

Belltower Triptych

Part II: Which Way the Wind Blows

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The bell tower rose up into the air over the entryway of my old Amish schoolhouse. Joe, the Amish carpenter who had restored this part of my home, stood on a ladder resting against the eaves. Melvin, Joe's twelve year old son, sat on the roof's peak, a chain wrapped around one of the beams. The other end of the chain was hooked to the bell tower, and then slowly, Joe and Melvin winched the structure into place.

Half the neighborhood had gathered in my front yard to witness the event, unfolding their lawn chairs. Amish women held babies on their laps. Picnic baskets rested on the ground and toddlers ran through the grass with sandwiches in hand.

"Joe," I called up. "Do you mind if I get a picture of this? I'll just shoot the bell tower." The Amish observe the biblical ban on "graven images," including photographs of their faces. I might take a picture of their horse and buggy, but I've always been careful not to violate their religion or privacy with my camera.

"Take whatever pictures you want," Joe said. "As long as you don't publish them in the newspaper."

I snapped another shot of the men bolting down the bell tower to the roof, then ducked inside to carry on with my work at my computer desk.

A half an hour later Melvin appeared at the screen door as if he were a page at the royal court.

"We are about to place the bell in the tower," he announced.

I jumped out of my seat, ran outside and steadied my camera. Joe picked up the thirty-pound bell

with one hand and placed it on its hook in the tower. Then he began boring a hole through my roof with his air-powered drill. Back inside the house, I returned to my computer while Joe and Melvin threaded the rope down through the ceiling to its old resting place near the front door.

Father and son returned to the roof.

I answered a handful of e-mails.

"We are about to place the weather... vane on top of the bell tower," Melvin said from the porch.

I raced back outside just in time to see Joe fit the parts of the weather vane together and slip them on top of the pole peaking out of the top of the tower. Now the job was complete. I stepped back and clicked the shutter again and again, taking in different views of my house. My camera was full, so I returned to my computer to download the pictures.

"The wind is coming from the northwest," Melvin called.

Outside, the little brass rooster spun between the letters N and W.

What a great job, a beautiful project, I thought to myself back at my desk, wondering what I was doing inside anyway on a day like this, head down, typing away at my computer, trying to connect to the world through wi-fi, when other much more important connections were being made. After all, according to Melvin, the wind was now shifting to the northeast. 



Photo Courtesy of Mary Swander