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Dear Friends and Family,

Last year I told about reconnecting with my long-ago canoeing partner and best friend, Anne Waldspurger Shuster, who was at that time battling pancreatic cancer. I visited her several times, the last being for almost a week at Christmas. Sadly, she lost the battle and died in early April. When planning to attend her funeral, I learned that there would be five of us from her canoeing days with Penn State Outing Club. Four came from nearby but Martha Teeter was flying into Philadelphia from California and renting a car. We decided to get together for in-state travel.



Helen Yeisley, Martha Teeter, me, Norm & Barb Holcombe

I knew Martha quite well from PSOC activities 50 years ago. She started her PhD program in Chemistry the same year I completed mine but we did not keep in touch when she graduated. It turns out that she was good friends with Anne and they *did* keep in touch, which brought us together for the funeral.

After the service in Harrisburg Martha and I drove to Lansdale, Anne's family home, for the graveside service, then stayed overnight with step-daughter Beverly and Charlie Stanley before driving back to Harrisburg to meet with Anne's daughter, Amy Crosswait.

Before going our separate ways we agreed to get together again the next time Martha was back east. That came about when she had a family event on Cape Cod in early August, after which she stopped in Mustoe for a few days. That visit set off some sparks; I never thought I would have a new girlfriend at age 80 but here we are! I then joined her on Cape Cod in early September (via my first airplane flight in 30 years) and she was back in Mustoe at the end of September for another short visit.



Martha at Piney Point on the farm in Mustoe

Then it was my turn to travel. I flew to Davis, CA, in early October and have been here ever since. It is a very interesting place to be. Davis is in the Central Valley near Sacramento. The land is flat and would be

a near-desert without irrigation. There is virtually no rain from May thru October, then the monsoon sets in sometime in November with frequent rainy days until May. Sub-freezing nights are rare. There are orange, lemon, and almond trees in Martha's yard and thruout the community. Her house is in Village Homes (<http://www.villagehomesdavis.org/>), a planned eco-community designed for sustainable living. The streets are all narrow, curved, and lead to cul-de-sacs. There are community gardens and orchards and an extensive network of paved pedestrian/bicycle paths. The flat ground and mild climate make Davis ideal for bicycles. There are bike lanes on almost every street and there seem to be as many bikes as cars.

It is tough to get a good photo of the house as it is situated in a grove of redwoods and shielded on the south side by grapevines to block the summer sun somewhat. The view at right is from the community garden with the main north-south bike path in the foreground and the garage (solar on the roof) and part of the house peeking out from the trees.



We go for a walk around the neighborhood most mornings and often pick fresh fruit for breakfast. Clementines and persimmons are plentiful right now. The food co-op here is quite amazing. It is a full-sized supermarket but unlike commercial markets it has many organic products and at least a thousand bulk-food items, including fresh orange juice, squeezed as you watch it fill your bottle. Similarly, almond butter is made on the spot as it fills your jar. I have been a lacto-ovo vegetarian for many years but Martha is vegan (no meat, dairy or eggs) so I have been eating vegan since I've been here (with a few minor lapses). It is easier than one might think to prepare tasty, well-balanced meals, and it confers clear health benefits.

Many activities here involve music and singing. There is a song circle every fortnight hosted in various homes. Martha sings and plays viola in church on Sundays. We attended a weekend singing retreat on the coast south of San Francisco in October and we are going to a week-long event between Christmas and New Years. We attend a fitness class at the Senior Center 3x per week and Martha also does folk dancing, which I may eventually be able to do a little of. Much of Martha's time is taken up with community projects, primarily developing housing and a permanent shelter for homeless people in Davis.

I expect to be here for another six weeks or so, then I will go back to VA in February for maple season. We were unable to make syrup last year because of uncooperative weather so I really hope to do it this year. Meanwhile, Chris Moore, my friend and faithful employee, is looking after everything while I am away. He has more than the usual things to do right now because we are replacing 35-year-old carpet with hardwood floors thruout the house. I'm actually quite pleased to be avoiding all the mess and I look forward to seeing the finished job when I get back. We also installed an oil heater so that Chris does not have to stoke the wood stove 3+ times a day. We replaced the asphalt-shingle parts of the house roof with metal and rebuilt the porch.

In September there were two deaths in the family. Rudy, my 15-year-old cat, died on the 2ND, the day before I left for Cape Cod, and Chesapeake, my 31-year-old horse died on the 10TH, the day after I got back. Rudy suffered kidney failure and Ches was just very old. While sad, these deaths made it easier for me to be away as Chris now does not have to be there twice a day every day to care for aging animals.

I look forward to reading your cards and letters in the coming days.

Love to all,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'John'.