

Merry Christmas, 2020

Dear friends and family members,

We hope this [slightly late] letter finds you well and happy. We went from four of us living in a self-inflicted construction zone to The Kids getting their own place having done much of the work to make this old place nicer. This year, we made two versions of this letter: One is a two-pager for printing and mailing to some folks and the other has additional pages of photos and stories that will be in the emailed PDF and is available here http://www.diggles.com/xmas/xmas2020_Diggles.pdf

Our January get-away was to go to the Big Island of Hawai'i for a vacation. Kīlauea had been pouring lava out of the Lower East Rift zone much of 2018. The Hawaiian Volcano Observatory facility overlooking Halema'uma'u had to relocate down to Hilo and had just set up shop in the old Iron Works and we thought it would be interesting to visit there. Well, Hilo is on the windward side of the island so it rains a lot there. If you were to say "we were in Hilo and it rained a lot," people would yawn and think "what else is new?" Well, it didn't just rain a lot, record amounts of water came down and it made the front page of the newspaper in O'ahu. The road to the Iron Works was flooded, a southern road we tried to take back to Kona was flooded and we had to circle the island the other way just to get home, So, we went to see the volcano. Off to Volcano House for a meal and a view -- well a meal at least.



Kona coffee beans

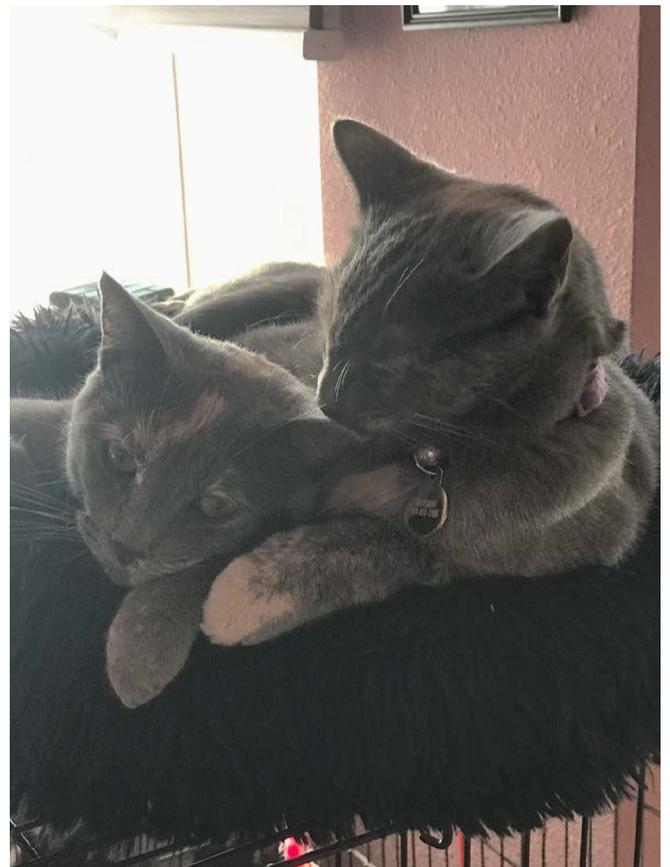


View of the volcano; this is as good as it got

A year ago, we took home a pair of kitten sisters, Cinnamon, Nutmeg and here we are a year later and the kittens are bigger and get into bigger trouble on a regular basis.



*You'll count three cats here if you can see Mocha
Cinna and Meggie*



The Spice Girls

In March we locked down with the rest of the world so we set this house up to be a work-at-home and play-at-home place. Deanna does her UCSF job from her laptop upstairs with the cats and I do my USGS job from my laptop downstairs with the dogs.

We built Deanna a full-featured workspace with a second monitor, gigabit broadband, a new chair and table, and a custom cover to keep the cats from pushing stuff down behind the old desk.



Cut, sanded, stained, and varnished



New cat-proof desk top snugged up against the wall

In September, we had enough of our second failed attempt and having a nice sanded floor downstairs. So, this third attempt included replacing damaged floorboards, adding a medium-dark stain, and using oil-based varnish. It has been amazing so far with dogs trying to scratch it and it still looks good.



First, all of the furniture had to be moved into a Pod



Floor to be sanded



Finished floor

Have a safe and wonderful Christmas and New Year,
--Michael, Deanna, Maurie, and Will, Mocha, Rajah,
Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Mattie, Bear, and Leia

Visit
http://www.diggles.com/xmas/xmas2020_Diggles.pdf
for a few dozen more photos of other adventures.

For the email and Web version, here are images from the Year In Review pretty much from beginning to end.



Sunset on the northern Kona Coast



*Mauna Kea with snow on the 13,803-foot summit.
I took this image from sea level.*

Back home, fifteen years of rain pelting the half-height door to the pantry under the stairwell had pretty much done the door in. I had a new one made at Ashby Lumber, found the old can of paint (still good), inlaid hinges and a lock and I'll try to keep it painted on a more regular basis



Before



After

One more improvement on the Airstream before towing it to Los Angeles to visit my sister, Linda, and many other friends. Normally, Deanna and I make a week of it but Cinna got sick and had to go to the Kittie ER and Mama needed to get back to her baby cat.



This new baseboard is stained and varnished oak with round-head brass fasteners. More to come along the bedroom wall.

One stop in LA while I was there solo was to visit Cal State Northridge and watch the Geography students working with an Uncrewed Aerial Vehicle (UAV). They have a heat-sensor camera and a differential GPS. They were training to go to Hot Creek in Long Valley Caldera and run a heat profile. The equipment memorizes the exact route as they grid the study area and it can re-fly with great accuracy perhaps a month later; they can make as many slices of time as they like to study changes.



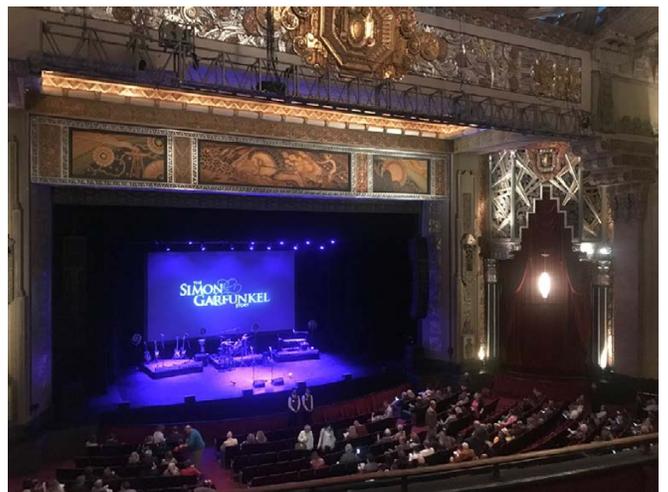
Amalie's students

It was a hop, skip, and a jump from here out to Caltech to the USGS offices in Pasadena.



I had lunches, dinners, went to a lecture, had some discussions about peer review, and hauled some dead computers back to Menlo Park

The birthday event was going to a retrospective on Simon & Garfunkel with Linda and Norm.



The Simon & Garfunkel Story is in Los Angeles at Pantages Theatre

More Airstream work; the power jack ground to a halt so I had a new one waiting at home when I got back from LA. I left the trailer in the driveway where I could get at it easily.



The old one didn't want to come off without some sawing. I bought a new floor jack to make this job easier



The new one is smooth, powerful, and has a nice long reach.

Every March for a couple of decades, my friend George has a Birthday bicycle ride. We used to go over the hill to Pescadero but are now quite happy running up to the Pulgas Water Temple on Cañada Road



Here the group is half way; ready to go back for beers and birthday cake.

Bear still acts a lot like a puppy sometimes so Will grabs him and picks him up to show him what that's like.



Bear has trepidations about this

A group of us gathered for lunch at The Dutch Goose most Thursdays for beers and burgers. Warren commonly will bring a classic publication to share. This is Alexander von Humboldt's map of the the West Coast



Warren and Ted with Humboldt's map

Back on Irwin Court, Deanna's potting table had seen better days; it was old it came with the house over 20 years ago. So we got recycled lumber from Urban Ore in Berkeley, rototilled the ground there and on past the Airstream, and set to work.



Use solid-core doors for the lower shelf and the working surface



The frame is all leveled and fastened with stainless-steel lag bolts



copper top. I later fastened it with bronze boat nails and calked it

I'm sad that we lost two of our Tribal Elders early in the year. Sheafe Ewing and Bobby Faulkner were both in their late 80s and I would have loved to have them here forever. Bob's mom and my mom were sisters. We think that at some point, perhaps when they were girls in Indiana, each sister was given a wicker-bottomed chair. Bob had Mary Lou's and I have Kathryn's. Both needed re-caning (mine 20 years ago) and now they are sitting at my house all rebuilt.



Kate's chair



Lou's chair at the shop

Being here at home all these hours and days, Deanna has added plants on the balcony, the front and back yards, the windows inside (with grow lights), and

the greenhouse window in the kitchen. Here is her new pot tower; we added earthquake proofing and I get to eat strawberries from it now that it has taken off.



Waters from the top down. Here before adding soil.



Deanna's pot tower on Christmas Eve

For the second year in a row, we had a hummingbird nest in the tree between our house and

Kim's next door. We can view this domestic scene from our windows and not be intrusive. I used a 500-mm lens for this shot but she knew I was there, I'll bet.



Hummer on its nest

Deanna decided to refinish much of the guest (now kittens') bathroom since the lockdown had just begun and we had time here at home. She (OK, I helped) painted the walls and ceiling, we replaced the cabinet beside the sink, and put in new hinges and pulls on the cabinets.



This cabinet mostly contains kitten supplies

Last year, as you may recall, Will built us fences and gates in the back yard. The fenceposts were all

plenty tall but now that the job is done, I trimmed them all down to size, sealed the end grain, and mounted solar LED copper lamps on each one. It makes the yard look nicer and also casts some minimal light on the walkways.



I think we added about 20 of these in all.

The June workshop "adventure" was when poor Will used my air compressor to paint his car. It turns out that the air that comes out of that thing has a lot of moisture in it. The paintjob looked pretty awful with the paint/water mixture. It follows that all of the other times I used that compressor, I was pumping wet air -- inflating tires, using my little sandblaster... So I bought and installed a fancy two-stage filter for the machine (better late than never). Now, amazingly, the sand in the sandblaster doesn't glob up in the jet.



I also got a large jug of refill for the chambers.

I also got some harder grit for sandblasting.



This stuff is hard, sharp, and dust-free



This little device will do a patio chair or a bicycle part but is way too small to do a car.

So, when you are a hammer, all problems look like nails. Deanna has this garden art that was rusting on the wall in the back yard. So, I sandblasted and sealed all ten or so pieces.



Deana bought these as a craft sale a few years ago.

I admit that years ago I was adamant: No TV in the bedroom. Well, when we got a bigger TV downstairs, guess where the old one went? Yup, and later, even a bigger one downstairs and the previous big one is now upstairs. I was adamant: No TV visible from the bed. Well, when we spend so much time downstairs in the house these days, we just want to spend the rest of the evening upstairs. Now we have a pull-down projection screen and a projector bolted to the ceiling.



It has a holster to hold the Apple TV 4K HDR 64GB. It connects wirelessly to our Bose SooundTouch 30 for awesome sound

Well, back to copper sheet metal. As long as I was cutting and trimming copper for the potting table, Deanna wanted a copper backsplash for the kitchen counter instead of just the painted wallboard back there. There are, of course, three outlets for which I needed cutouts. That's why there are tape measures and carpenters squares.



Product placement; DeWalt blade on my Gerber knife.

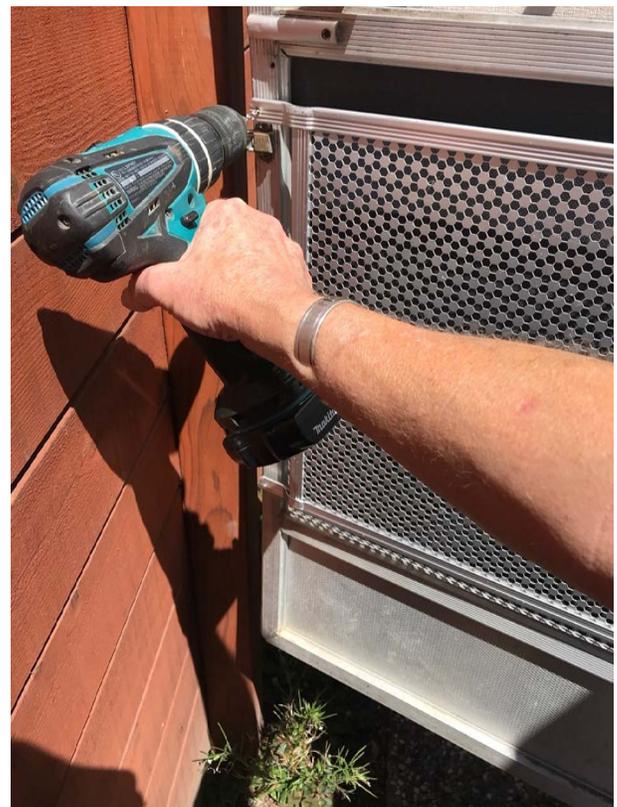


Ready to but all the kitchen gadgets back.

Another Airstream story: The dogs love their Airstream. Mattie mostly camps out under the kitchen table and Bear in front of the fridge. But those dogs don't like to let me out of their sight. The screen door had a fairly nice little protector for the screen -- fairly nice if your dogs are smaller and less determined than ours.



I have a roll of that screen material, some rubber beading, and a roller in the garage as part of my normal stock on hand.

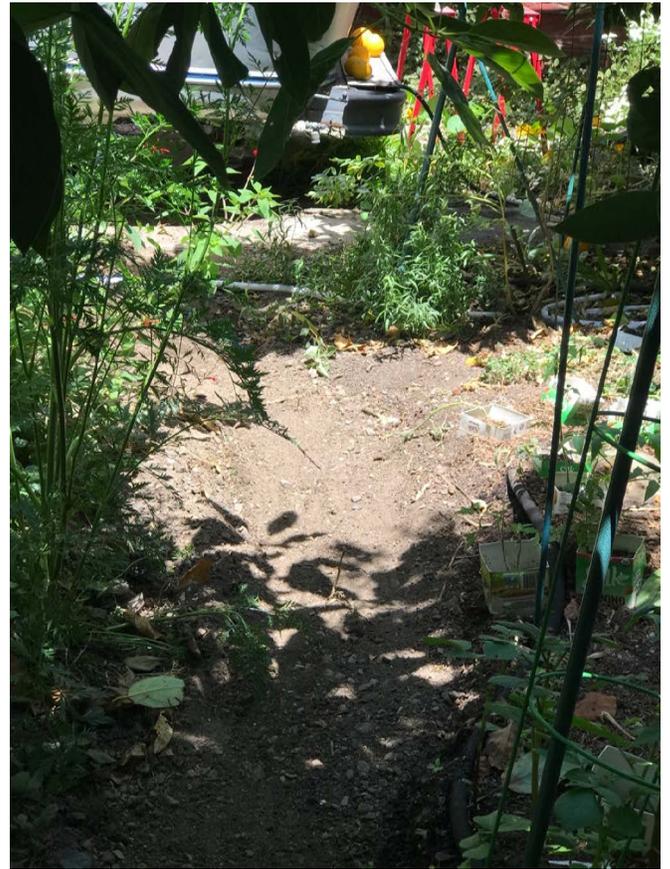


It turns out other trailer owners have big dogs also; I found this larger one and it fit just fine with only two additional holes for stainless fasteners.

There were three parts to tilling the ground for under the potting table. There was also the walkway beside the Airstream and the little walkway through the tomato garden.



Leveled, tamped, and filled with sand and "blue fine."



Had to bury some drip lines before adding stones here.



Potting soil between stones for dichondra.



We made these stepping stones in 2002 as a children project. Each has fun items in the cement.

I had stuff break and Will had stuff break.



I upgraded the fountain to have an external pump so when it fails next time, I don't have to empty out all of the stones to get at a submersible pump.



Will had to pull the brake rotors off of Maurie's 4Runner but it has all new discs and pads now. This made the recycling bin kinda heavy but there is a lot less metal in a bin full of tin cans than in these things.

A couple more Airstream stories. Since Will built the 18-foot electric gate for Button, the Airstream, last year, we have been moving it in and out of the yard with this ancient motor dolly that has no brake and gets forward and reverse mixed up. Well, Deanna and I discovered these really nice motor dollies. It uses a big battery-powered drill for the motor, has a brake, has a really low gear as a choice, and attaches to the ball instead of the jack. It'll make moving that trailer in and out much easier.



It also has two wheels so it might not slip as much on the unpaved part of the driveway.

Back to Button. The bottom of the coat closet has the fender well eating up a large area. Deanna had me cut and fit a new plywood shelf that sits on top of the fender well and gives us a nice flat useful space back there.



Nice and square; too bad the trailer isn't that square.



Even stained and varnished to match the trailer where nobody can see it. But we know it's there.

The fires in August and September were really bad for many people besides all of us having smokey air. I have MERV-13 filters and just running the fan alone filters every cubic meter of air in the house in minutes and it is nicer in here.

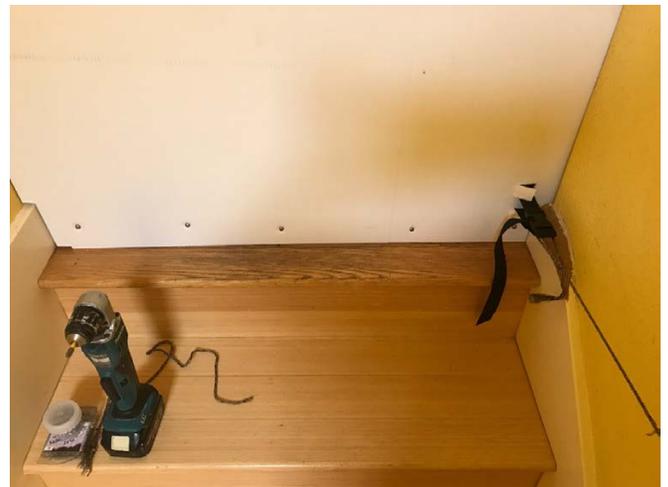


This shot was taken at mid-day

The main cover story for this Christmas letter was the refinishing of the floors. Besides those three images, here are some more.



That 20-foot Pod was a trick to get into the driveway. I snagged the three parking places on the street that the driver needed empty so he could make the turn. I moved the cars, he delivered the big box, and came back two weeks later.



A problem we had to solve was how to outsmart the cats (big problem) and keep them upstairs while the varnish was wet downstairs. This plastic "door" worked pretty well.



A key part of this being a better job than last time was replacing substandard boards that we put in 15 years ago. Fixed now; better late than never.



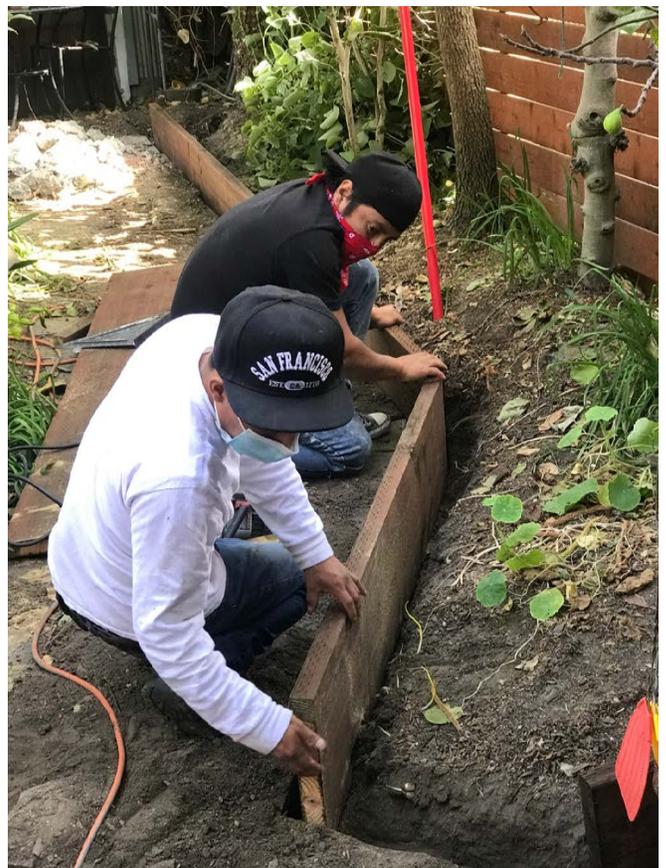
Another problem to solve was getting the dogs from the Airstream back up the freshly varnished stairs into the bedroom for the night. Deanna just stayed upstairs all day working at UCSF but one Friday night, before the varnish had set but after she was off work, I had to deliver some whiskey via a rope and basket.

There is a long flowerbed between the fence and the walkway and dirt slides both directions where it doesn't belong. So, we had a fellow who has helped us many

times over the years dig two long ditches and put in several tens of feet of rim. Half a yard of soil later, and it's looking pretty nice. It'll be lots of fun this Spring.



Part of digging the ditch was pulling out an old clothesline pole that was well anchored.



Nice mitered joints.



This yard is looking more civilized all the time.

Hallowe'en was still fun on Irwin Court. People stayed six or eight feet away and had good masks; also, good costumes. That Darth guy by the pickup is me



That Darth guy by the pickup is me



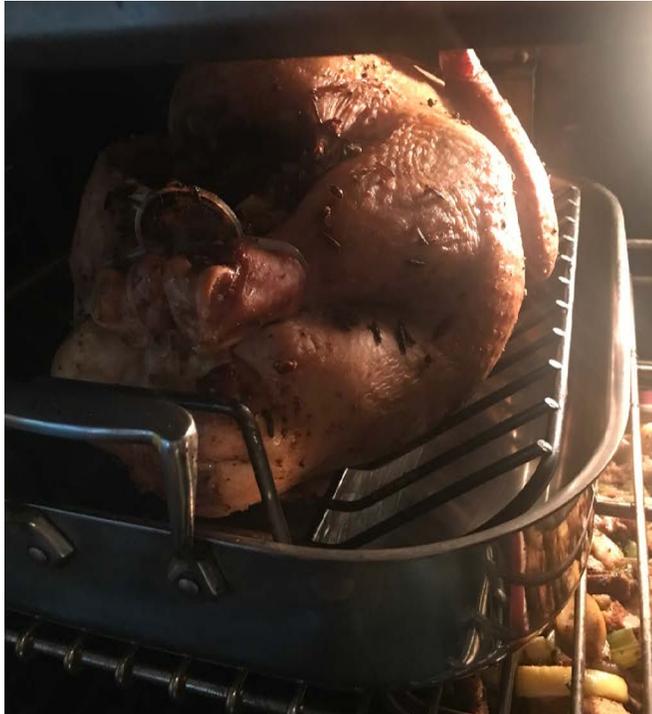
Deanna in her Mad-Hatter hat. She also had the "10/6 label for 10 shillings and 6 pence

It's always a surprise to see what new item is running scarce in this Pandemic. A surprise, but it makes sense with everybody living in their yards so much, is the run on patio heaters. Rather than one of those with a sort of lampshade on top to reflect heat down, we went for the kind with a long Pyrex tube for a four-foot flame.



Just in time for cooking Thanksgiving dinner outside

Thanksgiving was quite a production. Deanna cooked two turkeys with different brines, different stuffings, and different stoves. We delivered two dinners to two family households: One to Susan and Wayne and one to Maurie and Will. Each delivery was a half a turkey plus all the trimmings. That still left a half a turkey for us and half for leftovers for Maurie and Will as well as us.



This is the one from the oven inside.



This is the one from the spit on the barbeque outside.

The shortest day of the year and the longest night was at Winter Solstice on Dec. 21. It also was when Saturn came close to Jupiter. This happens about every 20 years but during the one a few days ago, they were closer than they have been since 1623.



Great conjunction of 2020

I was surprised to see my own photos showing so many different mini-events in this lockdown year. Making the Christmas letter is always a surprise for our house and here it is for you to view from your house. I'd be glad for less drama and a joyous 2021 for all of us. Stay safe!