



Livin' Like Family

It all began 15 years ago when Lou and Molly Houck, members of St. Boniface, Comfort, started thinking about land in the Hill Country for their eventual retirement. Thinking about turned into buying 11 acres outside Boerne and, well, since they had the land with a house on it they decided to move in before retirement. It was a lovely spot, once owned by a rancher, with some barns and out buildings dating from the late 1800s.



Nana Patti and four-year-old Audie enjoying the afternoon.

Then Lou and Molly's daughter, Beth Hawkins, and her husband moved a small house onto the property. "We were going to buy our own

land eventually and move our house onto it," explains Beth, a member of St. Mark's, San Antonio.

They eventually did move the house – to the other side of Lou and Molly's property. Then along came baby Audie – now four – and then baby Grey – now three months – and suddenly there were three generations living on the property.

This spring, the family made it four generations when Molly's mother, Patti Young, longtime member of St. Mark's, built a house within shouting distance and moved to the country. And 12 miles down the road – just a stone's throw in country terms – lives Lou and Molly's other child, Ben, with his wife and two children.

"I had great reservations about making this move," admits Patti, who left a lovely condo in the city. "Lou and Molly had been after me for years but I had a million reasons why

not to move. Friends in the city, my involvement at St. Mark's (where she is a devoted choir member). I didn't want to be a burden to my kids. I resisted and resisted, then

one day I woke up and said, 'Of course. Why not?'"

The family works together some, leaves each other alone some. Together they built Patti's house, starting with some beams that had come from an old farmhouse in New York. The wonderful soaring ceilings and high windows give Patti a bird's-eye view, literally. "I sit here and can watch the birds fly through the sky," she says.

When Beth and her husband, Aaron, moved their little house to the "other side of the property" they also added a sure-enough log cabin that was built barn-raising style. They ordered the logs and other parts that came numbered, and assembled the entire house in less than a day with the help of neighbors and church friends.

"We didn't start out for this to be a permanent arrangement," says Beth. "But we all enjoy it so much . . ." For Patti, of course, having grandchildren and great-grandchildren within dropping-in distance is the best part. "Both of my grandmothers died when I was very young," she says. "I was determined to have a relationship with my own grandchildren. And now with their babies, too."

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Culturas

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Even for Molly, who admits to needing a certain amount of “alone time,” the four-family lifestyle works just fine. “We help each other, but we don’t get in each other’s way.” Lou and Molly babysit Beth and Aaron’s children; Beth and Aaron feed Lou and Molly’s

animals when the latter are away.

Molly says she was somewhat concerned before her mother moved out there. “I was afraid she wouldn’t enjoy it, that she would miss her friends,” she says. But Patti continues to see her friends, to sing in the choir

at St. Mark’s every Sunday, to enjoy the St. Mark’s concert series. Only now at the end of the day, when crickets chirp Hill Country lullabies and one can actually see the stars in the sky, she comes home to family. **t**

Coming of Age in Two Cultures

The young woman, dressed in a resplendent gown and surrounded by a court of honor, stands with her parents at the altar to receive the blessings of her parents and of God. Today she is 15 years old, an age at which she leaves her childhood behind and becomes a young woman. That the blessings take place in the church is right and fitting; that

they take place in an Episcopal Church in a small town in south central Texas is part of what it means to be the church in this community.

The next day the same young woman kneels before the bishop at the same altar to confirm her intent to follow Christ as her Lord and Savior. This also is part of what it means to be the church in this community.

Jessica Rangel of Emmanuel Church in Lockhart celebrated her Quince Años and her confirmation on the same weekend in September, both of which signified her coming of age.

The Quince Años ceremony has long been a marker in the Latino culture; “In the ceremony, Jessica left her childhood behind and became a young lady before God,” explains her mother, Julie Rangel. “She is blessed by the church and by her parents to grow in God. She is now

responsible for her own decisions.” Her confirmation, says Julie, signified Jessica’s acceptance of her own spiritual walk. “She knows that God is the only way and that God will be with her in all her ups and downs of life.”

In the parents’ blessing of the young woman, they ask God to fill her with courage, wisdom, and joy; Christ to be her friend and her defense; and the Holy Spirit to guide her in truth and peace.

Likewise, the service of Confirmation asks God to defend, sustain, and empower the confirmand “all the days of her life.”

While many girls today are choosing to forego the traditional church service of the Quince Años in favor of an elaborate party, Julie Rangel is pleased her daughter chose to bring herself before God. “It meant a lot for her to stand before God,” says Julie, “and know he is always with her and for her faith to grow.” **t**



Jessica (in blue) and her court.

Chuck Shamel's Magnificent Whirling Machine

You can see it from the highway – a tall, skinny, pole with three arms at the top continuously circling like a prop-driven airplane without the body just getting ready to take off. While it sits there spinning in the wind, the price of electricity at the home of Chuck and Betty Shamel just outside Rockport continues to fall. The wind turbine went up in early April, and the Shamels are already recouping some of their \$15,000 investment.

The average home, reports the American Wind Energy Association, uses about 780 kilowatt-hours of electricity a month; Shamel's wind turbine generates 900 kWh in a good month. When the turbine produces more than is needed at the Shamel home, the rest is sold back to the utility company. Overall, the Shamels are saving about \$85 a month on their electricity bill.

But it's not just money that motivated Chuck and Betty,

who are members of All Saints Episcopal Church in Corpus Christi. Chuck is a retired English teacher, and while he does not describe himself as a die-hard environmentalist, he had always been a naturalist and outdoorsman and practices conservation of resources as much as he can. "Everyone should get a share of the sun and the wind," he says. Betty is a potter and artist and joins Chuck in believing that "We all have so much, and all we want is more. We are just trying to avoid conspicuous consumption, to leave a little health and beauty for the next generation."

Part of Betty's contribution is to use nothing but cloth napkins at home. "When my aunt died, she had four drawers of cloth napkins," she says. "So we women divided them up. And no, I don't iron them."

Home, by the way, is also atypical – a dome in the woods, as the Shamels describe it. Constructed as a geodesic dome, the house resembles a large igloo. Domes require

about 40 percent less material than conventional construction to enclose the same amount of space and



are less expensive to heat and cool. The Shamel's two-story house has three bedrooms and rises to about 22 feet at its mid-point. Walls are on five-foot risers, meaning the slope begins at five feet from the floor. Fans throughout help to keep the air circulating.

Chuck designed the home, but a quick search of the Internet produces many companies that sell kits for do-it-yourselfers.

Short of putting up a dome house and installing a wind turbine, what can the average city-dweller do to help the environment? "Recycle, re-use, resist," says Betty Shamel.

On her refrigerator is a magnet listing 10 Things You Can Do to Fight Global Warming: run your dishwasher only when full; adjust your thermostat (up in summer, down in winter); take the bus, ride your bike, walk . . ."

Or contact Chuck Shamel at chuckshamel@clearwire.net to learn more about all of the above. **t**

The dome in the woods.

