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»» Our house after recent snow.

Dear Friends and Family,

In 2009 we built a lot of fence, painted the house, tore up and re-graded the front lawn, and bought a new car and a new TV, along with all the usual projects like maple syrup and hay making. Char went to Minnesota to visit family and played in the Allegheny Highlands Orchestra, all the while recovering from her stroke. John went caving only a couple of times this year but worked on two projects at the caver's field house and went on a pseudo rock-climbing trip in the fall. On the down side, we suffered two deaths in the family. Buck, the more elderly of our two horses, had been suffering from Cushing's disease for some while. He finally succumbed in May. Then in August Duffy, our Scotch-Highland steer, passed away. He had been getting weaker and more arthritic all the time but it seemed chronic, not terminal. Both of these fellows have left empty spaces in our lives. For more on these and other things, read on, below. If that is not enough, there are more details and a lot of photos on our web site.

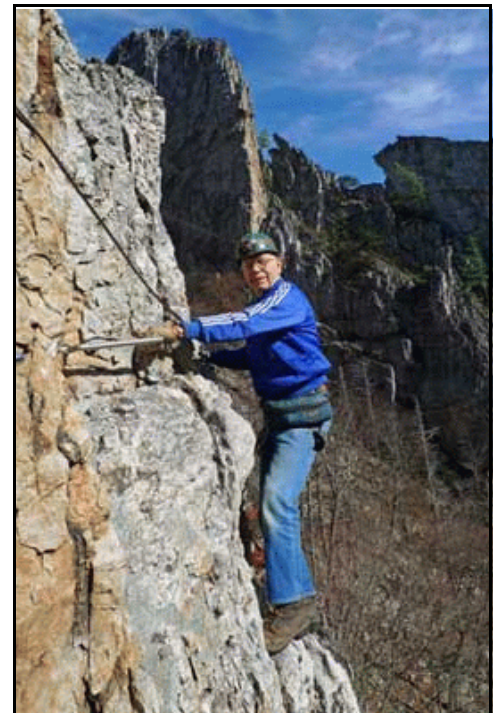
<http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/2009.html>

News from John:

My caving activities dropped off considerably, since we finished off the Water Sinks survey last year. I made one trip into Breathing Cave and one to the Water Sinks plus several digging expeditions in hopes of opening up new caves. In October I went "rock climbing" with a couple of caving buddies at the Nelson Rocks Preserve, in nearby West Virginia, photo at right. This is a *via ferrata* where ropes and other climbing equipment are not needed because you are continuously clipped into a system of fixed cables and bars. You get the climbing experience without significant danger and no real skill is required.

Char has been wanting a new car for awhile so in February we took the plunge. Another Subaru best fit our needs, this time a Forester. We considered an Outback but the Forester sits up a little higher and has more cargo capacity.

April brought nicer weather so it was time to attack the lawn problem. It sloped the wrong way, directing rain runoff back toward the house. I stripped off the topsoil, dug it down and re-graded it, replaced the topsoil and seeded it. It looks nice now and



water flows away as it should. Also in April, Shane and I spent two days at Kathy's in Roanoke, building fence for her dog, Reckless, so he can be outside safely and not get into the streets.

My farmhand, Shane Wiseman, left for college in August, so I had to hire a new helper. Chris Moore started work when school was out, so we had both of them for much of the summer. Our first major project was a big section of line fence on Stark Ridge. They painted the warehouse roof with minimal help from me, then all three of us tackled the house. We got all of it painted except the east end, which is scheduled for renovation work next summer. The photo on the front page shows the south and west sides.

News from Char:

2009 has been a bizarre year. I floated through the first half, either asleep or working on unscrambling my brain. At mid-point I went to Minnesota and spent six weeks with Stephanie. Both Julia and Kevin were home for the summer and Alta was home from his frequent travels and we had some high-quality time! I came home feeling wonderfully rested and clear headed. Because I felt so restored and there were so many things I wanted to do, I did not resume rehabilitation. As I look back to the summer it's hard to see what I did with the time, but I know I started playing my violin again and I did some basket making with a friend. In the fall I started rehearsing with the Allegheny Highlands Orchestra.

As time has gone along I have realized my mental functioning is like an electrical short – when I am rested and not stressed I can communicate fluently, but without notice words start escaping me and thoughts become delinquent. My hearing has become pretty bad (I wear two hearing aids) and that does not help matters. Not infrequently I discover I have missed the crux of some subject or misheard the content of someone's comment. I find this disconcerting, not to say maddening. I will have to upgrade my hearing aids as soon as I can bring myself to spend the (outrageous) price. But my memory and concentration are also features of my misunderstanding. I see I should have taken up where I left off in my Brain Injury Workbook last summer and have resolved to go back to therapy in January.

All this wailing is not to suggest that I'm in distress! Life is good – John and I both enjoy rude health on the whole and are blessed with a wonderful (if far away) family and close friends. It has taken me two days to write what should have taken ten minutes (okay, twenty) but I hope when next we correspond I will be functioning much better!

We enjoyed a couple of visits with Tom and Paulette Irwin during the year. We would love to see more of our friends so please plan to come see us if you can make your way into the mountains. Stop in for an hour or stay over in our cabin. We offer nature hikes, scenic drives, vast leisure, vigorous chores, whatever strikes your fancy! Have some good times together in the coming year! Make your days count but be sure you waste some, too! Good luck and may your financial news improve in 2010!

Love to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Char & John". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.