

2010-2011 Beasley~Forrest Newsletter



2010 has been the most difficult and challenging year we can remember. We've had below normal cold winters & above normal hot & sticky summers, with little reprieve in between. 2011 summer was brutal as well, which puts a damper on outdoor activities and makes yard work even more arduous. Living on the coast, we are grateful, however, to have survived another 2 years without a hurricane or evacuation from the threat of a hurricane.

2010 continued a worsening financial crisis. Beaufort County government, our umbrella employer, has suffered from this economic instability and initiated a hiring freeze early in the year, which is still in effect (with the exception of very key positions). Beaufort County Libraries, where Stuart and I work (at the main branch in Beaufort), is now down by ca. 30% of its employees overall. It has been a stressful time with the County government putting the fear of God into the library administrative staff riding herd on its employees, demanding we do more with less and at times even making us feel guilty for having a job. If I hear the phrase "just be grateful you have a job" one more time, I think I'm gonna barf!—to borrow a phrase from Marge Gunderson in the movie *Fargo*—still one of my all-time favorite films. It's so unnecessary... of COURSE we're grateful to have our jobs, seeing more and more unemployed coming in to use the library each day to get help to finding employment and relief. Needless to say, our work environment that was once fairly relaxed, became supercharged for many months with so many people on edge from having to work so hard. Several employees complained of increased blood pressure and inability to sleep well at nights, me being one of them. To add to our stress level, the County initiated mandatory yearly employee evaluations. And this year they ran out of money and had to give us all a week off with no pay to make it through the year-end budget.

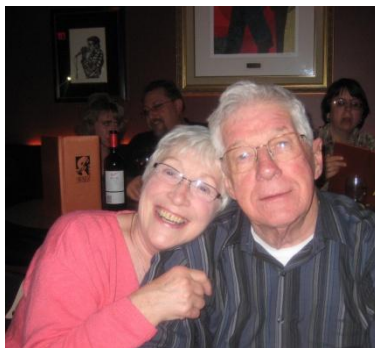
In addition to Stuart's many IT responsibilities, overseeing the IT budget and making sure all the software is installed and hardware running smoothly for roughly 250 computers, he is on several committees, and makes all the IT plans for the new St. Helena Branch library, slated to open late 2012. Stuart was also heavily involved in our newly-installed RFID program (Radio Frequency Identification), which allows patrons to go to a self-checkout station that reads the radio tags inserted in each item. Also there are conveyor belts that sort materials, reading these tags, as books & other library materials are checked in. So he has had his hands full! The good news is, just a few months ago, Stuart finally got an IT assistant, one of our Reference Librarians. So he now has the beginnings of an IT Department! Laura can handle the more mundane computer snafus while Stu can concentrate more on the big-picture projects that take more time and expertise. YAY!! Being our chief IT person, Stuart was the only employee funded for travel. Last year he traveled to Grand Rapids, Michigan and this year to Decatur, Georgia, representing BCL at Evergreen Conferences, our online library catalog system.

Brenda does all the original and nonfiction cataloging for the library system, and has a cataloging assistant who does all the fiction (including feature films) and children's picture books. In addition, she is the recycling coordinator with the county for the entire library system, served on the ILS Committee, Communications Focus Group, Intranet Design Committee, compiled library statistics, and oversees special cataloging projects such as maps, illustrations, and music CDs. We'll be addressing e-books in the coming year. Still active in our monthly library book club, she dreams of starting a new book club that meets in the comfort of peoples' homes.

Last year Stuart turned the big 5-0. For his half-century celebration, we met Jim & Kelley, our Raleigh friends, in Myrtle Beach. We had a Japanese Hibachi restaurant night, shopping and lunch at Market Crossroads, and of course worked in the obligatory round of Putt-Putt. We've also spent the past 2 New Years with them in Raleigh, going to movies, working on our laptops, and finding great restaurants for celebrating. Kelley and I have been friends since Jr High, and we were in each others' weddings.



We were blessed to have visits both years from cousin Carol Beasley, and our library friend, Bruce Pencek. Coincidentally, they lived in the same town and both worked at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. Bruce and I both worked for Northern State Univ. in South Dakota, and I ran into him a few years ago in Blacksburg when visiting Carol. Bruce comes down for the Charleston Library Conference every fall, then to Beaufort to see us and go fly fishing. Sadly, they both lost their long-time canine companions this year... Sassie & Eddie will be sorely missed.



Last year we met up again with our friends Carol & Paul Thompson, who come down to Beaufort from Wolfeboro, New Hampshire to stay a month in Beaufort & Hilton Head. We stayed with them in their condo in Hilton Head and had a lovely dinner at the Jazz Corner. In September, they invited us up to the NH Highland Games, held each year at Loon Mountain. We hadn't made vacation plans yet,





so that worked out great! We flew into Boston and spent a couple nights there, enjoyed tours of the city, including the Duck Tour in a WW2 land/water submersible vehicle (previous page) and a walk about Beacon Hill neighborhood (right), the Boston Public Library, and the harbor. We then rented a red Dodge Charger and drove up to Loon Mountain, NH where Paul & Carol had rented a condo. We attended a Scottish Ball the first night that included the piping in of the haggis, and several Scottish dancers and bands. We went to our first ever whisky tasting the next day at the games. The weather was gorgeous, and we had a lovely dinner the following evening at the Woodstock Inn & Craft Brewery. www.woodstockinnnh.com We toured the capitol in Concord on the return.



Just after I finished the last Statue of Liberty Club Newsletter of a five-year commitment, we began in earnest all the tasks of putting our house on the market. For over three years, Stuart and I lived in the 900 sq ft cottage I'd purchased before we met, and it was time to expand. The dining room table was Stuart's office, and we really wanted a dedicated space for that. Most of the spring and summer of 2011 was spent doing the copious house repairs, two coats of exterior paint on all areas, landscaping, and yard maintenance. It was the worst possible market to try to sell a house in; but we were determined to give it our best shot.



Just after we got the house listed in July we left for a one-week visit with my brother and his family at Nags Head. We spent the 1st weekend w/Jim & Kelley in Raleigh. Stu went to his first ever American baseball game at the Durham Bulls stadium. The 100° day cooled off a bit, and at least there was a breeze on that night in the upper 90s! It would be our last visit with Ron's wife Linda, who died early this year of a long and painful battle with osteo-arthritis. Stu and I stayed in Wilmington, NC on the way back—a great town on the Cape Fear River. We have been blessed with the bi-annual trips mom & dad made each year to see us, via Amtrak, as well.

I'm a longtime fan of blues legend Stacy Mitchhart, from the Bourbon Street Blues Bar in Nashville (Printer's Alley). He and his band did a free concert on the street sponsored by the Arts Council and nearby town of Port Royal. It was so great to see him and the guys again!

Oct 23rd of last year, Stu and I took an impromptu trip up to the mountains to see the fall foliage, traversing the scenic highways throughout South Carolina, and ended up overnighing in Cashiers, NC, just across the border. It was a glorious weather weekend. We especially enjoyed sitting around the firepit at a restaurant after dinner, and talking to guests from all over NC.



Then on the drive back, our lives would change dramatically as we were in a near-fatal crash in I-95 @ Walterboro btw Charleston & Beaufort. Traffic had come to a stop, but the tractor-trailer truck behind us did not. He rear-ended us at high speed, throwing our car off the road. The impact was so great & my head hit the headrest with such force it split my scalp open all the way across the back. I broke my right ankle and several ribs from the seat belts. Stuart also broke several ribs, and was quite shook up. Fortunately, he healed quickly; although there has been some residual PTSD. The carotid arteries in my neck were stretched so badly it caused dangerous blood loss to the brain. I was airlifted to MUSC (Medical University of SC) in Charleston where they worked on me all night. I don't remember anything from the accident; the only thing I recall from that night was when they were stapling my scalp together and I said "wow, that's loud!" I was in the hospital until Wednesday. Stuart was at my side the entire time. He went back to work that Thursday, and somehow I managed to make it back to work the following Monday. I'd nearly used up all my time off, and was saving some days off for Christmas, and Beaufort County doesn't give sick leave, so I had to show up if I wanted a paycheck. The next six weeks were so hard; but I realized how very fortunate I was to have a job where I can work at my own pace, and not with the public (I had ghastly bruises all along one side). By 2:00 in the afternoons I had to lay my head down and rest, then take some tea or coke to make it thru the end of the day. Stuart cooked every night for weeks. We somehow made it through...

The following weekend was another tough one; we had to clean house and get it show-ready for our realtor's open house. Bruce was in town and did a lot of excellent work in the yard while Stu and I concentrated on the inside. On top of that, our beloved Suki-Lu was walking down the hall, blood coming out her back side. None of the vets were open in Beaufort and we took her to an emergency pet clinic in Savannah, where they put her on IVs and kept her comfortable. But she just didn't want to eat anything. We picked her up that Monday morning at 6:30, drove to Walterboro and cleaned everything out of our car we could salvage at the wrecking yard, then drove Suki to her vet in Beaufort. They tried to get her to eat, but alas she would not, and her organs started shutting down.





The following morning we were there holding our little dear while they put her to sleep. We had her ashes put in a white cat urn where we will always remember her. I'm working on a collage of my favorite Suki pics to put behind it on a special shelf just for her. We really miss having a pet, but some days it's all we can do to take care of ourselves. It's been over a year now, so hopefully soon after the new year, we'll have another furry bundle of love at chez Beasley~Forrest.

The next three months I was consumed with a regimen of doctors and physical therapy, and copious memos and copies for the accident attorney. We need a part time bookkeeper just for that! To date, there've been nearly \$200,000 in medical expenses. It's the first time I've met all my out-of-pocket expenses with Blue Cross.

Just when we least expected it, our house sold, in February. The new owners live in the upstate and purchased it for a 2nd home on the coast; so they allowed us to rent a couple extra weeks until we could relocate and close on our new house. We purchased a home in an older, established neighborhood called Mossy Oaks, in town, just three miles from the library. I've walked to work a few times on nice days and we've biked in together many times. There's a one-mile stretch that we have to ride on the sidewalks, since it's a busy street, but we hope the proposed new bike trail will take us away from this route and run alongside the marsh instead. Our house was built in the early 60s, but the interior was completely gutted and reconfigured. We love the open floor plan, and the back deck is huge. One wing of the house runs along one side of the deck, and on the other is a separate entrance to what we've made our office. The kitchen was a real selling point with the new appliances and granite counter tops. And we love sitting on the deck at dusk to watch the sky change colors. I enjoyed collecting, washing, and bleaching shells to fill our new lamps. Soon after we moved in this spring, we had two huge limbs come crashing down on the deck in subsequent storms. We decided it was time to call a tree service to come and prune some of these huge live oak limbs.



We got to know the former owner, who did all the excellent renovations, and discovered he was retiring and offered Stuart a chance to purchase some woodworking tools as a part of the sale of the house. This was such serendipity! Stuart's dad was a woodworker, and Stu has always wanted his own wood shop. Soon after we closed on the house we bought a utility building made in SC for Stu's workshop, which we put at the back fence to obscure the view of stuff piled behind our neighbor's garage. So far Stuart has made a hand railing for the front stoop, a work bench, a router table, a low bench for the bedroom for tying our shoes, and a window seat for the hallway, where we can store our plants in winter.

We lost a dear friend, Suzanne Longo, to cancer. A fabulous sculptor and friend, she and her husband Eric opened their hearts and their garden to Stuart and I and gave us a magical space for our wedding reception, just a few years ago. It's such a huge loss to us, to her family, to Beaufort, and the world. We're so fortunate to have one of her sculptures, and enjoy its whimsy and artistry every day.

One of our favorite things is watching the cooking competitions on TV; such creative flair and imagination! We got to meet two nationally-known chefs who have restaurants in Hilton Head: Orchid of Red Hot Mama's, and Robert Irvine from Eats!

Not to be deterred from our misfortune last fall, we went to Hot Springs, NC for another mountain getaway weekend for our 4-year anniversary this October.



Brenda has spent the entire fall beautifying the exterior with landscaping projects. We've planted tall decorative grasses to line the fence, flowering trees and bushes like gardenias, camellias and cassia, and several other species to soften the sharp angles of the yard space. It's a good neighborhood for walking, and now that I've gotten everything planted for the year, I hope to be doing more of that! Now that we live in town, we're getting out more. Before, once we got out on the island for the weekend, it was hard getting us out again. We think it will be good to get more involved in the community. For starters, we've joined the Beaufort Photography Club, and the Beaufort Film Society, which brings indy films to town throughout the year, and a film festival in February.

We'll head up to Richmond for Christmas. It's been a year since we've been back! Mom's health has us all concerned, as her dementia is worsening, and dad having to do more and more for her and around the house. She's getting to where she doesn't feel like doing much, and seldom gets out anymore. Dad may have to stop working. Yes, at 85, he still works 20 hours a week. He loves getting out and about town, and has the perfect job for that as a courier for a dental lab. Brother Ron has just started dating and has a new love in his life, as does cousin Carol. We're so grateful they've both found someone to enjoy life with. We'll see the New Year in with Jim & Kelley and Carol & Kim on the way back home.

Sorry this was so long-winded; but now you know why we were unable to compose and send a letter last Christmas.

Wishing you all a blessed New Year filled with an abundance of quality time with friends and loved ones, and time to do the things that feed your spirit and your inner child.

Our Love,
Brenda & Stuart