garage door I plowed into with the truck (Doug's fault of course – bad brakes). The stuck-in-the-seventies Pepto-Bismol pink bathroom also posed a challenge. Despite it all, the place was rented to a corporate relocation executive before we could even finish it.

Doug made his 5th attempt on Mt. Robson in British Columbia. After learning of the 4th fatality there this year, the boyz wisely called it off and summited two other splendid mountains. In keeping with the climbing theme, Doug insisted on dressing as Rope Man (a 70's cartoon character) for a children's superhero costume party. He ran his worst race ever during a horrendous heat wave. However, he *was* ★FIRST★ to order beer at the bar (after stepping over paramedics attending to an elite runner collapsed in the foyer). He was also proud that he went the farthest on the homemade Slip 'N Slide at a cousins' party.

The Z family flew to Texas for a remodeling intervention of sister Julie's bathroom. We RVed up to Quebec City, after which we always wonder why we don't camp more often. Unfortunately, pesky work keeps getting in the way. I was on travel for almost 3 months this year. I am working on saying "no" to jobs (while simultaneously trying to remove that reply from Doug's vocabulary). Working from home has its own challenges, like when I'm on an important teleconference and Tenzing the Cat sits on the receiver and disconnects everyone.

Sadly, Mac the Goat expired. (He was the bonus goat we inadvertently brought home inside Peanut.) We quickly learned that A Lonely Goat is a Difficult Goat, as Peanut proceeded to bite me in the butt and yank all the feathers out of Puzzles the Duck. She settled back down after we got her an alpine/pygmy goat pal we named Butter.

I got another paper published in the *Bluebird* journal. I also contracted Lyme Disease while monitoring nestboxes. At first I thought it was the flu, but when I was suddenly barely able to walk down stairs, Doug took me to the hospital. I'm all better now. Fortunately our folks are all well. Doug separated his shoulder during a recklessly dangerous dive for a softball (which he *did* catch). The doctor said he was out for the season, but a few weeks later Doug was pitching his team into the playoffs. There are no diaper-clad girlie Zimmermen.

The best book I read was *The Time Traveler's Wife*. Unforgettable fiction seems increasingly hard to find. I picked out a passel of absolutely awful films, of which *Palindromes* was the clear loser.

Overall, we were pretty boring in 2005. We did not get to goof off or see enough of friends or family. Some folks dread the holidays, but I love hearing from you, and the decorations, baking, music and anticipation. We hope your holiday is filled with all this and more. To those for whom this was a difficult year, we especially wish you the best ever in 2006. And remember, it's not what you get, it's what you give.

