

February, 2010

Robert and Ruth Henderson

Robert was born on November 4, 1940, at the Chico Enloe Hospital. His parents, John and Elizabeth, had been married over 20 years when he surprised them with his arrival. They were living on 30 acres on Cummings Road which was part of the original Durham Land Colony and this is where Robert spent his youth. His father was born in Nova Scotia and his mother was born in England and they both became naturalized citizens after their marriage. Robert attended schools in Durham (along with his present wife, Ruth Bjerke and you've all heard him say "we went through 12 years of school together and never had a date!) and he graduated in 1958. Robert has worked various jobs: He worked 20 years as a master mechanic at Volpato's in Chico and then he decided to try his hand at almond farming (which he continues to do) and he has also been a millwright for Site Constructors, and is self-employed as a backhoe operator primarily installing septic systems. Last but not least, Robert is proud to say that he has worked for four generations of Sohnreys starting when he was a young boy for Howard Sohnrey and continuing today during almond and rice harvest time.

Robert married his high school girlfriend, Darlene Bauman, in 1959 and they had two sons, Jerry and Jeff. Jerry lives in Chico and has two teen-age daughters and an adult son. Jeff lives in South Carolina and has two adult step-children. Darlene died of cancer when the boys were young and Robert remarried a Durham woman with two young sons. Together they raised the 4 boys and then cancer struck again and Robert's wife, Julie, passed away in 1991.

Ruth was born on September 26, 1940, in Mayville, North Dakota, the sixth child in a Norwegian family of seven. Her father, Dave Bjerke, was a farmer and when he lost his farm in 1944 he decided to move his family to California to work in the shipyards. The family lived in Richmond for approximately one year and then Dave was offered a job to "make a ranch" out of property recently purchased in Durham by O. E. Tracy, a Chico realtor. Ruth attended Durham schools and she also graduated in 1958. She attended Chico State majoring in English and Business Administration and upon marriage in 1960 went to work for the State Board of Equalization in Sacramento. She and her husband, Jack Pendergast, eventually moved to Plumas County where they owned and operated the Crescent Hotel a hotel/bar/restaurant business for several years. After selling the business they moved to Homer, Alaska, where Jack crab-fished and Ruth worked as a partner in a bookkeeping/tax preparation business. The marriage dissolved and Ruth returned to Durham with her 3 young daughters in 1973.

Ruth went to work for Hignall & Hignall Realty in Chico as a bookkeeper in their property management division and began a new life as a single working Mom.

One day at the Durham grocery store Ruth encountered her high school boyfriend, Vern Strong, who was home visiting his parents, Bert and Anna Strong (who coincidentally are charter members of the Durham Good Sams). Vern worked for the California Department of Forestry in Monterey and despite the commute the relationship grew and Ruth and her girls moved to Monterey where she found work as a "Gal Friday" for an architectural company. Vern was transferred to Nevada City in 1976 and Ruth went to work as an escrow officer for a title company. After 20 years of marriage Vern died of cancer in 1994. When Ruth's father, Dave, died in 1995 Robert came by to pay his condolences and as they say: "the rest is history". Ruth and Robert were married March 2, 1996. Ruth has 3 daughters, Jody lives in Chico and Kathy and Marcy live in Nevada City. She has eight grandchildren ranging in age from 26 years to 7 months – 4 boys and 4 girls. She also has two step-daughters from her marriage to Vern and an additional 5 step-grandchildren and one great-grandchild – a big extended family!

We were introduced to the Durham Good Sams by Ivan and Caralee Sohnrey and have been members since 2002. Robert has been Wagonmaster twice as well as VicePresident. Ruth has been Secretary twice and has been the club's Historian for the past few years. We very much enjoy attending the campouts and value the friendships we have made within the group.

