

# The Bird's Nest MMXXIII in Review

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Life is good here in Monmouth, Illinois, where Anne spends much of her time cooking, reading and twiddling doilies while Tom gardens, dabbles in professional activities and swims three miles a week at the local YMCA. 2023 was another year filled with family, friends and travel, often in combination.

We began the year by driving with Julia and Dorothy (8) to St. Paul to celebrate Epiphany with Richard and Jessica. Richard made the *galette des rois* ("Three King's Cake"). While in the Twin Cities we visited an exhibit entitled "Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the Uffizi" at the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The museum had somehow managed a loan of 45 pieces, quite the coup!

Tom spent much of the winter sorting the piles of papers, mementos, and other accumulations which over the past 30+ years had transformed our study into a storeroom. The task was quite a stroll down memory lane. Thank goodness for paper recycling! That space is now once again usable for its intended purpose and we now have a much better idea where things are. He has now moved on to performing the same task in his college office—a much more formidable undertaking!


Towards the end of March we were pleased to have Marie's daughters Sylvia (13) and Phoebe (8) spend a weekend with us for some crafting as well as making chrusciki, the Polish version of angel wings. Tom and Anne had, for the first time in memory, made a batch at Christmastime and had shared some with Marie's family. Phoebe was particularly taken with what she called "crispy chicks" and the girls really enjoyed learning how to roll them out and fold them properly. Tom's grandmother Sienkewicz would have been thrilled. We also took them out to visit the Mississippi, the grave of Norma Jean the elephant in Oquakwa and the Henderson Co. covered bridge.

Tom managed to get some onions and leeks planted before we left in early April for Salem, Virginia, where we had delayed celebrations of Julia's and Dorothy's birthdays, followed by Easter. Right after Easter Julia's husband Victor flew to Rome to work on his pottery project, so Tom left Anne in Virginia to help Julia get through the rest of her semester while he drove back to Monmouth to till and plant his garden. At the end of April he drove up to Rockford to celebrate his birthday with Marie and her girls. They spent the afternoon at the Burpee Museum of Natural History, which they had never visited before but highly recommend for its dinosaur and geological displays.

By early May, the garden was planted and Tom was back in Virginia in time to see his brother Eddie who was visiting sister MaryBeth at her house at Smith Mountain Lake, Virginia. Sister Toni was also able to drive up from her home in North Carolina, so the four Sienkewicz siblings gathered together for the first time in a number of years and had a great time boating on the lake, visiting the Roanoke star, and celebrating Tom's birthday.

On May 10<sup>th</sup> Tom and Anne flew from Dulles to Rome with Julia, Dorothy, and nine Roanoke students who had all signed up for Julia's Grand Tour travel course to Italy. Julia asked Tom to serve as an official chaperone for this trip and Anne to come along as a companion for Dorothy. How could we refuse such an offer, especially since Tom's cousin Barbara Esposito was also tagging along on the trip? So we spent the next two weeks experiencing a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Grand Tour of Rome, Naples, Pompeii, Florence and Venice. The Roanoke College students were great traveling companions. The trip included not only the obligatory visits to St. Peter's in Rome, the Duomo in Florence, and the Archaeological Museum in Naples, but also an incredible nighttime visit to the church of San Marco and a gondola ride in Venice, a pizza-making class in Florence and a concert of opera and traditional Italian songs in Rome. We also found time in Florence to visit friends Janet Smith and her husband Giovanni as well as the DiNoia family. After the Grand Tour, Julia, Dorothy, Barbara, Anne and Tom visited our cousins in Angri for a few days, followed by a trip to Capri. The boat ride around the island and the Blue Grotto were incredible.





Anne and Tom flew back to Dulles on May 31<sup>st</sup> and were delighted to have lunch with Jad Freyha (the Syrian student we hosted while he was at Monmouth College) and his parents before driving back to Monmouth. We were both very glad to be home, but especially Anne, who had been away since early April. We returned to find the garden flourishing, despite the risky early planting and our long absence. It was an incredibly good year for cherries, raspberries, zucchini, beets, basil, celeriac, and, especially peppers, but we did lose our strawberry crop which ripened while we were away.

Upon their return to the US, Julia and Dorothy spent much of the summer with us, first in Monmouth and later in Maine. While in Monmouth, Dorothy made cherry jelly with Tom and was also a great help in the garden. She especially enjoyed picking basil leaves for pesto (and then eating it). The last weekend in June Tom and Anne traveled to St. Louis to attend their first American Classical League Summer Institute since COVID. It was great to see old friends there even if events were interrupted by a violent rainstorm which forced participants to shelter in place for several hours. Upon returning to Monmouth, Anne and Tom were thrilled to have all three granddaughters visit for a few days. One highlight of this visit was having the girls make and decorate a cake to celebrate Marie's birthday.

By the end of July, we were at our cabin on Lake Damariscotta in Jefferson, Maine, with Julia and Dorothy. Our time in Maine was marked by many good times with Anne's brothers Jack and Carl, along with Jack's wife, Debbie, their sons Tim and Nick and Tim's daughter Livia. We also had good visits with Tom's college friend Paul Sullivan, his student Emma Vanderpool, and Anne's high school friends Linda Cunningham and Debbie DeGroff. There were also two wonderful days at the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay.

We drove home from Maine via Virginia, to bring Julia and Dorothy back to Salem, and were pleased that Tom's sister Toni drove up from North Carolina for a visit while we were there. Upon our return to Monmouth much of our time was devoted to the garden. Tom canned more than 100 qts of tomato sauce, thanks to several folks in town who shared their surplus tomatoes with him. Dorothy was actually in Monmouth for a week and helped can some of them while her mother was giving a paper in Naples, Italy. During this time Sylvia and Phoebe also joined us for two nights in a hotel in Mundelein. This hotel has a great pool where the girls enjoyed spending most of their time.

While Dorothy returned with her mother to Virginia, Tom and Anne drove to Lancaster, PA, for a reunion with two of Tom's K-8 classmates and their wives. Bob Tarantula, and his wife Carol were our hosts. Also, there was Dan Lally, who also went through high school with Tom, and his wife Zorina. Fortunately, all three wives were great sports to go along with their husbands' reminiscences. Sadly, Bob passed away suddenly at the end of Nov. and will be sorely missed.

When they got back to Monmouth, Tom and Anne hosted yet another one of Tom's school chums, Bob Ruggieri, and his wife Lori. Bob and Tom went through both high school and college together. We took them to see the locks and dams at the Mississippi, crossed that mighty river into Burlington (so they could add Iowa to their bucket list of states visited), and drove down to Nauvoo, Illinois, to visit the old Mormon settlement.

Anne and Tom spent the last two weeks in October with their friends Viv Edwards and Chris Morriss colleague Will Motley and to visit the Natural History Museum and the Botanical Garden, to Portsmouth to see the

in Reading, England. Anne and Viv mostly sat and chatted for those two weeks while Tom and Chris enjoyed almost daily swims. Tom also traveled solo to Oxford to have lunch with his

colleague Will Motley and to visit the Natural History Museum and the Botanical Garden, to Portsmouth to see the incredible Mary Rose Museum and to London to the Victoria and Albert Museum as well as a new museum of the Roman wall of ancient Londinium.

In November Sylvia and Phoebe spent another weekend in Monmouth, where making Welsh cakes and decorating a shared birthday cake for Anne and Sylvia were high priorities and lots of fun. Thanksgiving was spent in Virginia with Julia and her family. While there we also had lunch with Tom's sister Toni in Martinsville, VA. where we also visited the impressive Virginia Museum of Natural History. A quiet Christmas in Monmouth is planned.

