

Good times with Barbara

I have been very lucky with Barbara in all important ways: pleasant home very welcoming to many friends as well as family; shared love of much vacation time in Scotland; shared enjoyable participation in meetings of the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE); many interesting trips to various parts of the world.

Barbara and I had come to know and like one another during the late 1960s-70s, when our families were often together in Lexington after Reid and I had become friends at the Table-Tennis Club. Myra and I quite often talked admiringly of the "story-book" Bush family where seminarian Reid presided over evening meals that began with someone saying grace, or with some short appropriate reading.

Our divorces came more than ten years apart, but Barbara and I got together soon after my own divorce. We married at the Registrar's Office and celebrated with lunch at a Dairy Queen or similar place; on August 25, 1986. It would be easy to remember the date since that was also my mother's birthday.

My parents had also known Barbara earlier and seemed happy with our decision, as did Helen and Judy. Barbara's parents welcomed me warmly, and some months later we had a celebration evening meal with them and Barbara's siblings. In later years we spent several vacations with Moody and Virgie, at their condo in the Florida Panhandle or at various resorts.

In 1987, I took part in a Loch-Ness-monster symposium at the Natural History Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. There Barbara met my Inverness friends, Dick and Sybil Mackintosh, who later became long-term friends as we spent a few weeks during summers for almost 20 years at Loch Ness.

In Edinburgh, the Mackintoshes introduced us to a traditional High Tea in one of the old-time hotels.

After the meeting, Barbara and I toured Northern Scotland, finishing at Loch Ness. I had planned for us to stay at the Loch Ness Lodge, where I had a mini-sabbatical in 1985 and had helped the proprietor, Donald Skinner, develop a "monster" exhibition in competition with the one at the Drumnadrochit Hotel some tens of yards away. Skinner was utterly dismayed that the Lodge was completely full up. But he had an inspiration. The owner of Lundy Cottage, on the hill above Urquhart Castle, had put the cottage up for sale and left the keys with Skinner to show prospective buyers around. Skinner gave Barbara and me the keys, told us to stay as long as we liked, and to come for free breakfasts at the Lodge.

We did stay for more than a week, with a marvelous view over the whole Loch. It was summertime, with daylight lasting until something like 11:00 pm, and we would sit in the glass-walled room enjoying the Loch scenery and the sun-setting sky until bed-time.

I met fellow Nessie fans, Alistair & Susan Boyd, who annually rented a chalet over-looking Urquhart Bay, and I arranged with the chalet owners (the Rosses), who lived just up the hill, that Barbara and I would rent it the following year after the Boyds left; and that became an almost annual event for nearly 20 years. The Mackintoshes had a summer cottage just across the bay. They would leave the doors of the garage shed open when they were there, as a signal to us to visit.

In many years we entertained visitors. Ed and Joanne Spann several times; Codron parents and children; Judy and Dave, and later Judy alone; Bud and Harriet; Mark and Kate; Jim Moughan; Bob and Marion Paterson; J. B. Jones from VT, and his daughter. One year we went later than usual, to catch the heather at its purple best, and that year the New York Towers were demolished. For a little while we had to wonder when we would be able to fly back home. A local tourist kiosk opened a book for people to write and sign their sympathies.

Barbara always delighted in being a home-maker and caring for people. When my mother had cancer and I was still teaching full time, Barbara went to Florida and organized everything needed for my parents to come live with us. My mother died soon after, but Dad continued to live with us for years. To make our Scotland vacations possible, Dad stayed in Hugh Bowman's Heritage House, which had just opened at that time. Kevin also stayed with us during some of those years, and he enjoyed together with Dad and us the Friday-night seafood buffet at a motel.

Eventually Dad became physically too heavy and difficult for us to handle, and he spent years in Heritage House, invariably telling me, "I could not be better looked after". It is to Barbara's eternal credit that my mother, and later hers, had both been able to spend their last years and days at home with us; and that Dad had so many good years with us.

Beginning with the first annual meeting of the Society for Scientific Exploration in 1982, I attended all of the conferences for about 25 years, except once when Mark's wedding took priority. After Barbara had sampled one of the meetings, she came with me every time, to Austin, Boulder, Charlottesville, Huntington Beach, Ithaca, Las Vegas, Kalispell (MT). She and made good friends with several of my colleagues, as well as with several other wives with whom she also corresponded for years.

In 2003 we attended the European meeting of SSE in Paris, and followed that immediately with a Norwegian Coastal Voyage cruise in company with the Spanns, meeting them at the beginning of the voyage in Bergen, where Joanne's mother was born. Later we had an Eastern Mediterranean cruise with them, with a noteworthy excursion to Ephesus, visit to the Parthenon in Athens, and experiencing in Athens the Eastern Orthodox ceremony at Easter time when crowds walk through the streets in candlelight; we learned that for the Eastern Orthodox, Easter is a more important day of remembrance than Christmas.

Another year we took a guided tour of Ireland with the Spanns, before continuing to our annual stay at Loch Ness.

In 1993 my old friends In Australia, Tony Linnane and Sever Sternhell, arranged a few lectures for me that paid for a lengthy visit by Barbara and myself, during which she met and stayed for several days with Tony and Sever and their families. In Melbourne, friends of Tony took us to a wildlife sanctuary where Barbara was enraptured particularly by the profusion of vividly and variedly colored birds, especially parrots. We rented a car and drove to the Snowy Mountains where I had skied several times. Then to Canberra, where every country has built its embassy in its traditional national style. Then to the village (Picton) where I went to my first school; to Sydney and surroundings including the Opera House, the apartment house overlooking Bronte Beach where my parents and I had lived many years, and the well-known Bondi Beach. And we took a guided tour to the Great Barrier Reef, rainforest in Queensland, and Ayers Rock in central Australia — tourists come from all over the world to admire this stunning huge piece of rock, and to climb it along a narrow path fitted with a handrail. As is well known, Central Australia is desert with no rain at all; but when we were there, we had the almost unique experience of seeing the Rock wet with rain, and climbing too dangerous to be permitted. We also experienced a tourist visit to an Aboriginal group who demonstrated their dances and allowed us to sample some of their traditional food. On the way back home, we also enjoyed sampling some of New Zealand: lovely Sea of Islands, remarkable hot springs even used for cooking, amazing boat ride through a deep cave whose ceiling is brightly lit by glow-worms.

Barbara's worst, long-lasting physical problem was a progressive loss of feeling in her lower body and loss of control of her legs. She would stumble and be unable to prevent herself falling frontally. By the late 1990s, it was happening all too frequently. We would sometimes indulge a sort of gallows humor by reminding each other that neither friends nor even family ever asked how her face had become bruised. After innumerable visits to doctors, a radiologist at Duke diagnosed the problem as ineffective nerve signaling along the spine, caused by an imaging dyestuff used for a short time after CT-scan machines were introduced: in the early 1970s, Barbara had been saved from unbearable headaches through information gained through the first CT machine in Lexington (KY).

Our last Scotland vacation was in 2005. Large-scale travel had become unattractive, but for years we enjoyed winter breaks at an ocean-front hotel in Myrtle Beach, usually together with Bashka and Tony Lopez.

The stairs in the Highland Circle house had become too difficult for Barbara, and we were lucky that my chemistry colleague, Jim Viers, enabled us to outbid the other hopeful buyers and acquire the Woods Edge townhouse that both Barbara and I had liked on sight. We enjoyed it thoroughly for a dozen years, able through the self-contained apartment on the lowest level to have quite a number of friends and family with us for sometimes quite lengthy stays: Mark and Kate, Kevin and his partner and adopted daughter, Jim Moughan, Uma and Colin and their delightful and wonderfully talented Kabir and Mirabai.

Later, in Assisted Living, Barbara continued to fall too often. Sadly, she became unable to care for Pip, her beloved big black lap-cat, but I continue to count it as a good-time memory that I was able to please both Barbara and Pip by taking him on the long walks through Showalter corridors that he clearly enjoyed greatly, always finding quite a number of places of sniffing interest.

Barbara had documented many of our trips with photographs and pamphlets and postcards, and these albums remain nicely available for nostalgic reminiscing and remembering our good times together.