

Merry Christmas, 2000

This year started out as a sad year for me, and at some levels I surmise for Martha. It feels like we will always be in each other's families yet we are no longer a couple. We have those 25 years of knowing each other and remain close friends. Please keep us both in your prayers and give each of us your support. This letter tells the story of getting from down here back up to being pretty happy again. I think you'll find I am doing a fairly good job yet I miss having a soul mate a lot. The best thing for me to do was head for my mountains again. In April, I went to the Yosemite Association (YA) Spring Forum with the thaw runoff. I took a wonderful photo seminar from one of the naturalists who critiqued my work from

<http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mdiggles/YA-Spring-Forum.pdf> I took some of these photos when I skied out part of the Tioga Pass Road the day after the meeting. Other shots show the amazing melt water not only in the waterfalls but off the faces of the very cliffs. On the way home from Yosemite, I swung north for an evening visit with Katherine and Martha with fears that Katherine might feel distant from me. Well, fear not. I was so relieved. She crawled into my lap, leaned up against me, and let me read her dance journal. I love her.

May was the month of the Adobe Acrobat PDF file. I was peripherally involved in organizing a field trip to Big Sur for the Peninsula Geological Society; a group for whom I've been Vice President for about a decade.

<http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/PGS2000/PGS00-05b.html> is a compilation of that trip with a PDF photo collection. It did my heart good to bang on rocks with a hammer and get my boots dusty yet again. I was in Denver at a publications conference later that month where I attended a class on authoring in PDF. I couldn't keep my mouth shut and the next thing you know I was recruited to co-teach the class the next day. Despite airline strikes, I made it back to California six hours before I had to begin a three-day presentation at the USGS Open House. They needed another photographer to tail Congresswoman Anna Eshoo around campus and guess who just happened to have a Nikon around his neck? Well, you need a bit of bandwidth for this one. This is a big PDF I did of my photos and my favorite shots are of the students. I also had fun catching Mrs. Eshoo looking at our maps; she wrote that she liked it too. See <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/openhouse2000.pdf> My favorite student shot is the third one down. Bicycling kind of came and went this year and I need to get it back into the "came" mode. I did the Sierra Century (100 km) with my friend Judy and pedaled up Ramshorn Grade without stopping for the first time after many years of riding that event. Judy was waiting for me at the top. I visited Katherine at the end of the month to give her a copy of my friend's book, *Exploring the Highest Sierra*; the plan was also to go for a bicycle ride. Well, Katherine had the sniffles and had to stay home so Martha and I rode out the American River Bicycle Trail for a few miles and tried on this idea of staying friends; it seemed to work pretty well although you can imagine it had its share of being a bit hard.

In the 1999 exchange of Christmas cards, my former dorm mate Ken invited me to climb Mt. Hood with his son and him in June. It was the same week as my cousin's granddaughter Sarah's high-school graduation in Redmond so I made a northwest trip of it. I spent hours and hours packing. I nitpicked over every little thing. I had to select my two favorite carabiners, I took my old leather boots in case something went wrong with the rental of the fancy new synthetic jobs. I decided my Dad's crampons were better than mine but the straps were too short. My rescue pulley is holding my canoe in the rafters so I got a replacement. We use climbing helmets and harnesses now. The photos from both the graduation, the climb, and back for a choir recital are at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/sroife/>



Sunrise, summit of Mt. Hood

Well, being on a mountain summit was the closest to being happy again I had been this year so I jumped at the Isherwoods' invitation to join some Sierra Club/Explorers Club/USGS friends and bag a couple more. In July a few of us went up both Mt. Rose and Mt. Tellac in the Tahoe Basin. On Mt. Rose, I held a prayer circle for my friend Barry who is getting used to life after heart attack. I hoofed it up Windy Hill out of Palo Alto with him since.

One of the few places on the east side of the Sierra where you can take a fairly long hike and not cross the crest is Little Lakes Canyon up Rock Creek out of Toms Place. We got a group of about eight of us together and spent four days and three nights up under Bear Creek Spire, the peak on the front cover of *Manual of Ski Mountaineering*. This was Katherine's first trip with a regular Kelty pack; she hiked with 24 pounds and an 11-pound dog. Martha got to hike the whole thing twice to fetch new camera batteries from the car but what that really did was give her a day of alone time in her wilderness which I know is a holy place for her. The photo collection is at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/kgilmore/>



Katherine at Gem Lakes

I had about a weekend to empty my pack, do my laundry, and head for Europe. About seven of us family members were in different countries together for some ten days. Indeed we three sibs had a grand time. I don't know if I could name a time when my sisters Linda & Barby and I had that much time to just be us three kids together. We had a bit of it three years ago but it was a grander family reunion (15 of us went to Dole for nearly a week). With this being more of a sit-by-the-river gathering without having a dozen people to shepherd around, we had the most wonderful connectedness (is that a word?). We got to



launch into stories about what each of us saw in the very same events in our past (different views, same scene as you can imagine). And they are just the sweetest people; I'm blessed to be their kid brother. Barby and Harold have stories to tell about the town folks, the local politics, the international scene. We did a bit of work prepping their house for sale while we were there; I got good with a masonry drill and hanging drywall; then I'd curl up for the night with *Harry Potter*. I had to read the other three when I got home. If they can sell their house, Barby and Harold may move to California's central coast. If you'd like a second home in the Jura of eastern France, you can buy this one; visit <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mdiggles/> I even tried to sell it on eBay...



Barby and Harold's house; watercolor by cousin Peggy

Over several weekends in August, I proceeded to destroy my back yard <grin>. I unscrewed one of the deck boards, took out my torch and un-soldered the hose valve from the side of the house, and proceeded to splice in a second water line down under the deck and out into the garden for sprinklers and a drip system. The pipe work was all copper so I kept that quality; I went through three bucks worth of silver by the time I had soldered all the joints. I only burned myself once and not badly. While I was at it, I ran wires under the deck and into the ditch for (1) a phone out back (in the shed), (2) 120-volts in the shed, (3) low-voltage ("Malibu") lighting for someday when I might want it, (4) wire for the sprinkler clock, and (5) speakers from the stereo. The phone wire is "Cat-3" network cable so someday when I have my own IP address on a DSL line and run an Apache server on a Linux box in the garage, I can sit out in my back yard with my Apple PowerBook and plug into the Web whilst sipping lattes. Oh yeah, I'll need an espresso machine... and a PowerBook <grin>. I put in solenoid valves for the sprinklers and run the wire to the clock mechanism which I put in the garage so when I wake up at 2 AM because of a rainstorm, I can jump out of bed naked and dash out and shut off the sprinkler clock before it begins to water the rained-on grass three hours later. I stuck in a rain sensor but I have not tried it in a storm yet.

It was easy to get me away from this yard work for my 35th high-school reunion. I got to hang out with old mountaineering and river-trip buddies and hear stories. I got to stay with Linda and visit Katherine's grandparents. My sister Barby's daughter, Anna, and her husband, Stephane, make it a regular habit to go down to the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon, park their car, and rollerblade down the bike/blade path along the beach towards Marina del Rey. So that's what we did. I slathered myself with Water Babies 45X sun screen (missed a spot on my shoulder that looked really silly later...) and away we went. We covered about nine miles and did some minor jumps off low curbs and I showed off going (slowly) backwards. Stephane is an animal. He actually had to pedal a bike because he had dinged up his foot somehow

and the blade boots hurt. So Anna would hang onto his bicycle and let him pull her along some. These kids today; got to watch them all the time... So I tried it too and it's a blast...

I returned to Yosemite in mid September for the YA annual meeting in Wawona with Anna and Stephane. So the simple thing to do would have been (did you catch that? "*would* have been...") to take the day off and drive up there early. Well, it turns out that Friday mid morning was the dedication ceremony for the Robert Wallace Earthquake Center followed by a lunch being served on the site. The seismology folks asked me if I would be their photographer for the event (which I didn't want to miss anyhow even with Wawona waiting). I couldn't pass that up; Bob Wallace is a wonderful man; Wallace figured out the recurrence intervals for large quakes on the San Andreas; a helpful thing to know if you want to build cities in this State... Bob's son and I were coauthors on the national mineral resource assessment a few years ago so I sort of know that gang. They wanted photos that tell more of a story than having folks line up and smile into the lens. That's one of my favorite things to do, so... I entered brush-fire and whirlwind mode. You've likely gathered that none of this is unpleasant; I'm glad to have both speeds of joy in my life. I dropped the film off at the processor on my way to the freeway and was dining in Yosemite sharing a bottle of chilled Jurassic Chardonnay with A&S a few hours later. At the YA meeting, David Brower talked about removing Hetch Hetchy Dam to make up for the mess that John Muir tried to stop. Brower was two years old when Muir died. When he finished his presentation, he signed copies of his books. I enjoyed the stories he told me about writing *Manual of Ski Mountaineering* as he signed the beat-up, klistor-stained copy I bought new in 1967. I got to introduce Anna and Stephane to my friend Wendy Crowder who was there with her two children but her mom Betsy, who is usually at these events, was off in Tibet that month. For contrast with the photos I took of waterfalls in April, shots I took in September with nearly no runoff are at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/amarazzi/> I like different photos in different ways. The rainbows in the falls are a favorite subject and pictures of my family members being themselves are another favorite. I get to have more than one favorite, don't I? I bought Stephane one of the guidebooks to Yosemite that are translated into different languages (guess which language?) After a shuttle ride to Happy Isles, we continued being happy tourists and walked to the bridge for the famous photo op with Vernal Falls in the background.



Anna and Stephane in Yosemite

On we went up the Mist Trail that goes up the side of the cliff we were shooting photos of each other on the large stone steps. While we were still plenty hot, we went to Emerald Pool and swam. We jumped into the cold water, swam across to the other side as fast as we could, and got out on the hot rock to sun ourselves like lizards. The moss was

really nice and slick as the river ran down the rock into the pool so we went sliding a few times. We waded across back to our clothes farther up where the mossy surface was not much of a slope. On the way out, I noticed a sign saying that it is against Federal regulations to (1) swim, (2) slide, and (3) wade. We just did what people have done there since the Miwok Ahwaneechee came shortly after the end of the last ice advance a few thousand years ago. On the way home, we stopped at El Cap and hung out in the meadow watching the climbers on the rock face making camp. Out came the sleeping gear and the four or five parties there were getting clipped in and using the last bit of daylight to get ready for their night dangling there. Betsy got back from Tibet later in September and I got to share these stories with her at the monthly meeting of The Explorers Club. After the meeting, I made it home; Betsy died in an automobile accident on the way to her house. <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/EC2000/EC00-10.html> is a site where I have a very sweet write-up on her that Eva Blum wrote.

The 2000 edition of the Boot 'n Blister Reunion backpack in October was yet another Sierran trip. I feel blessed to have so much Sierra time this year when I need it most. We had about a dozen people involved in this trip in one way or another, including the pre-hike gathering and post-hike dinner. Five of us actually hiked and all had a good weekend. We went up Noble Canyon out of Ebbetts Pass. Rick had his little girl Jeanine along and she's quite the hiker at six. Sunday morning, Sandra and I went on up to the summit of Tryon Peak, collected our packs back at camp, and barely caught up with Rick and Jeanine before they got to the car. Sandra makes hand-carved animals (<http://www.handcarvedmenagerie.com/welcome.html/>) and I've been after her for several years to make me a Mountain Yellow Legged Frog. She had a Red-Legged Frog with her so I bought that for a start. Back in Markleeville and back to having a dozen of us, we had a toast and a prayer circle for Betsy. For a photo collection, see <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/bnb/2000/BnB2000b.html>



Sandra and Mike on Tryon Peak

I thought summer's end would put an end to my yard work but in November, I paved my driveway so I don't need 4WD to get to my door any more. We did the trick of putting a pipe under it first so I can run sprinklers and Malibu lights on the other side of the yard later. I did a photo essay of the Robert Wallace Earthquake Center dedication I shot last September and put it online and lots of people liked it; it was quite satisfying (<http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/rwallace>). Next thing you know, one of the seismologists crashed our office Koffee Klatch and presented me with a \$500 award for the job. I'm tempted to squander it on a 20mm lens rather than just pay my Visa bill (driveway...) with it. Awards aren't supposed to go towards balancing the budget, are they? So far, I bought the Mountain Yellow Legged Frog that Sandra carved for me.



This entire letter has been something I wrote to describe my trying to climb back to being happy again which is basically what my year has been about. Well, one more trip to Yosemite in November and I gleaned more happiness than I've had in a long time. My friend Margie invited me to teach geology at her school when she was in third grade. The students all wrote me little letters that I had pinned up on the wall outside my office. One little boy said he'd never forget my lesson about "all you need to do geology is the "three H's: Hammer, Hand-lens, and Helicopter." And then he drew pictures of all three. Margie's in seventh grade now and I still come in and do week-long Yosemite field trips with sixth-graders. I have been teaching geology as a "guest lecturer" for three of the last five years and these kids have me wrapped around their little fingers. See <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/kwalkowsky> for some special moments with some wonderful people, young and only slightly less-young. I had dinner with Margie and her folks before the field trip and Katherine and Martha joined me so that was nice.

We had about forty girls and twenty boys. I had five boys in my two cabin rooms and took them out for a night hike after we got our room keys rather than organizing our junk. Junk never stays organized anyhow. That trip and those children were, ...no surprise... joyful for my soul. I got to work with my friend Dave Dahler again; I know him from a few years ago at YA when I made a Sierra ecosystem presentation; he was my Naturalist for the first part of this trip. I was hiking up to Mirror Lake Monday when, nearly at the top of the path, one student fell and crashed her knee. It hurt a whole lot; little Jaci didn't manage a single step without more tears until much later. The thought of missing Mirror Lake ("Mirror Meadow") brought even more tears. So I carried her up to the lake for the view and lent her my Mountain Yellow Legged Frog and Jaci's eyes turned joyful once again. I did, however, have to lug her out on my back two miles to Camp Curry (http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/kwalkowsky/small_screen/0011P-35sm.jpg) so now we're friends <grin>. Dave spelled me from Lamon's Apple Orchard to the Stables which was quite helpful; he had a class to teach at the same time so he's quite the hero. When I got her back to camp, I rolled her pant leg up to take another look at the sore spot and there was this giant bruise. "Oh, that's from soccer," she said; the new one showed up later. She was hobbling by dinner, went though Spider Cave (named for its shape on a map) on Tuesday, and hiked down the Four-Mile Trail with me on Wednesday. Jaci kept the frog all week and her friend Kelli borrowed the Red Legged Frog. By the end of the week, Jaci was explaining to everybody about how to carve frogs. Both students also learned about non-native trout and the demise of the frogs along with information about the worldwide decline of amphibians and how many unanswered questions there are about that. If Jaci (http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/kwalkowsky/small_screen/0011S-09sm.jpg) had a single mom, I'd woo her just because she raised such a wonderful daughter. This girl has a great way of being quite focused on what she's learning and she soaks up natural-history stories like a little sponge. She tends to try to get every detail just right so I had a very good time telling her about geology as a study where we struggle with perfection but will never get there. I think it helped broaden her view of what being a natural-history student is like.

I was in Yosemite Monday, ran the election at the firehouse across the street from USGS in Menlo Park Tuesday, went back to Yosemite Tuesday night. Pretty odd. I drove back to Yosemite after the election thinking I would wake up in the campground, go have breakfast Wednesday morning, and find out who won. NOT!

We squeezed in a trip to Glacier Point between snow storms. All sixty of our students got to hike down the Four-Mile Trail from the rim to the floor of this, one of the most magnificent canyons in on Earth. I burned seven rolls of film this week (one whole roll on the snowball fight; if you attack somebody with a snowball, you get a great photo a few seconds later. I attacked dads, students, teachers, naturalists...). That evening, I got moved to another Hiking Group that had a less-proficient Naturalist so the kids would have somebody give them more/better experiences; not what I expected to be doing this trip for but



I pulled it off. A week later, the main memory of that "fill-in" was the boys and girls with wide eyes looking at the scenes and making explanations for me. Even after hiking down into the Valley all day, I found them gleeful for a night hike. I took them a mile and a half from Lost Arrow past the moonlit Royal Arches and related the geologic stories told by Blake, Whitney, Muir, and the glaciers.



The Four-Mile Trail

Thursday, we moved the class to Wawona and learned about forests. I gave a lesson on plant succession and fire ecology not two miles from where I talked with David Brower two months earlier. I'm sad because the world lost him to cancer the day we began our Yosemite trip. I held a prayer circle (that's three this year) for Dave with the children and told gave them a little history of the development of the environmental movement and the pivotal role he played in all that. Friday it was time to bail out. We had to put on chains or use 4WD to go home. One of the games we play on these trips is called "Two Truths and a Lie" where the group tries to figure out which statement is false. Here's mine: 1) Sunday, I will build a Web site, 2) Monday, I try to tag Great White Sharks, and 3) Tuesday I give a lecture on geology. You guessed it: the lie is 3); I gave the paper on Wednesday.



These are some of my kids

A fellow Fellow of The Explorers Club, Rex Passion has a friend named John Kelly who is a graduate student at U.C. Davis' Bodega Marine Lab. John is studying the predator-prey relationships between the Northern Elephant Seal and the Great White Shark. To do this, he needs to track the movements of the sharks with little beepers. So all you have to do is get the shark to come along side the boat and poke 'em with this little gizmo. Well, with Yosemite two days under my belt, it was time for a sea-level activity.

<http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/EC2000/EC00-12.html#sharks> shows the story of the technique. We didn't see hide nor tooth of a single shark

this time; the waves came up early and we had to quit before noon so we didn't have much exposure. We drifted instead of using the noisy motor but the swell moved us into the rocks and we had to fire up the motor and go back out again and again so that ate time also. Wildlife studies are harder than geology; the samples sit still in geology. That night, I drove over Donner Summit in a light snow flurry, easy in 4WD. It was the national meeting of both the Association of Earth Science Editors and the Geological Society of America meeting in Nevada; I had a whole day to take it easy before I presented my paper in the History of Geology section. <http://www.geosociety.org/cgi-bin/2000/geotimer/doc.pl?annual/abs/50325.htm~1219820> is my abstract. When I got back, I got to take a bicycle ride with my friend Elsa on her 80th birthday. We went a mile for each decade. I visited her and her kitty Saturday; she's had that cat since she was 59 Her husband, John, was one of my editors on my Sierra ecosystem paper. Anna and Stephane visited my house before Thanksgiving and I had to make this place look less like it is occupied by a single man living alone: you know: Clear out the beer cans and last-month's dishes from the sink, suck in my guts, hide the smelly socks... Put out wine, flowers, shine the silver, place a New Yorker on the coffee table, iron a shirt...

Thanksgiving is one of those holidays that are fine if you are doing well and can be awful if you are not doing well. I was quite at risk this year but I have this wonderful family whose love and supportiveness put me in the "doing well" realm by an easy margin. We had five generations at dinner from Mikaela (3 months) to Neva (92 years) and you can see it all at <http://caldera.wr.usgs.gov/mfaulkner/>



Five generations; Jacqui, Thom, Neva, Mikaela, and Melissa

Neva started December with a Christmas party. As granddaughter Mary pointed out, that light in her eyes shines as she plays carols on her piano after a career of teaching music at Cal. I got one more presentation in this year. I tried to drag my kid along but he's heard me "drone on" before. I gave a short presentation on teaching natural history in an outdoor environment (you guessed it, the Yosemite photos) to the Society of Women Geographers joint meeting with The Explorers Club in San Francisco. Chris and I have our plans all made for the holidays to come, though. He and I will spend Christmas at Linda's and drive back together. I'll get to see Katherine dance in The Nutcracker before that and give her a hug, a kiss, and a gift sometime after that.

I wish you all the love and closeness that goes with this season. Thank you for being my caring friends and family members.

Love,

Nike

mdiggles@usgs.gov

<http://www.diggles.com>