

# The Bird's Nest MMXXIV in Review

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It came as no surprise to us that, as retirees, we can summarize 2024 with the same opening paragraph with which we began our end-of-year letter in 2023:

"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."

Having said that, however, we do have two pieces of news to report, one happy and one sad.

The good news is that Richard and Jess are expecting a child in February. They have already announced that the baby is a boy and that he will be named after two of his forebearers: Edmund (after Tom's dad) and Virgil (after Jessica's maternal grandfather). Needless to say, both the Sienkewicz and Zaiken families are pleased with the news and the names and are looking forward eagerly to the arrival of little Edmund Virgil in 2025.

On a much sadder note, we must report that Anne's brother Carl died unexpectedly on October 25<sup>th</sup>. Since his retirement from Rockport Marine last February Carl suffered from various mysterious ailments for which brother Jack (retired MD) took him for many medical consultations with no clear diagnosis, but his sudden death still shocked us all. Richard kindly drove his grieving mother back to Maine for a memorial service. Carl's ashes will be buried next to his parents on North Haven sometime next summer. If you are interested in knowing the interment date, please contact us.


Julia and Dorothy spent the spring semester with us in Monmouth while Julia, on sabbatical, worked on her next book (which she hopes to finish this spring). Victor, meanwhile, teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. It was wonderful to have Julia and Dorothy with us. Dorothy took swimming lessons at the Y and had piano lessons with Nancy St. Ledger. She also helped Tom a lot in the garden and Anne in the kitchen. Tom took cat-crazed Dorothy several times to visit the local animal shelter and the inevitable result was her adoption of her "dream kitten" named Toby, who has become an important member of the Sienkewicz-Martinez family.

At the end of March our family gathered in Chicagoland to celebrate Dorothy's 9<sup>th</sup> birthday followed by Easter. The festivities centered around a hotel near Marie's home in Mundelein. Richard and Jess drove down from St. Paul and a special addition was Tom's sister Toni, who flew in from her home in North Carolina. A great time was had by all. Especially noteworthy were a raucous Easter egg hunt at the hotel as well as meals at a Jewish deli favored by Jess's family on their visits to Chicagoland, at Marie's favorite French bistro in Mundelein, and at an exotic Near Eastern restaurant also in Mundelein.

In late May we hosted a "*Festschrift* Reveal Party" for Tom's Monmouth colleague Bill Urban. Because Bill had been such a good friend and major support throughout Tom's career at the college, Tom is spear-heading the publication of a collection of academic essays in Bill's honor by some of his many former students, colleagues and friends. The volume will hopefully appear in print sometime in 2025.

Since Gareth Cordery, the son of Monmouth College colleagues, was getting married in Burlington, Vermont, in early June we decided to fly to Montreal and spend a few days visiting that city before driving down into Vermont for the wedding. We were especially impressed with the Japanese and Chinese gardens in the Montreal Botanical Gardens and with the Montreal Museum of Archaeology, which is built over the remains of the earliest European settlement and which we highly recommend. The Cordery wedding took place





in Trinity Episcopal Church, a beautiful 19<sup>th</sup>-century building in Shelburne followed by a reception on the “Spirit of Ethan Allen,” a cruise ship on Lake Champlain. All in all, a lovely and memorable affair and we wish Gareth and his bride Sophie a wonderful life together. Following the wedding we drove back into Canada and spent a few more days touring the province’s Eastern Townships. As fans of Louise Penny’s Chief Inspector Gamache mystery series set in the fictional village of Three Pines somewhere in the Eastern Townships, we were pleased to visit Knowlton which may have served as Penny’s inspiration. We also attended a beautiful Vespers service at the Abbey of St-Benoit-du-Lac and enjoyed a visit to the Lac-Brume Museum with its excellent World War I exhibit and to Magog on Lake Memphremagog with its sea monster called Memphré before returning to Montreal for our flight back to the USA.

In mid-July we headed back East for our annual stay at the camp in Jefferson, Maine, where we spent a lot of time swimming, enjoying sunsets over Lake Damariscotta, and spending quality time with Anne’s brothers Jack and Carl, as well as Jack’s family. There were also pleasant visits with Anne’s high school friends, Linda Cunningham and Debbie DeGroff and her husband George, in addition to Anne’s almost annual reunion with the Waldoboro High School Class of 1968. We also traveled to North Haven for the interment service for Anne’s first cousin Tina Waterman Southard. While the occasion was not a happy one, it was a special time to visit with Anne’s family on the island, especially her Uncle Toots and his wife Aunt Mary (Tina’s parents), as well as many other relatives and friends.

Since Julia spent several weeks in July doing research at the Boston Athenaeum, Tom managed not only to tour the Athenaeum himself but also to take Dorothy to the impressive New England Aquarium. He also spent a pleasant afternoon visiting his college roommate Ed Vodoklys, now living in the Jesuit Retirement Home in Weston. In August Tom and Julia found time to visit the Wadsworth-Longfellow House in Portland while on the way to drop Tom off at the airport for a flight to Memphis. This trip was occasioned by another wedding, that of Tim Morris, one of Tom’s Monmouth students. The wedding gave him a chance to spend some time not only with Tim and his lovely wife Madeline, but also with several other former students, including Emma Vanderpool and Nick Mainz. He also spent several days touring Memphis. Upon returning to Portland, Tom took Anne to visit Portland Head Light, which, believe it or not, neither of them had ever visited in all their time in Maine. Afterwards they had a pleasant dinner with Paul Sullivan, another of Tom’s Holy Cross friends.

We returned to Monmouth later in August to find the most prolific vegetable garden we have ever had. Tom canned a record number of quarts of tomato sauce and ate tomato sandwiches well into November. We were pressed to find ways to use or preserve the many pounds of sweet and hot peppers we harvested this year but managed to do so. Not to mention good crops of black raspberries, cherries, pears, basil, lettuce and daikon (Japanese radish). The only disappointments were the beans which produced hardly at all and the eggplant which were almost all chewed up by raccoons, two of which Tom managed to trap and to transport out into the countryside.

Throughout the year we enjoyed seeing Marie and her daughters, Sylvia (14!) and Phoebe (9) often, either in Mundelein or in Monmouth for occasions including birthdays, a nature program in Rockford, a concert for Phoebe’s Red Rose Children’s Choir of Lake County, and a Brookfield Zoo trip.

Late October and early November, of course, was a sad time because of Carl’s death so we have made a special point of spending time with family for the holidays. In late November we drove out to North Carolina for a pre-Thanksgiving gathering of the Sienkewicz clan to celebrate the retirements of Tom’s siblings Toni and Eddie. Also in attendance were Tom’s nieces Tracy and Theresa, Theresa’s family, and Tom’s nephew Roy and his husband Mike. It was an additional bonus to spend time with both his sisters, Toni and MaryBeth, each of whom had moved into a new home. From there we drove to Virginia to spend Thanksgiving with Julia and her family and were joined there by Anne’s brother Jack, his wife Debbie, son Tim and granddaughter Livia.

We look forward to more quality family time in the remaining weeks of 2024 and in the new year.



**BEST WISHES FOR A HAPPY 2025 FROM TOM AND ANNE SIENKEWICZ**