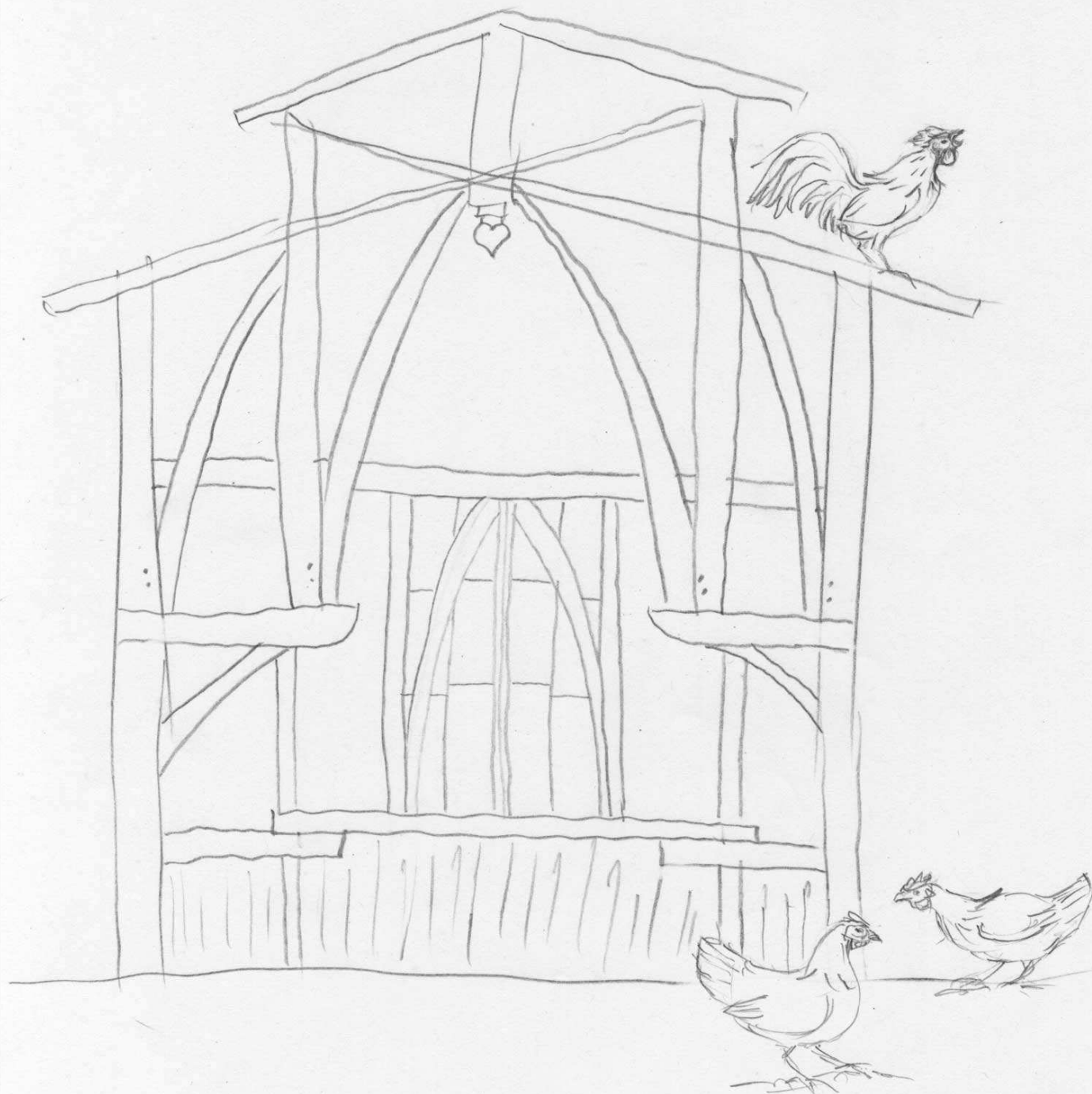


Merry Christmas, Happy New Year,
and may all your dreams
come true!



WE HAVEN'T SENT OUT CARDS FOR A FEW YEARS, SO THERE'S A LOT TO CATCH UP ON. It's been quite a stream of years. After retirement in '96 Martha plunged into... life in the slow lane. Meticulous stonework in the garden and at the foot of the tower steps, each stone so well "planted" it looks as if it's always been there. Cultivation of a backyard garden in Clarkston with so many indigenous species that one day, out of curiosity, she counted how many. There were 72. Concoction of marvelous meals so tasty, nutritious and such a delight for the eye that some days our tummies and taste buds feel they are going to live forever.

Great sadness has visited a time or two. One year our new neighbors, from Bangladesh, cut down all their trees when they moved in. Sigh. The sensitive tree cutters tramped over Martha's prize specimen, a Jack-in-the-pulpit, so badly it didn't come up for two years. And when it did, its usual 18" beard was nowhere to be seen. Sigh. The end result is the garden no longer has western shade, so it's heated up and drier. Much drier. But dedicated gardeners never rest. Up went a Carolina silverbell, a Canadian chokecherry, a volunteer redbud, and a row of camellias to bring some of the shade and moisture back. The favored microclimate returned slightly, to the great pleasure of our polypody and autumn ferns. Their good friends, the cinnamon and lady ferns, didn't do as well. They died after the trees were cut down and never returned.

Great joy has come our way too. A few times a year in the warmer months our neighbors across the street throw a birthday party on their front lawn. Up go the decorations. In stream the cars and children. The climax comes when one of the men hoists up a piñata and a dozen children (youngest first) take turns with blindfold and stick, while festive, bouncy Latino music takes us south of the border. The master of ceremonies jerks the rope up and down at just the right time, so the swinging colorful donkey, bird, or fish doesn't get hit too often too early, especially since the older the child the better they are at peaking through the blindfold. Eventually, after a hundred misses and a thousand laughs, a few whacks are allowed to hit home and down it comes. When it does, it's a signal for the kids to shout and pile on the piñata en masse, as a melee of hands grabs for the candy and trinkets inside and spilling out on the ground.

Episodes like these are enough to warm our hearts for years, as we savor the fact that again and again, ethnic neighborhoods are so full of the little things that make life so special.

In '01 Jack went full time on the sustainability project. Ending a career of business consulting, he awoke to the fact that the biggest, most challenging problems of business pale in comparison to the difficulty and importance of the global environmental sustainability problem. If it's not solved then eventually no other problems are going to matter. So like Martha, he plunged into... life in the analyst lane.

The longer he looked at the problem, the bleaker things looked. Countless others had tried to crack this tough nut. None had more than scratched the surface. After a few educational years of false starts and blind leads, a strategy emerged that may eventually allow the problem to be proactively solved. The strategy involves stepping back, looking at the meta-problem, and asking a totally new question: “Why, despite over 30 years of prodigious effort, has the human system failed to solve the environmental sustainability problem?” This has led to a novel approach to solving the problem that centers on a principle that’s old hat to the business world and science, but has not yet come to public activism: the more difficult the problem, the better the process used to solve it must be. This led to perfecting the System Improvement Process and applying it.

Lo and behold, a chink in the armor of the problem has opened up. Root causes that have never been indentified have been found. Even better, high leverage points (for resolving the root causes) that have never been pushed on have been pinpointed in the human system. All this has been expressed in simulation models that have caught a few eyes. Thus it was that the first bud in Jack’s analytical garden bloomed in June of ’09, when a paper describing these subversive ideas was accepted by the System Dynamics Review. Suddenly Jack, who only has a BS in systems engineering, was getting emails saying “Congratulations Dr. Harich.” ☺

The big story of ’08 was when Martha and Jack took a day and a half of training with the Obama campaign and then went out to personally register about 500 new voters. For a few intense months we became part of a social phenomenon and a historic turning point. The seeds of social system evolution in a positive direction in the US, and perhaps the world, have been sown. Stopped, at least momentarily, is movement in the other direction.

Events like these are enough to warm our hearts for years, as we savor the fact that again and again, human behavior is so full of the little things that make life so marvelous. Even as the aches and pains of old age begin to come our way, the glass still looks half full.

But that’s not all. In mid ’09 another bona fide miracle occurred. The Tower started growing again. Jack is back at work on it and vows to keep at it until we move in. To enhance the probability of this pleasant moment coming to pass, we will be throwing a Back to Building Party in the spring. Thus this is not only a Christmas card. It’s your early invite to come, eat, sip, look around, chat and be merry, on a day the astrologers have not yet foretold.

Warm wishes and we hope you are doing as well as we are,

Martha and Jack Harich
December 23, 2009