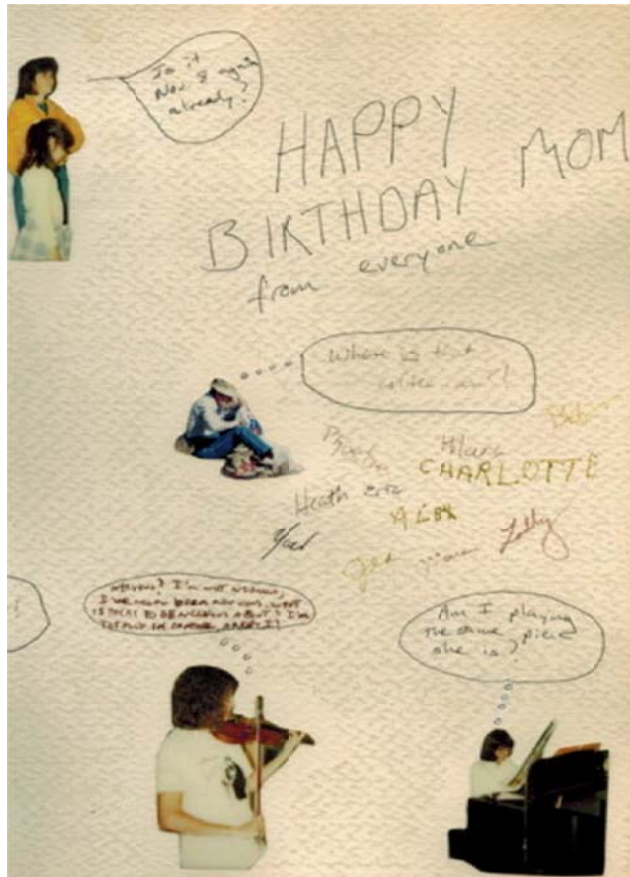


Some very special birthday celebrations

I wonder now why I found 65 such a significant number of years to have survived. From the perspective of 90 that seems like just entering middle age. But it was the beginning of a series of memorable birthday celebrations at age 70, 80 and 90. By 1988 when I arrived at 65, our 3-daughter family included two sons-in-law and 5 grandchildren. Our oldest, Heath, lived in Davis CA with her husband (Marc Schenker) and 3 daughters (Yael, Phoebe and Hilary); Jenny lived in Tucson and she and Bob (Bernhardt) had a son and a daughter (Alex and Charlotte); and Lyle (Lolly to me from her babyhood) was at UCLA pursuing her MA but spending a year teaching at UC Santa Cruz. We thought they were spread out, but it was nothing like what was to come when the grandchildren began to move around. Eric and I were empty nesters in Long Beach in the house we bought in 1956 and where we lived until 1999.

A surprise was planned for me in Davis, where we drove for my 65th birthday – I thought we were spending the weekend with the Schenkers, but found that the whole family had gathered. Heath's big new house rocked with the sounds of excited children. It was lovely. The house stood alone on its big lot, there was not a single plant. That would not have appealed to most potential buyers but for Heath it was a gift. As a landscape architect nothing could have pleased her more than having a pristine piece of ground on which to create her own design. There were gifts I don't remember but I did keep a delightful 4-page folder of photos of the family with balloons to suggest what they were thinking. They are probably not legible without a magnifying glass, but Eric's grin thru teeth clenched on a pipe, Alex playing at his feet, Charlie play-acting with a basket, Yael at the piano, Jenny on her violin – all bring back the lovely moments of that family gathering.





And even lovelier was the special gift the girls had arranged for me – a Mom and daughter weekend with the three of them at Dr. Wilkinson's Spa in the Napa Valley later in the month. That was our first such outing, and we had several more in the next few years (Santa Cruz, Prescott AZ, and Catalina Island) before our lives got too complicated. At Napa we did the spa special, which included mud and steam baths and massage, and ate happy meals accompanied by local wines.



I did find a postcard showing Dr Wilkinson (I presume), and it reminds me that I did not particularly enjoy the mud bath. The other memories are only vague, but there were hikes and vineyard tours and glorious weather. I do remember the new Clos Pegase winery, a wonderful Michael Graves building where we tasted wines (in delicate pink glasses with an etched Pegasus logo) that so delighted me I took 2 dozen home, and still have 6 or so.

Here is a photo of the 4 of us taken at the charming B & B where we stayed on Catalina Island in 1990. Left to right – Lolly, Heath, Barbara, Jenny. It was this weekend that made a huge change in my life. All three daughters were into sketching and watercolor by then so while I bird watched they drew and painted. It looked like so much fun that I decided to try it myself. Result: two years of courses at Long Beach City College taking drawing, rendering, perspective, life drawing, and watercolor. That was our last trip for a decade but it was a big game-changer for me.



When the 70th rolled around I was in Madagascar for a month's trip with a good friend (Phyllis Faber) and 5 botanists from the California Academy of Sciences, all friends of hers. We got to know and like each other fast and soon they found out I had a big birthday coming along. We took several trips from Antananarivo to places that were still wondrous in that devastated land, coming back to the one good hotel in the one city in the country to respite until the next foray. My birthday was during one of those city stays. My friends had found a shop with local geologic treasures and presented me with a handsome ammonite sliced in two and polished, which still sits on a windowsill in the living room. For dessert at lunch they had commissioned a big chocolate layer cake with 7 candles - surprise, surprise.

The food was delicious at the hotel and at the end of our trip we were honored at a banquet offering some very exotic foods, and I saved the menu. It was encased in a papyrus folder with a floral decoration made from petals, stems and leaves in a women's cooperative we visited.



"TATAO"
 Amalona nahandrofahiny
 (Eel cooked in the ancient fashion)
 Romazava
 (Zebu and chicken with herbs)
 Varanga
 (Fried frayed zebu)
 Zanadandy
 (Fried silk nymphs)
 Vorontsilozasy sesika
 (Fattened turkey with fowl black-pudding)
 Fruit salad
 Coffee or citronella

Zebu is the dominant herbivore in the country, used for farm work and food; silkworm nymphs (larvae) were coated, deep fried, and tasty. I don't want to know what 'fattened turkey' was, but have visions of caged and force-fed fowl. But we all honored the 'One should eat what one is served in another country' ritual.

Ten years passed before another memorable birthday (80) came around in 2003, and we had moved to Ashland a few years before. This time, at my request, it was at Grand Canyon with all three daughters. I had always wanted to stay at the grand old lodge instead of camping, and so we did. Again we hiked, and sketched and I remember seeing the first juvenile condor – a tiny black speck on a cliff ledge across the canyon. The birthday dinner was lovely, by candlelight in the hotel, with gifts and cards from the family and lots of talk among the 4 of us. I remember photos of the dinner but can't find them. The family put together a ring binder of short essays and photos to let me know what I had meant to them, and I was delighted to see that a very important hand-me-down was my love of the natural world. The booklet is appended to this narrative (There will be a delay as my printer needs some attention.)

And the 90th, on November 8, and still lingering as friends in Ashland treat me to lunches, dinners, and outings, since I was not here for the actual birthday. When asked by my girls how I would like to celebrate I chose another 4-girl weekend, in San Francisco and with dinner at Chez Panisse. Little did I know that the restaurant, now 30+ years old, was still so popular you had to jump thru hoops to get a reservation. Exactly a month before the date you want, you must call at 9AM and continue calling til you get thru. Lolly was elected, and she and Keith and Sam(age 13) began calling on 3 phones at exactly 9. An hour later Lolly actually got thru and booked a table for 4 on Nov 8th. And then was told she got the last table! It is a tribute to Alice Waters that this is so, as the restaurant-life in our big cities is usually about 10 years. But I'm still unable to let go of my depression-era childhood and the frugal decades of our early marriage and felt it could not possibly be worth that kind of effort to pay such a huge amount for a meal. The girls, however, were wholly for it. The one disappointment was that Jenny had to cancel at the last minute; her husband Mac had a double hip replacement 3 weeks before and was still not well enough for her to leave him. She was replaced by granddaughter Phoebe who lives in SF and was thrilled to fill in.

I went to San Francisco by van (shawnsrideshare) the day before my birthday, so I could tote some extra stuff for the 8-day trip, and because the van starts at the Ashland Co-op and stops 2 blocks from Heath's apartment, very convenient. Heath's is the family's favorite hotel in SF, old enough to be large and gracious, on the 3rd floor with a front view looking up to Buena Vista Park and the back over rooftops and gardens. The views rival those in Paris, which re among my favorite cityscapes. There is a charming deck in the back and the sunrises are gorgeous from there, as are the sunsets from the living room. A bay window in the front has a mattress and lots of pillows and is another specialty, especially when you curl up with the Sunday Times and a cup of Peet's. I sketched both views in ink.



View west up to Buena Vista Park



View east over rooftops

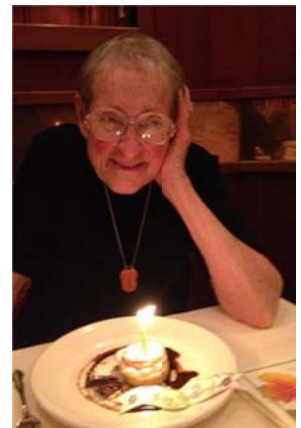
Next day Heath and I started with breakfast at Cafe de Soleil, a block away, which has outdoor tables and the best almond croissants to be had anywhere. We had not yet finished catching up on the 6 month interval since we were together, and in the interim she had retired from UC Davis and spent 3 months in Brooklyn helping with her new twin granddaughters. We continued with a long walk at Chrissie Field on the bay, where Heermann's Gulls were abundant, and the native dune vegetation has been restored. It was a gorgeous day and the Golden Gate Bridge did a magical appearance above the fog as we watched.

This walk is a ritual on every visit, along with the steep hike up to the top of Buena Vista Park with which I challenge myself on every visit and certainly had to do in my 90th year.



Lolly arrived mid-afternoon and we drove across the bay early so as not to be late for our 6 p.m. seating. As usual when precautions are taken against heavy traffic all goes smoothly, so we had time to window-shop along an elegant street in Berkeley. A Sur la Table store appeared before us and in we went. I had never heard of this chain til the week before, when granddaughter Charlie did a series of short clips for them on 'How to mix a special drink' and everyone in the family watched it on U-tube. We found the special glasses used in the videos and took photos of us with them and sent them to Charlie. What fun are iPhones!

Jenny called as we were driving up University Ave and we put her on speaker and all talked at once. She was sorely wishing she was with us, so we suggested sending her iPhone photos of the courses as arrived, which Phoebe did. There is no menu; one meal is served unless you are a vegetarian. The visuals did all but taste! At the next table a woman was celebrating her 90th with her daughter. But her actual birthday was the day before, so I introduced myself and told her how astonishing it was to meet someone older. Very funny, I thought, but maybe she didn't. The meal was delicious, lovely delicate appetizers, the roast beef so tender you didn't need a knife to cut it, potatoes from Elysia, dessert a flaky melt-in-your-mouth pastry with chocolate sauce and (for me) a candle. We had prosecco with the appetizer and a delectable white (Keith, don't shudder, I just don't remember what it was) with dinner. While we were eating I was told about a special gift that was brewing in my honor – and how I love the idea of a memorial that happens when the one being memorialized is alive and can enjoy it and even participate. It will be at North Mountain Park in Ashland, one of my favorite



haunts, and where I have volunteered since arriving on Oregon. More about this when it is finalized. Linda, Libby and I are still in the decision-making stage.



The light was really bad for photos but at least our glowing faces show our pleasure and contentment in this snap taken after dinner. Here are Phoebe, Lolly, Barbara, Heath at Chez Panisse.

Next morning we went to the de Young to see the David Hockney retrospective and spent 3 hours roaming the galleries; the show was huge and represented only the past decade. Hockney went home to Yorkshire in the early 2000s, and has now returned to L.A. Much of the work was done on an iPad, incredible, it was so good. I immediately downloaded a free app called Brushes to see how this can be done. So far I have gotten nowhere, it is not intuitive and I haven't the patience needed for computer challenges. If it doesn't come easy forget it - I will get instruction when life settles down again. On to the 'Lookout', the new visitor center in Golden Gate National Park which Phoebe designed and also was the overseer during its construction. Lolly had not yet seen it and I enjoy it on every visit.

There is a new light installation on the old section of the Oakland Bridge and that evening we decided to find a restaurant from which we could watch the play of lights up and down the cables.

Lolly left on Sunday and Monday Heath and I went to the Exploratorium. It is newly redesigned and has moved to the waterfront where it occupies a whole pier. It is wonderful. We did some serious child-watching, all ages from toddlers in strollers thru high school, plus lots of adults, and not all accompanying children – like us. The little ones were darting around and pushing buttons while the older kids were sitting down to read and then play. The transition seemed to be about 8, when reading skills are honed and ready for the serious commitment such a museum calls for. The exhibits seemed all worth checking out, and several hours flew by. Lunch was delicious, and reviving – all the new museums in SF and LA have chefs and serve tasty foods.

Next day was devoted to Alcatraz. My companions were Heath and long-time friend Bernard Halliwell. They had both been to the island, but decades ago, and there are many changes. For one thing, the gardens are being restored and seeds that were hoarded are once again becoming plants, and the plants drawn and painted. Bernard brought BLTs for lunch – he knows my favorite foods – and a gift, a gallon jar of cashews in Ajwain seeds, an exotic and tasty combination. It was a glorious day and the bay shimmered in the sunlight, with only a light breeze ruffling the water as we ferried out to the island. And then walked, and walked, and covered every open site there was, doubling back at the end because I had missed the gardens. But the main tour was the prison itself, an audio tour thru the dismal gray corridors lined with 13 ft long cells that were barely wide enough for a narrow cot and a small stand-up space. I have dormant claustrophobia/agoraphobia that is triggered suddenly and vigorously in certain situations, and this turned into one of them. In a cell block the combination of the cramped cells, and a press of people packing closer as we went. The audio talk was dramatic with descriptive details of escapes and punishments such as solitary confinement, which acted to further reduce the space around me. A sudden panic overtook me and I needed desperately to get out. I fought my way thru the horde to a broad stone terrace where I sat breathing heavily and gulping in the great open bay and the far-off city skylines. For the rest of the day I stayed outside when visiting the gallery of watercolor renditions of the plants. Hardly anyone there and lots of windows.

The last two days were spent in Mill Valley with Phyllis Faber, an old friend with whom I lost touch a few years ago. We met when testifying at a hearing on a coastal issue in LA in the early 80s. Phyllis, a botanist/ecologist, was already well known for her work in coastal wetlands. Within a year we met again, this time in a hotel in Lima, Peru. Eric and I had just come from Cuzco and were leaving next day for the Galapagos Islands with a group of friends. Phyllis had

also been in the high Andes on a botany trip and was going (I think) to the Amazon. We walked past each other on the way to lunch and each looked at the other with the feeling of 'I know you, but from where?' She came over to our table and we figured out where we had met, and then she lunched with us and we talked. Acquaintanceship renewed. A few months later we began a nifty project together which resulted in a book (says she), or report (says I) and a long friendship. The project was to identify the flora of southern California's coastal riparian areas (Phyllis) and birds (me). This entailed lots of field work of the most rewarding kind, and we used my home in Long Beach as our base. Later, when *pro esteros* was formed, I invited her to be on the board. We also went to Madagascar together and she has been to Ashland several times. But in 2011 her house burned down and she lost all computer files, and many books, furniture, artwork, and personal items, and had to rebuild her life. She now lives in a condominium on the edge of Bothin Marsh, a mighty appropriate safe landing, and has put her life back together admirably.

We spent a packed two days, much of it on catch-up. Saw a fine HD performance of Tosca at a local theater, a rather unmemorable show of Richard Diebenkorn's early sketches and paintings at the College of Marin, toured her former home site with its half-rebuilt house, lunched with her son Charlie, walked the marsh, and took a ferry ride across the bay. I had met Charlie briefly but never her daughter Caroline, but on our final evening she joined us for an awards dinner. It was the annual dinner by the local newspaper (complete with plaque and basket of goodies) to honor the 'heroes' of Marin county. There were 8 honorees and Phyllis was the last, and hers was a lifetime award. Her 'thank you' was limited to 5 minutes and she chose to cover briefly several happenings that were major positive environmental triumphs during her long time in Mill Valley. What she DID NOT say was that she was a key figure in all of them. The Marin Agricultural Land Trust was one, and she and Ellen Straus were the founders. At present 40% of the county's ag lands are protected in perpetuity by easements.



Another was Muzzi Marsh, a large chunk of junk-filled bay-land in Corte Madera restored to a viable marsh under Phyllis's direction. Phyllis had warned me that it would probably be boring but is certainly was not; it was the opposite. And I was proud to be a long-time friend and colleague of Phyllis'.

The entire trip was a happy event and rates at the top of a very long list of birthdays.