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DECEMBER 2014

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# Stu's Last Lesson

*In case of the unexpected, make it easier to distribute your astronomy possessions.*

STUART FORSTER (known to friends as Stu) was a mentor, educator, and one of the most highly regarded amateur astronomers in central New York. It came as a great shock in January 2011 when we learned of his sudden passing at age 55, having just retired from his medical practice to spend more time with his family, telescopes, and imaging software.

Although Stu's family appreciated his celestial activities, his familiarity with his equipment was his own. He had more than a dozen scopes, dozens of eyepieces and filters, six CCD rigs, two domes, 400 books, *S&T* back to 1964 . . . you get the idea. Stu was unique for the size of his collection, but the problem of dealing with specialized equipment when the unexpected occurs is one that all amateur astronomers risk sharing.

Ryan Goodson (New Moon Telescopes) and I have helped Stu's family sell his collection. As we have gone through this process, we've learned that you can make the lives of your family and fellow astronomers much easier by taking stock of what you own. If you weren't here tomorrow but your gear was, how much work would it be for someone else to deal with it? We recommend you consider the following:

1. Keep a list of *everything* and let someone know that this list exists and where he or she can find it.

2. If it's valuable, say so. If it can be thrown away, say that, too.

3. If you can't keep the original boxes, use containers to keep grouped items together. Stu kept Tupperware in business by placing complete sets of tools and components into labeled containers.

4. As you organize or modify your collection, take a picture of complete sets of similar objects, then add image labels and



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descriptions to your inventory. You instantaneously make a mountain a molehill.

5. Stu's collection was excessive in some respects, but he wasn't just an observer. He was the closest thing our region had to an equipment library where people could pick up a piece of astronomy equipment on loan, try it out, and bring it back (usually). Consider the possible future of your equipment.

6. Join a club! Your local astronomy club is a support group for others who share your passion. It's also the first place your family can go to when they start selling stuff. We're happy to say that astronomy club members from all around central New York are putting Stu's gear to good use.

7. Be aware that proper distribution will not be easy. I posted announcements on several astronomy websites when I started selling Stu's equipment. I was

sent take-down notices within hours because I wasn't selling my own stuff and didn't have seniority enough to post my announcement in the Classifieds section. Two years later, we're still sorting items and finding ways to sell them.

8. Keep books and magazines in the local area. See if your local public library or high school accepts donations (and offers tax write-offs).

If you have other helpful ideas, please find a way to add them to this list and let others know! ♦

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