



JOHN & CHAROLETTE SWEET

**8562 Jackson River Road
Mustoe, VA 24468-2150**

Phone: 540-468-2222

**E-mail: char@johnrsweet.com
jrs@johnrsweet.com**

23 December 2013

Dear Friends and Family,

We had a lot of good news this year but let's go straight to the bad news and get it out of the way. In August Char was diagnosed with a rare form of bladder cancer. We spent some time on consultations with two of the top doctors in the country on this and then started

chemotherapy at the end of September and radiation treatments in November. As if that was not enough, she had another stroke in October, which landed her in the hospital for three days plus a couple of weeks in rehab. Cancer treatments have gone well, with minimal side effects except for the expected hair loss. Char has never been a hat person but now she has quite a collection! She also has a wig, which she does not especially like but she wears it occasionally, as in the photo below with our neighbor, Nette Johnson.

She finished radiation last week and then has one more set of three chemo treatments right after Christmas. Sometime in January we expect to find out how all of this is working.



Now, on to the good news. In April we installed a 3.5 kW solar photo-voltaic array in the pasture above our house. It is connected underground to the electric system in the house. A bank of batteries provides backup when there is an outage. On a clear day we sell power to the utility and on cloudy days and at night we draw power from the utility, which is called *net metering*. For more on this and other news than we can cram into this letter, please see <http://johnrsweet.com/personal/2013.html>

As soon as the solar array was up and running we started construction of a new equipment shed, something we have needed for years. We had all manner of stuff sitting out in the weather that is now under roof. This was a bigger job than Chris and I could handle in a reasonable time so we hired Virginia Frame Builders to do it. They are a top-notch firm and I have no regrets.

We painted the house and cabin in the past few years; now all of the out buildings needed it. The warehouse, built in 1988 with T-111 siding, was



getting really shabby, so we decided to bring the VFB crew back and put the same metal siding on it as they had used for the new equipment shed. That reduced the amount of painting needed but there was still enough to justify investing in a paint sprayer. We used it for the large doors on the warehouse and the attached woodshed and sugar shed, some of the exposed structure on the new shed, the barn, toolshed/garage, and the woodshed for the house — all in all about 60 gallons of paint. There will be pix of all of these projects on our web site.

The last big project of the year was sad but necessary — removal of the large basswood tree next to our house. We've known it was hollow for a long time. We had an arborist out to trim it back and take some weight out of the crown five or six years ago. Then two years ago, a large limb fell, smashing the clothesline and garden fence and in July another large limb fell in nearly the same spot. It was only a matter of time until something fell on the house or the car, so we had our arborist back and took the whole thing down in September. We now have peace of mind, though our lovely tree will be missed, especially in summer. We converted the stump into a table and bench.

Most of our usual activities continued apace. We made maple syrup in the spring and hay in the summer. At Chris's urging we bought a John Deere zero-turn mower, which both he and I enjoy using. It has greatly simplified keeping up with mowing and the timing was excellent — it was a wet summer so the grass grew and grew. Last year we spent much of the summer cutting down invasive shrubs on the new tract we bought, so this year's job was spraying the new shoots that sprang up everywhere. That will have to continue for several more years before we have it under control.

Char continued her violin lessons in the spring and attended a chamber-music retreat at Garth Newel Music Center in March. Once the cancer thing started she was unable to keep up with her music. Maybe next year. With all of the farm projects going on, John was able to go caving only once this year, though he did help with several projects at the cavers' fieldhouse.

Our aging horse, Chesapeake, has been slowly going lame. With advice from a vet, our farrier put wooden "shoes" on him this fall. He could barely walk for several weeks and we feared for his survival but he has come around and no longer limps and appears to be pain free. The rest of our animals are fine.

We had fewer visitors this year than in 2012. We hope more of you will come to see us in 2014. Our cabin, hiking trails and pond are just waiting for you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris & John". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.