



Family members at my pre-birthday party on 5 August:
Lynne, Kathy, Kevin, Doug, me, Charlie, Beverly, Andrew,
Julia, Altair and Stephanie.

JOHN R. SWEET
8562 Jackson River Road
Mustoe, VA 24468-2150
Phone: 540-468-2222
E-mail: jrs@johnrsweet.com
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Dear Friends and Family,

My research into family history, described in some detail in last year's letter, continued thru the first part of 2018. I entered a lot of data into [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and scanned more photos and family documents, though there were no gigantic discoveries like the cache of old letters I found last year. I spent much of my time this year on the Randall branch of the family, my mother's maternal line. This is of particular interest to me, since the Randall homestead is about 60 miles NE from here. I first visited there in 1941 and I've been back a number of times since. I learned a lot about my G3-Grandfather's role in the Revolutionary War and I even found a document about the war that carried his signature.



Norfolk & Western Railway, Kimball, WV, 31 January 1958.
Photo by Bill Gordon

In February I gave a talk on steam railroads to a group in Bath County. A month later, my best friend from college died. Bill Gordon was at first a caving buddy but he later introduced me to his hobby of photographing steam locomotives. This was a life-changing experience as he and I, along with a few other friends, traveled all over the country to document the final years of steam power in regular service and its transition into tourist operations.

Last year I spoke of the nearly disastrous accident with my Model A pickup and plans to get it back on the road. I took it to my friend Reggie Hiner, who owns a number of As. He repaired the rear axle and brakes, rebuilt the rear end, and did some work on the engine, but it still overheated badly in ordinary driving. It now resides in a specialized Model-A shop in Strasburg, PA, where they will rebuild the engine and install a heavy-duty radiator, among other things.

Several friends have come to visit this year but the visitation highlight was in the first week of August when many friends and family members came for an early 80TH birthday party. Late September is an inauspicious time for a birthday if one hopes to have family attend who are involved with school in various ways. Doug Stanley got the long-distance travel award as he now lives in Paris. In truth he was back in the US for other reasons but he *did* travel from Paris and came here. Stephanie came early, stayed late, and planned the whole thing with assistance from her sisters. Thank you all for a wonderful event.

I had lumbar back surgery three years ago but back pain returned this year. This time it was thoracic vertebrae, for which I had the same surgical procedure, right after the big party. I have not had significant pain since then but there is enough osteoporosis that I must remain vigilant.

In September I finalized the papers giving my farm to the Valley Conservation Council, where it will be protected from development and used for environmental education. I retained life estate, so I will continue to live here as long as I am able. There was a nice article in *The Recorder*, which I will post on my web site, johnrsweet.com/personal .

Also in September was the fiftieth anniversary of the first descent of the Gauley River in West Virginia by canoe and kayak. I was the instigator of this adventure and was joined by three other canoeists and two kayakers. Three of my five colleagues joined me and a couple hundred others for a celebration at *Adventures on the Gorge*, a resort and outfitter perched on the rim of the New River Gorge. Our 1968 trip and an earlier one that I led on the New River can reasonably be considered as the sparks that ignited today's central-WV whitewater industry.

This fall I have reconnected with Anne (Waldspurger) Shuster, my caving friend, canoeing partner, and BFF from many years ago. Anne has been undergoing cancer treatments. I have gone up to Pennsylvania to see her several times. While there I have run errands, helped with chores, and we have enjoyed looking at photos and talking about the old days. Now I am looking forward to being with her for several days at Christmas. Please keep her in your prayers.



Anne and me at the Yough Slalom, 12 September 1970.

We did most of the usual farm projects this year but maple syrup was not among them. February was too warm and March too cold, with 30" of snow. Hay making was a challenge due to incessant rain but we got enough in the barn to see us thru. The animals are all doing fine. Rudy, Chesapeake (now 30 years old!), four cows and two goldfish, the same as last year. Finally, a shout-out to Chris Moore, my right-hand man. I'm no longer able to handle all of the day-to-day chores by myself, let alone any bigger job that comes along. He is also here to take care of things when I am away, which has allowed my trips to PA this fall.

There is always more to tell but I want to hold this to two pages so I will stop now. I look forward to your cards and letters and I hope more of you can come for a visit in 2019.

Love to all,