

Mary Holder (5749-HL, SU) – A Personal Tribute

by Eugene Dimitriadis 4686-HL
and Mary K. Hughes

Our friendship with Mary and Chuck Holder goes back some 20 years. It was a friendship that covered continents, it spanned oceans and decades, woods and Canucks. As Chuck himself recently said it was based on little more than “a common interest in a few sticks of wood” (Max Marshall quote). “Eugenio!”, as she enjoyed calling me, was what I heard when I met her last with Chuck at the recent South African meeting. Sadly that was the last time I saw her although I promised we’d meet again.

On reflecting what I should write I find the most memorable events are those I shared while traveling with Chuck and Mary in North America and Australia. In Australia an unforgettable outback camping trip through Broken Hill to the “corner country” was one such occasion. It was a bit rough at times so there was concern for her adaptability. Mary preferred to stay in the shelter of a tent instead of being exposed to the unknown and unimaginable fears of Australian snakes, insects, dingoes and wild Canuck eating marsupials, instead of sleeping in a swag, or outside, under the Southern Cross. Cooking on a campfire and warming ourselves in the chill of the evening; she survived as she always did, with confidence and a smile.

We covered thousands of miles together, chatting on or with mild occasional bickering as the strain of long days driving took hold. We covered not only many miles but every imaginable subject - IWCS, policies, relationships, people, politics, fuel range fears, our health, food, culture and, of course, many hours on flora, taxonomy, dendrology and botany. In frustration Mary even tried banning such discussions when she could not participate in them. We arrived at the remote Corner Store pub in central Australia to enjoy the Melbourne Cup, via satellite, in the sparse company of drunks and drovers, station managers and children playing on the floor while outside Boozle the dog waited his master’s return. They struck up easy and familiar conversations with Aussies wherever they went as Mary and Chuck were almost Aussie from their many visits. (She kept a meticulous record of all events and travels in her diaries and Chuck and I often relied on them for detail and confirmation for stories written of such travels.) When in Australia I enjoyed taking them from city to city, state to state and we crossed deserts and coastal beaches of NSW south to north, north to south finally crossing the Snowy River together. Travelling was always a joy, full of good cheer, familiar warmth, love and humour. I loved their company. But when she said “Charles, are you listening to me?” We both did, attentively!

Travel with Mary and Chuck included two very memorable trips in Canada and the US, e.g. to the Rocky Mountains National Parks and Montana. However, one trip will always stand out. It was to Purgatory, CO where an IWCS meeting was held.



They picked me up from the airport in San Francisco in Mary’s Volvo and well loaded to the roof we headed off to Purgatory ... via Death Valley, as you do. We stopped at a fruit and veggie stall for a few minutes and drove off, Chuck at the wheel and I beside him. Mary who sat in the rear seat was unusually quiet we realised after 30 minutes. In fact she was still in the bathroom when we drove off! Yikes, I still feel the discomfort! This occasion led to what Mary has called “The Abandonment” ... recounted (with good humour) on many IWCS occasions. Bless you Mary, your forgiveness knows no bounds! I can still recall her on our return to the stall, standing with her arms crossed, smiling and shaking her head... saying “How far did you two go talking trees?”

Over the years Mary would offer kind but professional advice on my relationships with others. She was a trained nurse and psychologist so I always valued her opinion.

The fun exchanges between Chuck and Mary as they wrestled with a notion over a bicker was always amusing and heart-warming to me. She enjoyed a good “bicker” too I believe - it kept her sharp in Chuck’s company.

As noted in her eulogy by an old friend “Mary was a vibrant, intelligent, inquiring and active person who didn’t let the onset of Parkinson’s disease twelve years ago slow her down much. She had places to go and mountains to climb when the added burden of cancer diagnosed just in September was too much to overcome.”

I know that many in IWCS who have known Mary Holder, will feel a deep and personal loss from her passing as do I. She held a special meaning to all who knew her. She was generous of spirit, giving of her time, skills and energy for others. Her help and involvement with many organizations as well as IWCS (including Co-hosting Wood Canada 2000) will not be forgotten. I am sure the cats she loved will also miss her as well as her family whom she loved so much.

Bless you Mary, and you have been blessed, you have been a warm and helpful soul in the lives of many, me included.

Mary K Hughes also recalls: “in addition to the reflections in this piece, there is so much which can and is probably being said about Mary, as we each reflect on a very alive person!

‘The Abandonment’ has to be the funniest and most poignant of all the experiences... I can see her and hear her at the roadside, laughing and chastising at the same time. She was so well balanced.

As a mountaineer and the one who led us over the trail at Waterton, introducing us to marmots, I also have to comment on Mary’s nuggety nature – both in her tough little body and the determination which went with it on the trail and in life.”

