

2017 to Present Tom and Sherry Christmas Letters

These letters are summaries of each years events and out lives.

2017 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2017

Dear Family and Friends,

Our year 2017 started off with a bang. We went to our traditional Monterey Country Club (MCC) NY Eve party with friends and neighbors, then a week later Tom's brother Ron and his wife Judy arrived on Jan 6 for a week visit from Chicago. I had warned Ron January could be cool here, and it was mostly highs in the 60's. The Palm Springs Film Fest was also going on, and my birthday was the 9th. It was an exciting week, and we had a good visit with Ron and Judy.

Tom's dear friend and academic collaborator (and Sherry's friend and former professor), Bob Cash, 85, had lost his wife to dementia after a long struggle. However, Bob's unsinkable spirit kept him going. On Valentine's Day Bob visited us with his new friend, Mary. They were so happy and bubbly that we thought they were like a couple of teenagers. Last summer while we were in Maui, they were married, and we are so happy for them. We hope this story can give hope to at least some people who have lost a spouse.

In March we took a first-time-ever trip through the desert back roads to Laughlin, NV. We love the desert scenery and had an interesting visit on the Colorado River there.

We look forward to our nights. We often sit by a fire having dinner and watching a mystery or movie, we have dinner with our friends, or we go to one of the many sources of entertainment in the desert. At the McCallum Theatre we attended our six visiting philharmonic orchestras including the Prague Symphony (where we would be visiting in the summer). Some of our other favorite performances were Lorna Luft (J Garland's daughter), Steve Tyrell, Bernadette Peters, Diane Schur, and the Kingston Trio, and a Neil Diamond tribute artist.

We continued to ride our bikes almost daily except when Tom played tennis (mostly rallying with his 90-year old partner Dick Borah or Ab Glowicki). Lots of tennis and solving the world's problems. Sherry continued in her Pallette Ladies painting group, but it had met less often in the Spring, and the founder, Carolyn Doub moved to Modesto; so they have not met this Fall. Sherry is investigating her options. Tom continues to work on various sub-projects related to his SHAQ questionnaire, and simulating human thinking and behavior with some AI programs he merrily writes.

In June our oldest grandchild became the first to graduate from college. Savannah Steffen graduated from UCLA in Sociology, and did so in four years despite also being on the UCLA swim team the entire time. We attended her graduation in Pauley Pavilion along with 200 other athletes. It was a special ceremony, and we are very proud of her.

We booked our summer trip this year very early when Tom found a special on Eurail passes and used mileage to get round-trip tickets on United to Paris. We love our little area on Rue Dauphine area near the Seine with all its small hotels, restaurants, and shops. We decided to act more as if we lived in Paris and see only a few tourist sites. However, we did attend the Lido de Paris. From Paris we took the TGV high-speed train to Milan, then spent 3 nites in Bellagio on Lake Como, Italy (a first). We got the only rain on our trip, but had a waterfront room overlooking the beautiful mountain-surrounded lake.

From there we returned to Monterosso on the Italian Cinque Terre, one of our favorite towns in Italy. Then we returned to Venice because it was on the way to Eastern Europe. This time we toured the Venice Opera House, which was almost hidden away, but is one of the most gorgeous in Europe—dating back to when Venice was one of the richest cities in the world. After a one-night stopover in Villach, Austria—a beautiful town in the Alps—we went to Ljubljana, Slovenia. Most people (like us) have little knowledge of Slovenia, but it was the most educated, liberal, and economically sound area in the former Yugoslavia. Ljubljana has 50k university students (all free tuition) and won the most ecologically green city in the EU. It is a beautiful, friendly city where nearly everyone speaks English. We went on an interesting walking tour and also walked up the long road to the Palace on top of the hill.

Next was Budapest, the first time Sherry has visited her ancestor's city (she is half Hungarian by her dad Chuck Bene). In Eastern Europe prices are still lower than in the west, so we could stay in (our first) new 5-star Kempinski Hotel in the heart of the old-town area—not far from the Danube. We walked all over the city, took a city bus tour, and took a Danube boat tour at night. Sherry wanted to find Bene in their phone book, but younger people didn't know what a phone book was. Finally, we found one in an antique shop, and Sherry found about two pages of Bene's in Budapest. One of the highlights was visiting St. Stephen's Cathedral—which was amazing. It was very moving for Sherry to realize that her grandparents and many ancestors must have prayed in this church. Her father had been brought up to become a Catholic priest. We also enjoyed our visit to their opera house.

Next was Prague, where we stayed in a very nice hotel, but had to walk further to get to the old town area. All three Eastern Euro cities had closed off the large old town areas to most traffic, and pedestrians were everywhere enjoying the shops, restaurants, etc. Prague seemed to be EU party central for the young (under 35?). There were hundreds of the (well-behaved) young having a good time there at night. The Czech Republic is also doing well economically. While there, we continued our opera house tour by getting tickets to Madame Butterfly at the Prague Opera House (even though we're more architecture fans than opera fans). It was very beautiful and ornate. We also visited their very interesting technical museum.

We have always enjoyed traveling by Eurail: excellent, efficient, timely trains with no TSA or lines with stations located in the heart of the cities and big, roomy comfortable seats with bar or restaurant cars on longer rides. However, for some reason, there were no trains from Prague to south/central Germany, so the German railway runs nice buses to/from Prague. So we bussed and then trained across Germany to Colmar, France—just south of Strasbourg on the Rhine. We'd been to Colmar before, and Rick Steves calls it the most charming city on the Rhine. We liked it so much we were returning to see their amazing old buildings and their excellent food. Then we returned to Paris, where we saw the Macron presidential inauguration, saw Rafa Nadal win his tenth French Open, soaked up the ambiance, and had some very good meals.

After 5 weeks in Europe, we returned home. In the Summer—both in PD and Maui—we swim almost every day. Here we have a pool across the street and in Maui we have the Pacific outside the Whaler side door. So we take our 30-40 supplements a day and try to get moderate exercise 30-60 minutes about every day because we want to go on enjoying our wonderful life as long as possible. We were in PD about 5 weeks between trips in what seemed to be the hottest part of the hottest summer ever in the Coachella Valley. It was over 110 about every day, most days over 115, and 2 days over 120. However, we swam, enjoyed the pool and AC in home, shops, restaurants, etc. MCC painted the homes on our street the day we left.

We arrived in Maui on July 20. We enjoyed life there for several weeks alone. Then the Steffens, Spencer and daughters, David's recently widowed father, Sherry's ex-husband and new wife, and some of their friends arrived. Tracie had a delayed celebration of her 50th birthday, and overall they had a wonderful time. While in Maui, we learned that one of our first PD friends, Lind Berry, died of a heart attack hiking at his 80th birthday party at their lake home near Wenatchee, WA. His wife, Sue, has been close to Sherry and other neighbors, and we all hope she continues coming. Recent losses such as Lind have helped keep us focused on the belief that every day is a wonderful gift that we can't take for granted, and that we intend to be as healthy, happy, and productive as possible in the time we are given.

When we returned to PD on Sept 7, it was still hot, but not as bad; and we enjoyed being home and the quiet before the "season" starts. We celebrated Uncle John Curran's 102 birthday at our 13th block party, which included more new residents than ever it seemed. This Fall was pretty quiet until just before Thanksgiving, then Tom bought a yellow 2015 Mustang GT convertible with a 435hp V8 stick-shift and all the extras—including crash avoidance features. He has had the best time with that car. Also, we can finally take people somewhat comfortably in the back seat. Sherry thinks the coolest thing is the Mustangs it projects onto the pavement when the doors are open at night. Then our Friends, Tom and Jan Binckes visited for the first time in years, and it was a great renewal experience.

Soon thereafter, the fun really started. Tom got a kidney stone, we had to practically move to prepare for new carpeting, and then Sherry's brother Chuck and his wife Nancy visited us. We would like to have had them stay longer, but it didn't work with our schedules. Still, it was fun visit. We all like to travel and had many stories to share. The next day we drove Tom's new Mustang to the wine country in Temecula and stayed overnight at a beautiful winery hotel and had a very nice dinner there. It was a great get-a-way, and the beginning of a brief respite before going to LB for Christmas.

Some highlights of the Steffen's year were Savannah's UCLA graduation, Spencer completing his first year at San Luis Obispo CSU, Sean's continued success and enjoyment of water polo, and their Maui trip. Daughter Tracie had a very difficult year taking care of her best friend, Jill, who died of cancer in June. They have also been helping David's dad, David, move to Seal Beach Leisure World.

Son Spencer Snyder has had another great year with his Naples, LB Real Estate company, and got a hot new Porsche as a reward. He continues to dote over his girls. Roxy is now a junior at Wilson HS, and Charley is a freshman. Both have become very committed to sail boat racing, and have a new hot sailboat that Spencer bought them. All our grandkids have done very well in school and in life, and we are very proud of them.

We will have our private Christmas celebration in PD, then go to LB to be with the family for Christmas, and return home to celebrate the New Year at our club with our friends. Except for some losses, this has been another great year for us in our adult Disneyland, and we are grateful for every day. We hope that you have had a good year, and would like to hear about it.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love,

Tom & Sherry

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Tom's Website: <http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens> --"You Can Choose To Be Happy"



Photo of Lovers in Venizia

PERSONAL ADDED CHRISTMAS LETTER ITEMS

TOM's Eisenhower Procedures. On July ??, Tom had a hernia operation by Dr. Karl Schultz, and was back to normal with no complications in a short time. On Nov 21, he went to Urgent Care with what turned out to be a Kidney Stone which was going to be removed by Dr. Kevin Shandera, but when they gave him the anesthesia, it passed on it's own.

2018 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2018

Dear Family and Friends,

2018 was our 15th year being retired and living in Monterey Country Club (MCC). Almost every day here, we wake up to bright sunny skies, a green golf course, palm trees, and the beautiful surrounding mountains. We usually ride our bikes 7-8 miles and have coffee or brunch someplace. In the afternoons Tom often works on his computer or does chores and Sherry has a variety of activities. At nights we generally have a cozy dinner at home with a fire and watch an old movie or mystery; or we go out to eat, visit with friends, or go to a concert at the McCallum Theatre. We've found a balance that makes our lives very happy and works well for us. Every day we are thankful for the life we lead and just hope it will continue as long as possible.

As is now a tradition, we began the year with our MCC "New York New Years Eve Party" with a group of friends. [NY means it's over after NYC's midnight—9pm here.] We also love all the desert entertainment available. This year at the McCallum we saw Paul Anka, Motown Musical, Pink Martini, Jack Jones 80th Bday, the Beach Boys, John Pizzarelli, the Moscow Ballet Nutcracker, and others. We also have season tickets to the Philharmonic Series that features top symphonies from around the world.

Our get-a-way travels (why leave here?) included the little mountain town of Julian—a beautiful 2-hr drive away, Oceanside, Las Vegas, and the South Coast Winery in Temecula. Our May-June trip was to England. We were in London a week, Cambridge 4 nights, 2 beautiful "Manor Houses" in the country, and the Cotswolds. In London we saw "42nd Street" and Selfridge's Dept Store. This fall we began viewing the PBS series "Mr Selfridge" and have enjoyed it very much. In Cambridge we went punting (small boats like gondolas) and nearby saw the huge, fascinating, Duxford Air Force Base. Museum. Duxford was prominent during WWII. It has a huge all-grass runway and many huge hangers including one for U.S. planes that includes a SR-71 Blackbird, a B-52, and many other U.S. AF planes. There is a Spitfire hanger and a Concorde that visitors can walk through. It took all day, and after reluctantly agreeing to go, Sherry also really enjoyed it.

One of our favorite stays was in the beautiful, elegant Kilworth Manor House where we saw a great presentation of "Guys and Dolls" by West End actors. We also toured the Cotswolds again because we enjoyed it so much in 2013. We had rented a car in London and drove it for 2 weeks around England. We loved avoiding the main highways and driving through the 1 to 1½ lane (2-way) rural roads where there was little traffic and beautiful scenery. We would frequently come upon beautiful mansions and villages seemingly in the middle of nowhere, with no normal width roads leading to them. Tom enjoys the challenge of driving on the left side shifting a stick-shift with his left hand with hedges or rock walls on one side and fast-moving cars coming at us on these narrow roads. So far we've been lucky: on 3 such trips no scratches on the cars yet!

We stayed in Stratford-on-Avon, Chipping Campdon, Painswick, Bibury, and Burford. In Painswick we took a day trip to Bath. We love Bibury and the Swan Inn there—again. [See photos below.] On returning to

London we met Chris and Dee Sharp for dinner—who came from their home near Bury St. Edmunds. In April they sold their MCC home across the street from ours after many years of being our neighbors on their PD visits. We are very sad about their decision; but hope to see them occasionally.

After returning from England, we stayed in the hot desert, swimming a lot, then went to our Maui home for 7 weeks. When we first arrived, we were told that our 1996 Sebring's AC would cost \$2k to fix. It only had 47k miles [we had put 12k on in 14 years], but we sold it and bought a 2005 Mustang convertible with 41k miles in great shape. Tom is still loving the yellow 2015 Mustang GT convertible at home we got last year, so now we have 2 Mustangs.

While in Maui, Spencer, Roxy, Charley, Sean, and Savannah visited us for about 10 days at the Whaler (in a separate condo). They had many adventures and loved Maui as always. Spencer's real estate business seems to hum along, and he has taken his daughters around the country for their competitive sailing. Roxy and Charley are doing very well at it, and Roxy is looking to possibly attend college next year on the East Coast and get on a sailing team.

The big news for the Steffens this year was that David retired from his position as a Fire Chief from the Orange County Fire Dept in April. [Scary having a son-in-law retiring.] The Steffens held a big party at the LB Yacht Club, where David's praises were sung by one and all. Savannah has a new job as a medical sales rep, Spencer spent this Fall in Europe for a study abroad college semester, and Sean continues to be a water polo force of nature in his first year at Wilson High School. Tracie has not retired from her nursing position. There must be a lot of people in the Long Beach area whom Tracie helped bring into this world.

This year Tom has downloaded and been studying an AI software package [ACT-R] from one of this favorite theorists--John Anderson at Carnegie-Melon. ACT-R attempts to model how humans think based upon learning and cognitive psychology principles and research. Tom also just finished re-recording many CDs into higher-quality m4a files, reorganizing his music collection, and receiving a dozen new CDs for Christmas. That makes about 1100 CDs recorded into our music collection that we can listen to on our home stereo, our cars, or our portable music players. Tom loves to listen while he rides his bike or drives. Tom also joined the Shadow Mt Tennis Club in PD—which yearly is listed by Tennis magazine as a top club. Tom needed some new tennis partners. His friend and partner Dick Borah retired from tennis last year at age 90 along with friend Ab Glowiki. Nevertheless, the 3 of them have been continuing their solve-the-world's-problems meeting regularly. However, this Fall Dick announced that he and his wife Lou had bought a new home in Gainesville, FL near their daughter, and were selling their other homes. Sherry and I will miss them very much; but wish them the best there. Sherry spends lots of time with friends and family and her other interests.

So here we are at the end of another wonderful year and counting our many blessings. We hope that you have had healthy and happy years as well, and would like to hear from you.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love 

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Tom and Sherry in Amboise, France for a special dinner

Below: My beautiful wife Sherry, then Charlie, Sherry, and Roxy Snyder



Below: Chief David, new Firefighter David, and Savannah, Tracie, David, Spencer, and Sean Steffen.



2019 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2019

Dear Family and Friends,

Having been retired and moving to Palm Desert 15 years ago made 2019 seem like a milestone. Hard to believe it's been so long. From not believing we didn't have to go to work on Monday to forgetting what working is like illustrates how our life has changed. We are so grateful for our blessed life with few bumps in the road during these years. We have been living a life better than we ever dreamed. We have focused on our happiness and health. So far, we are healthy, energetic, and still feel young at 77 and 74. We have loved living in our beautiful Monterey Country Club (MCC) with our view of the golf course and surrounding palms and mountains. We love all the entertainment options and places to easily drive to. We love our friends, family, and our little community.

We love the freedom of getting up to a bright, sunny, beautiful day almost every day, and being free to do what we want (mostly). We love our weeks in our Whaler 861 condo in Maui—usually 6-7 weeks in July-August. Our long travel trips in May-June to Europe and elsewhere have been dreams come true. We have seen many of the best and most charming/romantic spots in Europe over the years—10 month-long trips in 15 years. We've also driven Hwy 66 twice to Oklahoma City in 2005 and 2010 for Tom's Northwest Classen High Reunions and driven to Victoria, Canada along the Coast in 2016.

Sherry learned oil painting and has painted many wonderful paintings that we love (some sold or given away). Tom completed his Success and Happiness Attributes Questionnaire (SHAQ) research and published a monograph on the surprisingly strong positive results. Then he consequently revised his book, *You Can Choose To Be Happy: "Rise Above" Anxiety, Anger, and Depression* to include those results in 2010. He also has kept his website updated, and has had going on 2 million visitors viewing his free self-help information (including his book) since it went online in 1998. For the past few years he has been writing computer programs in LISP language to go beyond SHAQ and model human personality and thinking at a more detailed level. It's his—maybe never finished—life project he works on many hours/week for fun.

During these years our kids have aged and prospered. We even have a *retired* son-in-law David. He retired as a Chief from the Orange County Fire Dept 2 years ago. Our grandkids have mostly grown up. Spencer will be the second to graduate from college this year. On the other hand, we have been saddened by the loss of some dear friends and relatives. Other friends such as Dr Chris and Dee Sharp, Sky and Joan Richardson, and Dick and Lou Borahs are still healthy, but miss that they have moved away.

So, after 15 wonderful, lucky years, 2019 has seemed a little bit like the start of a new phase; though it has continued along the same path. We began with our MCC New Years Eve of some friends, followed by the desert "Season" of the Palm Springs Film Fest, the Philharmonic and other McCallum Theatre concerts, the Indian Wells Tennis Tournament, art shows, car shows, etc. We enjoyed visiting with Tom's brother Ron and wife Judy who escaped the Chicago cold and visited us for a week (Feb 7-13). We mostly just enjoyed being here living our desert life during the Spring. This year was the rainiest year since 2005, and we finally had a great desert flower season. So, we enjoyed taking drives to see them. We also took a 2-day trip to Laughlin NV to see the desert and flowers by taking the back desert roads in April.

Tom's loss of Dick and Ab as tennis partners impacted his interest in playing tennis. He's enjoyed the social aspect as well as the tennis, and has not enjoyed hitting with strangers so much. He joined nearby Shadow Mt Tennis Club, with 300 members (vs MCC's handful for 19 courts). He has found some good singles matches with 4.5 players; but has not found a regular partner. However, Tom and Sherry love riding bikes (or swimming) almost daily, so we get our exercise that way.

On May 13 we flew to **PARIS** to our Grand Hôtel de L'Univers off Rue Dauphine near Notre Dame. We saw what was left of Notre Dame after the fire; which thankfully left most of the walls fairly intact. We love our little area near the Latin Quarter. The rain we had in SoCal seemed to carry over into Europe. It was very cool and drizzly both times in Paris; but we loved it anyway. After many years of being very happy with Eurail passes, significant changes in the French rail part seriously affected our desire to get Eurail passes again. Because of those changes, we had to take Easy Jet from Paris to **MILANO** instead of the beautiful, relaxing ride we've previously taken on the TGV high-speed train. We always try to find new great cities/towns to

visit, and this year 7 of our 11 cities were new. We usually stayed 2-3 nights in each. Highlights: **VERONA**—though raining—was a beautiful, charming city with a river around the walled older city. It is the home of Opera and has a small Roman Coliseum—with nightly performances. We took a Funicular to the hilltop for a beautiful view. We picked up our Hertz rental in **SALERNO** and drove all day through beautiful, wooded hills across the upper Italy boot to one of our favorite spots on the trip—**ALBEROBELLO**. It was in all the most charming towns lists, and was unique with its white stone, usually round buildings with pointed tops that looked almost like Greek stone teepees (see photos below). It was a beautiful, romantic town without too many tourists (few Americans), and we had two wonderful dinners there. We drove back to the Atlantic side of Italy along the Amalfi coast and stayed in **PRAIANO**. It rained for the entire time, so we skipped our planned stop in Positano and went on to our Hotel on the hill above Sorrento where we have stayed before. Sorrento is one of our favorite places to stay, so we have often “Returned to Sorrento” for the beauty, the food, the small bowls and other pottery pieces we bring home, and to just feel a little at home as we do in our Paris Rue Dauphine area.

We had a long journey on May 29. In the morning we returned our car to Salerno, boarded a train with 3 changes to go to Lucerne. However, on the train from Milano to the next stop, we could not find our Eurail pass when asked by the conductor. We concluded that Tom had thrown it in the trash in Milano with our used ticket stubs. It is impossible to replace these passes—though we did have insurance to pay for part of the new costs. Two Italian conductors kindly believed us and let us continue. That night Tom arranged for tickets for the rest of the journey—though we mostly went 2nd class and we booked the trip from Strasbourg to Rheims on Flixbus (which worked out very well and was way cheaper and faster than the train). The trip proceeded smoothly, and eventually most of the extra costs were reimbursed. Travelling can be an adventure in more ways than one. After all the (very unusual) rain in Italy, **LUCERNE** was beautiful. We have been there many times, and this time we splurged and stayed in a beautiful room on the lake/river in the Hotel Des Alps. We had to have fondue, and it was a wonderful dinner overlooking the lake, and we took a ferry across the lake the next day. Then we journeyed to **GOSLAR** in Northern Germany near the Hartz Mts, where we found more rain. Goslar is a charming old walled city with many original buildings.

STRASBOURG in Alsace was next. It is the home of the EU Parliament; and is regularly patrolled by machine-gun wielding soldiers throughout the central city. We have loved Colmar (not far away) because of its quaint and beautiful old buildings, and Old Strasbourg is very similar. As you would expect, the food was wonderful. One comment about prices. The Euro has been down some, and the hotels and meals all over Europe seemed like a bargain compared to the U.S. In Strasbourg we recommend our beautiful Hotel Maison Rouge right in the center of everything. Next **RHEIMS** France is in the heart of the Champaign district, Oddly, when we arrived, we saw American flags and ESPN interviewing people outside our Hotel De La Paix. The U.S. Women’s Soccer team was playing a match the next day in Rheims (which they won). In Rheims we naturally took a Champaign tour that drove us around the area and gave us two extensive tours—Moet & Chandon and Tattinger. Some fascinating facts. They store the Champaign in bottles below the streets of Rheims (and elsewhere) in 200 km of tunnels that were dug by the Christians, etc. There are over a *billion* bottles stored at any one time just by Moet & Chandon! It rained in Rheims and it rained on our return to Paris, where we stayed in our other favorite Hotel Regent on Rue Dauphine. Though the rain

and losing our pass dampened the trip a bit, we still had a wonderful time. After all, we get a lot of sun in Palm Desert and Maui.

On June 11 we returned to Long Beach in time for Roxy Snyder's HS graduation. This fall Roxy became the most adventurous grandchild by going across the country to Charleston College, where she is on their well-regarded sailing team. During her first weeks there, a huge hurricane hit and flooded the city. Nevertheless, she seems to love her new college life there so far. Our summer continued. We were home in PD for 2 hot weeks before leaving for Maui on July 1 for 7 weeks. We had our condo cabinets painted by a genuine country singer who's had top hits; has made his home in Maui; and paints for a steady income. His name is Steve Zuwala, and we enjoy his music. I will Segway into mentioning how much we've enjoyed watching the PBS 16-hour series Country Music this Fall even though we've never been Country Music fans. While in Maui we were visited by all the kids/grandkids (except young Spencer) and several of their friends who all stayed at the Whaler. This has become an almost yearly tradition. Among the visitors were Jeff and Pam Monahan and their daughters—best friends off Savannah, Aubrey and Madison.

We returned home on August 8 and got into our routine of swimming and enjoying the beautiful desert mornings and nights and enjoying the few people in the desert. The good thing about "scary" temps of 120 is that they keep the whole world from moving here. On Sept 5-6 we stayed in the Hollywood Celebrity Hotel and heard Mozart, then Barry Manilow at the Hollywood Bowl. Since returning home, we have not left the desert on a trip except to visit the kids for Spencer's 50th birthday and Thanksgiving (where Tom went to LA Auto Show with Dixon). We saw young Spencer and met his best friend roommates who were visiting from CSU, San Luis Obispo on their break. We missed Savannah, who is working in her new job with Hedy's company that provides the show personnel for several auto manufacturers. Savannah received a managerial promotion moving from Seal Beach to Nashville, and has been living there since this Fall. So far, she seems to be enjoying the new experience that is quite different from SoCal. She makes the third grandkid that is living outside SoCal right now. Meanwhile, back in LB Tracie and David's youngest, Sean, is all alone but playing on the Wilson High Water Polo team and enjoying his sophomore year. Spencer's youngest girl, Charley, really misses Roxy, but is enjoying her junior year at Wilson. Charley flew to visit Roxy for thanksgiving, and they made a Turkey dinner together for the first time. Daughter Tracie is still working as a part-time nurse at Memorial, and son Spencer continues to manage his successful Real Estate business in the LB Naples area.

This Fall we returned to our pleasant, cozy routines, had our 15th Block Party, saw the "Highwaymen" (Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, etc) tribute group, and fought our MCC Board's action to remove many beautiful, tall Mexican Fan Palms to "prevent future driveway cracks" (which they probably didn't/wouldn't cause). At Frank's Place in the hotel Desi Arnaz built, we heard Frank DiSalvo's dinner show (just like in the old movies) where he sings like Frank Sinatra and other oldies performers that we love to hear and dance to. Christmas we'll be in LB and home for the MCC NY Eve again.

We hope that you've had an excellent year in both health and happiness. We'd love to hear all about it.

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love, Tom & Sherry

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2020 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2020

Dear Family and Friends,

Hmmm. How to begin our 2020 Christmas letter. We like to begin by telling how grateful we are for so much in our lives; and despite COVID we still feel essentially the same way. We have had another wonderful year in so many ways. The year started great: enjoying concerts at the McCallum, Tom's brother Ron and wife Judy visiting us, and then taking our first Winter trip to Maui in several years to see the Whales. We went on two whaling trips and had a whale of a good time. It was a great trip and we were lucky we did; because we haven't been back since. We also saw some excellent Palm Springs Film Festival films, and some concerts at the McCallum before they closed: Jack Jones; and tribute artists for Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald. We also saw several PSFP International Symphony concerts.

The COVID part of the year didn't start well. I cancelled my 60th High School reunion trip to Okla City; we cancelled our month-long trip to Italy—including a cruise to Croatia and Greek Islands; we cancelled a trip to see Grandson Spencer's graduation from Cal Poly, SLO; and we cancelled our long summer trip to our Maui home. This was the first whole summer we have ever spent in Palm Desert; and it turned out to be the hottest ever. Old record for days over 100 degrees, about 130, this year over 150. Old record number of days over 110, about 70, this year more than 90. However, we still swam laps almost every day and were at the pool or outside for a couple of hours or so almost every day. We still did most other normal activities, and had a great summer. We also did some virtual travel. We watched some beautiful travel videos; and explored both places we'd like to visit and some we never would. Virtually touring places we wouldn't go was a good way to learn more about the world without the expense and trouble of visiting.

Not seeing family has been another major Covid cost. We are aware that prolonged, close contact with friends and family is the primary cause of covid spread. We have now gone almost a year without visiting face-to-face with family because they are such a large group who all interact regularly. It has been especially hard for Sherry to not see her children and grandchildren. This is the longest in her life she has not done so with any of her children or grandchildren. We had intended to see them for Christmas; but with the increased Covid and vaccine shots around the corner, we have decided to stay home. It was an extremely hard decision for both of us.

A very sad event for Tom was the relocation and renaming of the (United Methodist) Claremont School of Theology, where Tom received his MTh degree in 1968 after some wonderful years there. CST has been associated with the very highly regarded Claremont Colleges. Tom is not only disappointed; but shocked they would move from such a great location and association with one of the top college systems in the U.S. to Willamette University in Oregon. The move was final this year, and they are selling the campus. Tom has made a couple of trips back to CST to revisit old memories and take some photos of its end. Tom made many close friends, learned a great deal, and refined his personal philosophy and goals at CST. CST has had a great impact on so many of its students and the people the graduates have influenced.

Tom had cataract surgery at UCLA in March so has great vision without a contact in his distance eye. We kept hoping we could do some traveling and planned a trip up the CA coast that we kept cancelling. We did

manage a couple of overnight trips to Julian (a mountain town nearby) where we were one of the few people staying those nights. Finally, August 19 Sherry had to go to UCLA for an appt with a new MD, so we extended the trip and went to Santa Ynez (near Solvang) for 2 nights. Then on Sept 30 we took our long overdue Coast trip, which included 2 nights in Solvang, 2 in Cambria, 2 in Monterey, 2 in Carmel, 2 in Paso Robles, and 1 in Tehachapi. We were very careful to protect ourselves, and the places we stayed were as well. We celebrated Sherry's 75th birthday in our room with a Surprise Champaign bottle from Tracie and David and dinner in our room. Our La Playa Hotel room had a beautiful view of Carmel Bay and provided a very charming and romantic setting. The manager told us that it was the place where Steve Jobs announced the original Apple Mac. We had planned to eat at (outdoors) at a favorite restaurant; but stayed in our cozy room for 2 nights. The night before we ate at Clint Eastwood's Hog's Breath in its outdoor fire pits area. Our beautiful drive up the Coast was marred by a huge fire off Hwy 1 that had delayed our whole trip for 2 weeks. However, it was the first long trip in our "new" Mustang convertible, and Tom loved driving it on Hwy 1. In all our stays we have been very careful—spraying touch points with alcohol, keeping distance, wearing masks, etc. The hotels have done the same and have also had few guests. We think that generally what we did was a good balance between safety and our travel adventures.

Family members have dealt positively with this weird year, and several members have had major life changes. In the Steffen's family Spencer first graduated from CSU, San Luis Obispo last Spring. His overall goal has been to become a Fire Fighter (like his dad); and he just completed his Fire Academy Training at Hancock College. He is now looking for a position in a Fire Dept. Savannah has decided that she wants to become a nurse (like her mom); so she quit her job in Nashville and has enrolled in an accelerated nursing program at Xavier Univ. School of Nursing in Cincinnati. She has a degree from UCLA; but has few needed science courses, so she has a lot of work to do. Sean has done only "virtual" learning for his Junior year at Wilson High; has had to curtail his normal Water Polo HS team activities; but has worked part-time. Tracie and David have a new addition to their family--a big, beautiful new power boat which they are making the most of during these limited travel times.

Spencer (Snyder) has had a great year in Real Estate; has bought a new home; and has also bought a new power boat. Roxy is in her second year at Charleston College learning virtually; but her sailing has been severely constricted. Charley is a senior at Wilson. It seems so very sad she must spend her senior year away from school and friends. She's also working (with Sean) at Duffy electric boat rentals. So basically, despite the very strange and difficult year all the "kids" and "grandkids" are doing quite well, happy, and moving forward.

We have been seeing three other couples exclusively in our "Bubble." They are also very careful about being safe. Two of our original neighbors—Sue Berry and Frank and Marilyn Alexander both sold their homes here on almost the same day. Sue and Lind Berry were our first couple friends in PD. Sherry and the original women have had lunches for years. We will miss them. Fortunately, all are in good health. Ab and Joan Glowicki, our good friends from Victoria, also sold their MCC home this year—though we hope they stay in their kids' PD homes.

One of the things we are most grateful for this year is to see an honest man with integrity, civility, and concern for our nation and **all** its people, Joe Biden, became our President Elect. No matter what is said about Trump's policies, in our professional opinions, he is a narcissistic, vindictive, sociopath. He has

played on his followers' fears and directed their anger toward other groups thus enthralling them to follow him without question in a way eerily similar to how Hitler took control of the German people. As a role model and leader, the Donald has had a huge negative effect on our country. We are grateful that the Judicial System of our nation worked; and he was finally "fired." We expect that Joe Biden will be a positive role model and a competent leader.

We've grown accustomed to living a wonderful life year after year. So not being able to do some of our travels, concerts, dining, and getting together with others—especially family--has seemed difficult at times. However, we are aware that we are still extremely spoiled, blessed and way better off than most. Despite this crazy, confining year we managed to overcome our disappointments and "rise above" it all pretty well. Our life still has many of its wonderful parts: our time together; our daily bike rides or swimming; our cozy nights eating dinner by the fire and watching a good show; and visiting in our bubble. Additionally, we still managed some travel and dining out. Finally, our health is excellent, and the days are always sunny and the mountains and desert beautiful.

We hope that you've had an excellent year in both health and happiness. We'd love to hear all about it.

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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love Tom & Sherry

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2021 Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas 2021

Another crazy year has just passed. Personally, we have had another happy and healthy year so far. We had few changes in our own lives this year. We continue to enjoy our beautiful desert paradise; ride bikes, swim, or dance almost daily for exercise; enjoy our quiet evenings watch mysteries, movies, etc or visiting with friends. We were able to return to dining out this year. All of the concerts and major events in the desert were cancelled for the Spring, so we missed that part of our life. However, we did attend three concerts at the Hollywood Bowl including the first Tchaikovsky night we've seen in years the night we returned from Maui. attended the delayed BNP Indian Wells Tennis Tournament this year after missing it in 2020. We also saw an Elvis impersonator at the famous Purple Room in September, which was a hangout for Frank Sinatra in his desert days. In December we saw a Barry Manilow Gift of Love concert at the McCallum. Barry puts on a wonderful show and for 5 years has given all the proceeds of 5 performances to local charities (he lives here). He fills the audience with Joy!

It's hard to think about 2021 with noting that almost miraculously, vaccines were developed that had the potential to end the pandemic. We were excited about the vaccines, got our shots and boosters early, and *were able to live much more normally with much less fear than in 2020*. However, it is so hard to understand why—despite all the data--people have not been vaccinated or--even worse--spread fake news about the vaccines' effects. They are causing needless

suffering and death for millions of people! We're so sorry for such tragic losses.

During 2020 we had somewhat isolated ourselves due to Covid and started limiting our social life mostly to three close couples; and we continued this habit through 2021. We are grateful for the joy that we have had with all of them, and they have been a light in our lives.

We held our 16th annual Block Party in November after missing 2020. Our block has seen almost everyone from our original neighbors sell or pass away in the past few years including our dear friend Dr. J.R. Fleishner at age 94. Partly because so many friends have left over the years, we decided to make more of an effort to stay in touch on the phone with some of our long-term friends and relatives who we rarely/never see. Our friends the Borahs had moved to Florida, and Tom and Dick stay in touch. We thought that Dick and Lou had a wonderful and romantic relationship reminiscent of our own (for over 60 years). Very sadly, Lou passed away just before Christmas. On a more positive note we have some nice new neighbors. They are more the age we were when we moved in 17+ years ago.

Our travel this year was again affected by Covid. However, we went to Maui for 3 weeks in late March while new ceramic tiles were installed on our roof in PD; and we went to Maui again in the summer for 6 weeks (after missing last year). The "kids" (Steffens and Snyders) also came again this year. We had scheduled a 3+ week trip to France for September; but cancelled because of Covid-related concerns. We rescheduled it to May, 2022; and sure hope we can go. We also took trips to the Temecula wine country in September and a drive through the desert to Barstow (which causes everyone to ask, "Why?") We, especially Tom, love driving through the beautiful and peaceful desert.

This was Sherry's year to get cataract surgery. She had both eyes done at UCLA; and sees better than ever in her life. It took about 5 trips to UCLA in the Spring, but it was so worth it. UCLA has a very nice hotel in the center of the campus that is quite reasonable; so it makes the trip much more pleasant. We also drive through the hills on Beverly Glen, Mulholland Drive, etc. which is a beautiful drive and helps us avoid some traffic and enjoy some great views.

As in past years, Tom has been working on programming a computer cognitive model of peoples thinking as it relates to personality. However, for years he has wanted to develop a phone App for users to complete SHAQ: The Success and Happiness Attributes Questionnaire that he developed in 2000, and has been on his website since. SHAQ asks users about 300 questions concerning specific values, beliefs, and habits/skills in areas of their world and self views, interpersonal relations, self-management, etc. SHAQ has had remarkable research results on 3500+ subjects that Tom summarized in his book and website. SHAQ's scales had high correlations with Overall Happiness, .865; with Low Depression, .730, with Low Anxiety, .675; with Low Anger-Aggression, .701. For Relationship Outcomes, .693; Health Outcomes, .816; Income, .486; Education Completed, .458; and College GPA, .393.

Tom thinks that just taking SHAQ helps people to examine specific **changeable** beliefs and habits that they can modify to improve their success and happiness. SHAQ also directs users to self-help resources on Tom's website. Developing an Android phone App and getting it on Google Play Store involves learning a new programming language and a lot more. Tom finally decided to take on this big task. He has been absorbed in this new project since November, and he'll be working on it for a good part of 2022.

Some highlights in our families lives this year include: Tracie retired from her long nursing career to join David. They love their adventures in their new boat. Roxy Snyder was on the sailing team at Charleston College that won the NCAA national championship; Charley Snyder was one of the Valedictorians in her HS graduating class; Savannah Steffen returned to college [in Cincinnati] to get her RN to become a nurse; Spencer Steffen finished fire school and got a job as a fireman; and Sean Snyder's water polo team won his HS league's championship. Sean won a number of awards for water polo and swimming. Spencer Snyder has had a great year in his real estate business and bought new homes in

Mammoth and Kauai.

We hope that you have all had a good 2021, and look forward to hearing about it; and we hope you'll have a happy, healthy 2022 as well.

Tom & Sherry and Happy New Year. Love,

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PS. The family had Christmas at Spencer's new home in Mammoth, and were there in a historic snow storm. They had a lot fun. Though we missed them, we were glad we decided to avoid all the snow and bad driving conditions.

2022 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2022

Dear Family and Friends,

Sherry and Tom began the new year with hope of life becoming more normal after the worst Covid years. Our Covid years taught us some good lessons and made us appreciate our precious life even more. The biggest changes have been a renewed sense of freedom to do what we want—especially in entertainment and travel. We celebrated Tom's 80th birthday in January. So we've been living, loving, and having fun together for over half his life now.

Typically, during the coldest months of December and January, we hunker down; but Tom took advantage of the cold and worked endlessly on getting his SHAQ: Success and Happiness Attributes Questionnaire on Google Play Store [called "SHAQ TEST" there]. It was officially on Google in April. It's free and collects no data, so users can get benefit from it without worrying about privacy issues. It gives a very comprehensive view of oneself with well-supported scales.

The year didn't start normally since the Palm Springs Film Fest was cancelled again. We did get to see the Indian Wells Tennis Tourney for the first time in two years. The "Season" is a time when we love to attend many wonderful musical presentations mostly at the McCallum Theatre. They include visiting Symphony Orchestras and favorite other events included were Barry Manilow, a Ray Charles tribute artist, the Lettermen, and Pink Martini. Elsewhere, our old favorite Frank DiSalvo left "Franks Place" at the IW Hotel (built by Desi and Lucy); however, he was replaced by Marc Antonelli in the renamed "IW Live Lounge." Mark is not a tribute artist, but sounds almost exactly like Andrea Bocelli; and put on a wonderful performance. It's a dinner theatre just like in the old days, and we can even dance there.

We've been so happy in the desert that we just don't seem to have a lot of desire to travel on short trips during the colder months. However, we love driving through the desert, and there are not a lot of good destinations within easy driving distance. In April we drove to Las Vegas via back desert roads and stayed at the Bellagio Hotel. In 2017 we had stayed in the real Bellagio town on Lake Como in Italy. We also took short trips to the Temecula wine country and to UCLA Medical Center.

During 2021-22 it seemed to us that many of our possessions needed fixing or replacing. It began with the HOA replacing our shingles with a new tile roof in 2021. We needed two new computers, then Tom's phone replacement, etc. One of our happiest replacements has been our new bicycles. We had put 20,000+ miles on our old ones in our first 18 years here. We bought new bikes in Maui as well (though much cheaper ones). We love our rides which include beautiful sun and scenery, and usually a stop where we can enjoy a snack and chat.

For travel, we had planned a trip to tour France first in Summer, 2021; then in Fall, 2021. Covid concerns cancelled both. Then in Fall, 2021, we rebooked all hotels, etc for May-June, 2022. To get ready we spent a lot of time on Rosetta Stone learning French. It was the first time we had ever taken an entire month trip within France. We flew to Paris; then drove around Northern and Western France for 17 days. The little area we love in Paris is on/near Rue Dauphine (crosses the Seine at Pont Neuf). It is a wonderful and charming area near the Latin Quarter. It feels like a small town to us; and is like our home in France. We go for long walks, enjoy the food and wine at our favorite little restaurants, and see a few sights each time we're there.

After Paris, we spent 3-4 nights in each city we visited. We look for cities with charming old towns. First we drove to Rouen, where the most memorable part was one of the best meals and charming restaurants we had ever been to—La Couronne. They have beautiful, signed photos of Aubrey Hepburn, the Queen, and many others in this tiny old restaurant (see photos). Next was Honfleur which is a beautiful fishing village (and tourist site) on the N Coast. Then we drove SW to Dinan and Amboise. Amboise is in the heart of the Loire Valley and the fabulous Chateaus of the French Kings. We toured Chenonceau (often considered the most beautiful) for a day. We stayed in Le Clos d'Amboise in Amboise, which had been a palace; and enjoyed some of our best meals there (see photos). We experienced a lot of rain on our trip; but it didn't dampen our spirits too much.

Next was Bordeaux, which some consider one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. One surprise was a large ocean liner not far from our hotel. It comes up the river. Naturally, we had to go on a wine tour; and picked the number one red wine area in France—St Emilion area. It was a fascinating all-day trip in a small van led by a guide who was a true expert. He talked for about 7 hours non-stop. Sherry was a bit put off by that; but Tom was happy to learn so much new information. We learned a lot about wine, the history of the area, the politics of wine, and many tips about drinking wine. We toured three top wineries there and took a noon break in the beautiful hilltop town of St Emilion. After Bordeaux, it was on to Versailles and back to Paris for a delightful trip finish (though anxious about Covid tests to get back into U.S.).

After our trip, we attended grandson Sean Steffen's Wilson High School graduation, and spent time with the family. Spencer had bought a new house in Kauai and invited the family to see it, and they went two days later. After a brief time at home, we were off to our Maui home, where we decided to have the carpet and bathroom renovated. We enjoyed our 7 weeks there as always; and included a perfect trip on the road to Hana.

We returned home August 29, went to the Hollywood Bowl, and had time to enjoy the nice warm (100-110 highs) weather. However, the pool was great, and weather quite comfy in the mornings and later pm. Then October and November were sunny and good temps most of the time. We began attending the MCC Wine Club where we've met a number of nice people. We also went to the IW Live Lounge again and saw Barbara Streisand at her best (at least the tribute artist looked and sounded almost like her).

Our saddest news of the year was the passing of Dr. Bob Cash soon after his 90th birthday. Bob was one of Tom's best friends and a CSULB Ed Psych professor for 30 years. He had developed a class, training materials, and an outreach program to teach basic counseling/helping skills to thousands of students, teachers, and others. His training was the most important single factor in helping counselors be effective. Bob and Tom shared similar cognitive behavioral approaches, and made several presentations together at professional conferences. They also played tennis weekly for years. Sherry was in Bob's class when Tom and Sherry met, and thinks his class was her most important for becoming a skilled counselor. She and Bob also became close friends. We were also close to Bob and his first wife, Mary, who passed; then close to his new wife, Mary Hester, who is a wonderful person he was lucky to share five happy years with.

On a more upbeat note, Tom has a "new" left eye (cataract replacement) from UCLA this month. His left eye is more for reading and right more for distance, and he hasn't seen so well ever? He also is back to working on his Cognitive Systems model of personality using his favorite LISP programming language again this Fall.

Our son Spencer is very excited about his new love, NaTa, who is from Colombia and studying to be a chef. They are both very adventurous, and have been spending a lot of time traveling, snowboarding, etc. Nata moved in with Spencer this Fall; and they seem very happy together. Savannah had decided to become a nurse after receiving her UCLA degree and working awhile, and received her RN in Cincinnati. Then she moved to Eureka, CA to work in their hospital ER room. She and Bryce made a big move; and are now living together there. He is an environmental scientist in the area. Spencer Steffen has been working with Hot Shots this year fighting forest fires in Northern CA. Roxy is enjoying her sailing and life in SC, and will graduate from Charleston University in the Spring. Charley is a sophomore at University of Colorado, and loves Boulder and snowboarding nearby. Tracie and David are having a lot of fun on their boat and visiting with friends in their retirement. They've taken several trips to Catalina this year. We are grateful for our family, good health, and good life.

We hope that you have all had a good 2022, and we hope you'll have a happy, healthy 2023.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Love, 

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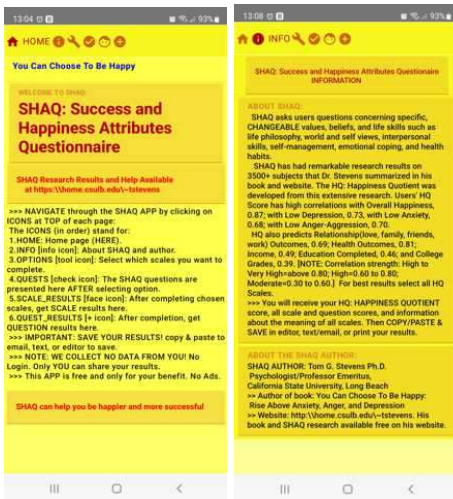
Tom's Website: <http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens> --"You Can Choose To Be Happy"



One of our best meals ever at a famous 100 year old restaurant in Rouen, France



Our home patio view we love every day! Mt San Jacinto



Tom's SHAQ (Success & Happiness Attributes Questionnaire) app on Google Play Store

2023 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2023

Dear Family and Friends,

Every year when I write the Christmas letter, I look back on the year and reflect on all the experiences of the year; and that causes me to be very grateful for that year our lives. This year it occurs to me that in almost 82 years, I have never really had a bad year, and Sherry feels the same way (even though she's only 78). We've been extremely lucky to have such wonderful lives. 2022 was another very good year which began with our MCC Club NY Eve party with friends, followed by the PS International Film Fest. We enjoy seeing the very different films they have; and often learn a lot from one or more of them.

Winter is also the height of the entertainment/concert season in "the desert." Highlights this year for us included Paul Anka (who is my age and puts on a wonderful show with lots of energy), Katherine Jenkins, Bob Anderson (an excellent Sinatra tribute artist), and this Fall the Lettermen. Plus we have season tickets to see touring top Philharmonic Orchestras (including the LA Phil). El Paseo Cruise nites get a regular visit from Tom, who likes old and exotic autos in their show before they all cruise up and down El Paseo. A lot of people relive teen dreams by actually owning the autos they dreamed about then, and enjoy cruising in front of the many onlookers, then going to dinner.

On January 24, Tom's brother Ron and wife Judy visited with us for a week; and we had a great week catching up, telling old stories, can solving the problems of the world (if only anyone would listen to us). After their visit, Tom attended the annual BNP Tennis Tournament to see the world's top players. He is no longer playing tennis because of a problem of finding regular singles players of his age. We are still riding our bikes, swimming, or dancing almost every day to get our exercise though. We still take all our supplements; and we are still healthy, happy, and energetic. We are also still enjoying the MCC Wine Club. The people we have met have been interesting, and the wine we drink yummy.

This year we traveled to first Charleston, SC to see granddaughter Roxy graduate from Charleston College, and enjoyed seeing whole Snyder-Steffen family. We had never been to Charleston, and discovered what a beautiful, charming, and historic town it is. Then we flew to Rome for the beginning of a 23-day driving trip around Italy. We have seen many of the sights in Rome and other Italian cities, so we now focus more on strolling the streets and enjoying the beauty, restaurants, hotels, people, parks, and other sights at our leisure. Though we usually find a tourist site or two to see as well. We try to spend 2-4 nites wherever we go, to be able to enjoy the city (and not repack so much). A few highlights of each place include: Florence (Firenze) we took a tour of Salvatore Ferragamo's World Shoe Headquarters' Museum because we had seen a documentary about his fascinating life and love of shoes at the PS Film Fest. We also took an interesting wine tour of 3 Tuscany wineries, and discovered throughout Italy how good and inexpensive by our standards the wine (and food) is right now. In Assisi, we always enjoy the beauty, solitude, and food of the town. In Orvieto, we saw the Duomo, and discovered what a charming hilltop town it is.

Next we went to Positano on the Amalfi coast. When we first arrived at the city parking garage, they called the Hotel Dimora Forcillo to send a porter to get our luggage. He said it was 250+ (big) steps down to the hotel. He slung one suitcase over his shoulder, and carried another. We took the rest. About halfway down, we decided we'd never come back to this hotel. However, when we finally arrived, we found our room opened into the grassy table area overlooking all of Positano and the Mediterranean—one of the best views we have ever had. We got to know the owner, and he told me that everything (furniture, appliances, etc) had to be carried down those stairs. We could also walk about another 250 steps down to the beach. Actually—except of carrying the luggage—we enjoyed our trips up and down. Positano was wonderful, and we would love to go back there (but not sure we will). The Grand Hermitage Hotel in Sorrento (on the hill near St Agata) is a favorite of ours, and we had another wonderful visit there. Then we returned to Rome and stayed in an amazing Hotel room. It is at the top of the Spanish Steps (on the right as you look up). Our room had a panoramic view of all of Rome toward the Vatican.

We returned home to find a relatively mild summer (yea) where we took a pause in our busy schedule and enjoyed the pool, Palm Desert, and friends. We went to our Maui home on July 12 for another relaxing time on the Beach, etc before going to Kauai to visit son Spencer's beautiful wedding to Nataly (Nata), which was also attended by almost the whole family and many of their friends. Most of the family stayed in Spencer's Kauai home in Princeville, and we stayed in a condo overlooking the beach not far away. The wedding was held on Spencer's friend's isolated, gorgeous property on the river leading to Hanalei Bay. Spencer and Nata seem so happy together. All went smoothly, and everyone had a great time!

We returned to Maui on August 7 where a tropical storm was beginning. The next morning we awoke to a fire in the hills above Lahaina and watched through the day from our 8th floor condo at The Whaler. By night the smoke and flame was immense. The next morning when I looked out our lanai, I noticed that there was only a little smoke. Turns out that the reason was because the entire town

had burned to the ground, and many tragically lost their homes or lives. As a result, officials closed the only route from West Maui—leaving residents all stranded. However, buses of all types took all tourists to the airport in about 2 days. The only people left were confused residents and owners. We had no electricity, no internet, no phone or cell service, and almost no connection with the outside world. I could listen to the FM on my music player; the Whaler had propane-powered emergency generators that allowed us to charge our phones (though useless) for 2 hours each night where we all met and got some emergency news. After about 3 days, I got a limited cell signal and made flight reservations for 8/13. Our frozen food spoiled, and some food was brought in by boat, and eventually trucks. The night before we left, limited electricity was back on, and some people were allowed to come and go to West Maui. Meanwhile 23 Whaler employees had lost their homes in the fire along with all the other tragedies we heard about. Displaced people were already staying in the Whaler, so we heard stories first hand. The night before the fire we had driven through Front Street on the way home without knowing that was the last time anyone would see historic old Lahaina. We have spent so many good times there; it is so hard for us along and so many others to think about the tragedy of the damage. Since we left, the Red Cross has been renting Aqua-Aston managed condos (including ours) for displaced families; and the saga goes on. The damage occurred almost entirely to the old-town Lahaina. Almost all the rest of Maui is *physically* untouched, but seriously financially and emotionally impacted.

We were very happy to return home, though feelings about Lahaina persisted. However, that happiness was soon blunted as Sherry came down with her first case of Covid 3 days later for a week (from plane)? Then the first desert hurricane in history? (Hilary) arrived and made a mess of the desert topsoil/sand. The huge amount of fine dirt caused terrible dense, unhealthy dust clouds for a couple of weeks. Nevertheless, the rest of the Summer was very nice, and overall we enjoyed it. We thought the series of mishaps was finally over. As a result of Lahaina, Tom took emergency preparedness (especially electrical outage) seriously and bought stuff to take care of such emergencies for extended time periods.

The Fall was pretty normal. We attended the Hollywood Bowl, swam, and enjoyed the sun and great weather. Tom finished Stephen Grossberg's 800-page life's work summary about his Adaptive Resonance Theory (ART) of basic brain and AI networks. Tom has followed Grossberg's work since 1980, and believes he has made the greatest theoretical contribution to Psychological, Neurological, and AI theory of anyone. He has been called the Einstein of the brain. SOOO, Tom decided to write a lisp program to incorporate Grossberg's network into his own Cognitive Systems Theory. He has been working on that project whenever he gets time. It many lead to nothing; but he is fascinated just working on it and making small steps of progress. This Fall we also hosted our 18th block party; and we were surprised at both the size of the turnout and how long people stayed and interacted.

At Thanksgiving we took a trip to first Prescott at the 96-year old Hassayampa Inn, then to Sherry's brother Greg and wife Melissa's home in Tonto Basin, AZ 30 miles south of Payson and 60 north of Phoenix--it is remote. Her other brother, Chuck, and his wife Nancy were also there. Tonto Basin has only a few stores and a few people. Greg and Melissa have a double-wide home on a large lot with a beautiful view of the high desert and mountains. We saw many quail, rabbits, and other animals in their yard, and they told us of the coyotes, foxes, wild pigs, and even a wolf and mountain lion that can visit. We had a great time laughing and visiting. However, they may have been sorry they asked us, as mishaps seemed to have followed us to Tonto Basin. First, BOTH Greg and Chuck had bad falls the first night. Greg really messed up his shoulder. Then on Thanksgiving morning (before dinner), Greg announced that their bathtub had filled with backup from the toilets. So to no avail, he began trying to get help. We all had light Thanksgiving dinners despite a full and delicious menu. That night the guys decided to let the girls use the bathrooms. However, only one guy (Tom) went outside in his jimmies. First he went out the back door and walked away from the home, and all the floodlights and video cameras automatically came on—and it was freezing outside. When he couldn't do anything and the lights went off, he wondered what other creatures might be out there, so he went back inside. (Later he had better luck out the front door.) The tale ends happily as Greg found a neighbor to fix the problem the next morning. After a pretty drive home through the desert, we finished another adventure.

Our life has been mostly back to normal since, though Tom had a very successful droopy eyelid surgery from UCLA on 12/4. We just had a very nice Christmas Dinner/Dance at the Club and had a lot of fun dancing and visiting; and this Friday we are going to hear Marc Antonelli (sounds like Andrea Bocelli) at the Indian Wells Live dinner theatre for their Christmas Celebration. Then we will be off to Long Beach to spend Christmas with family at Tracie and Dave's home.

More on family: Tracie and Dave took their first trip to Europe, and had a wonderful time on a cruise and driving trip around Italy and into Croatia. Their daughter Savannah is enjoying her nursing in Eureka, CA; their son Spencer has been a "Hot Shot" fighting fires in Central and Northern CA; and Sean is attending CSU, San Luis Obispo and was a lifeguard last summer. Spencer and his girlfriend Maia also took a trip to Southeast Asia and Australia where they toured extensively. All will be back for Christmas. In addition to marrying Nata, Spencer has still been running his business, visiting his girls, and traveling between homes with Nata. Both his girls Roxy and Charley are now in Charleston most of the time as both have significant-other relationships there and love the town.

That's all folks! It's been another interesting, fun, and mostly healthy/happy year for us despite the unusually large mishaps and challenges it has brought us. Overall, we are so very grateful for every day and every day together!

We hope that you have all had a good 2023, and we hope you'll have a happy, healthy 2024.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Love, Tom & Sherry

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2024 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2024

Dear Family and Friends

Overall, this past year has been another healthy and happy year for Sherry and Tom. As of June 4, 2004 we have lived in our wonderful Monterey Country Club home over 20 years! We have wanted to upgrade/fix a many items at home and at our Whaler studio; but have put them off for a long time. So we spent a lot of time and \$\$ getting our homes ready for the next 20 years. Here is a small list. At home: we put in new baseboards and refinished the travertine floors and shower; repainted the master bath and new put in new shower glass and hardware; recovered our French chairs; got a new mattress; plus many smaller projects. We still have more to do, but we're very happy with what we have done.

Next project: a refurbished 1980 Taylor-Dunn "Tee Bird" Golf Cart came with our home. It has floor mats with pictures of "Tweety" bird, and we call it "Tweety." Tweety's batteries died again, and we decided to replace them with a Lithium Iron Phosphate battery weighing only 60 lbs (vs old batteries' 360 lbs); and now Tweety goes like a "bat out of hell." We also installed new LED lights, mirror, windshield, and 4 seat belts. So Tweety has been reborn. At our Whaler studio we finally had our ceiling and bath re-model completed, and are very happy with it.

We started the 2024 celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Palm Springs Friends of the Philharmonic which hosts major International orchestras at the McCallum. The LA Phil was conducted by Zubin Mehta and PSFP passed out lots of Champagne! We later saw at the McCallum Paul Anka, Pink Martini, The Four Freshmen, and a Bee Gees tribute group. We also saw a "sound alike" to Andrea Bocelli, Marc Antonelli at the IW Live dinner theatre in the hotel Dezi and Luci built. In January we also attended the annual Palm Springs Film Festival, and saw some excellent films including *Common Ground* which details more natural ways of farming that could have amazing effects on the world's health and could almost solve the global warming problem. It's predecessor *Kiss the Ground* "touched over 1 billion people globally." It is a must-see for anyone living on planet Earth. On Feb 4 Tom's brother Ron and Judy visited with us for a week, and we all were in for a lot of non-stop talking. They are enjoying their life in Chicago; however, the desert appeals to them in January.

When we first retired, we wanted to see every place within driving distance, and spent more time visiting other cities not too far away. However, now we are very content to enjoy our immediate area. We enjoy our cozy dinners, videos, and dancing at home; ride our bikes almost daily; go out to dinner or entertainment; and visit with friends or family for most of the year.

However, in the Summer we usually take a major trip and go to our Maui condo 6-7 weeks (when it's hottest here). May 26-June 24 we drove through England and Wales. Some highlights included: 1. **Two West End musicals:** *MJ: Mickael Jackson* then *Mamma Mia* (where we all had a great time dancing to the music with the cast for about 20 minutes after the finale). 2. **Port Isaac** (home of the Doc Martin series) where we stayed at the Slipway--a hundred-year old hotel across the street from Mrs Tishel's pharmacy and next to the life guard boat station. We had a great view of the bay and many TV show buildings from our attic room. The only problem was that Tom kept knocking his head on the low ceilings and door frames. 3. **Kilworth Manor** (Lutterworth) and **Audley's Wood Manor House** (Basingstoke) were beautiful manor houses with beautiful interiors, grounds, and places to see how the English gentry lived. 4. **Oxford** tour of the colleges--a busman's holiday. We also stayed in Broadway (Cotswolds), Wales (Ross-on-Wye and Tenby), Lynton/Lynmouth (Devon), and Exmouth (Cornwall).

After the cold and rainy weather of the UK, we were happy to come home to 100+ temps and swimming for 3 weeks. Then we were off to Maui [7/15 to 8/30]. We were happy to see that progress is being made to clean up and rebuild in Old Lahaina Town. All of the house lots and many of the business lots were cleaned and the ground covered with gravel. The old banyan tree is smaller, but is flourishing. A few homes were already being framed, and new condos were built on the hill above Lahaina Town. Meanwhile the rest of Maui was never touched by the Lahaina fire, and Kaanapali is as it always was—except fewer tourists.

We had a wonderful time being back at the Whaler--except... First, we had expected all the bathroom work to be completed, and instead parts were done while we were there. However, it is great now. Second, on 7/19 Tom had an AFib and called 911 because of high heartrate, and was given a cardioversion at Maui Memorial MC. Immediately, he knew his 11+ year old ablation needed a refresh. After some thorough MD testing, he got lucky with an early appointment with his original MD--Dr. Andrea Natale (now at Scripps MC in La Jolla)--for another ablation. Sherry was Tom's guardian Angel and partner through the whole process.

Once we returned home, we attended the Hollywood Bowl for 2 nights and saw the new Motion Picture Academy Museum. This is the 60th year that Tom has attended the HB; however, he will not renew his subscription for the first time since 1973. We will only go to very special events.

We have been "vacationing" on the beach in La Jolla and Scripps MC on and off this Fall for Tom's new ablation Oct 1. It was extremely successful: he recovered quickly, and we are both very hopeful about getting another 11+ years with no AFibs. This Fall we also hosted our 19th annual Block Party on Nov 10, and it was we had a good turnout of neighbors who had a good time. This year we attended the Wine Club nites for the 3rd year, and enjoyed new people and sampling good wines at the MCC club house. For fun Tom continues working on his Cognitive Systems neural network model and reading the 800 page book written by Thomas Stevens about his historic first ever ride around the world on a bicycle in 1884-86. In October Tweety was reborn (see above). We both read a lot about health, science, and world events; and we see lots of movie and mystery videos with our dinner and a fire.

The Snyder and Steffen Families 2024. After living in Long Beach for so many years, almost every member of both families has been traveling a lot. Spencer and Nata Snyder travel to Mammoth, Colorado, Kauai, Columbia (her home), etc. Roxy is living in St. Croix, and Charley is finishing college at U of Colorado, Boulder. Tracie and David took a 3-week trip to Greece including a bare boat charter and a trip to Santorini and Milos islands. Savannah and Bryce took a wonderful trip oriented around nature to Indonesia, Thailand, and other spots in SE Asia this Fall. Sean is currently in Spain and all over Europe for his junior Fall semester at Cal State, San Luis Obispo. This was a very good year for Spencer Steffen! After a long journey with many turns and a lot of work, Spencer reached his childhood dream of becoming an Orange County (OCFA) Fireman, and we celebrated his academy graduation on 12/4; which was highlighted by the 18 new inductees extinguishing fires at the training facility. Congratulations! All the Steffens and Snyders seem healthy and happy in their interesting and adventurous

lives. This Christmas we will again be at the Steffen's home in Long Beach which is usually the Celebration Center for the whole family.

We have just finished planning next Summer's big trip. After thinking we wouldn't go to Europe this year, we decided on an "easy" trip by train of 6 stops in France and Italy to cities and most hotels we've already been to. So almost every year we have been lucky enough to enjoy a beautiful and romantic trip that for many people is a once in a lifetime experience. But we believe in "Keep on Keeping On" and don't let just age get in the way. Or as Clint Eastwood says, "Don't let the old man/woman in."

We hope that you have all had an excellent 2024, and we'd love to hear about it..

Merry Christmas and have a Happy New Year and 2025.

Love, Tom & Sherry

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2025 Christmas Letter

Merry Christmas 2025

Dear Family and Friends,

See our photos in 3 emails—300M to enlarge!

This has been a very eventful year for us—both positive and negative. As usual, we started the year attending the Palm Springs International FilmFest where we saw a biography of Paul Anka, etc. We were so impressed with him we bought tickets in the 2nd row to his Jan 18 performance at the McCallum. It was a great performance (again)! Similarly, on Dec 16 we saw Barry Manilow's inspirational charity Christmas show again. Both performers are Tom's age and put on amazing and energetic performances. Paul and Barry just love entertaining and spreading joy. They choose to be happy and help spread it to others. The audiences just light up with excitement and joy.

The bad news began on Feb 11 when Sherry had an Afib event, and we called 911 when her HR went to 180+. Meds brought it back to normal. Then on Valentine after Hershey Felder at the McCallum, she had another Afib and 911 call, and was in the hospital all night. We were shocked by Sherry's AFibs. Tom had them from 1995 until his ablation in 2013. Then had an ablation on 10/1/2024 after an Afib in Maui. We couldn't believe SHERRY was having Afibs. So Dr Natale at Scripps in La Jolla gave her an ablation on April 28 with no more Afibs since. However, on Oct 28 she also had a "Watchman" device (a small disk over the left atrial appendage) installed to prevent strokes. That is normally a routine procedure; however, her IVC vein was punctured and she lost 3 liters of blood (replaced as it was lost). Dr Wiese, a vascular surgeon, put in a permanent stent in the vein to seal the leak. As a result, it took over a month for the 3 liters of blood in her abdomen to be eliminated, and her energy and pain also took that long to go back to near normal. However, she is a trooper, and was doing aerobic dancing and riding her bike 6 miles as soon as she could. Despite the problems we believe that we have had outstanding care and concern from our MDs—Drs Natale and Wiese.

About a year or so ago Sherry mentioned that we had lived in our home 20 years, and that things were beginning to wear out or need replacing. We hadn't really done much in that 20 years to our home. She was right. Since then we have replaced our mattress; renovated our master bath; bought new washer/dryer, home HVAC unit, patio furniture, dishwasher, venetian blinds, microwave, TV, and computers; refinished 2 French chairs and coffee table; and are now replacing all our carpets. However, after spending all that time and money, we hope that we will get a long respite from replacing and remodeling so many expensive home items (and 2 phones and TV). It feels a little like we just moved in and are starting over again. When we combine that with all the changes we have made to our Maui Whaler condo, it adds up to a lot of time and money. We're thinking of it as a new beginning for our next 20 years.

Much of our travel in 2025 was taking trips to La Jolla for our visits to Scripps Med Center for Sherry and I. We found the Pantai Inn on the beach near the Cove and charming restaurants, shops, etc nearby; and have now stayed there enough so it seems like a second home.

Unexpectedly, we decided on another trip to Europe in June. This was just five weeks after Sherry's ablation. Dr Natale said we should probably wait a month, so we were good to go; and Sherry was amazing as usual. She was a little nervous about going so soon, and still not 100%--but charged forward. We hadn't taken a train trip for a few years so we took a 3-week train trip to favorite places. In Paris we again stayed in our favorite area on Rue Dauphine—the street that crosses the Pont Neuf Seine bridge. That is our second Europe home. We had been to Paris just before Notre Dame had burned, and now toured it just after it just reopened.

From Paris we went to Nice, then 4 nites in Monterosso al Mare, Italy (in the Cinque Terre). That was our one stay in a small town, and we loved it. We had booked early enough to stay in our favorite place. We had a wonderful breakfast each morning on our patio overlooking the beach. Then we walked the charming streets, and had wonderful meals at night.

Next was Firenze and the most amazing hotel. It was in an old palace--Relais Uffizi. Yes, across from the Uffizi Museum—one of the best in the World. Our breakfast room overlooked the entire Piazza Della Signoria—where the giant (copied) Michaelangelo statues and many restaurants are. We also took a fun Tuscan wine tour, on which we met a just retired 4-star US Army General and his wife, who were considering buying a home in Palm Desert.

Then we took a Flixbus to Luzern over the Alps. It was a gorgeous trip; but it was long, and we arrived after the 9 pm front desk closing time of the Hotel des Alps. However, all was well, and our second stay there was as beautiful as the first. Our room and balcony was on the mouth of the lake with a breathtaking view. We took another lake cruise the next day, and again the weather and ferry trip was amazing.

Next was a train to Strasbourg. This time we stayed in the Petite France area at Regent Petite France. This is the original old town city heart that has hundreds year old buildings and oozes charm. Our hotel was one of those old buildings on the outside; but sadly, the inside was a modern (no décor) hotel. On Midsomer Eve night the whole town came to Petite France. There was partying everywhere and we got to dance the night away with all the bands and “kids” in the streets. It was all so fun and memorable. Back in Paris we celebrated our 34th wedding anniversary in Paris's oldest café (1686), the elegant Le Procope restaurant (also on Rue Dauphine). The food and atmosphere are hard to match.

We were in Maui 7/13 thru 8/28. Lahaina and the residents are gradually recuperating from the fire (which didn't directly damage areas north of Safeway—such as Kaanapali). However, everyone was affected in some way. In Kaanapali there are fewer tourists (and less income for people like us). However, at least the beach was less crowded, and it was easier to get into restaurants. Prices are very good for tourists now. Replacing our carpet was the last major improvement for awhile we hope. As always, we loved Maui, its amazing beauty and climate, and our fun stay in our island paradise. During our stay Tom needed to redo his website (see below) to meet new standards for accessibility, which was a major job—especially when he hasn't used html programming much for

several years; however, it also gave him a chance to edit some website parts that probably also needed work. While—compared to popular websites—his site hasn't had that many visitors, it has still had more than 2.5 million since 1998. So hopefully some people have benefited from it, which has been his main goal.

This was the first year that we decided not to renew our Hollywood Bowl subscription. Tom has been going almost every year since 1964, and we have gone every year we were together. Sixty years is a long time to attend the HB concerts; however, we now see 5 or 6 top world symphonies each year at the McCallum, and that is enough. It's been a great part of our lives!

Christmas will again be at Tracie and David's home in Long Beach. She will have 24 mostly family members for Christmas Eve dinner. Tracie and David have been traveling, visiting friends, fishing and going to Catalina on their boat, and visiting family. Savannah is still an ER nurse in Eureka. She and Bryce have been fixing up their new home, and found time for a trip to Africa with his parents. Spencer Steffen has just passed probation with the Orange County Fire Dept. His parents were thrilled to hear all the complements about his work. Sean Steffen graduates from CSU, San Luis Obispo in June, 2026. Spencer Snyder and wife Nata have moved to Princeville, Kauai and loving their life there. Spencer's daughter Charley is temporarily living with them, and seeing what it would be like to live in Hawaii. Roxy Snyder is still in St Croix living with her significant other, Taylor.

Our Monterey Country Club is like a small town, and our street a small neighborhood where we can wave at people and stop and talk with them. In addition to other friends, over the years three couples—Liz and Lee Legvold, Carrie Jo and Dixon Johnson, and Penny Ordonez and Karl Johnsen--have become like family members.

Our year has been filled with various medical issues and major home chores. However, we've also loved our travels and being in our beautiful and cozy home. We've loved the wonderful green and mountainous environment, visiting with friends and family, our 20th yearly block party, concerts, and fun dining out. We love our daily swims, aerobic dancing, or biking and our movie or mystery TV nites. We couldn't ask for a better life, and are soooo grateful for so many wonderful, loving years together.

We hope that you have all had an excellent 2025, and we'd love for you to tell us about it!

Merry Christmas and have a Happy New Year and 2026.

Love, Tom & Sherry

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