

Continued from previous page

the mail. We meet them at the diner and see them putting on the course. They might attend the same church.

Sierra Lodestar has meant a world of unique and interesting people to me, but most of the time, I have met these folks the same way that you have – through the words of the other Sierra Lodestar writers. Many of these people are now on my short list of folks to call when I run into a question on area history that I can't find the answer to. Life here wouldn't be the same without them.

Because children grow up and leave the nest, most youngsters bolt from the Mother Lode never to

return, save for that occasional Thanksgiving gathering or wedding or funeral they must attend. Based on what I have seen, I think that we have grown into a bigger, brighter family of sorts, one that has all the oddities of the most dysfunctional household on the planet, but one that shares and cares.

I talk a lot about music being a terrific medium to draw brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles and parents and grandparents together, and my alma mater is revving up its annual salute to spring with a band concert March 14. Yes, I was a "band buddy" in my high school days; a moniker that would be akin to a "Gleek" today, I think. We were

none-too-appreciated on campus, but we didn't break into song at the slam of a locker. We weren't necessarily loved, but that didn't detract us from performing music that made us happy. Some of my fellow players still pick up their horns on a regular basis and play; I haven't touched a bass clarinet since that day in June of 1983 that I left the secured confines of Calaveras High.

The Calaveras Unified School District Band Festival will blow your socks off. I'm constantly amazed that there aren't more clarinet squawks or trumpet blares than there are; these kids are much better at performing than I was at age 10. And into the middle and high school

years, the talent just ratchets up higher and higher. A couple of years ago, the CHS band performed a melodious original piece that was written by a student. OK, one senior (Greg Carroll) did that when I was a freshman, but that says something, doesn't it? It has been about 30 years between original compositions from the band room at the school.

Seeing the floor of the Mike Flock Gym – named for the football and basketball leader who also coached the golf team I sliced and triple-bogeyed my way through one year – covered with young musicians is something to behold. There are more than 250 kids playing their hearts out. In these days

of legislators plundering schools to line their own pockets, it's a marvel that music is still available to students. I sincerely hope voters understand who they are sending to Sacramento before they cast their ballots; we cannot afford to cut any more from education.

But I digress. Over these past three years, Sierra Lodestar has served to remind me that everyone who calls these foothills home has a terrific story to tell. Sharing those stories is a treat for the likes of me. Just don't expect me to visit you in the sauna.

Reach Mike Taylor at mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

Sonora man creates support group for MS patients

More than 100 people in Tuolumne County have multiple sclerosis (MS), explained Stephen Lucas, once a businessman, now an adult whose parents act as caregivers. Stephen, who with his mother's help founded the Tuolumne County MS Self-help Group in 2007, cannot retain short-term memories due to his cognitive MS. Other forms of MS cause both mild and severe symptoms like numbness of the limbs, paralysis or loss of vision. The symptoms are unpredictable for each individual and the disease can affect both children and adults.

According to Stephen and his mother, Gloria, a lack of awareness about MS prevails. Gloria and Stephen's sister knew nothing about MS before the disease took away what Stephen described as his "top of the world" occupation.

"It's very difficult to know that I have to depend on others and can't do things for myself," Stephen said.

After being diagnosed with MS and moving back to his parents'

home in Sonora, Stephen said he felt alone. He knew nothing of the 100-plus MS-affected residents of Tuolumne County.

"Those of us with MS are normal people who happen to be unlucky enough to have a dreadful disease," Stephen said. "MS is not a killing disease, but with many of the symptoms that we have, others think that we are drunk or drug addicts and they tend to stay away from us. Depending on our symptoms, others think we are mentally ill and make fun of us or shun us. It's amazing what some of us go through when others put a label on us. Even family members and old friends can't understand and they label us as being something we are not."

Stephen said he originally felt like he was the only person in the county with MS, and he needed and wanted to be around people with the same disease who experiences the same difficulties he did. He called the National MS Society to ask if a support group existed nearby. Modesto had the closest

one, but eventually, the MS Society asked Stephen to start a group in the Sonora area.

Stephen said the number of people who came to the first support group meeting amazed him.

"I wasn't alone any longer," he said. "The Tuolumne County MS Self-help Group is a great group of people with MS who need each other and need to be able to share with each other. They are fun loving, laughing people and don't want anyone feeling sorry for them and do not feel sorry for themselves."

The support group meets once a month at the Tuolumne County Senior Center at 540 Greenley Road, Sonora, every third Saturday of the month from 1 to 3 p.m.

"It is very informal," Stephen said. "We talk about problems, new developments in the medical field. We laugh, share, have refreshments and in general have a great time just getting together. We are a family that understands each other because those who do not have MS have no idea what we go through on a daily basis; even if they live with us they do not know."

The group aims to create awareness and drum up support for a cure.

"We need your support so we can fight this disease with new medications and hopefully, soon, a cure," Stephen said. "Amazing strides have been made in the medical field in the past few years and new medications have been approved that help some people with MS, but those drugs aren't for all of us."

He says that March 12 to 18 is MS Awareness Week. He and several others with MS will go to various stores and set up tables with literature about the disease and talk with people about it. They will also ask for donations to help in the fight against the disease. Stephen also asked that people consider

donating money to support his team or walking alongside his team in the April 28 MS Walk 2012, which will take place in Modesto.

Stephen raised \$2,000 in donations and pledges for last year's walk and he hopes to raise the same amount or more this year.

"The group raised about \$3,800 last year, and we would like to beat that record if possible," Stephen said. "Because of the economy last year, it was difficult to get monetary donations. We will accept any amount from \$1 up. We know a lot of people can't give more. But everything helps, and it adds up."

"Every hour of every day, someone is diagnosed with MS," Stephen wrote in a letter seeking support. "That's why I registered for Walk MS: Northern California, and that's why I'm asking you to support my fundraising efforts

Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler

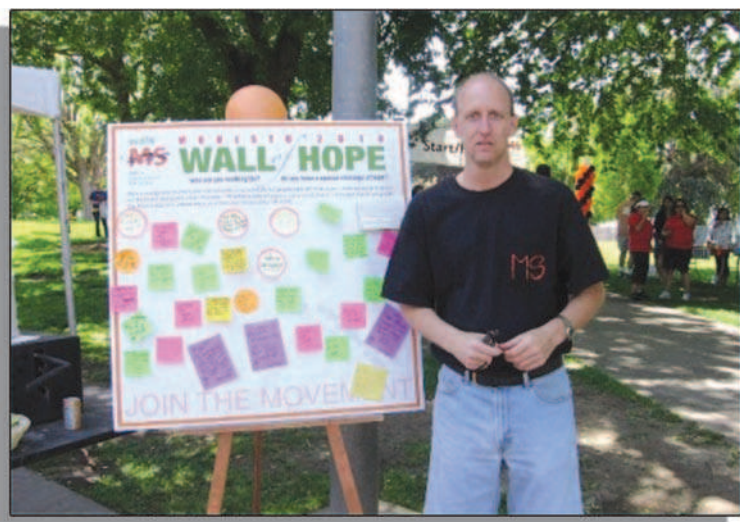


with a tax-deductible donation. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is dedicated to creating a world free of MS, but they can't do it without our help."

Gloria said MS might have changed her son's for the worse in some ways, but the self-help group and the events for MS awareness and cures have given him a new life and a reason to fight.

"He thought his life was over because he lost so much," Gloria said. "When he started the self-help group, he became a different person. He had a reason to keep going knowing that he was not

Continued on next page



Stephen Lucas founded a multiple sclerosis support group in Tuolumne County that meets monthly at the county library in Sonora.

Sierra Lodestar

AS SEEN ON NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CHANNEL!

California's Oldest and Largest Celtic Faire

The 26th Annual SONORA Celtic FAIRE

March 9th, 10th & 11th, 2012

A Celtic Music Gala of Celtic Music • Fencing
Modern Clans • Celtic Living History • Vendors
Longbow Archery • Food and Drink
Mary Queen of Scot's Royal Court
Jugglers, Fire Eaters, Story Tellers and Dancers
Irish Step Dance • Whiskey Tasting

Live Music from The Wicked Tinkers, Golden Bough and Black Irish Band (and many more!)

Mother Lode Fairgrounds, Sonora

Tickets Online and In stores Now! For more information, or Ticket Locations go to www.sonoracelticfaire.com

February 29 - March 6, 2012

7

Celebrate the day of choices

Once-every-four-years occurrence is headed our way; Leap Year and Leap Day are here. In a January column, I explored a bit about the adjustments made to our calendars since the days of the ancients – Julius Caesar and Pope Gregory XIII – and into the 1700s, when America adopted the Gregorian calendar.

Wednesday is this year's calendar Leap Day, and so, I figured the "Oakdale Roundup" could take a leap, so to speak.

But where would I find those Feb. 29 celebrants? Where else would I look but to the trusty Oakdale Lions Club Community Calendar, which has chronicled the birthdays and anniversaries of people for 59 years. Of course, in the case of the leap year recognitions it has been almost 15 years. Sure enough, Chinese New Year luck was with me and the calendar square for Feb. 29 included the names of two birthday honorees and one anniversary couple.

Now to me, the story of most interest was not the by-chance birthdays of Katrina Cheek or Tom Robinson – though I wish them both happy Leap Day birthdays! – but the wedding anniversary of Oakdale residents Derek and Cherlyn Davis. They made Feb. 29 a special day by choice.

Also, by luck, I knew the Davis family, and so it was an easy call for me to make to convince them to let me write about their Leap Day wedding story. It also didn't hurt

that Derek had recently been reading Sierra Lodestar; the "Oakdale Roundup" column had some street credibility. Derek and Cherlyn agreed to the interview and so their story unfolded.

Derek relates that as a young boy growing up in Oakdale, his parents had helped him establish an account at the American Savings branch on F Street. It was convenient to his home, he knew the staff and felt comfortable going there. As he matured and started working on part-time construction jobs with his family and attending college at Stanislaus State University, he maintained his account at the branch and frequently stopped in for small transactions. The fact that the Oakdale branch had added a new, very pretty blonde employee did not escape his attention.

That pretty girl was Cherlyn Olson of Modesto, a young single mother who had been hired to fill the new accounts position at the bank.

Derek's interest in his banking transactions didn't wane, as he says it was a highlight of any trip there to spot Cherlyn at her desk. One day while driving in town with his longtime buddy, Frank Rivera, Derek spotted Cherlyn out walking on her break.

"She was wearing a great red dress," Derek said. "I expressed my appreciation for the sight and Frank challenged me with a \$20 bet that I would not ask her out for a date."

Derek took that bet, and soon

stopped by American Saving to invite Cherlyn to a party with friends. Cherlyn related that dating was not foremost on her mind as she had a young daughter and the responsibilities of her job.

"I was very nervous and so not ready for Derek's question that I actually surprised myself by saying 'yes,'" she said.

The couple hit it off, dated for three and a half years and became engaged in March of 1991. Traditional thinking at that time was that you were usually engaged for a year before your marriage. But to Cherlyn, that tradition presented a problem. The month of March to her meant spring, and a spring wedding with "springy" style pastel colors was not in her dreams.

"I wanted winter colors," she said, "black and royal blue."

So the couple looked ahead to the calendar of 1992 and seized upon the idea of an "it's still winter" wedding on Feb. 29, 1992. Cherlyn

could comfortably have her colors of choice and three out of every four years they could celebrate their anniversary on March 1, or as Derek jokes: "Whenever I can remember."

Though the chosen date created lots of discussion among family and friends, it actually was a great choice for the couple as most people shied away from it and they had their choice of halls, bands and caterers.

So on Feb. 29, 1992, Derek and Cherlyn became Mr. and Mrs. Derek Davis. They were wed in the Calvary Temple Chapel in Modesto, celebrated at a reception at the Riverbank Community Center and honeymooned in Carmel and the Napa Valley. Their future celebratory date was dictated by a young bride's love of the winter colors black and royal blue. Their beautiful wedding party, of course, included Derek's good friend, Frank Rivera,

Oakdale Roundup

Melinda Owen



the loser of the \$20 wager.

Derek and Cherlyn are parents to Jessica, 25, Austin, 19, and Anneliese, 15 and grandparents to 4-year-old Levi. Derek is employed by the Oakdale Irrigation District as its safety coordinator; Cherlyn works for the Stanislaus County Community Services Agency.

Happy 20th anniversary, Derek and Cherlyn; or happy fifth, if you're only counting those leap years. Enjoy your anniversary celebration on the California coast and the wine country.

Send your Oakdale area events to Melinda Owen at mowen@sieralodestar.com and mtaylor@sieralodestar.com.



Cherlyn wanted winter colors at her wedding, so Feb. 29, 1992, became her special day.

Courtesy photo



Melinda Owen

Derek and Cherlyn Davis celebrate their fifth anniversary Wednesday (20th if you're counting).

Continued from previous page alone, and he learned from others how to live with MS."

Stephen said people can support the cause by volunteering or by merely becoming more educated about MS themselves. They should also consider helping to educate others. He asked for individual dona-

tions and encouraged businesses to put out donation containers. People can also have yard sales and put out signs and literature about the disease, as well as donate the proceeds from sales to the National MS Society or to groups like the Tuolumne County support group.

Anyone interested in information or sponsorship can contact Stephen

or Gloria Lucas at 532-5646 or at the group's email address, GS4MS@sbcglobal.net. You may also visit main.nationalmssociety.org to discover ways to make donations.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

AMERICAN LEGION
AMBULANCE
Ambulance Ticket Program

Visit our website or call for information on our
\$50 Ambulance Tickets!
One ticket covers family for one whole year!

www.alpost108.org

<p>Amador Office (209)223-2963</p>	<p>Calaveras Office (209)754-3498</p>
---	--

Dial 911 for Emergencies