



## BESS NEWS 2025

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Arkansas! We can't believe the end of 2025 is here already! This was a very full year for us so hang on...it's a wild ride!

### LOSING ZOE

Every morning at 5 am and evening at 5 pm, we feed the cats. This is so they come in routinely from wherever they are hunting. The day of our 21st wedding anniversary, January 3, I had to work. So we were just doing the daily routine but this time, the cats did not come in. I called for them and waited to hear and thought I heard a lone meow but they did not come. I had to leave for work but Shawn was home and would continue to check on them. My stomach hurt as I drove out the driveway and as I turned onto the asphalt road, I found what I never



wanted to see; our little Zoe had been hit by a vehicle during the night. I pulled off the road into our neighbor's driveway and went out to get her but I just moved her off the road so Shawn could get her once the sun came up. It was a terrible moment and a terrible day. I also believe Oliver was over in the woods watching and once he saw I had Zoe, he came up for breakfast. That poor boy was out there all night watching his sister; such a good boy. He was the lone meow I heard. Shawn buried Zoe on the hill and we marked her grave with stones. I planted daffodils that will come up each spring and remind us how we loved our girl. We still feel so sad and have not found another mate for lonely Oliver yet.



### PROJECTS

**IRRIGATION:** We ran almost 2500 feet of 1 inch poly irrigation throughout the property so dry times are not so difficult. Clay and rocks made it hard but with some help from a friend, and a trencher Shawn rented, we have all of it done! However, are still collecting rocks! It was fabulous having irrigation this year!

**NEW RAISED GARDEN BED:** The beginning of a bigger venture, we began replacing the garden bed areas. We started in the hoop house since that is a year around bed and plan to extend a similar system to other areas. This bed is a tall one that is easier on our backs!

**HOOP HOUSE:** We had built a hoop house of sorts with cow panels and t-posts but we wanted a better option for winter to prevent windy day drama and to keep out chickens and other interested parties. This fall, Shawn built a wood frame with doors on each end, a metal skirt on the sides, and a removable plastic cover. With leaves and mulch for the floor, the composting will heat it up. We already had our first few freezes and it works great!





This will be called the year of Chickens for us! The whole story makes it fun: of course we love them!

## THE ARKANSAS BESS NESTERN

So this time, we were in the grocery store buying eggs and Shawn said, "I think it's time for chickens". I laughed and thought, "No way!" I continued to ignore it for a bit and then Shawn said, "God is telling me it's time to get chickens". Well, ok then. So, we started planning and in February, we found a breeder in Missouri who had most of the breeds we wanted. I messaged back and forth with her, we came up with a plan for May, and then we started planning the coop. Instead of trying to build our own, we thought it would be easier to find a coop we liked from a local builder. We did and by the end of March, the coop and run were here. We started planning the food; we don't do things easy. It's a real challenge finding organic chicken feed around here and after spending a LOT of time on this, we decided to mix our own because we could order the individual ingredients mostly from local vendors. May came around and we contacted the breeder who promptly informed us she forgot about us and all her chickens were sold except some Lang Shan Roosters. Now I know you have all heard about the "Bird flu" and that whole mess made finding chickens really difficult. So, we put together our flock a few here and a few there. We did take the time to go get one of the Lang Shan cockerels which turned out to be a wonderful idea. Our big boy is a gentleman and while he took a his time maturing, Leo (Law enforcement officer) is amazing! Then we got two olive egggers from our friend, another friend gave us some mixed pullets...well, one turned



out to be a rooster and that did not work out well so he is no longer. Then we had another friend who raised up some pure bred barred rocks for us. That made 11, and then McMurray hatchery finally had female chicks of the other breeds we wanted (except one). So we had our first batch of mail order chicks. Of the 9, 7 lived and now we have 18 birds. We have discovered a lot of things new to us because of climate and spent a lot of time and resources but, we are now chickening and the Bess Nestern is up and running. Our egg production has gone down with the colder weather and shorter days; we are both new at chickening in the cold but also considering the hot summers. So, we had to make some coop modifications for that. You can see from our present set up, it's not finished but until spring, it will do. I think Shawn did a great job with the tunnel and the time we had to get it set up. Two nights ago, I did the close up and missed poor Tiny who spent the night under the tarp on top of the tunnel. Good thing it wasn't cold! We have had some challenges with this flock and since chickens are not really great with change, integrating all those groups has been a interesting but on November 12th we integrated our last group. Whew! We are looking forward to more chicken fun and the new egg colors!





## AT THE PARK

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Still loving my job at Buffalo National River! What a year though! So first thing, DOGE cut our new folks. We had a hard time there for a while and the busiest spring I have seen yet. I am still on weekends by myself during season (March - November) and I am still hoping for help this coming season. The park stayed really busy all through summer and fall with just a short break end of August. Then the government shutdown rearranged our plans! Just a few of us worked using camping fee money during the shut down so now we are playing catch up which we won't because we don't have enough people or time. But I still just love the job anyway!



### SHAWN 4 WHEELING

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Shawn attended the Razor Back Ramble in May and then the Cottonland Cruiser event in the fall; both just three hours South in Hot Springs. The 1977 cruiser he runs is still going strong with just a few minor repairs the year ....oh wait! Not really that minor. So the steering box was giving Shawn a hard time turning left. He had missed a few events because everything he had tried was not working including replacing the box. Finally, he played around with it long enough he discovered the issue was the drag link. Once he adjusted that, no problem! The fall trip, he decided to try out using the travel trailer. While it was a cool idea, the extra travel back and forth to transport everything made it difficult. We did however get to spend some great quality time with our friend Larry who stayed with us for a few days.



**Shawn's Drone:** Since we did not have a lot of time to schedule our favorite photographer this year, we decided this year's photo we would use Shawn's drone. It's hilarious how hesitant he is since the "crash" but he is getting more confidence each time he uses it! Love this picture!

## NOTABLE EVENTS:

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**PEACOCK STORY:** One day, I was working in the chicken run and I looked up and saw a peacock! Yes, a peacock! After posting on a local chat group in Facebook with no replies, the neighbor decided it was ok over at their place. Then we discovered it's not ok; she was coming to visit the chickens and eating all their food, scratching up my neighbors car, and being a nuisance! Plus she was loud! So our friend came and got her for his new pet.

**FREEZE DRYER:** After it sat in the box for three years, we decided to set up and use the freeze dryer. Wow! We love the fruit: apples, mangos, bananas, pears, strawberries (11 quarts from our patch) are our favorite so far. We also love the chicken and rice soup! We had so many peas this year, we dried those but they were just weird. No to gummy bears and small berries too!

**AMERICAN LEGION:** Shawn was very involved with our local Post again and landscaped a picnic area by the building, installed new LED lighting, and participated in a whole host of events. He served the post as the finance officer this year.

**MASTER GARDENERS:** Deana had a good time as always with the Boone County Master Gardeners teaching classes, hosting plant sales, and working in the downtown beds. With irrigation on our minds, she finally installed it plus a timer in the big main street bed downtown Harrison that made our chores SO much easier this year.



## LOSING MOM

For the entirety of my life, I have carried a deep longing for my Mother to have peace and be happy. Earlier in the year, we learned from a brain scan that my Mom had a brain injury to her frontal lobe, likely from childhood, with several additional damaged areas from recent strokes. Damage in this area of the brain causes paranoia, confusion, emotional instability, and many issues we saw with Mom. She was diagnosed with dementia in March and we moved her to assisted living. I had the opportunity to go see her at the end of August. It was a good quality time for us. Each week, during our weekly call, I noticed her responses were getting shorter and by early November, we did not talk for long. The staff at Medilodge in Gaylord was amazing; They kept me informed about her status. Her brain was forgetting to walk, forgetting to do regular things she needed to live. Her primary day nurse called me the day she passed and said I needed to speak with Mom. Even though she would not respond, Mom needed to hear me. So I did and I told her I loved her and that it was ok to let go. I was prepared because God gave me a great peace. Mom could not reply but I could hear her breathing. About an hour after I spoke to her, she passed away. What a gift to have been able to speak to her. God comforted me as I cried for all the dreams that would never be. For my Momma who always suffered and never really lived happily.

Mom passed away Thursday, November 13, 2025. The week afterwards, I traveled to Michigan. I have written a memorial for her online so that others may post pictures or memories of her (<https://www.online-tribute.com/EllenJeanEckler>) and where I will write her story as I learn it. Mom's illness hid her life from me and I want to learn all I can about her. While I was in Michigan managing Mom's affairs, I was able to meet and thank many of the people from Petoskey for their kindness to my Mom and for helping us in so many ways over the years. I have also been able to reunite with many of her family members. This brings such great joy to my heart and healing to my soul! This is so true that God works everything to His Glory for those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

This experience reminded me that we really do not know the details about difficult people we encounter. Maybe they just need a kind word. We talk about boundaries and place limits on God when really, we just need to see people through His eyes and hear Him about how to respond. Many of the people who helped us with Mom did not set limits; they kept trying and praying for her. Let us all ask God to help us see what He sees in people, to listen for what He says, and to show compassion, tenderness, and forgiveness towards all no matter their ways.



*To them God willed to  
make known what are  
the riches of the glory  
of this mystery among  
the Gentiles: which is  
Christ in you, the hope  
of glory. - Col 1:27  
NKJV*

This was one of  
Mom's favorite  
verses, let us all  
learn from Him it's  
meaning.

INTERLOCHEN STATE PARK  
LAUNCH - DUCK LAKE

One of mom's favorite places