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View of our pond after a snow
at the end of February.

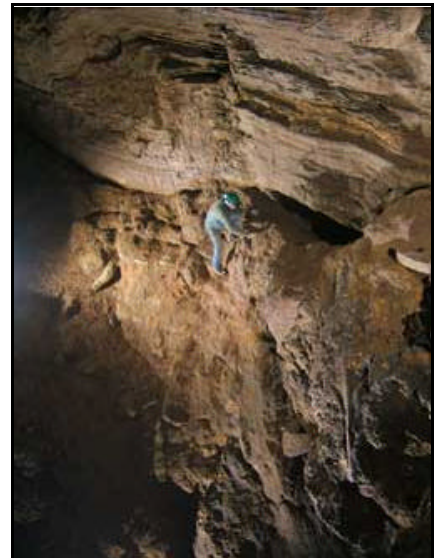
Dear Friends and Family,

2006 ended on a down note and 2007 got off to a similar start. Char had a stroke in November, which she wrote about in last year's letter. Then two of John's old paddling buddies died suddenly and unexpectedly on the last weekend of December. Earlier in December our senior cat, Cleo, was diagnosed with untreatable cancer and she died in mid-January. After such an inauspicious start things could hardly help but improve — and they did.

We dealt with all our usual projects — sugaring off in the spring, haymaking in the summer, bringing in firewood whenever possible — but we added one major project this year: We are remodeling part of our house. The complete story is on our web site, <http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/house2007a.html>, but in brief the plan is to build a small addition to house our second bathroom, move the laundry room into an enlarged space where the bathroom had been, expand the kitchen into the old laundry room, and add more dining space in the kitchen. This is a combination of new construction and tearing out the rest to bare studs and joists — in other words, a big job. The goal was to finish steps one and two this year and we've pretty well accomplished that. John did most of it himself but we will need more outside help when we start on the kitchen work early next year.

News from John:

I have been doing more caving than I have for many years. Several trips into Butler and a couple of digging projects seeking new caves, but the big news is the discovery of an excellent new cave just this fall. Details can be found on our web site: <http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/Caves/index.html>. The photo at right, by Phil Lucas, is from Butler Cave in January. It is not as hairy as it looks! I have been wanting a new tractor for several years, one with greater loader capacity and a better gear range. This was finally acquired and I am just beginning to get used to it. I went to a canoe race for the first time in ages but not to paddle, just to watch and visit with old friends. The slalom Nationals were held on a man-made course on top of a mountain in western Maryland. It was an interesting experience. We have a wonderful young man working for us this year. He has helped on the building project but, mainly, he has taken care of routine lawn mowing and the like, freeing up some of my time for the project and for trips to caves, etc. There is much more about all of this on our web site: <http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/index.html>.



News from Char:

2007 was pretty much a lost cause as far as I was concerned. My main activity was seeing one doctor or another and getting tests and adding and subtracting medications. The diagnosis was *vertebral basilar insufficiency*, and what it amounts to is not enough blood flow to the brain. My memory, never good, flickers in and out. I have had a few TIAs, which manifest themselves in numbness in my hands and feet and sometimes parts of my face, plus inability to come up with the words I want, once to the point that I couldn't communicate. However, I don't hurt anywhere and, though I'm tired, I feel fairly good.

After I recovered from the stroke in November 2006 I got involved in physical therapy at the Wellness Center of the Bath County Hospital. They have a crackerjack physical therapist who worked on my balance and strength and did some magical thing to any nerves that were hurting. I was sorry when he announced that I was able to continue to improve on my own. He set me up with exercises to do at home and I even did them for quite a while.

Kathy has been after me for a long time about how bad my hearing is and I decided, since I was spending practically all my time in communion with the medical community, I might as well throw in an audiologist. I got my hearing aids in January and it is amazing how much difference they make!

I again went to the spring music retreat at Garth Newel in mid-March and played chamber music in a harp quintette and I played with the Allegheny Highlands Orchestra in Covington for their spring concert. However, I didn't play in the Fall concert because I was advised to get rid of anything that was stressful. I also dropped all the organizations I was active in. I simply couldn't remember what I was responsible for, when meetings and activities were, and was too tired to go anyway. This was amazingly hard to do, but is very rewarding now that I've accomplished it!

Since last spring I've been seeing a psychologist, who diagnosed me with depression and anxiety. It's been helpful to talk to him and he's had some suggestions for strategies to help with the missing memory. I'm no stranger to this malady, but he suggested some things I haven't tried. Our house remodeling is stress I can't eliminate, so it's good to have him around.

I'm really hopeful that I will be perking up over the holidays and greeting 2008 with renewed vigor and a functioning brain! Stay tuned!

Love to all,

