

CENTENNIAL MEMOIR

VOLUME II

PEGGY KALPAKIAN JOHNSON

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Sidekick Press
Bellingham, Washington

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This memoir represents the author's recollection of her past. These true stories are faithfully composed based on memory, photographs, diary entries, and other supporting documents. Some names, places, and other identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of those represented. Conversations between individuals are meant to reflect the essence, meaning, and spirit of the events described.

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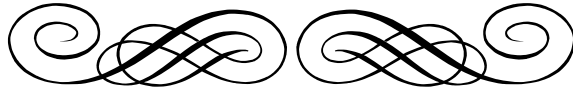
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Peggy Kalpakian Johnson, 1922-
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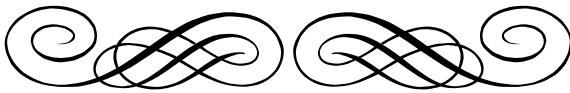


This book is dedicated to my son,

Douglas Scott Johnson

January 19, 1950 – January 5, 2021

Always in my Heart



FOREWORD

This year, 2022, marks one hundred years since my mother, Pakradouhi Kalpakian, uttered her first cry in Constantinople, Turkey, on March 26, 1922, the second child of Haroutune and Haigouhi Kalpakian. Just the year before, November 1921 the young couple, their eldest daughter, Angagh, and Haigouhi's teenage brother, Haigauz, had all been thrust out of their home in Adana, Turkey, pushed on to cattle cars and sent to Syria. From Syria they sailed across the Mediterranean to Constantinople where Haroutune found work with relatives, and they made plans to emigrate to the United States. As an infant and toddler Pakradouhi unknowingly shared the family's perils and tribulations until they could arrive at last in Los Angeles in October 1923. Haroutune and Haigouhi became proud American citizens in 1931; they brought up four American daughters. These stories and other elements of Peggy's life she put into her *Centennial Memoir: A Tribute to my Parents*. Chronologically that book ended with the Christmas of 1945 when her young husband, Bill Johnson, came home from the War in the Pacific. Peggy published *Centennial Memoir* in 2019 at age ninety-seven to great fanfare at a celebration at Mediterranean Specialties deli and grocery store.

Since 2019, however, Peggy realized that Christmas, 1945 might have been the end of one book, but it signaled the beginning of another, the life she shared with her husband and their four children, in Southern California. Beyond those sunny Southern California years, there were also other stories to tell about her three sisters, her grown children and her two grandsons. She began to think about a Volume II, to make notes toward writing. But work on this project was sadly curtailed in January 2021 when she suffered a heart attack.

Following her release from the hospital she moved to Shuksan Healthcare Center where she resides today. In the summer of 2021, after a rugged six months of recuperation and physical therapy, Peggy could turn her attention back to Volume II. Though she was still blessed with a good memory, and insight, she no longer had the energy for hours at the computer (indeed, she did not have a computer) and even to make notes by hand left her exhausted.

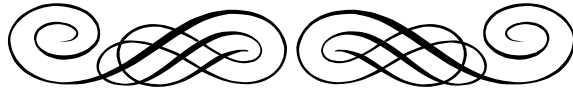
Luckily, we found an early (2015) draft of her original memoir that we had once printed up. This was a very much more rambling, informal document than *Centennial Memoir*. Often it's just jottings allied to certain addresses and incidents. But at least it provided a framework, and became the basis for the book you have in your hand. Volume II does not have the thematic swath and historical density of *Centennial Memoir*, but the underlying theme remains the same: the story of a truly American family forged from immigrant beginnings.

Centennial Memoir, Volume II is a testament to Peggy Kalpakian Johnson's strength and stamina, her commitment to getting her memoir on the page and into the hands of readers, despite the hardships of 2021. In readying the book for publication, I have done some edits for transitions; I have added the occasional detail and some bits for clarity. However, these pages remain her story.

Peggy has recorded here many stories to enrich the lives of all her readers, of all her family, her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and generations to come. Published in Peggy Johnson's centennial year, 2022, *Centennial Memoir, Volume II* is a great achievement. As she turns 100, let us all celebrate her book, her life, her strength, and the love that she has so lavished on her family and friends. Let us all celebrate the affection and esteem, the respect and deep devotion we all feel toward her. One hundred years! Bravo, Peggy!

Laura Kalpakian

January 18· 2022



PREFACE

BY PEGGY KALPAKIAN JOHNSON

“I truly feel in my heart that good health in my very old age has been a gift to me—the sole family survivor (age ninety-seven)—to create and to leave not only this written record of my remarkable Armenian immigrant family, but also a living, loving heartfelt testimonial to my young-in-heart old country parents, to their four daughters and to their talented grandchildren and great grandchildren.”

I wrote this toward end of *Centennial Memoir*, on page 92.

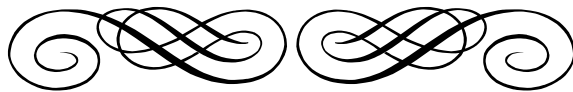
In the fall of 2020, more than a year after publication of *Centennial Memoir*, one afternoon, out of nowhere, out of the blue, I suddenly remembered—and recited, verbatim—a Bible verse that was actually unfamiliar to me: “Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long on the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

I was stunned! Later, my son looked up the quote, and found that it was Exodus 20:12, one of the Ten Commandments, and that, in fact, I had quoted it absolutely correctly.

Perhaps my mother may have taught this verse to me when I was a little girl. I certainly felt that I could hear her voice talking to me. I hoped that I fulfilled the promise of the Bible verse—and also that I had remembered and revered my mother’s wish.

This remains one of the most profound experiences of my life.

PKJ



THE IMMEDIATE POST WAR YEARS

I met Bill Johnson at a USO dance in the spring of 1944. By September of 1944 we decided to get married. Because it was wartime, there were no long engagements. We wanted at first to get married in Santa Barbara at the mission. (I was endeared to the missions in California.) However, at that time marriage licenses had to be obtained in the same California county as the marriage. Plus a small barrier—neither of us was Catholic! So we moved it to LA County at the U.S. Naval Chapel in Long Beach, California—a kind of local elopement. A few days before the wedding, Mama bought me a beautiful lavender suit, a fashionable, large-brimmed black hat, plus an elegant white nightgown and other lingerie. Sid Finegold was best man, and my sister Betty was maid of honor. My sister Angagh also attended, as well as a Navy friend of Bill's, Harry Rupp. When we returned home following the wedding at the Naval Chapel, Mama had prepared an elegant, full table buffet—plus champagne. We overnight honeymooned in Santa Barbara—Mama made the reservation at the Samarkand Hotel. About a month after our marriage, Mama had a sit-down-dinner wedding reception for us at her home for family and friends. I remember it as a very happy and exciting event, with wedding gifts for Bill and me. (Bill borrowed the \$25 to buy a wedding ring for me. Bill always had very good taste in jewelry—and he replaced that ring twice in the sixty-eight years we had together.)

We had three months before Bill was shipped out in early January 1945, on the USS Bairoko, an aircraft carrier. He was a pharmacist's mate. Our first home was a cute little furnished rental of three rooms at 1421 West 101st Street, Los Angeles.

In a month or two, the Navy gave Bill a week's leave and my parents and sisters paid for a honeymoon-type trip for Bill and me to his old college town of Logan, Utah, to meet many of his relatives. It was the first



Peggy and Bill, 1944

time I experienced snow and also the first time I had been out of California, since I had arrived there as a toddler with my parents. It was a wonderful trip.

After Bill shipped out for the Pacific, I returned to my parents' home to await the birth of my first child, Peggy Ann Johnson who was born at Seaside Hospital in Long Beach, California on June 28, 1945. The magic of this child coming from my own body and becoming a new body was the most powerful experience I ever had. I felt a deep and everlasting love for this child, who was a part of me. I felt these same deep emotions when each of my

four children was born—an indescribable and all-encompassing love—like no other love—visceral. A truly life changing experience.

In the fall of 1945 Bill got a quick shore leave and hitch-hiked to Los Angeles to meet his new baby girl. During the war, hitch-hiking servicemen were almost guaranteed an immediate ride. Wartime America opened its heart to all servicemen. It was a wonderful reunion. He told us of an incident when the Bairoko had cut all motors at sea, no lights, and

instructed all crewmen to remain absolutely silent, not so much as lighting a cigarette because there was a Japanese sub somewhere near beneath them. Bill and everyone on that ship had never been so scared. They survived it. However, when he did return home, he had a streak of gray hair in the middle of his hairline, which he said occurred during the foregoing incident at sea.



The war ended and Bill was discharged from U.S. Navy in mid-October 1945. I drove down to meet him, San Pedro, or Long Beach, I can't remember which. I brought him home to my parents' house in Los Angeles where I had been living with my baby daughter. They gave us the back bedroom and the little bathroom that was attached to it. My sisters all had to share a bedroom, and they and my parents all shared the other bathroom.

At this time, my older sister, Angie, was teaching high school French. Harriett (ten years old) was in Carthay Circle Elementary School. Betty had just re-registered at UCLA. We were crowded there in my parents' house. Bill and I were very grateful to my parents for taking us in right after the War when no one could find housing. Returning servicemen who remained in Southern California after the war had flooded the market. We gave them a thank-you gift of a new inlaid coffee table—appreciation for their generous hospitality and love during the war years. We paid \$75 for it—probably \$400 or \$500 in today's value—which is still beautiful today and located in Laura's house.

Though Bill soon found a job with the U.S. Public Health Service at the Army Base Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, we still stayed with my parents for some five weeks. Finally, first week in December 1945, Bill found a housing project home for veterans near Fort MacArthur called Banning Homes. There were many six-unit one-bedroom homes, plus a community laundry room, community clothes lines, snack bar, playground for children, office, etc.—actually a small community. Our place, 2103 Withrow Court, San Pedro, California, was one of several one-bedroom

furnished frame homes connected together—located in the outskirts of the City of San Pedro—it was literally built in open former weed fields.

The housing project homes were furnished with basics so we just moved right in: a living room, a small bathroom, small kitchen and a bedroom. We brought our baby's crib and set it up in our bedroom. It was wonderful! We had windows only at the front and back—since the sides were also the walls of our neighbors. There was a warm feeling of camaraderie among the residents. At first, the men asked each other about their service in the war, where they had fought, etc. All cordial neighbors. Lots of little children. Every day, a local vegetable truck came around—rang a bell to let us know he was there for our choice of many fresh veggies—and even a few other items, nuts, candies, and sometimes bread, rolls and eggs as well. We were truly happy in our new housing project home.

After a couple of months, the U.S. Public Health assigned Bill to go to Washington, D.C., for a six-week special training. Mama suggested he should ask if his wife could go with him—and Mama would take care of our baby, Peggy Ann. He also asked if he could drive, instead of using public transportation. They said YES. My Dad told Bill to get this permission in writing, which he did. Good advice, since Bill had to produce the written permission at a later date.

Shortly after the war we bought a 1939 Ford sedan for \$100. It was white and a dream car to us. We enjoyed that drive to D.C. in the spring



Peggy 1946

of 1946. In D.C. we rented a room in a wonderful old Southern plantation-type house, and I found a job at a bank while Bill attended his training sessions. On weekends, we went sight-seeing all over

the East Coast, including to New York and a visit to some of Mama's

distant relatives in Patterson, New Jersey. We found these relatives, but they did not recognize Mama's married name (Kalpakian), but when we told them her maiden name (Koolaksuzian), they immediately embraced us, offered us food, totally welcomed us. We sent them a thank-you note as well as a hostess gift of an electric toaster (a very hard item to find following the war years).

We really enjoyed east coast seafood and historical sites. We were happy to head home, however, as we missed our baby daughter, Peggy Ann, so very much. I pressured Bill hard to drive for long periods of time, but of course, he was as anxious to get home as I was. We drove that car 3,000 miles to the East Coast and 3,000 back to the West Coast when, somewhere in California in the night we had a flat tire. Bill checked, and it turned out, we did not have a jack to fix the tire. So we sat there by the side of the road, and pretty soon someone came along stopped for us, and helped him change the tire. This was right after the War and Americans

still felt a kind of togetherness that was special. We arrived home the day after her first birthday.



When we returned home, the U.S. Public Health Service offered Bill a transfer to Lincoln, Nebraska. However, by this time, Bill—raised in Idaho—had become almost a native Californian, and he declined. Instead, he decided to use the GI Bill, go to the University of California at Berkeley for a master's degree in Public Health.

So, in the fall of 1946, we moved to Richmond, a suburb of Berkeley. We lived in an upstairs student housing unit, one bedroom, on Portrero Road.



Peggy Ann, c. 1946

It was furnished, and it also had a built-in ice box. Melting ice dripped into a tray beneath the ice box—we were supposed to empty the tray often, but we forgot. (I was not used to an ice box; my family always had a fridge!) When our ice tray started dripping into the Manager's unit below us, she was livid, and let us know!

This married student housing project was a compound of several frame buildings, each holding four apartments. Each of these buildings was named after former University of California/Berkeley grads who were war heroes. These names became well known (and revered) in our student interaction and activities. The unit next door to us was named for Robert Herwig, a Marine who had served five years (5 years!) in the Pacific war. (I have heard that Robert Herwig was also a UC former All-American football player and a Grad Student in 17th Century England Studies. At this time (1946) everyone was still talking about the 900+ page sexy-best-seller, the novel, *Forever Amber*, by Kathleen Winsor, published in 1944. She was also a UC graduate, and the ex-wife of Robert Herwig. Local gossip said that she had read some of his seventeenth century England textbooks—and wrote the novel . . .)

Bill was given a federal fellowship which paid \$100 a month. Along with the GI Bill that gave us \$90, we would have \$190 a month—a livable income in 1946. However, when the first fellowship check arrived, it was for only \$10! Since he was already receiving the \$90 from the GI Bill. We had counted on this money, and the loss of it was a profound shock to us. I quickly found a part-time job at a bank from 5 p.m. to about 10 p.m. sorting checks that had cleared through the bank that day. Bill was at home with the baby in the evening. He went to school during the day.

He received his master's in Public Health in June 1948. Harry Truman was the speaker at the graduation ceremony. Bill did not walk with the grads. He sat with our baby and me in the bleachers and applauded the President.

I might add here that much later, when Bill and I took our four kids on Western States vacation trips, we drove by our former Potrero Road student housing building. The kids were unimpressed. They thought the

two-story frame looked pretty dumpy, but when we were assigned this furnished upstairs apartment in 1946, we thought it was great.

For the rest of our lives we stayed in touch with friends we met here at UC's Married Student Housing—Johnny and Maxine Johnston (Johnny, an Angeleno, had met Maxine when his U.S. Army duty stationed him in Alaska), and Lois and Bill Thomas (both from Arizona). My daughter Laura and I have stayed in touch with their daughters, Diana Thomas Quirk and Francia Thomas O'Connor,



Peggy Ann, age three

but I am the only one of those young original 1946 UC Married Students still alive today to record these life-long friendships.



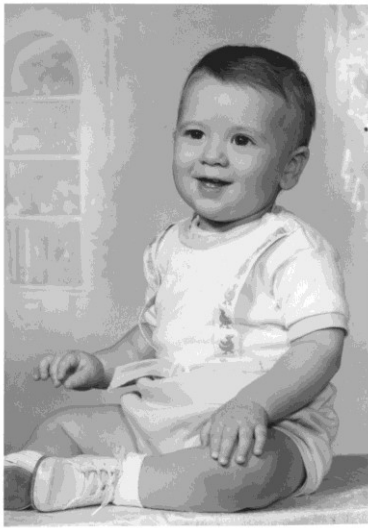
Bill was hired as Assistant Manager to the American Red Cross Counseling Office on the U. S. Army base at Fort Ord, California. Half of the office building was a furnished home for the American Red Cross Manager, but since the manager already had a home in Monterey, Bill was given the furnished home to rent—a perfectly lovely home, with all the benefits of the Army base as well. We got a dog and named it Popcorn.

We made many friends there—Tim Irons was an Army Chaplain from Utah—his five-year-old daughter, Sonoma, taught our three-year-old daughter, Peggy Ann, how to make mud pies. We met Army Sergeant Roy Lopp, his wife Marian and their children, Ray and Eva Marie, at the base

Sunday school. Roy had met Marian when the U.S. Army had stationed him in Hawaii. We kept in touch with them for many years.

The year was 1949—Bill was offered the job of Assistant Manager of the American Red Cross Blood Program in Great Falls, Montana. Bill was extremely elated by the offer—and accepted it—and we started making plans for the move to Montana. I was not as excited, and I was reluctant to leave California, but we set off on an adventure. We went first to Utah to visit Bill's family. Peggy Ann and I flew since I was pregnant with my second child, Douglas, and Bill drove our new Plymouth from Fort Ord to Utah and then to Great Falls.

We found a duplex on the edge of town which had been an Army Quonset Hut during the War. Our neighbors (in the other half of the duplex), Pete and Mary McCann, were wonderful and helpful—and their three children were company to our daughter. Bill loved the job and immersed himself in it while I did my best to adjust to our new environment—and the brutal weather . . .



Doug Johnson, 1950

When my second child, Douglas, was born in January of 1950, the temperature was *40-below-zero!!!!!!!!!!* Bill's mother came from Utah and together they found a lovely home in town for us on Second Avenue South—an original one-family home that was converted to two separate apartments. We had the first floor downstairs and the basement. We brought the infant Douglas home to this house. This was a real house and I was happy to live there. From this house Peggy Ann started kindergarten wearing a maroon wool coat with

a hood that she remembers to this day. It was difficult for me to become accustomed to the weather in Great Falls. In fact, I never did. On snowy

days, I called a cab for transportation—it was 25 cents to go anywhere in town.

While we lived in Great Falls, Montana, we went on a camping trip with other married members of Bill's staff at the ARC Blood Program and their families to one of the nearby National Parks. We took a small tent for Bill and me, and the children, Peggy Ann and Baby Douglas, would sleep in our car. After a great picnic dinner with the group and a fun campfire evening, we all settled in for the night. Apparently leftover food remained on a low level in the tent and a bear, attracted by the food, came to claim it! Bill and I both bolted from the tent to the car! I'm not sure how we all four slept in that car, but we did! I was terrified! Camping was a new experience for me—and I was happy to leave!

I was also happy to leave Montana altogether in December of 1950, to drive back to Southern California. I never will forget that as we crossed the Arizona state line into California, the sun shone brightly and we opened the car windows for the first time on this trip. We were surprised to see antennas on nearly all the California homes—television antennas—which did not exist in Montana. We were happy to be back in Southern California.

We had Christmas with Grandma and Grandpa who welcomed all four of us with open arms, and were delighted to meet their grandson, Douglas. I was so happy to be reunited with my parents and my sisters. Betty had just married a fellow UCLA student, Finley Bown. Earlier, Angagh had married a fellow student from George Washington High School, George MacKellar. George and Angagh had a little boy, Jimmy, born in 1948. Southern California would remain my home for the next nearly forty years, and in my heart, to this day, I am still a Californian.

BECKFORD AVENUE

After our return from Montana we lived for a short time in a housing complex called Avalon Village near Long Beach. Then, early in 1951 Bill got a job with Lederle Laboratories, American Cyanamid Corporation as a pharmaceutical salesman, calling on doctors, hospitals and pharmacists. He had a vast territory, all over Los Angeles. He would work for Lederle for thirty years.

All U.S. veterans had been given a \$300 bonus to buy civilian clothes. (The equivalent in today's dollars? Maybe \$1,000.) Bill and I went to the May Company Wilshire and bought him an entire wardrobe, including five French cuff shirts, plus cuff links. He looked terrific as he started his new sales job. Lederle also gave him a company car, a new Chevy or a Ford, every other year.

With this fine new job, we were able to buy our first home, also thanks to the VA and Congress and the GI Bill. We first looked at a place in Lakewood, but our toddler, Douglas, showed signs of asthma, and our doctor advised us to live someplace drier. We were able to buy the last house available in a brand new tract in the San Fernando Valley, 7051 Beckford Avenue, Reseda, California. We moved in about June 1951. Three bedrooms, about 1200 square feet, one bath, living room, kitchen and back porch, with a huge back yard (lot 50×150), a detached double garage and a set-up clothesline and incinerator behind the garage. The front lawn was planted and a baby elm tree graced our parkway. A perfect

home! Heaven!!!! The VA offered us also a stove, refrigerator and washing machine—which would be included in the mortgage installments for the next thirty (yes, 30 years!). We accepted only the stove, as we already had a refrigerator and a washing machine. Price of our new home was \$10,000. Our monthly mortgage payment was \$55, which included taxes and insurance, plus principal and interest.

After the anxieties of living through the War years, I feel confident in stating that on the whole, the 1950s were happy times for WWII veterans and their families—that living in a tract home on Beckford Avenue in post-war San Fernando Valley created a truly happy childhood for their children.



Johnson family, mid 1950s

Once we moved in, we started making improvements. Bill, some neighbors and some of his friends first put up a redwood fence around our lot. Then, he and these same men built a cement patio off of the double garage in the shape of a huge horseshoe; it was big enough to roller skate on. Later, they covered it with a wooden roof for protection from the heat. I planted strawberry plants all around the outer edge of the horseshoe. On a trip up north, on the seventeen-mile drive in Carmel, I had admired some pale-yellow and green pickets along a driveway, and Bill made me the same to go around the patio; they were laced with rope. We had many barbecues and family parties in that patio. We had dinner there often in the summer months as well as birthday parties for children.

We also planted fruit trees, an apricot, a peach, and a plum tree. We planted grapevines out by the clothesline so we would have grape leaves for *derev*. We planted an elm tree (for shade). We bought a swing set and a playhouse for our children. Helen remembers doing her “dangerous tricks” on the swing set (swinging up high) and Laura remembers planting radish seeds in her own veggie garden—and the thrill and excitement when the pink radishes appeared—and she didn’t even like radishes!

The apricot and plum trees thrived. Once I wanted to dry apricots the way I had read the early California missionaries did. I spread the apricots on make-do tables in the backyard under the hot summer sun, but I was thwarted with flies. I then covered the apricots with cheesecloth. It was a huge, total mess, and the whole thing went into the trash can. Still, it was a great adventure, and the beginning of my interest in preserving and preparing fruit.

Our housing tract had been a former pear orchard in the San Fernando Valley and there were still some straggling pear trees—with pears—on the edges of the tract. At a family dinner one night, Bill suggested I should home-can pears or make pear honey—at which Peggy Ann (seven years old) piped up, “Daddy, she isn’t the canning type!”

And she was right. In later years, I planted many fruit trees, but I preserved the fruit with a drying oven—dried fruit, frozen fruit, and many-flavored jams.

At my request, Bill converted the tiny space intended for a dining table to a reading area. He made built-in bookcases and there was a comfortable chair for one person, who could read stories to the children. One year he won the first place in a company sales program. The prize was a beautiful set of service for eight Lenox china, which I still use for special occasions to this day. Because we did not have enough cupboard space for them, Bill built cupboards high on the kitchen wall. And he also created a space in the garage for an office and workplace for himself, and he rigged up a two-way intercom with the house.

Early on I got an electric sewing machine, and I taught myself to sew. This was a major undertaking for me. I got increasingly good at making clothes from patterns and I made many of Peggy Ann's school dresses right up until the seventh grade. She always complained, however, that I left pins in the hems and they would "bite" the backs of her knees.

One year after moving into our new home, I was pregnant again and on the first day of July in 1952, our second daughter, Helen Kathleen, was born. Helen was so darling, so cute and so sweet, that we started calling her Doll. Doll remained her name for years



Doll Doll, 1953

until she was about five years old, and put her foot down and firmly declared that she was no longer to be called Doll-Doll! She hated it! And that was the end of that. Thereafter, we called her by her given name, Helen, as she wished.

So we now had three beautiful, talented children: Peggy Ann, Douglas and Helen. We were truly a happy family. Our lives centered around our children and a happy home. We got a dog, Porgy, a boxer who lived outdoors in our backyard, and had his own doghouse. The kids and the neighbor kids all loved him.

To the delight of our children, we bought a TV—the very latest thing. They loved *Howdy Doody*, *Sheriff John's Lunch Brigade*, the *Mickey Mouse Club*, *Betty Boop*, cartoon shows and movies. A favorite show was *Disneyland* on Sunday



Bill with kids and dog, 1953

nights. Everyone watched *Davy Crockett* and learned to sing the theme song. The children would watch television while I was preparing dinner.

Sometimes Peggy Ann would read to Doug and Helen while I was preparing dinner. Shortly after Peggy Ann learned to read at about age six, she became a lifelong (yes, lifelong!) reader. Like my mother, I took my children to the library every two weeks for new books to read. Peggy Ann and Helen read many of the same childhood books that I had read—*Little Maid of Old New York*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, etc. Helen read all the *Little House on the Prairie* books.

We were fortunate to live on a block that had many other young families, and the children were all good friends. They all attended Shirley Avenue School, a brand new school that opened up shortly after we moved there to accommodate the influx of children living in these new tracts. The Beckford Avenue children would walk to school and walk home together.

Our immediate neighbors were a delight. Next door to us on the north side was the Carol and Carleton Grimes family—with three children, Carla, Cherie, and Craig who were very good friends with our kids. Carleton (an Angeleno) had met Carol when he was in the U.S. Army stationed in Oklahoma during the War. Carol was a part-time professional manicurist. Carleton's parents took loving care of the children while she worked. Carleton told Bill and me at one of our patio parties that he was

a “closet writer,” and that he was working late every night on his masterpiece, a novel.

Directly across the street from us at 7050 Beckford Avenue lived Freddie and Ida Mipos, originally from New York. Ida became a very good friend of mine. She visited with me often and our children loved her. She told me that she and Fred had decided to move to Southern California after he was discharged from the Army—he had served in Africa and Europe. So Fred drove their blue Studebaker sedan alone to Los Angeles to find a job, a house, etc. while Ida and her baby boy, (born Raphael but always called Butch) stayed with Ida’s mother in New York until they moved to the City of Angels. In May 1951, the Mipos family—now with young daughter, Debra, as well as Butch—were very happy with their new home on Beckford Avenue in Reseda, California. Wonderful neighbors.

On the south side of Ida and Freddie lived Wilma Jones, a plump, charming, outgoing woman (originally from Oklahoma) with twelve-year-old daughter, Mary Jones and ten-year-old Billy. Everyone called Wilma Jonesie. Jonesie had a husband who had a “good federal job,” which he needed to support two families because but he didn’t live with Jonesie. He lived somewhere else in Southern California with another family, but he came now and then to visit Jonesie and her kids, and she proudly introduced him to us. He was a well-dressed, charming, outgoing man.

On the north side of Ida and Freddie lived Audrey and Jim Ashauer and their two children Jamie and Jeffrey. Audrey worked in an office and Jim’s parents took care of Jamie and Jeffrey during the day. The elder Ashauers had a farm of some sort, or perhaps a chicken ranch in the Valley. Peggy Ann has vivid memories of Jimmy Ashauer and his father chopping off the heads of chickens in the Ashauer’s backyard, and all the neighbor children standing around watching the chickens literally running around with their heads cut off till they fell over.

Tragedy struck the Ashauers a few years later when Jimmy (the young father) was killed in an automobile accident as he and his father drove a small truck over the Sepulveda Pass. There was a pall over our entire neighborhood as we tried to express our complete sympathy for the young

family. Jim's father, nearly comatose with grief, was very vocal, stating he wished he had been killed instead of his son, Jim. Eventually, Audrey rented out her house and took her children on a trip around the Western states.

Down the street lived Bill Flynn who had just completed his Law Degree on the GI Bill. He and his wife, Jean, a former Chicago airline flight attendant, decided to leave Chicago and move to LA. They re-fitted the backseat of their car for their three-year-old daughter and headed for Route 66, just like the current popular song suggested:

*Well, if you ever plan to motor west,
Just take my way that's the highway that's the best.
Get your kicks on Route 66.
Well, it winds from Chicago to LA,
More than 2,000 miles all the way.
Get your kicks on Route 66*

Bill Flynn was the most educated of our immediate neighbors—and a very good friend. When he passed the California Bar Exam, he got a job as a tax attorney in a downtown LA law firm. A year or so later, he bought a beautiful, spacious former movie-actor-home in Encino that was for sale for non-payment of taxes. It was a lovely home—with a movie-projector-theater room as well as a swimming pool and garden. The Flynn's invited our family to lunch and to swim in their pool on hot summer days. Good friends.

All these neighbors would meet in the street when the yellow Helms Bakery Truck came by daily with its well-known toot. He stopped three times on Beckford Avenue. He was essential to our lives in those years that no one had a second car to go to the grocery store. We would buy fresh bread and other goodies from the Helms man. In summer, the children too would crowd around the Helms truck hoping for a donut or a cupcake.

I was happy to discover that a dear friend of mine from high school, Barbara Wright, lived on the next street over, Sylvia Street. She had a daughter a year older than Peggy Ann, and two boys, the ages of Doug

and Helen. Barbara lived in that house on Sylvia Street her entire life and she and I stayed in touch by letter for as long as she lived. Her next door neighbor was a woman named Tessie Messina. She had two daughters as well, just Peggy Ann's age. We all became great friends working in Brownies and Girl Scouts.



During these Beckford Avenue years we went to my parents' home on Olympic Boulevard almost every Sunday for Sunday lunch. We were joined by my sisters, Angagh MacKellar and Betty Bown and their husbands and young families, Angagh's three children, Jimmy, Patty and Nancy, and Betty's three, Richard, Barbara and Ron. My youngest sister, Harriett was a college student at USC and still lived at home. These Sundays were always lively. We enjoyed my parents' company and Grandma's fabulous Armenian cooking. Grandma and Grandpa loved having all of their children and grandchildren nearby. They loved having their home ring with the sound of children's voices and laughter. One of my father's great joys was taking his grandchildren on the short walk to La Cienega Park—holding hands—and they loved checking his pockets for candy bars, which he always had for them.

Grandma and Grandpa always hosted Christmas Eve for all of the family. Grandma made *lamajune* and *derev* and other Armenian treats, a Christmas tradition I later took up. Each grandchild got a stocking filled with candy and other goodies, always a tangerine, and there were gifts for everyone. I remember that all the sons-in-law got



Helen and Doug, winter 1955

Old Spice. Celebrating Christmas Eve with Grandma and Grandpa allowed their daughters to spend Christmas Day with their in-law families if they wished. Bill and I and our three children spent Christmas Day together.



One day in 1954 the mother of a little girl who lived down the block came to our house. She knocked on the door and asked if would please take her and her daughter with us when we went to see Mary Martin in *Peter Pan* on the stage in downtown Los Angeles. She was afraid to drive on the freeway.

I was stunned. “Go with us to see WHAT? News to me!”

Apparently Peggy Ann had told her playmates that I would take her to see *Peter Pan*.

So I did, and we brought the neighbor and her daughter as well.

That fabulous stage production was mesmerizing—it was truly wonderful! When Mary Martin was flying around over the stage, she asked the audience if we believed in fairies. In unison, the entire audience (including parents) shouted, “*I believe!*” It was a magical experience.

Perhaps that magical visit to see *Peter Pan* on the stage was the start of our love for drama, stage and all things imaginative and musical. At about this time, my five-year-old son, Douglas, wrote his first song: “I love my Ma-ma-ma-ma.” He then told me my lyrics, which I most earnestly sang: “I love my boy-ba-ba-ba-boy.” Shortly after seeing *Peter Pan*, at age nine Peggy Ann decided she wanted to write books, and she asked me if I would type them. I said of course, I would. And I did.

In later years we took all of our kids to see Robert Preston in *The Music Man* on the stage in Los Angeles. On the front steps of the theater, someone asked my six-year-old daughter, Helen, who was wearing a darling sailor dress, if she was part of the performance. In later years we saw stage productions of Douglas Fairbanks Junior in *My Fair Lady*, Pearl Bailey in *Hello Dolly* and Anthony Quinn in *Zorba the Greek*. While *Zorba* was taking bows to the standing ovation audience, he threw a floral

bouquet to the audience—and Helen caught it! (And, incidentally, I should also add that many years later, with Laura, we also took our grandsons, Bear and Brendan, to see *Annie Get Your Gun* on the London stage.)

We got a small spinet piano that we placed along the back wall in the living room. All of my children learned to play the piano, and to read music. The piano teacher for all of the Beckford Avenue kids was Mrs. Grace Haskins—a middle-aged, charming, very patient, talented teacher. Periodically, she had piano recitals for all of her students in a selected place where parents and friends could come to hear their children perform. It was an exciting event and both my daughter, Peggy Ann, aged about ten and Carla Grimes, aged eight were excited to perform their piano pieces. For the occasion, Carla's mother, a professional manicurist, gave both little girls a grown-up-pink-manicure. Both of those little girls—they are both grandmothers today—still have fond memories of that particular California San Fernando Valley piano recital when they both performed their recital pieces beautifully with their grown-up, pink-manicured fingers. Brava! Carla and Peggy Ann!



For years we only had Bill's company car, and if the kids and I wanted to go somewhere, to the library on Sherman Way or to the Piggly Wiggly market, we had to walk. In the mid-1950s, Bill bought a used 1948 Chrysler sedan for me, for \$200. It was dark navy blue and kind of purple here and there—a really, big, comfortable sedan with Chrysler's Fluid Drive Transmission. I took the kids everywhere in that car—we loved it! Once when we were transporting our parakeet over to my sister's house, we spilled birdseed in the car! Thereafter, even after removing it many times, the birdseed seemed to reappear—and remained forever. We kept the Chrysler until 1960 when we turned it in—including birdseed—on a new aquamarine 1960 Ford station wagon.

My oldest daughter, Peggy Ann, was the only one of my four children who, like me, tended toward car sickness on long drives. (When I was a child in the 1930s we often drove among the acres of orange trees on

Sundays, and the heavy fragrance of the orange blossoms seemed to make it worse. When I became nauseous, I told Daddy and he stopped the car. We all got out, walked around, sat on the grass until the feeling passed, and I was ok.)

When Peggy Ann was on a Brownie (pre-Girl Scout) field trip, the Parent Transportation Chairman assigned her to a back seat car position, at which my ten year-old daughter replied: “I have to sit in the front seat or I get car sick—and I will vomit!” Needless to say, Peggy Ann Johnson always was assigned a front seat in every vehicle Brownie field trip thereafter.



I have always loved California’s rich, colorful history—the wonderful missions that were built by the Spanish padres which were one-day’s-walk apart from each other. We took our children to all of the nearby missions and told them the stories of the early Spanish families and the Spanish missionary padres. We also went to Disneyland when it opened in 1955 and were mesmerized by the razzle-dazzle rides, the Disney re-creation of a 1910 community, parades, bands, wonderful food and general holiday spirit. We did visit Disneyland several times thereafter, but that first visit was so very special.

We took our children to see the endless hillsides of California poppies as well as the tall flowering yucca plants on the drive to San Diego. Even as grown-ups, some of those children tell me they smile to this day when they drive past the poppy fields on their adult drives to San Diego.

Bill educated his family (including me) in the joys of camping. We began these adventures with a little tent, camping at a place called Big Pines near Wrightwood. About this same time, we also got a little 8 millimeter “movie” camera and we have wonderful videos of many of these trips. We had a little camp stove and a pancake griddle that is still in use at Laura’s house. Eventually we camped all over the West and took our children to Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, Lake Tahoe and other wonderful places. After Bill’s father died in 1956 we used many vacations to go see his

mother, Mae, in Ogden, Utah. Mae had remarried a dour man we knew only as Mr. Hoult. Livelier than Mae were Bill's aunts, Lila, Anetta, and Kitty who was the widow of Stan Johnson. We often stayed with Aunt Kitty. Once we stayed with Kitty when Brian was just an infant and she made a bed for him out of a dresser drawer.



Next to Christmas, I think Halloween was the most loved holiday on Beckford Avenue. Children loved to plan and talk about who they would dress-up to be on Halloween. As soon as it became dark on October 31, the youngest ones, in costume, came to our door (the parents standing back on the lawn) followed by the eight-, ten-, and twelve-year-olds in their favorite costumes—ballerinas, ball players, witches, Davy Crockett, ghosts—and lastly, the teenagers who wanted to participate one-more-time in the fun of Halloween.

Ida Mipos made a clown costume, with cap, for her son Raphael when he took his little sister, Debra, trick-or-treating. She was a pirate with an eye patch and an eyebrow pencil mustache and a red hoop earring on one ear. I think that was the year that Carla Grimes was sick and could not participate in Halloween so Debra shared her candy with Carla. I think that year—1955—Peggy Ann (age ten) was Peter Pan. I had dyed one of Bill's shirts green for her costume. My son Douglas (age five) became his hero, Zorro. Bill made him a cardboard-base-tin-foil-covered sword to swing around with gusto, and Helen (age three) was an angel with a beautiful halo which was held in place by wires and tape and shoulder supports set up by her doting dad. Halloween was great fun!

The only unpleasant part about that Post War experience was in about



Easter Sunday, 1953

the mid-1950s: measles, mumps and chicken pox spread like wildfire through Shirley Avenue Elementary School. For a period of at least three months, our children took turns with each of these childhood diseases. It was awful. Very stressful on children and parents as well. By the time I had grandchildren, I was extremely grateful to American medicine that all of these childhood diseases were gone.



In October 1957 our youngest son, Brian, was born. Peggy Ann, at twelve, was old enough to stay with the other children while Bill and I went to the hospital. She was making dinner for them when he telephoned to tell them that they had a new brother, Brian.

This was just about the same time that Lederle transferred Bill from Los Angeles to San Bernardino. He was often gone during the week, due to the transfer. In addition to my three children, I dealt with the daily stress of a pregnancy, followed by a new baby, trying to sell the house and thinking about packing and moving to San Bernardino. One Sunday afternoon after Brian was born, to get some R&R, I took Peggy Ann and went to the movies, to see the comedy *Don't Go Near the Water*. When we came home that afternoon, Bill had sold the house to people who came to look at it.

In January 1958, shortly after Doug's eighth birthday, we left Beckford Avenue for the last time. That night Bill drove Helen and Doug in his car. I drove my Chrysler with Peggy Ann in the front seat holding the infant Brian.



I think all of these Post-War children have wonderful memories of Halloween, Christmas, and summertime and their picture-book childhoods on Beckford Avenue in the San Fernando Valley. Their parents were later called, "The Greatest Generation;" their fathers—as young men—had responded one hundred percent to their country's call at time of World War

II. While some of their fathers never talked about their war experiences, their children knew their fathers were heroes. I think those sweet Beckford Avenue post-war children carried their fathers' hero-worship in their hearts forever.

Part of the GI Bill for World War II veterans was the gift of no down payment to own a home. While this gift certainly had a dollar value beyond the veterans' means or even dreams, the real gift was that of a happy childhood for their sons and daughters. Those veterans like Bill, might have sent a Thank-You Letter to Congress for that priceless gift for all those sweet children on Beckford Avenue in the early 1950s—the little girls playing hop-scotch and jump rope in their own driveways, pretend tea parties with their neighbor playmates, football, softball and hand ball on their own garage doors for the boys.

Living on Beckford Avenue in the early 1950s was a true gift to the parents of all those children. A very special Thank You to the United States Congress for this aspect of the GI Bill that gave the magnificent gift of a happy childhood for their children.



Johnson family, 1955

SAN BERNARDINO

In January 1958 Lederle Laboratories transferred Bill to work in a new territory, San Bernardino and the Inland Empire. When we moved to 3246 Turrill Court, San Bernardino, Brian was a babe in arms, barely three months old. Doug was eight, Helen was six and Peggy Ann was twelve. Our new home was a ranch-style house in a cul de sac just off of Marshall Boulevard. It was at the foot of a hill called Little Mountain. It cost \$20,000; our new mortgage payment jumped from \$55 a month to \$150—including taxes and insurance. The neighborhood was nice, though not showy, and the house had a real fireplace, four bedrooms, two baths, a big two car garage and a bricked patio just off the kitchen. Early on we got a big barbeque and a picnic table for the patio so we could eat outside. The lot was large, though oddly shaped, almost in an “E” formation. We lived here for thirty years.

Big challenges lay before me: I had a new home, an infant, and three other children to care for daily. Peggy Ann was a big help to me, especially since Bill’s territory now included Las Vegas and every now and then he was gone for a whole week. Helen and Doug started at Davidson Elementary school, a newish school set amid a neighborhood of tract houses. Peggy Ann started at Arrowview Junior High in the seventh grade. Unlike Los Angeles County, San Bernardino only had one graduating class per year. She had skipped kindergarten in Reseda because there were too many kids. If she had gone back to the sixth grade, she would have been right

for her age. But Bill declared no child of his would be set back a year, so she ventured on in the seventh grade. Our children were growing up, all playing the piano, the boys playing Little League baseball, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts—school activities galore, family parties, summer camping trips. Our lives were family oriented. Happy times.

Bill was Assistant Boy Scout Master to Bill Sullivan, Troop 36, and Doug was a member of the Troop. But when Doug was younger, he was



Brian ready for Scout camp, c. 1967

in my Cub Scout Den. The little boys came to our house for their den meetings, usually in our patio. At about this time I had a new crystal punch bowl with matching small crystal cups. I used it for the first time at Doug's Cub Scout

Den meeting—as if it were a very special occasion—and the boys loved it. Elegant. The crystal bowl and cups are currently in Laura's dining room, still being used for elegant occasions. Both Doug and Brian became Eagle Scouts and both attended Boy Scout Camp in New Mexico and Swim Camp in Santa Catalina Island. Fun times.

In this new house I again began planting fruit trees in our back yard. I first planted apricot and peach trees. Plenty of fruit. I made jam, dried fruit in a special drying-fruit-oven, apricot-this and peach-that, frozen apricots, frozen peaches, etc. By his eighth birthday, Brian knew his favorite fruit was pomegranate. We gave him a pomegranate tree on that birthday and planted it in a corner of the broad back yard. I also planted a grapefruit, orange and nectarine tree. At the side of the front of the house, there was a little area where I planted a fig tree and also a persimmon tree. In the

winter when persimmons were ripe, I made persimmon cookies and persimmon breads. Lots of fruit, some of it exotic.

But the favorite of all was a lemon tree that had already been planted when we moved in. Over time, its branches reached the ground, creating a sort of hiding place around its roots. When Brian was a little boy, he liked to crawl under the lemon tree and pretend it was his special secret hideout—plus the fragrance of lemons. When he was a little older, he built a fort near the lemon tree with tree branches and bamboo shoots for a real fort.

We squeezed lemon juice and froze it in ice cube trays so it was readily available when I needed it. And I needed it a lot. I became a lemon-freak. (Actually, I had begun to be a lemon-freak when I was a teenager and read *Gone With the Wind*. Scarlet O’Hara said her mother loved the lemon fragrance and kept sprigs of lemon verbena in her linen closet. I thought that was so cool.)

Sometime after we moved to San Bernardino, I started learning to cook old-country-style, like my mother. In addition to our regular-every-day rice pilaf, bulgur pilaf and red soup, I rolled grape leaves into *derev*, made *lamajune*, *chee-kufta*, cheese *borak*, I tried boiled *kufta*. I even made *pak-lava*, the wonderful old country dessert made of many layers of buttered filo dough, nuts, and syrup. (Bill loved it!) Over the years, I became more proficient in old country cooking, and I really enjoyed it. Bill became the master of shish kebab on the barbeque. His was the best.

Our house was at the “top” of Turrill Court. Next to us were the Thompsons, Dale and Doris. They had two boys about the age of Doug and Helen. In 1958 they had a third boy, Brett who became Brian’s dearest friend. These boys were inseparable as children and they stay in touch to this day. The other families in Turrill Court and nearby were mostly like ours, people with school-age children. Only one couple, Faith and John Kuziak, were older and childless, retired from the Air Force. All over their house they had interesting things they had collected from their travels around the world. Peggy Ann and Helen loved to go see Faith and Johnny.



Peggy and Bill in the Bahamas

In 1959, Bill was honored as one of Lederle Labs' top national salesmen, and given an all-expense-paid, weeklong vacation in the Bahamas. Faith Kuziak came and stayed with Peggy Ann, Doug, Helen, and Brian so that I could go with Bill. This was a never to be forgotten vacation. My first time out of the country since I had arrived in the U.S. as an infant. They had elegant

galas, as well as a special ceremony presenting [the literal] Gold Cups to the top salespeople in the nation. We had a wonderful time and brought back loads of straw hats and Bahamas mementos.

One winter weekend we all bundled up and rented a cabin a Crestline for a snow holiday. We took our sled and had a great time sliding down the many mountain areas. Since there was no TV in the cabin, we had taken several board games for evening fun. Needless to say, we all slept well after day-long snow activities. Helen was about seven years old—she rode down a snow mountain and hit a tree, which really shook her up. When we got home she decided to write a letter to “Government Brown” (Pat Brown, father of Jerry Brown) to suggest snow slide areas for children. In one of the bags of memorabilia, I found the reply to her letter from a Deputy Governor who assured her that the State did have such snow play areas for children at Squaw Valley, and he hoped her local government would also do the same for Crestline.

These bags of memorabilia came to me when Laura's basement flooded in December of 2010 and had to be cleaned out. In one of them

I also found a darling note written by Helen who would have been about seven. It was her report on Brian (age about two) when the neighbor girl, Cory Krisle was babysitting them. Helen wrote: “Brian burped twice without saying Excuse Me. Then he burped and did say Excuse Me. Other than that, he was good. My report. Helen.” (Cory was the eldest child in the Krisle family who bought Faith and John’s house after they moved.)

When Helen was about ten years old, she became interested in embroidering. (I think I may have started embroidering, but can’t really remember.) We bought her an embroidery frame plus multi-colored thread, the works. She wanted to share her interest in embroidering with her friends, so she started The Thursday Afternoon Sewing Club (or something very similar to that). They all enjoyed the sewing club. The girls came after school with their embroidering—they sat in a circle, and I read stories to them while they sewed. Then we had refreshments, probably lemonade and cookies. To this day, Helen still remembers one of the stories I read to her and her friends—“Katushka and the Poppy Seed Cakes.” (I had loved this story when I was a kid.) Helen said I served poppy seed cookies to her sewing club that day. Ten years or so later, when I was in the hospital having a hysterectomy, Helen embroidered an Aries Ram Sign for me (my astrological sign) and brought it to the hospital. I still have it, framed, on the wall in my home library.

On Doug’s fourteenth birthday, we gave him a guitar. He loved it. I volunteered to take free adult guitar lessons at the local adult night high school and I would come home and tell him what the teacher taught me. The teacher gave our class a very brief history of the guitar, and then moved quickly into names of the strings, tuning, chords. The first song he taught our class was “Down in the Valley.” I can even remember some of the words: “Down in the Valley, valley so low, . . . Hear the wind blow.” I thought we sounded great. (Shades of Beginning Strings class in junior high school in 1935!) After two—or maybe three—of my lessons, Doug said, “Is that all he taught you?” By this time, he had mastered the guitar all by himself. Music was always part of our family.

Our longtime piano teacher in San Bernardino was a man named Mr. Hulbert. He was a very exacting, demanding teacher and he stayed with us until he got a job with a music publishing firm and moved to Chicago. His biggest influence was undoubtedly on Doug who played the piano with passion. In his senior year at San Bernardino High at a Talent Show, Doug played a piano solo arrangement of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue"—without music. He also played a mean, show-stopping "Bumble Boogie" that brought down the house. On the day of the Senior Talent Show, I went to SB High and stood at the back of the auditorium and watched Doug's performance. I was really proud of my son. He was terrific. (In addition to his music, at the same high school talent show, I think, Doug was the winner of The Best Looking Male Legs in his class.)

Helen's schoolgirl years were made more difficult by nonstop chronic illness that was finally diagnosed as Crohn's disease. She was often so ill she could not even go to school for long swaths of time, but had a home tutor. Despite this Helen made wonderful lifelong friends, including the irrepressibly funny and charming Mary Burke. All of Helen's friends, all



Johnsons, 1961

of the kids actually, doted on Brian who was a darling little boy, happy to be surrounded by so many others and his two best friends, Bret and Floyd who lived around the corner from us. Later, we had dogs, two Irish

setters, Chief and Shadow. These were Brian's dogs and he adored them.

In addition to all our activities, I continued to sew clothes for the girls. I made many A-line dresses for Helen, in grammar school and junior high. I also made special occasion dresses, including Peggy Ann's prom dress in

1961, a dress of pink satin with a white train at the back, modeled after one of Jackie Kennedy's dresses. I also made her graduation dress in 1962, of a heavy white jacquard material with a fashionable Jackie Kennedy type of skirt called a bell skirt. Though I sewed less after returning to work, I still made dresses for Helen's special occasions including the dress she wore to ninth grade graduation. Helen remembers it to this day: "The material was a soft light blue dotted-Swiss that had a beautiful different smell of new material. I had new shoes and felt like I had the world by the tail. I felt beautiful and special." I made the dress for Helen's first prom as well, and we both remember the dress I made in honor of her return to high school after being so ill for such a long time. "The dress was so bright and beautiful. It fit so well and flared just perfectly. The material was delicate orange flowers on a white embossed background. The material was just stiff enough to hold its shape and flatter my body. Mom also made a matching purse." I took great pride in seeing my daughters go out into the world in lovely clothes.

When my eighteen-year-old daughter, Helen, suggested that I should read a book she liked by John Steinbeck, I replied immediately that I did not like John Steinbeck or his work. She then asked me, "What have you read of his that you did not like?" I had to reply, "Nothing." I was embarrassed. (When I was growing up in Southern California, we did not like Steinbeck's books about the Okies moving into California with their belongings piled high on rickety trucks.) Anyway, I accepted her Steinbeck book—I think it was *Cannery Row*. Who could not like *Cannery Row*? I loved it. I started reading Steinbeck. I read *Sweet Thursday*,



Helen, 1970

I read *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Tortilla Flat*. *East of Eden*, I read just about everything he ever wrote. I felt I understood him. When he wrote about his son being sent to Vietnam, I understood his daily fears. At that particular time, my own son had been sent to Vietnam and I suffered anguish all the time he was gone, which I knew John Steinbeck also experienced.

In one of Steinbeck's short stories, he tells about the elementary-school Mexican boy and the new college-grad social worker who asks him:

What did you have for breakfast?

Tortillas and beans.

What did you have for lunch?

Tortillas and beans.

What do you have for dinner?

Tortillas and beans. What more could you ask?

The expression "What More Could You Ask" became a part of our Johnson family vocabulary for time and all eternity. We still use it.



In the early 1960s, following the death of my father in 1963, we changed our Christmas tradition. We no longer went to Grandma's house for Christmas Eve. Grandma always came to our house for Thanksgiving. My sisters and I took turns hosting a Christmas Eve Party, where each family put on a show, music of some kind. When it was our turn to host the party, Bill, Peggy Ann, Helen, and Doug did a great soft shoe—song and dance with great élan. They wore straw hats and each had a cane and sang and danced to the Hawaiian version of the "Partridge in a Pear Tree." Peggy Ann had learned the words and taught it to the rest of us. It was really cute and a big sensation.

When our kids were teenager (or thereabouts), they wanted to go to the Rose Parade on New Year's Day, so we went and had a great time. We had seats near the end of the parade, so we saw it all—with great seats. On another Rose Parade occasion, we took them all to a park where the floats were on display following the parade so we had a close up view of

the magic they did with flowers. Dad, of course, did all the driving in the heavy, heavy traffic. Fun times.

When our kids were teenagers, they suggested that on Christmas Eve we should all give each other gifts which we had made. It was a special time for just our family and a time to talk about the gifts we had made for each other. I remember Peggy Ann gave each of us a painted walnut size, smooth-face rock. They were really quite beautiful rocks—painted bright blue colors and pink flowers, as I recall. Did she paint a word on them? I can't quite remember, but if she did, maybe it was Love, Timeless, or something like that. It brings tears to my eyes to this day to remember the familial love of our family as we sat in our living room all those years ago, the Christmas tree bright with color, many, many gifts under the tree ready for opening tomorrow, as we told each other how our handmade gifts were gifts of love. My children initiated this special occasion. My children are all very special people. I am so very proud of all of them.



In 1960 we traded in the 1948 Chrysler and bought a brand new blue Ford station wagon. This car served our family for years. It was a warhorse of a car. In it we took many great camping trips all over the West. We had started out with a small tent, but we bought a large green tent to house all our family and our camping equipment, stove, etc. One memorable trip was to Zion National Park. We had just set up the tent when there was a sudden downpour. At first we stayed in the tent, but then it turned into a flash flood and I moved to the car with the baby Brian and Helen, while Doug and Peggy Ann with dad somehow got the tent down and dragged the sopping wet tent, by now covered with red soil, to the top of the car and semi-secured it. We left as fast as we could, the rain still pounding on the car. We made one stop only: at a lodge where we sent Peggy Ann inside with the baby's bottle and asked them to warm it. They did. After that, Dad drove all night, never stopping until we arrived home in the middle of the night, all of us extremely tired—and glad to be home safely. Washing that tent meant we had red soil stains in our driveway for days.

On these camping trips we would also take instruments, Doug especially used to play the guitar and the others would sing and sometimes people would come from other campsites just to hear them.

One year we rented a trailer for our vacation. Because the speed limit at that time was fifty miles an hour, I didn't think Bill would want to drive with it. (He liked to drive fast.) But he was fine. We named this first trailer "The Boutchik" which is Armenian for Follow-Cat or something like that, something that always follows you around. One year we took it to the state campground at Cardiff Beach, right on the Pacific Ocean in North San Diego County. We came to love it there. We next bought a bigger trailer and planted it in our spot, #43 at Sea Aire Mobile Park on Vulcan Avenue in Encinitas.

Soon after (maybe around 1970) we bought a longer trailer with a bathroom—shower too. (Before this, when Helen would have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, she had to wake Peggy Ann to walk down to the bathroom with her. So they were both especially glad we had our own bathroom.) Plus, it had a four burner stove and a real oven. It had two little beds on either side that we named Ozzie and Harriett after the famous television show. The kitchen table could also be taken down and made into yet another bed. Thereafter, we spent all of our vacations there as well as weekends and any other time we could manage to be there.

At first we added a canvas flap that allowed us to put in a couch and some extra beds. One of these was a narrow, steel frame single that Peggy



Peggy and Bill at 523 North Vulcan

Ann named the Orph because it looked like an orphan's bed. (The Orph by the way is still in the basement of her Bellingham home.) We could also store the surfboards there because in these years both Brian and

Doug became expert surfers. They would sit out on the ocean for hours at a time, looking at the horizon and riding the waves to shore.

From Sea-Aire we could cross the railroad tracks and walk to Stone Steps, steep concrete steps that led from a residential neighborhood down to a beach so narrow at the foot of the cliffs that high tide covered it up. So many people brought their dogs to Stone Steps that the high lookout smelled like dog pee. Never mind, people would still stand there just to look out over the ocean. Our favorite beach though, was Moonlight Beach, down at the end of Encinitas Boulevard. Moonlight Beach had bathrooms and showers to wash the sand off. It had a snack bar and fire rings and concrete picnic tables as well. We would often come back to Moonlight Beach in the evening and have dinner there, light a fire in the fire ring, bring our folding chairs and stay till sunset. We came to have our own “place” on Moonlight Beach. All of our family and friends knew that if you went to Moonlight, turned north and walked a little way, you would find the Johnsons.

In about 1973 we took down the canvas from the side of the trailer, and had built a real room. We had bookshelves and a desk, a TV, lamps and a chair. I cooked tremendous meals on that little stove and we had portable table to put up outside when there were too many of us to sit inside. (Which was often.) I planted cosmos and other flowers in the front. Somehow in the winter months, as I recall, in the night quiet, we could hear the waves breaking on the beach. So peaceful. We loved it. The trailer became a real home-away-from-home.

In the months and years that passed that trailer served us for our every vacation, and also as a home for each of our adult kids for a while. Peggy Ann brought Bear and Brendan there as well. It was our favorite place on earth.



All of our children attended Arrowview Junior High and San Bernardino High School. Peggy Ann graduated in 1962 at the age of sixteen (turning seventeen just a few weeks later). She went to University of California at

Riverside. Doug graduated in 1967, and for a time attended Valley College, the local community college. Helen graduated from high school in 1970. In the meantime, California State University at San Bernardino had opened up, and she went there, graduating in 1976 with a degree in Liberal Studies. Later she earned a master's there in Special Education. Doug, too, attended CSUSB for a while, though he did not graduate. Brian graduated from SBHS in 1975 and attended CSUSB briefly before transferring to Fresno State where he graduated in 1981.

The best and most memorable graduation was without a doubt in 1967. In June 1967, Peggy Ann graduated from University of California at Riverside, Douglas graduated from San Bernardino High School and Helen graduated from Arrowhead Junior High School. UCR and SB High graduations were held at the exact same time—which we solved by Grandma and Bill going to UCR graduation and I went to SB High with the younger kids.

Afterward we had lovely party in our patio. Lots of food, champagne, music, it was a wonderful party. All my family came and our friends and many of Peggy Ann's friends from UCR, including her best friend, Terry Leonard. (Doug's entire graduating class from SB High were all-night guests at Disneyland that night also which is why we were able to serve champagne at the party.) Exciting times. Close knit family.

For these parties, I did nearly all of the cooking, certainly all the Armenian cooking, the *lamajune*, the *derev*, the salads. I also always made Armenian dinner every Christmas Eve, a tradition I continued right up until about 2005.



In 1965 I returned to work, at first part time in the office of Kenneth Kelly, a local insurance agent. I assisted his main secretary, and when she retired I took over the office, typing the letters, taking dictation and answering the phone. I learned a lot about the insurance business, but the pay was not great and there was no retirement to speak of. In 1972, at the age of fifty I went to work for the County of San Bernardino as the

secretary to the head of Orthopedics at the County Hospital. When I went to work there I worked for a Dr. George J. Weisseman. When he left he was eventually succeeded by Dr. Alan Mackenzie who was from Canada. I remained working at the county hospital for Dr. Mackenzie until I retired in the 1980s.

Before I left the insurance job the boss there gave me (yes, gave me) an old Ford Tempest with a three-gear shift. The boss had bought his daughter a new car and he gave me her old car. I had not driven a stick shift since I was in high school, but I managed to drive it home. Peggy Ann recalled the Tempest in a Teapot scandal of the 1920s—and from then on, we called this white two-door vehicle “The Teapot.” I drove it for some time and I think all of my kids drove The Teapot at one time or another also. We even drove it to the beach. It was a sturdy little vehicle and it served us well for a very long time.

But then, there came into our lives, the MGs, fussy British sports cars that we adored and drove for as long as we could. They were an eccentric family obsession.

While Peggy Ann was in graduate school in Delaware, she bought a 1959 MGA for \$200. She drove it all the way across the country to San Bernardino—the first part of the trip a friend rode with her as far as Oklahoma, I think. She drove the rest of the way by herself, as I recall. On second thought, I think Doug flew to Oklahoma and drove the rest of the way home with her. When they were somewhere near Indio, California, down in the desert, they ran over a large rock, or something like that, and she called home for help. Dad immediately jumped into his car and drove down to where they were stranded. I don’t remember what he did, but Peggy Ann, Doug, the MGA and Dad all made it home. Dad was the hero. We all loved this little British sports car.

On one of her drives across country, returning to the East Coast in her new yellow MGB, Peggy Ann took Brian with her. He was about twelve at the time. They stopped in D.C. and other places of interest so it was also an educational trip for Brian. He flew home safely.

Here is what Laura wrote about the MGAs for a 2019 blogpost on her website talking about her new novel, *The Great Pretenders*:

“If there is some glorious afterlife where one relives moments of tremendous earthly happiness, then for me, one of those would be me driving a vintage MG convertible, zipping along on a narrow road, Pacific Ocean on one side, dry California hills on the other, music blaring. I am wearing sunglasses and a broad-brimmed hat.

I endowed Roxanne Granville [the central character] with my passion for those sweet little British sport scars. ‘The Silver Bullet is a difficult English car, but it has everything I love: speed, style, wire rims, a smooth purr to the engine, and a grace on curves. On PCH I turned north toward Malibu, where I pulled off to the side of the road, and unsnapped the convertible top and pushed it back so I could really feel my freedom. Speeding up PCH, to my left the sea was a dolphin-gray, and blue-gray waves broke in a white, ruffled froth along the pale beaches.’ Happiness.

Other vintage sports cars, like the Triumph and the Porsche are fine and attractive, but the MG gets under your skin. And into your wallet. The electrical systems are iffy. MGs are prone to overheat. They do not always start when you want them to. In truth you can really only drive an MG if you can do your own mechanical work. I could not. My love affair with the MG has cost me plenty, not just money, but anxiety. I was so happy when I lived in Encinitas to see that a mere two blocks away in my scruffy, comfy neighborhood, a guy named Charlie opened a foreign car repair shop. Charlie himself would sometimes push my MG the two blocks to his garage (which is still there).

In my youth I have driven a ’58 MGA, a ’59 MGA (the car battery on this one was held in place with a coat hanger for a time). I had an Austin-Healy Sprite (which was wrecked, and I had to be pried out of the driver’s seat) and the model that replaced the MGA, a 1970 MGB, yellow.

I drove one MGA across country. In winter. The patron saint of travelers, St. Christopher himself vowed to disown me for such stupidity, but I did it. Driving in the desert late at night and very tired and thinking, idly dreaming somehow of marshmallows roasting on a fire, I passed beneath

an overhead light. I saw that the little cab was filled with actual smoke, and that the floorboards were on fire. Yes, this MGA had floor-boards, wooden floors. Miles later I found a gas station, closed, but the water was still available and I put out the embers.

I had to give up driving MGs once I became a mother. You simply cannot put a kid in one of these cars. No seat belts. No safety precautions of any sort. My mother (whose children were all grown and gone) took over my MG. My sis-



Bear and the MGA, c. 1981

ter had no kids, and she drove a red MGA for years until she started riding horses, and she could not afford both the horse, and the MGA. Although I have a picture of my eldest son, Bear, about three years old looking lovingly at the MGA parked in my parents' yard, neither he nor his brother inherited my love of sports cars. Perhaps it's not genetic, and certainly it's just as well."

It's true that we all loved these cars. When we saw a red MGA for sale in town, Dad bought it. I think he gave it to Helen as a get-well-gift after one of her surgeries. I know it was hers when she married Gary Hagerman at age twenty-two, but as mentioned above, once Helen became a horse-woman, she could not afford to cater to the fussy MGA.

At one time I drove the blue MGA to work at the County Hospital after Bill taught me how to use the four-on-the-floor gears. I always drove in my stocking feet, never with shoes on. I needed to feel the gas pedal and the clutch with my stocking feet. I bought a matching blue large-brim hat, which I wore when I drove it—plus sunglasses—fun to wave at people who admired the car and thought I was young. I felt young. I loved

that car. To open the door of the A, you had to pull a string! When it rained we put the top on it, but it was more fun to drive it as open convertible. When we moved to Washington, we



Helen and the MGA, c. 1971

had three MGA's – and sold them all together, reluctantly, to someone from the hospital. We loved those cars.



After receiving her BA from University of California, Riverside, Peggy Ann went to the University of Delaware where she earned a master's degree in History. She taught at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, the first Black university, for two years. In 1972 she returned to California and entered the PhD program in literature at University of California at San Diego. For that first year there she lived at our trailer in Encinitas. Jay McCreary, who had taught physics at Lincoln University also left then and came to Scripps Institute of Oceanography in La Jolla. They reconnected, and eventually married.

Helen was twenty-two years old and a student at San Bernardino State University, majoring in Liberal Studies when she met and fell in love with Gary Hagerman, also a student in Education at SBSU. They were married on February 16, 1974, at the Assistencia Chapel (Little Mission) in San Bernardino. Peggy Ann and Mary Burke were her bridesmaids. Doug and Brian were groomsmen and Jay played the classical guitar. We had a lovely reception at our home following the ceremony.

Helen and Gary moved to Banning when Gary got a teaching job there and Helen commuted to the college. Following their divorce some years

later, Helen earned a master's degree in Education and Special Education. She taught at the Chino Unified School District for thirty years, and retired to her mini-ranch in Mira Loma. Helen had always loved horses. At her mini-ranch, just a block or so from the dry riverbed, she has her own horse, a barn, chickens, rural life and, yes, a lovely, aged lemon tree. (Thank you, Helen!) Her neighbors ride by her house on horseback, wave to her. Whenever I visited her, I enjoyed walking to the riverbed, watching distant riders on the dry surface. I felt like I had happened onto a western movie set. Beautiful. Also, later, Helen became Chair of the Southern California Area for California State Horsemen's Association, and currently she is Vice President of CSHA for Region 11 of the Equestrian Trail Patrol.

In the meantime, Brian completed a year or so at Cal State San Bernardino and then transferred to California State University at Fresno, where he earned a Bachelor of Science Degree. He was living on the campus on his twenty-first birthday, so to celebrate as best we could with him, we contacted a bakery in Fresno and had them send him a Happy Birthday sheet cake. My uncle and aunt, Haigauz and Martha, had a chicken ranch very near Fresno at that time. They were so happy to reconnect with Brian, and he was happy to reconnect with his Armenian heritage.

At age nineteen, Doug dropped a class at Valley College—oh nineteen, thou art so nineteen!—was drafted into the U.S. Army, and sent to Vietnam in the 4th Infantry.

I can truthfully state that 1969 was the worst year of my life. To begin with, there was a terrible flood in Southern California that year, an ominous beginning. Doug, my oldest son was sent to Vietnam in the U.S. Army, and my daughter, Helen, a teenager was very seriously ill with Crohn's Disease and had several surgeries. It was day-and-night-worry. After going to bed at night, I would wake up in three or four hours, lie awake wondering if I had awakened because something awful was happening to my son. Hard getting back to sleep. My daytime life was seeing my beautiful, sweet daughter suffer surgeries—with no guarantees of her eventual health. To lighten this tense era, one day Bill brought me a small gift of an Authentic Worry Stone—a 2-inch long, 1/4-inch high onyx stone with a smooth round dip in the middle.

On the back it said something like, “For best results, depress thumb slowly in round area.” I still smile when I see this little worry stone on my desk. My prayers were answered and both of them survived. I will leave it there, but I prefer not to refer to 1969 again. Too painful.

However, I feel that a brief summary of that year should perhaps be mentioned. In Vietnam, Doug used drugs to help him do the required jungle hand-to-hand fighting with long knives; he walked point in dense, enemy infested jungles. In Vietnam, he was hospitalized for malaria. They sent him home to us at age twenty-one—a drug addict with an undesirable discharge and no veterans’ benefits. PTSD is very real. We gave him medical, mental, and rehab care over long periods of time. Bill was so outraged at the discharge, he started writing letters to the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C., requesting that the discharge be changed. They refused. He did not give up, just kept refuting their allegations as if he were a trained attorney, with evidence of newspaper clippings and even a photo of Doug and his unit in *Time* magazine. (Doug was in the front row.) After two full years of letter writing, the discharge was reversed with full veterans’ benefits. Getting Doug’s discharge reversed was Bill’s shining hour. *He did what everyone said was impossible.* With these veteran’s benefits, Doug was finally able to recover from the drugs and PTSD. He married Pauline in 2008 and lived with her happily in Port Hueneme for many years.

As our children grew and left the homestead, we communicated actively with them. I remember using the return address on my letters to



Johnsons, 1971

them as: SAAS (Society for the Advancement of Armenian Swedes). Required reading for the SAAS: *My Name is Aram* and *The Human Comedy* by William Saroyan. (Muted message from Mom: Remember that you are Armenian.)



The years in our Turrill Court house were full and busy, especially after I returned to work full time. We still had three children still at home and often, we had their friends come for meals, and occasionally one stayed with us for a while. During these years we had music on the stereo almost nonstop. I so well remember listening to and loving “The Point,” and “Zorba the Greek,” “The Sound of Music” and “The Music Man.” To this day hearing these albums can make me misty, thinking back to those years, some of which certainly had their struggles, but I rejoiced in having my family close by, including my mother and my sisters. When I think of our thirty years in the house at Turrill Court, I mostly remember all the kids and their friends coming in and out. I remember the Christmases and Thanksgivings. I remember the graduations and the weddings. It was a house that brimmed with love.



Peggy and Bill, 1974

GRANDSONS

The 1977 wedding of our daughter Laura to Jay McCreary introduced us to a whole new level of happiness, our two grandsons: Bear and Brendan. They opened an entirely new world to us. Thereafter, our entire lives revolved around them: our dear, sweet boys.

Jay graduated with his PhD in physical oceanography in 1977 and we had a never-to-be-forgotten party for the occasion in July in the backyard of their Encinitas home. In early 1978 he left for his new job at Nova University near Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Laura later joined him.

On Friday night, February 16, 1979, Jay called us from Florida to let us know that our daughter, Laura, had gone to the hospital for the birth of their first child. We were so excited to hear about the birth of our first grandchild! The next day, February 17, Jay called again to let us know that we had a grandson! On the following Monday, February 19, I was on a red-eye plane to Florida to help with taking initial care of the new baby. He was such a darling baby! She called him her little Teddy Bear—and somehow thereafter he was always called “Bear.” Laura and I took him to the pediatrician for his initial physical exam—a perfect baby! Perfect happiness!

Laura brought Bear home to California first when he was about six months old. We picked them up at LAX and went to Grandma’s house so she could meet her new great-grandson. We laid him on the bed in Harriett’s room and played games with him and sang songs. He was such a darling and everyone doted all over him. He spent his first Christmas, 1979

with us, in San Bernardino, and we have pictures of him in his darling, red Christmas jammies. He got a special little choo-choo train that made him cry when it whistled along the floor. We hid it.

We doted on Bear every time they came home to California which was fairly often. In 1979 they stopped in California on their way to and from living in Honolulu, and the same in 1981. Helen and I visited them both times in Honolulu. On our 1979 visit, Helen and I put the baby in the car (a VW Rabbit convertible) and went shopping so Laura could get some work done. But when we weren't back in an hour or so, she began to fret. When we got home with the baby a few hours later, she snatched him out of the car and said she'd been so worried, she had called the police! We always laugh at that.

At the end of these summer visits to Hawaii Jay would go back to Florida soon, but Laura would often stay for a while with the baby. Sometimes we would go to the trailer in Encinitas. One of my favorite memories is holding hands with two year old Bear and walking around the trailer park, stopping at the end to notice the ding-dong bell, and stopping to watch the ants on the sidewalk.

As the eldest grandchild, Bear got to give out names. Laura had long called me Madre for a while, and then it became Maude, and after that, Maudie. It was just my name. However, Bear is the one who gave Bill the name Dahbee. In the fall of 1980 Laura had an opportunity to go to Virginia Center for the Creative Arts for a month to write. Bill, who was retired by then, flew out to Florida to stay with Bear. Laura called Bill "Dad," and Jay called him "Bill." Baby Bear combined the two and called him Dahbee. Hence, his name in our family for time and all eternity. There is a wonderful story of the two of them sitting on the front porch of that Florida house, eating ice creams when Bear, at about twenty months, reached over, patted Bill on the knee and said, "You're a good boy, Dahbee."

Bear also named Helen "Nannies," a sort of play on Aunt Helen, which he could not seem to say. This has stayed her name ever since. He also named Terry Auntie "Tere" because he couldn't seem to master Aunt

Terry. The blankets that she hand-knitted for the family over the years became known as “Auntie Teres.” (Many years later Bear’s wife, Raya misunderstood this name; she thought we called them Auntie Teres because they did not rip!)

In 1983 Laura and Jay separated and she and four year old Bear returned to California. She rented an apartment in Redlands (and rented an upright piano to go with it) at 23 Dalton Court. The night before Brendan was born, Bill and I both came over to her house. I slept in the single bed in the guest room and Dahbee slept on the floor in the living room. The next day, June 12, 1983, I took Laura to the hospital (after she finished her book review for the San Jose *Mercury News*). I had gone to Pregnancy Lamaze Training Classes with Laura at the hospital where I worked, and I was present (as labor coach) in the delivery room at Redlands Community Hospital when Brendan was born. Another powerful, emotional, earthshaking experience. Laura named him Brendan William Johnson McCreary. Beautiful. We now had two wonderful grandsons, the lights of our lives.

Bear went to pre-school at a lovely place high on a hill, and as he always has, he made friends. Brendan was fine, fat happy baby. When he would fuss, Laura would put his play-



Bear and Brendan, 1983

pen next to the piano, and he would pull himself up on his two sturdy little legs, and stand there and amuse himself by playing the piano. Afternoons, when the heat cooled down, she would put him in his stroller and the three would take walks around the large apartment complex. They all three shared the big bedroom upstairs. The small bedroom downstairs was a

guest room where Bill or I or Helen sometimes stayed. The living room had bookshelves, the rented piano and her desk, a door laid over bricks and boards where she worked when she could.

When I told four-year-old Bear that we were all going to the movies on Saturday to see a great movie about baseball, he replied, “Do you mean *The Natural*, Maudie?” I was stunned! He was always mad for movies and very knowledgeable for four years old!

The little family lived in Redlands for about a year and a half. Laura applied for and was accepted for a teaching job at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. It was only a temporary job, but she took it just the same. Since Bill was already retired, he helped Laura



Bear, age four

move with Bear and Brendan to Bellingham. They drove in two cars. Bill tied Brendan’s crib on top of our 1977 Chevy and loaded the back seat and trunk with highchair, kid stuff, toys, books, etc.

Bill returned to California after a bit, though he came to Bellingham often. (He had family in Seattle and in Eastern Washington.) Laura found a wonderful babysitter for that first year.

The temporary job turned into work for several years. Early on Laura and the boys moved frequently from one rental to another. Then in 1987 she bought the house on Cornwall Avenue. From here the boys could walk down the street to Parkview Elementary School. Home sweet home. Forever home sweet home.

By this time, I too had retired. Bill and I sold our house in San Bernardino and moved to Washington to be with our grandsons and to be a help to Laura. When we moved to Washington, we happily stepped in to be

part of the McCrearys' lives. I rejoiced in having my grandsons nearby, but I must confess, I still missed my lemon tree.



In Bellingham Bill and I rented a house and made friends on our own. I joined a walking group that met every morning at 7 a.m. on the Western campus, and we became close friends with many of them. However, most of our lives were taken up with Brendan and Bear. Dad and I enjoyed our wonderful grandsons' childhood—we were part of all their activities. They were the joy of our lives. In the early years, we looked after the boys while Laura was teaching, which was fun for us as well. We took them to the movies, to school events, to birthday parties, to weekend sightseeing trips in our new home in the State of Washington. We, all of us, went on picnics and beach outings and to recitals, holiday activities, all the fun of childhood adventures.



Bear and Brendan, 1985

With the first royalty check from *These Latter Days* Laura bought a VCR that included a camcorder. Dahbee learned how to use this, and from then on, he filmed all of the kids' recitals, school plays, marching band competitions, and many of our family parties. Dahb with his trusty VCR camcorder was a constant feature of their childhood.

At first, Bear attended a private school, Bellingham Cooperative, which gave the pupils Wednesday afternoon off. On those days, we took the boys to their favorite hamburger place for lunch for hamburgers and fries—and maybe a fun place afterward. Brendan's first pre-school was on

the Western campus. Laura would take him in the morning and we would pick him up about eleven.

When the boys were about ten and six, I heard on the radio that people could go to the Hovander Pioneer Homestead ranch and pick as many apples as they wished—and people could also crush the apples on a cast iron hand-apple-press for apple juice. Laura, the boys and I went to the ranch with sacks—we picked a lot of apples—and we used the cast iron hand-apple press for apple juice. However, the press required a lot of energy and we soon tired from the pressing process, so we took the rest of the apples home—and I made a lot of applesauce. But it was fun.

Once when Brendan was about three years old, tired, crying, didn't want to take a nap, I held him up close, put my cheek on his cheek, and



Bear and Maudie, 1984

whispered that I wanted to tell him a story. He stopped crying, listened. He loved the stories I told him for a very long time: *The Little Red Hen*, *The Gingerbread Boy*, *The Three Pigs*, *Chicken Little*, *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, etc. etc. etc. Once after I re-told the *Three Bears* story, three-year-old Brendan asked me what a “walk in the woods” was. Shortly thereafter, I took him to the Inter-urban Trail in Bellingham, which was a modern footpath on the edge of the city through a verdant, almost-blind-

ingly-green-tall-trees forest. I still remember the thrill of holding Brendan's three-year-old hand as we were taking a walk in the woods, just like the *Three Bears* in the story.

Speaking of going to fun places after school, Dahbee delighted in taking the boys to PayLess Drugs' Toy Department—(yes, PayLess seemed to the boys to have specialized in toys).

Also, Dahbee and Brendan frequently enjoyed a special treat—just the two of them—of canned pasta.

When Brendan was about five, I took him to lunch at the mezzanine café of The Bon in downtown Bellingham. (This was before the Mall came to town.) We both enjoyed it. (I think we had hamburgers.) We visited the comic book shop in town as well as the music store. Also, at that time, the local bus stopped in front of his house, so he and I took a ride on the bus—its entire route—until it returned to its starting place in front of his house. It was his first (and maybe only) bus ride. Fun.

When Bear was about ten, one morning he found an abandoned full-size boy's bicycle in front of his house. Laura suggested they should take it to the police station in case someone would be looking for a lost bike. The station told Bear they would hold it for 30 days, and if no one claimed it, it would be his. He had a little-boy bike, but did not have a full size bike. No one claimed it so it became Bear's. They called it "The Bike That Fell From Heaven." That bike is still in Laura's garage—and still runs.

In 1988 we had the opportunity as a family to go and live in Italy for four months. I talk about that experience in a separate chapter. On our return, Brendan began kindergarten at Parkview School. That very first week he went there, his mother was called into the principal's office after school: Brendan had got into a fight with another boy because this boy had insulted Brendan's friend, David Eggers. When Laura walked him home, Brendan said, "No one calls my friend a shrimp!"

David Eggers stood by, too, some years later when the boys were at Assumption Middle School. On a snowy afternoon, and contrary to express instructions from the principal, Brendan threw snowballs!! The principal called his mother. Laura laughed when she picked the boys up. Of course boys are going to throw snowballs! What was that principal thinking?

When Brendan was in middle school and Bear was in high school Laura took them down to San Diego to see the Farewell concert of their favorite rock band, Oingo Boingo. The cost was high, and it was the weekend of the PSAT test for high school juniors. Laura figured: what would

Bear and Brendan best remember? The PSAT or that they'd seen Oingo Boingo? It was a memorable trip for all three of them. Bill and I were at the trailer at the time and we all had time together. Many years later Bear and Brendan would befriend all the Boingo boys, and Steve Bartek, the lead guitarist, would be a groomsman at the weddings of both Bear and Brendan.



The fam, 1989

One of the most memorable Halloweens was when Bear and Brendan wanted to be The Blues Brothers. They wore black suits, black ties, white shirts, bowler hats and dark glasses. When the Halloween front door opened, they broke into a quick song-and-dance and announced that they were The Blues Brothers and had come “on a mission

from God,” using the line from the movie. When they got a little older we had Halloween parties at Laura’s house where all the kids dressed up and lots of adults came too.

We had wonderful holidays with the boys and Laura. The house was full of people and voices and music and laughter.



In Laura’s novel, *Crescendo*, the protagonist played Beethoven’s 11th Piano Sonata and the music was integral to the theme of the book. She learned and played the very difficult Beethoven’s 11th Piano Sonata herself in order to describe the relationship of the music to the story. Music was always a part of the McCreary family life. From their very first house in Bellingham, she rented an upright piano. She moved to Cornwall Avenue

the same year that Bill and I sold our house, and so the baby grand piano that had been in our family since at least 1960 came up to Bellingham and the boys learned on it.

Bear began taking piano lessons, at first from a family friend, at age five. Her methods were too rigid for the way he needed to learn. Somehow Laura found Paul Klein who suited Bear exactly. Later he also taught Brendan. Paul helped them find what they wanted in and from and with the music rather than insisting on playing scales and the like. The downside of this was that both of them relied on their excellent ear and memory and didn't actually learn to read music till a bit later in the game.

For years Paul came to our house for lessons. (Later we drove to his house for lessons.) Laura insisted that I should take lessons from him also. With Paul's guidance I was able to play Debussy's "Clair de Lune" (5 flats) and Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" (4 flats) reasonably well. Thank you, Paul! I also loved playing Pachelbel's "Canon in D." I too rented a piano for my house.

I should mention here that Bill had been a talented trumpet player when he was a teenager in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. His Aunt Annetta had given him a trumpet that had belonged to her deceased husband. Bill taught himself to play it, to read music and his high school band teacher entered Bill in a statewide competition. Bill was the winner of his high school's local contest and sent to Pocatello to the Idaho State Finals where he won the top trumpet award for the State of Idaho students. He had played *Bride of the Waves* and *Carnival of Venice*, very difficult trumpet solos, perfectly. For the Christmas of 1990 Laura gave him a trumpet.

Bill gave it to Bear when he entered middle school so he could play in the middle school band. We found a teacher for him, and Bear played that trumpet all through middle school and high school, in the Bellingham High School marching band and also in the jazz band, a class that met at 6:30 a.m. every day, an hour before the regular school day. Laura drove him every morning. Bear also played the piano at many school functions both in middle school and high school. He was especially impressive with Scott Joplin's difficult rags.

The BHS Jazz Band under Mr. Mark Patterson's direction premiered Bear McCreary's first composition. This was a jazzy piece he had written called "Catch the Red Car." He took the title from a story I had told him about the Red Car in Los Angeles, the trolleys you could take anywhere. Bear played piano for "Catch the Red Car" and Mr. Patterson conducted the band. Our whole family was in the audience applauding wildly.

When Bear was about thirteen, Paul Klein told Laura he had taught Bear all about music that he knew. He said he wasn't doing him any harm, but Bear had reached the limit of what Paul could teach him. At this time Laura was teaching at the University of Washington and she made an appointment for Bear with the piano professor there, Robin McCabe. Dr. McCabe asked Bear to play a Mozart sonata, and he did. Then she put the music in front of him, and he could not play it anywhere near as well. Dr. McCabe correctly assessed that basically, Bear could not read music. She suggested changing teachers, perhaps going with someone at Western. But Paul Klein was important to our whole family. Laura told Paul what Dr. McCabe had said, and that Bear had to learn to read music and not rely so completely on his memory and his ear. And he did. However, music theory would have to wait till he went to college.

At the same time Bear explored other music venues and options. Mr. Dolmatz, the English teacher at BHS gave Bear an extra class in film scoring. First Bear had to write the film, which he did, *The Amazing Saga of George*. And he illustrated it as well. Then he wrote the music. He also worked with other musicians in a rock band and they played music for a BHS dance, maybe even a prom. This same band played Bear's original song, "Escape From the Machines" at the Lynden Fair Talent show in 1995 or 1996. They came in second. The winner was a Lynden girl singing a hymn, at the end of which she got down on her knees and raised her arms to heaven. We all still laugh about that. "Escape from the Machines" has gone on to have other lives and other venues, including, as of this writing, a place in Bear's still in-process heavy metal symphonic "The Singularity."



I remember one day when we were waiting for Laura to come home from work, three year old Brendan entertained us in the kitchen: he stood on the kitchen stage in front of the stove and sang “Obladee, Obladah, Life Goes On.” I think (I hope) Dahbee videotaped it, but I’m not sure. It was a truly special and spectacular performance. We all applauded loudly. He was a sensational performer even at age three.

Brendan was eager for piano lessons as well, and he too started learning from Paul Klein when he was very young. Often, he was not very good about practicing, but when Paul came for the lesson, I would always be surprised to hear that Brendan played it perfectly.

When Brendan showed an interest in the saxophone in an elementary school music program, Laura bought his first saxophone with monthly payments for four years through an offer affiliated with the school music program. His first private teacher was Mr. Kelly, followed by Mr. Ray Downey, whose studio was a small shed in the backyard of his friend’s house on Elizabeth Street. In the winter, I sat in the shed with them during the lesson, always with something to read, but in the spring, I sat outside in the yard which was dominated by a magnificent ancient wisteria—the most breath-taking, gorgeous wisteria I had ever seen. Unforgettable lavender beauty.



Brendan and the sax, c. 1992

Brendan played the sax in the band for his one year at Shuksan Middle School. When he transferred to Assumption Catholic School there was no band, but the church music director, Mr. Viens recognized and fostered his talents. In fact, one summer Mr. Viens gave him lessons on the church’s magnificent pipe organ. Brendan’s interest expanded to the

soprano sax. Laura also bought this for him, and paid for lessons with a new teacher, but with the condition that he had to play in church once a



Jam session, c. 1998

month. He kept to the bargain, and it really expanded him as a musician. The acoustics in the church are wonderful and his high, sweet melodies would lift over all, and of course Brendan couldn't just play, he'd add jazz riffs and the like. Laura and I, sitting in the congregation, held hands, sighed and got misty at the beauty of his music. As I recall, Brendan continued to play in Assumption Church

services even after he was a student at Squalicum High. There his interests expanded to include the tenor sax which he borrowed from a friend of Bear's.

When Brendan was in Assumption Middle School, the Missoula Children's Theater produced *The Wizard of Oz*. Brendan was selected as the Cowardly Lion. He was so superb! We went to every performance! I was so thrilled to see him perform like a pro on stage, I stood in the middle aisle of the auditorium (blocking the vision of the audience behind me) and took a full roll of film pix of Brendan on stage in his lion costume. After the first performance, a matinee, we invited all our friends who had come to our house for an impromptu party. In honor of his role, Dahbee made him a sign with big wooden letters painted yellow and green that read:

COURAGE

This sign is still in the window of Laura's room.

When Brendan was in the ninth grade at Bellingham High, he auditioned for (and got) the part of Annie Sullivan’s younger brother in the school production of *The Miracle Worker*. The high school had a professional photo made of Brendan for the part. His math teacher wrote a fan-letter note to him on his math homework paper. “You were great in *The Miracle Worker*.”

Brendan also stayed with Paul, but also began taking jazz-type piano lessons from Bill McDonough. When Brendan was still in high school, the new teacher got him a gig, playing background soft jazz piano at a municipal cocktail party in City Hall. Since Laura was out of town, I drove him there and I sat in the car in the parking lot for most of his two hour gig, and then I went inside. It was such a thrill to see my high school age grandson playing professional background music at an elegant cocktail party. Brendan was paid \$75 for his music. Probably his first \$\$\$ for professional performance.

At Christmas that year, the new teacher had a recital at beautiful Lairmont Manor at which Brendan was the finale (the very best of all the teacher’s students). On a stage bedecked with multiple poinsettias, Brendan played “Summertime” by Gershwin on the grand piano, and was accompanied by a string bass. It was so moving and so very beautiful it was beyond description. The audience caught its breath at the magnificent professional performance of this high school boy. He brought down the house! Bill and I were



Shoe sacrifice to Elvis

so very proud of our talented grandson. (I had to hold Bill back—he was all over the place praising Brendan.)

About this time Laura wrote and published *Graced Land*, a novel that centered on the music of Elvis Presley. We all became great Elvis fans. Every year on the closest weekend to January 8 we had a birthday party for Elvis. Admission at the front door required that the guest sing an Elvis song. They watched Elvis movies and listened to his records all evening. Laura served wonderful refreshments and the kids loved those parties. Also at New Year's, Laura had parties for kids and adults. At midnight, the kids all took kitchen pans and lids out in the front yard and banged in the new year. Great Fun. Great parties.

In 1993 Laura went to Scotland to a Writers' Retreat. Bill and I flew with the boys to Disneyland they were about fourteen and ten years old. We stayed a night or two at the Disneyland Hotel in a suite of rooms. Two bathrooms. Great fun. When Bear bit into a solid ice cream bar, one of his braces slipped and he was in terrible pain. Bill and I found an orthodontist in town who very graciously fixed the problem with the braces—without charge.



With the sale of *Graced Land* for a TV movie, Laura bought a computer, a printer, copy machine, fax machine and other electronic equipment from IBM. When she asked IBM to teach us WordPerfect, they told us we were on our own. At that time Laura felt she could never be parted from her typewriter, so she sent me to Community College, at first to a One-Day-Crash-Course in WordPerfect which introduced me to the many significant differences between typing and computer skills. I was still confused. So Laura sent me again to the local college to take a four-quarter course in WordPerfect, but after one quarter, I felt I had learned enough to handle Laura's manuscript writing. At that time, WordPerfect was not as simple as it is today—and I did learn it with assistance from Bear, who was still a boy, living at home and in school.

My first big computer project may have been *Cosette: the Sequel to Les Misérables*. Adding a French accent at that time required several steps, finding the correct accent at another electronic location and transferring it back to the manuscript over the correct word. Also, as I recall, changing a font required pulling up the bowels of the computer, trying to figure out what all the symbols meant, and making the change. Ugh. Help. Help. Help. And with Bear's help, I was able to type the whole book.

Laura had a contract with Harper Collins that she would submit the completed manuscript on a date in February of the following year. She and I worked for long and tedious periods of time to meet that date—and we did. Needless to say, Laura has since mastered the computer; she now enters and submits all her books electronically by herself and she is presently my computer guru. Thank you, Laura. She also took me with her to New York when she appeared with Katie Couric on the NBC's *Today Show* to plug *Cosette*. It was a very exciting event. I sat in the Green Room and watched her on national TV. Wow. How great is that?!?!?

I want to add a special note here that while we were in New York for the launching of *Cosette*, we went to Ellis Island and found my name and my family's names on the Ellis Island computer, which listed the names and the dates of arrivals in the U.S. We were able to pencil draw- over the names for mementos. Memorable record of that very special family milestone.



When Bear was a junior in high school he was chosen as the Rotary Student of the Month. This meant he was the guest of the local Rotary Club for their luncheon. Bill and Laura and I also attended and sat with him. Each student chosen (one from each high school) got to get up and talk about what they wanted to do in college and so on. Bear said that he wanted to write music for the movies. He said more than that, but that was the gist of it. Laura had to leave before it ended, to go teach, but Bill and I stayed with Bear. After the luncheon a man named Joe Coons came up and talked to Bear, asked him about his music, and said that he could

possibly introduce him to the famous composer, Elmer Bernstein who kept a yacht in the Bellingham harbor. Astonishing!

Bear made a tape of his music and gave it to Joe Coons. He listened to it and made the introduction. Within a few months Bear got to meet Elmer Bernstein on his yacht. Laura bought him new clothes for this meeting and we all waited eagerly to hear about it. It turned out to be momentous for Bear. Elmer Bernstein wrote a recommendation for him for USC and mentored him while he was there and after. One summer Bear worked for Elmer as an archivist sorting through his scores. Laura bought Bear a car, a red two-door Saturn so that he could drive to Elmer's office. The following summer Bear house-sat for Elmer while he and his family were on the yacht. (Bear kept that car for years. Just before he turned it in on a new car, we spilled barbeque sauce on the floor.)

Bear was awarded a Presidential Scholarship to USC's Thornton School of Music to major in Music Composition and began there in the fall of 1997. Since music majors were also required to take non-music classes, Bear took Geology. His geology class went on a field trip to the wreckage remains of the St. Francis Dam, San Francisquito Canyon, high above Los Angeles. At midnight, March 12, 1928, a small leak in the dam had expanded to a major break and like a sonic boom, it exploded into a devastating flood on sleeping Los Angeles, not stopping until it reached the Pacific Ocean—causing many sudden deaths, terrible destruction, and catastrophic panic.

Bear was so impressed with the tragedy of the St. Francis Dam, he created a classical piece for soprano and orchestra, "The Collapse of St. Francis," which he performed at USC's Bovard Auditorium with the USC orchestra. Another Music student, Melanie Heyn sang the vocals. It was a huge success and received tremendous praise and applause. USC now knew for sure (which we already knew) that Bear McCreary was a musical genius. Elmer Bernstein complimented Bear on "The Collapse of St. Francis," and commented on Bear's remarkable talent and achievement.

Bill, Laura, Brendan, and I went down to Los Angeles and stayed in a hotel near campus for this concert and also for Bear's Senior Recital in

February of 2000. He also had another piece performed by the USC Symphony the following year, a short piece called “Sparks and Shadows” from which he took the name of the company he now heads.

When Bear was maybe a sophomore at USC and Bill and I were on vacation at the trailer in Encinitas, Bear came on the Metro to spend a weekend with us. It was a real thrill for Bill and me to have Bear (as a young man) there with us at the trailer, where I used to hold his hand and walk with him as a two-year-old in the park—to stop and see the ding-dong bell and watch the ants on the sidewalk. My heart skipped a beat when I looked at his beautiful young-man-face—a scholarship student now at USC where he was just beginning to get real recognition for his musical genius—to even dream about the bright future that was surely ahead for him. I remember we took him on that first evening to sit on the sand at the beach and watch the sunset, which was spectacular. Also on

that visit, we took him to a music shop on PCH called, I think, Lou’s Records, where he enjoyed spending a lot of time checking out music at the shop. He had a great time and bought several tapes, records, or whatever he



Bear at the trailer, 1999

liked. On Sunday, he caught the Metro back to LA and USC. It was truly wonderful for Bill and me to have our oldest grandchild spend that weekend with us at the trailer. Memorable weekend.

Like Brendan on the guitar, Bear too was self-taught on his instrument of choice. He longed to play the accordion. For his nineteenth birthday he was given a beautiful 1960 Soprani accordion that came from Angagh’s son, Jim MacKellar. Jim had played accordion from the time he was just a little child, often gigging with other musicians and earning extra money



Happy Birthday Bear, 1998

giving lessons from his teen years on. Now, however, he was in the insurance business, and no longer played accordion. He gifted it to Bear. His sister Nancy brought it from the Valley to San Bernardino where a friend of the family collected it. This was probably the most exciting present Bear ever received. Since then he has collected several other accordions, including one he keeps at Laura's house in Washington, but this beautiful, hand-fashioned instrument is the

one plays on his compositions and soundtracks.

Incidentally, that fall Bear and Brendan met Jay in Phoenix for Jay's mother's birthday. They were staying in a hotel and the boys took their instruments, the accordion and soprano sax down to the hotel gym and jammed there on a piece that later came to be called "Whirlpools," duet for accordion and soprano sax that was performed at Bear's senior recital.

Bear graduated from USC Thornton School of Music in 2002 with an additional year to include Recording Arts. Laura and I and Brendan went down for that wonderful event



Bear and Maudie, 2002

as well. My sister Betty came up from Riverside to attend too. That day I

briefly met the beautiful singer, Raya Yarbrough who graduated at the same time. A few years later she would become Bear's wife.

For Bear, finding a job in music was difficult. For some time he was sleeping on a friend's couch, with help \$\$\$ from home until he found a job as an assistant to a film composer. Bear worked in his music studio in Malibu. When Bear's employer was offered to do the score for *Battlestar Galactica*, he was too busy with a score for a motion picture. Opportunity! Bear took on the job and wowed everyone associated with the TV production with his originality and quality of music. Here he was right out of

college with a TV show score that everyone raved about! That was the beginning. He has scored many motion pictures and TV shows, plus he received an Emmy in 2013 (at age 34) for the theme music for Starz' TV



Bear and Emmy, 2013

drama *Da Vinci's Demons*. He has also received Emmy Nominations for *The Human Target* (2012) and *Black Sails* (2014) and *Outlander* (2016). He has also put together several concerts based on his *Battlestar Galactica* score, and Laura went to all of them, even the one in Tenerife in the Canary Islands in 2010.

One Sunday afternoon Brian, Laura and I went to the artsy Bellingham Limelight Theater to see Bear's movie, *The Europa Report*, a movie based on Galileo's notebooks and observations. When Bear's name came on—full screen credit—we clapped and hooted. The musical score was fabulous. When the final credits came on, the audience was so riveted by the movie's climax music that no one moved until the credits were completed. Wow. Terrific. Powerful. That's our boy! In 2016 Bear gave a presentation at the Pickford about his music, accompanying the documentary, *Score*.

Laura and I have gone to several of his movies at the Regal, movies that didn't have much of an audience, but still had great music! In 2016 Bear was the featured speaker at the USC Music School graduation.



Brendan had his freshman year at high school at Bellingham High, but then they closed it down to renovate and moved all the students to Squalicum High School which was much further away from his house. Brendan played saxophone in the Squalicum High School marching band as well as the Squalicum High School Jazz Band. He was the featured soloist in many exhibition performances. On one occasion when the High School Band was marching down Cornwall Avenue in a parade, Laura and I ran alongside Brendan, cheering—he never once changed his gaze from straight ahead.

Until he could drive, his mother took him and his friend Sean every morning to Squalicum by 6:30 to attend jazz band class. After he got his license, Laura bought Bob Eggers' old 1985 Chevy Cavalier for Brendan. This car turned out to be a warhorse and ran forever. (After Brendan went to college, I drove it for years, until I was into my 90s!) Brendan also created rock bands and performed in various venues and coffeehouses all over town. He also acted and participated in the "Trailer Wars" movie trailers that he and his friends made. He was the director and producer and an actor in "Le Maitre de la Bete Sauvage," (roughly translated: The Teacher of the Wicked Savage) a play in French that began as a class assignment and then involved into a full scale production, almost twenty minutes long with a huge cast. I think Brendan was one of the writers as well, and then they gave it to Greg Finnigan to translate into French. It was filmed at Laura's house. Like Bear, Brendan always had tons of friends who spent many happy hours at his house.

While he was in middle school and high school, he went each summer with many friends to CYO camps on the Key Peninsula in Washington. He always had a wonderful time there, many adventures and after graduation, he became a camp counselor for the nine and ten year olds. He

excelled at this job, and did it while he was in college too. He made many friends at CYO as well. But perhaps the real gift of CYO camp was musical. He couldn't take the piano or the sax to camp, and his first year there someone lent him a guitar. Like Bear, he taught himself to play the instrument that is now his primary instrument. He writes incredible, original songs on the guitar, and sings as well.

In addition to the great music teachers, our grandsons' school careers were enhanced by good teachers. Several in particular stand out, people who remained close to the family and close to the boys even after they graduated.

Jeannie Havland was a counselor at BHS, and later at Squalicum. When Bear first went to BHS, she waived the PE requirement for him to give him more room for creative endeavors. Then she created for him and Kris Dahl their own video class and access to video equipment. They did a



Brendan, c. 2004

TV program that was shown on (very) local TV. They called it *BHS Live*. They went all around the school, interviewing kids and enjoying themselves while gaining skills. They even made a movie. Jeannie Havland helped Brendan too, all through high school, and came to many of his performances outside of school. When Jeannie retired, she took Laura's Memoir class at Western.

John Hoffman was a young science teacher at Shuksan Middle School when Bear went there. At home Bear was making McCreary Matinees (writing, acting, filming, and scoring these short films) but at school he was bored and not very engaged. The teachers and the counselor there were unresponsive to Laura's requests for further stimulation for her son. Laura turned to Mr. Hoffman who agreed that one day a week after

school, Bear would stay and work with Mr. Hoffman on science projects. I do not remember what they were, but the one-on-one attention was crucial for Bear. And too, Mr. Hoffman would drive him home so we didn't have to go to Shuksan to pick him up. Though neither Bear nor Brendan went on in science, Mr. Hoffman enriched their lives and brightened their education. He too would come to the lads' various performances, and when Brendan came back to the school after he had graduated, Mr. Hoffman stopped his whole class, introduced Brendan and asked him to play guitar.

Other teachers who were important to our grandsons included Betsy Gottschalk, Brendan's middle school teacher at Assumption, a lovely, caring woman who helped him through a difficult transition from public school to Catholic school. (However, he did get in trouble when the students were getting ready for a visit from the Seattle Archbishop and they had a special chair for the Archbishop and Brendan drew a bullseye on the seat for the Archbishop's butt. Laura had to replace the seat. The one with the bullseye is still at her house somewhere.)

Steve Dolmatz was unfailingly good to both grandsons. For each of them, he created a special class, Bear's in film scoring, Brendan's in songwriting. He guided and graded them, gave them attention and encouraged their music quite apart from any salary that was paid to him. Mark Galvin (social studies) and Mark Patterson (band) both made lively, memorable contributions to their educational experiences. (Contributions that Dahbee videotaped!)

Brendan graduated from Squalicum High School in 2001. He was selected the Most Valuable Player in the Band, and given the Louis Armstrong Award. He was accepted at USC for the spring term beginning in 2002. (He recorded his audition tape with the soprano sax at Assumption with its lovely acoustics. Mr. Viens accompanied him on piano.) Brendan attended the local community college for one quarter and then he transferred to USC with a major in Music, plus Letters, Arts and Sciences. He lived in the Honors dorm, and then moved into an apartment with a bunch of guys from the dorm. They stayed at City Park Apartments

till he graduated. One evening Bear and Raya and friends of theirs all crowded into the tiny apartment to watch the first episode of *Battlestar Galactica* that Bear had scored.

At Brendan's 2006 graduation, Laura and I came to Los Angeles. (Brian looked after Dahbee who was still living at home following his stroke in 2005). It was a fabulous occasion—wonderfully celebratory. We all went down to Encinitas and stayed at the Moonlight Beach Motel in Encinitas with Helen and Jay, all of us. We were all so very proud of Brendan. Following graduation, he found a day job teaching music to preschoolers in private schools, but his heart went into performing, recording and writing new music and creating a CD recording of his original music. I loved hearing him sing as background on TV shows. We are so very proud of him.



Bear and Raya were married August 21, 2010, at the Wright Ranch on hills high above the Pacific. It was surely the most elegant wedding ever performed. Raya was stunningly beautiful. The wedding vows were exchanged with live music against a backdrop view of the fabulous Pacific Ocean. Every aspect of the wedding was perfect—the seating, the name cards, the full course meal plus an elegant many-layered lemon cake. The musical program, of course, was professional, plus family members and friends as well danced, sang and spoke about this marriage of two truly beautiful people. Also, the following day, the bride's mother gave a lovely brunch in the garden of her LA home. I was so very happy to be able to attend my grandson's wedding. Love always, Bear and Raya.

In December of 2012 we had a surprise engagement party at Laura's for Brendan and his girlfriend, Shweta. It was a surprise for her because all the rest of us knew Brendan was going to propose to her. It was clearly, you can see from the photographs, the happiest day of her life. The cake was inscribed with lyrics from one of his songs.

On June 1, 2014, Brendan and Shweta were married, also at the Wright Ranch. It was the greatest disappointment of my entire life that I was

unable to attend their wedding, but after 2013, I knew I could no longer travel. My heart was there with them at this beautiful and magical wedding.

The bride was stunningly beautiful and Brendan was the handsome bridegroom at the blending of two beautiful people on the cliffs overlooking the great Pacific Ocean. Both families participated in the ceremony and all the guests enjoyed a wonderful, meaningful blending of two families—as well as a celebratory party and music, music, music. Thanks to John Harrington’s video of the wedding ceremony, I was able to see the wedding after all! I had tears of happiness throughout this beautiful ceremony. I was so proud of Brendan and Shweta—and my lovely daughters also. Sheer joy.



Helen and baby Sonatine

On June 1, 2014, was the most exciting wedding of the year and on the following day, June 2, Sonatine McCreary was born!!! So much happy excitement!!! I am near tears with happiness whenever I think about this adorable child. The entire extended family is rejoicing beyond description! We were able to see pix of Sonatine shortly after her birth: a beautiful infant who is my first great grand-child! I looked so forward to holding her close to my heart, feeling her heartbeat against mine. Sheer joy. For weeks after

her birth, Bear and Raya sent daily email pix plus email videos of their beautiful daughter, Sonatine. We loved them. We lived on them. Daily. Bear was enchanted by his lovely daughter. His expression when he held his daughter was priceless. She was surely the most photographed baby in the world.

Christmas 2014 all the family gathered at Laura’s house—both grandsons, their wives, AND Sonatine, my great-grand-daughter! It was such a wonderful thrill to hold this beautiful baby, to feel her baby heartbeat

against my old heart. It was such a thrill to feel her tiny, perfect fingers on my old, wrinkled hands. She and I were the oldest and the youngest. It was the most exciting Christmas of my life. I am too old to be able to watch Sonatine grow up, but I am confident in my heart that her capable parents will always love, cherish, nurture and protect her. Bear and Raya



Four generations

are perfect, wonderful, devoted, loving parents.

Though sadly the marriage of Brendan and Shweta ended in divorce, they had a beautiful little daughter, my second great-grand-daughter who is named after me. Zai Pakradouhi McCreary was born on January 30, 2018, a glorious day for all of us. Brendan brings Zai to Bellingham whenever he can, and she is a true delight. She and Sonatine light up the lives

of all the Johnsons and McCrearys.

Zai and I were honored in 2019 when Laura published *The Great Pretenders*, a novel. The dedication reads thus: “Dedicated to Zai Pakradouhi McCreary and her great-grandmother Pakradouhi Kalpakian Johnson”

In *The Music Room*, Laura’s 2015 novel, the dedication reads thus: “For Sonatine Yarbrough McCreary”

Both Sonatine and Zai have books written in their honor, and one day they will grow up to read them.



Zai and Maudie



My grandsons Bear and Brendan have been the lights of life from the time they were born. Bill and I loved the life we had with them in their childhood, looking after them, taking them places, especially to recitals and music competitions, watching them grow up. (Bill always had to help them tie their ties when they had to go somewhere wearing a tie! Laura never learned how.) They have both become fine men, fine musicians, good fathers to their daughters, and good sons to their mother. They were always good to Bill and me as well. Whenever Bear and Brendan come to Bellingham, they come to see me at Shuksan and they bring their families, their bright selves and their music.



Sonatine and Maudie

ITALIA!

My husband Bill and I never had the travel-urge that my sisters had. That is, we never had it until the day that our daughter, Laura, who was a professor of English at Western Washington University, was invited to go to Siena, Italy, to teach for a full quarter, September to December in 1988. She needed us to look after her two sons, Bear and Brendan McCreary, ages nine and four. We were retired, and somehow persuaded to disregard our former sedentary feelings and accompany her and our two grandsons to Italy.

We traveled first to England in August 1988, and lived in Cambridge for a month where we made several fun jaunts, including to Edinburgh, Scotland, where we toured castles and saw bagpipe bands playing.

When we left for Italy, our plane flew into the Pisa airport and from there we took the train to Siena. There were five of us so we had a lot of luggage, not least because we had to bring some winter clothes as well.

In Siena, the spacious two bedroom, one bath apartment provided for us was fully furnished and charges to the apartment were to be paid by the university. It was on the Via Mameli (which is the name of the lyricist of the Italian national anthem) two blocks from the big thoroughfare, the Via Cavour. The floors in the whole building were made of marble, a sort of tawny marble that was cool on our feet. The apartment was a charmer—except for its third floor location. No elevator! We felt third floor stairs was our daily exercise requirement and did not grumble about it. Laura

shared the larger bedroom with Bear and Brendan. Their bedroom had a small balcony that looked out to the street. Our small, sweet kitchen also



Arrival in Siena!

had a balcony that looked out over the back of the house near a place that repaired motorcycles, so it was sometimes noisy!

Brendan was four years old and ready for kindergarten, but the Italian kindergarten was far away from

our apartment and we would have had to take him by bus—so Brendan stayed with Bill and me while Bear was in school and Laura was at work.

Laura enrolled him in Italian public school, Scuola Peruzzi—within walking distance of our apartment. The teacher did not speak English—and neither did the pupils. (Outside of the city's tourist core, few people in Siena spoke anything but Italian.) Bear was placed in a first grade class which was fine because that's where kids learn to read and write their language. At first Bear was very unhappy. Bear told his mother that the Italian kids were ridiculing him and teasing him since he could not speak Italian.

Laboriously Laura wrote a note to the teacher explaining Bear's discomfort and unhappiness. When she walked him to school the next day before class she gave the note to the teacher. The teacher, Caterina Curro, immediately moved him from a desk at the back of the classroom to the very front. When the kids arrived she burst into a powerful lecture, a furious tirade actually, upbraiding them for their rudeness, cruelty, bad manners, etc. Things changed quickly. In a very short time Bear was speaking fluent Italian and became our travel guide, asking directions in fluent

Italian. He was invited to his Italian classmate's birthday parties and made many friends.

We learned an important Italian phrase, on our way to Bear's school. "*Ciao Amore!*" When Laura would walk Bear to school in the morning, and when we went to pick him up in the afternoon, we always passed a woman who waved and shouted at us, "*Ciao Amore!*" We replied with the same. We gave her that name, "Ciao Amore." We still sometimes say, "*Ciao Amore!*" even now.

One Saturday early on, Laura and Bill were out and about with Bear and Brendan when they looked across the park and there was Bear's teacher AND all his classmates! "Bear," they said, "why aren't you in school?" Bear said, "In America there is no school on Saturday!" Well after that Bear went to school on Saturday like everyone else!

There were lots of small street vendors in Siena, as well as many appealing shops. One afternoon when Dahbee was out with Brendan, they passed a street vendor of toys where they saw a plastic toy of a character from *Ghostbusters*, which we had all seen and loved. Slimer came with some goo that you could put in his mouth and press down and he would slime goo all over everything. Brendan was beside himself with desire for this toy. (Which was ridiculously expensive for a piece of plastic.) Dahbee bought it for him. As they were walking home, Dahbee suggested they stop for ice cream at the nearby gelato shop. "No," said Brendan, "I am too happy for ice cream." (What a darling boy!) Ever since in our family we always judge moments of happiness if they make us too happy for ice cream. Slimer is still upstairs at Laura's house though the goo is long gone.

The Italians world-wide are known for their love of children and they were especially kind and loving toward our two grandsons, Bear and Brendan. Our neighbors next door never objected to the laughter and joy that came from our Italian apartment. In fact, our neighbor turned to us one day and said, "*Brendino e vivace!*" Brendan is vivacious! That was true then. And true now.

We made friends with many of the small merchants on the street just below our apartment. There was a young couple who ran a Latteria, a place



Brendan gets an Italian haircut, 1988

where you could buy milk and eggs and dairy products. There was a woman and her son who had a little grocery store across the street where the local women would line up daily to get their groceries. And on the corner there was a small produce shop run by a man we called Signor Tutti Frutti and his charming wife. He was especially kind to us. Signor Tutti Frutti would help us with our Italian, pointing out things in his shop and giving us the Italian name and correcting our

pronunciation. When we had to weigh our packages of books to send back to the U.S., he let us use his scale to weigh them, and his little wagon to tote them down to the post office.

The Campo in the heart of Siena was the actual center of the city, government and government buildings, offices and restaurants, shops. It was about a mile downhill from our house and we walked there often. We soon came to know how to use the buses. The #5 and the #10 stopped on the Via Cavour very near our house. The #10 took a circuitous route through the city and into the suburbs. The #5 was direct into the city proper. On the Via Cavour we always passed the big factory that made Panforte, the Sienese specialty, a sort of fruitcake. The sweet fragrance wafted over the city.

I managed the errands, laundromat and food shopping for us, traveling on the bus and carrying shopping bags always. Wednesdays were market days at La Lizza. I never missed one of these. You could buy everything there: shoes, clothes, pans, gloves. I bought gorgeous Italian earrings, gifts to take home to my sisters, among many other things. We had to get used

to money in Italy. The monetary amounts were quoted in *thousands* of lira. One thousand lira was equal to about a dollar. It was hard to understand the true American cost. This was in 1988 before the euro replaced the old Italian currency.

Laura's literature class was called "Americans in Italy," and students read classic novels and memoirs. The classes were taught in an old building in central Siena and they were taught in English. When Laura took her students on bus tours to historic Italian towns, she managed to include Bear and me in the back of the bus, so it was an education for us as well.

Our Italian neighbors were social and kind and invited to an afternoon glass of wine. They were anxious to know if Bill had fought in World War II and where. So he told them that he was in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific theater. To talk with them we had to use an English/Italian dictionary. We had a good laugh over our mistakes in translation which led to another glass of wine. Bill constantly confused the word for daughter (*figlia*) with the word for leaf (*foglia*).

While we lived in Siena, we learned an important phrase that we use to this day. "*Domani certo!*" Meaning, tomorrow for sure. We first learned this at a small stationery store in Siena where we had ordered some of Laura's favorite pens. We were told they would come in on a certain day and so we went to pick them up. They were not in, but the guy said, "*Domani certo!*" They will be here for sure tomorrow. This went on for some six weeks! We heard this phrase everywhere in Italy, and it has become one of our family favorites.

Even today, here in the nursing home, I have taught the young aides to say *Domani Certo* when asked when they will come back again. Or when they will see me again.



On Thanksgiving Day the American students were given a holiday. Bill and Laura took this occasion to do a "dry run" from Siena to the Pisa Airport so that when we had to move with a lot of luggage, we could be certain to have the right train connections. (Though we had to make one

change at Empoli, from there the train went directly into the Pisa airport.) All was well, and when they got back to the apartment we celebrated Thanksgiving. There were no whole turkeys in the markets so I managed with turkey breasts and parts.



Christmas, 1988

We celebrated Christmas there in our Italian apartment. We have pix of the boys and me threading popcorn for tree decorations. The boys and I made homemade decorations. The angel that Bear made for the top of the tree is now framed and hangs in Laura's dining room. The little picture of the manger that Brendan painted is framed and sits on the vanity in her room. They are darling. All our gifts were small as we had to hand-carry everything home and we had so much luggage.

As we were packing for our return trip home in December we were shocked and horrified to learn that the Pan Am flight 103 immediately prior to ours had crashed over Lockerbie Scotland instead of over the Atlantic as the hijackers had planned. The plane had left London late which was why it crashed over land. This horrible event sent waves of fear over everyone.

We flew from Pisa to London and stayed one night in London. So anxious were we that we debated going in two planes, but finally we all stayed together with all our many bags, including carrying a soccer ball and a boxed Panettone tied to my wrist on the plane with us. Everyone on that Pan Am Flight from London to Seattle was very tense and when we landed safely in Seattle all the passengers broke out in spontaneous applause. As we disembarked, Bill Johnson got down and kissed the ground!

We loved Italy and they loved us but we were so very happy to return to the U.S. and hear the English language again.

And when we got home to Laura's house, Helen was already there and she had made everything sparkling and bright and welcoming for our return. We had another Christmas there with Helen. We opened the Panettone I had so carefully carried from Italy all the way home. These cakes are the size of an angel food cake and came in a cardboard box with a ribbon at the top which was how I tied it to my wrist. The following year we were surprised to find Panettone available in our very own local Haggens grocery store! We have had that special cake every Christmas since then. We always think of that very special Christmas of 1988.



I think history is my first love. I love history and history books, but reading books did not compare with the thrill of seeing the real-life historical wonders of Italy, of Italian cities and the Italian countryside. The very first day we landed in Pisa we went to see the Leaning Tower in person. Just



Fam at the city of towers

standing around that miracle tower and admiring its design and proportion was almost unbelievable! Our family and grandsons stood in awe of this beautiful, ancient structure.

Living in Siena we often went and had lunch at one of the cafes ringing the Campo, the central piazza. There were always pigeons for the children to chase and vendors who walked about with toys and other goodies. Brendan badly wanted one of the little Pinocchio puppet dolls. Laura told

him, if he could go ask for it in Italian, he could have it. She walked with him, and he did it. Said everything in Italian. It turned out we brought home some three or four of these Pinocchios and they all sit on the bookshelves at Laura's house.

Of all our travels in Italy, the most memorable was Venice. The dancing



Boys at San Marco

sparkle of Italian sunshine on the Venice canals lifted our spirits. Our hotel was right near the busy Rialto bridge and we walked all over the city. We also rode a gondola and we bought darling little gondoliers' hats for Bear and Brendan. They wore them the whole time we were in Venice. We still have them on the top of a closet in Bear's room.

We loved the sounds of the water in the canals and the lights and stones of San Marco Square and the orchestras that played there. We had tea at the famous Florian's café in San Marco Square and the boys chased

the pigeons everywhere. The weather was perfect the whole time we were there. We loved Venice, like love at first sight!

We were captivated by Roma, the Coliseum, the Senate, the Vatican, and the old roads in the city itself. Bear and Laura and I also went to the Spanish Steps, home of the famous Trevi fountain and we each threw a coin into the fountain and made a wish. We visited the Keats-Shelley Memorial House at the top of the Spanish Steps.

One afternoon Laura and I were shopping in a glittering jewelry store and the clerk said something to us like, "I think I'll close up shop now and go home. I just sold our last Italian gold-silver bracelet for the day to that crazy—I mean—eccentric American."

Laura said, "Who?"

The clerk said that he was about 5'9" tall with a shock of silver, wavy hair and sparkling ocean waves of charm.

Laura just laughed out loud. She said, "You just described my father!"

And that is the story of how Bill bought the last Italian gold-silver bracelet for me that I have worn all the rest of my life.



Peggy and Bill at Torcello



In 2013 Bear and Raya went to Italy for the launch of *da Vinci's Demons*. The producers brought everyone to Florence for the event which included a memorable meal at a restaurant in the actual town of da Vinci in the hills above Florence. Bear and Raya took some extra time after the production launch, and went to Venice and Rome as well. But the place they best loved was Siena. Bear found our old neighborhood, and our old apartment building. Bear was sad to see that Signor Tutti Frutti's little store was closed up and vacant. He had fond memories of Signor Tutti Frutti. Bear and Raya walked to his Italian school, Scuola Peruzzi. Just as when he was a child, when school was over, the parents and grandparents all waited outside for their children to emerge. As he stood there, Bear thought to himself: some of these parents are people I might have been in school with! The school let him and Raya come in after classes ended that day so that Raya could take a picture of him sitting at the same desk in the same classroom where he had sat as a little child.

THE KALPAKIAN WOMEN

When my sisters and I were young women, sometimes people would say to my father, oh, poor you, with four daughters! That's four weddings to pay for, and no sons to carry on your name! But my father never felt that way. He delighted in his daughters, and was proud of



Kalpakian women, c. 1975

us. In childhood and youth we all proved excellent students, winning school and city-wide awards. My father lived to see us go to university, to marry good men, and to have families of our own. He would have been so pleased to know of all the things we achieved in our lives. We were proud American citizens, women who worked toward goals, and still respected and honored our Armenian heritage.

Though our parents spoke only English in the home so that we would not be hampered in school, still they both had gift for languages. Between them, they spoke seven languages. They passed this gift on to their

daughters. Angagh and Harriett had degrees in foreign language, French and Spanish and were language teachers in public and private schools. Betty, in addition to her dedication to music, and her degree in education, learned American Sign Language in her fifties, and began a study of Armenian.

We, all four us, reflected our parents' belief in education. Angagh and Betty both went to UCLA, Angagh graduating Phi Beta Kappa, Betty taking part in many theatrical undertakings, including being a dancer in Bizet's opera, *Carmen*. Harriett and I went to USC where she graduated Summa Cum Laude. Angagh and Harriett both taught Spanish in public and private schools. Betty taught third and fourth grade in Los Angeles before marrying fellow Bruin, Finley Bown in 1950 and moving to Riverside. I married Bill in 1944 while I was still a student at USC.

Angagh graduated from UCLA in 1941. After teaching a couple years in Fontana (where her daughter Nancy now lives) Angagh returned to teach at George Washington High School where she and Betty and I had all been students. Here, she answered a request to write to GW alums, men who were serving in the War. She wrote to George MacKellar, and in 1946 she married him.



Betty as a bride, 1950

Harriett graduated from USC in 1956 and began a teaching career, French and Spanish. She met her husband Alan Donnell at a church group at Westwood Methodist church which is where she married him in 1961. She

asked her three sisters to be bridesmaids. We all wore matching blue dresses and shoes dyed blue. I was delighted to be in the wedding, especially since I had been living far distant and not able to be present when

Angagh and Betty each got married. Angagh's original 1946 wedding dress had been altered and worn by Betty in 1950, and altered again and worn by Harriett in 1961. Patty now has that wedding dress that had served for three sisters' weddings.

All four of the Kalpakian sisters also reflected our parents' belief in the importance of family. When our children were born, we each of us stayed home to raise our families. In these busy years we took active parts in our children's lives. Betty found scope for her musical interests leading the children's choir for her church, and also giving her kids musical background, creating the "Bown Trio" who performed in various hospitals and old folks' homes and other venues in Riverside. Betty and Harriett and Angie also assumed vibrant roles in their churches (commitments they continued in for decades). I was very active in the PTA for my children's schools and also in Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts. I too instilled in my children (and grandchildren) a love of music. All of my kids and both of my grandsons can read music—which is its own language!

Angie returned to teaching in 1963; this allowed the MacKellars to buy a second car so that Patty could have wheels to get to her doctors' appointments. I took a secretarial job in an insurance firm in the mid-1960s, and later worked at County Hospital running the office of an orthopedic surgeon. Betty, having learned American Sign Language at Riverside City College, became first a volunteer and later a substitute teacher at the California School for the Deaf in Riverside. From 1986 to 1996, before she moved to Ojai, Harriett worked as a commercial real estate market research coordinator.



As our children grew up and moved out into the world, the Kalpakian sisters took up their various passions, not least of which was travel. Travel was of course made easier for Angagh and Harriett; they each spoke fluent, flawless French and Spanish. (On a trip to Mexico, Angagh was asked by some locals why she had married a gringo, and she replied, "Because I'm a gringa!" That's how perfect her Spanish was; they thought she was native.)

After retirement Angagh and George embarked on European jaunt of the sort that much younger people might have done, buying a VW Beetle in Germany and traveling all over Europe for six months. On their return, they moved to Paso Robles. While they lived there, they traveled to Australia, New Zealand, South America, the middle east and China. They also traveled to various places around the U.S. by car.

Angagh continued to travel with friends and Elderhostel groups after George died in 1990. In fact, she continued strenuous traveling until she was well into her 80s. Among the places that she visited were the Holy Land and Turkey. On her visit there with a group that followed the travels of St. Paul, she went to Adana, Turkey, where our parents had met and married in 1917.

Betty and Finley traveled to all fifty states, Canada and the UK before his death in 1998. In 1992 Betty undertook an ambitious creative effort that would absorb her for twenty years, and would have cultural reverberations in the lives of many, creating connections among Armenians. Her efforts began modestly. She spent long hours with the Riverside phone book seeking out any family with an Armenian name. From these efforts she organized the first Armenian picnic in Riverside, out of which emerged the Inland Empire Armenian Club. The club met monthly at a local community center for well over ten years.

With some of these Armenian club members as teachers/tutors Betty began a study of the Armenian language. Despite her gift for languages, she found it very hard going. (It has its own alphabet.) But by the time she went to Armenia in 2006, she could speak and read a few words, and certainly had enough to be able to thank her hosts for delicious meals.

Expanding and deepening her Armenian roots in 1998, 2000, and 2002 Betty planned and arranged for an Armenian church service to be held in Riverside as a special event just once in each of those years. In 2004, the Archbishop of the Western Diocese came to Riverside, met with her and the group, and formalized it as a new parish of the Armenian Apostolic

Church. The Riverside parish continues to rent space at an Episcopal church for its monthly afternoon worship service and potluck dinner. (Monthly Zoom meetings minus the dinner during the pandemic.) Connecting Armenian-Americans with one another would have made our parents' hearts soar with happiness.



Kalpakian sisters, c. 1990

After she was widowed in 1998, Betty too continued to travel. In the fall of 1999 Betty and Barbara toured Jerusalem and the Holy Land with an Armenian group from Costa Mesa. Perhaps the greatest thrill that Betty's activism brought to pass came in 2006. She and her Armenian friend Norma were invited to visit Armenia with the Riverside priest's wife. The highlight of this visit for Betty was attending church services in Holy Echmiadzin, the world headquarters of the Armenian church. I can only just imagine the emotions that must have crossed her mind and heart as she stepped inside this church. Betty knew her father would have been so pleased to know she was there in Armenia! Remember that in 1918, nearly a century before he had named his eldest daughter Angaghoughi, meaning Independence, when Armenia was briefly declared its own sovereign nation. However, it was quickly overtaken by the Soviet Union, and not until 1990, and the fall of the Soviet Union was Armenia once again its own country. And here was Betty—the first Kalpakian born in America—worshiping in the Holy Echmiadzin, the foundational church of all Armenians.

Betty and Angagh both bequeathed to their daughters their love of travel and their facility and respect for foreign languages. In fact, Betty's studying American Sign Language at Riverside Community College

inspired Barbara to join her. Barbara already had an undergraduate degree in German from UCR and had studied in Germany. After studying ASL with her mother at Riverside Community College, Barbara returned to grad school at Gallaudet University where she got a masters in Counseling. She had a long career as an ASL translator with Social Security.

Patty got a degree in French from Cal State Northridge, and as part of her travels as a young student studying in France, she and a friend went to see the widow of our father's brother, Nishan. Nishan had died in 1970, and his widow, Nevart, lived alone in Marseilles. It must have been an eerie sort of visit, meeting a great-aunt no one had ever seen before.

In 2016, Nevart's grand-daughter, Astrid reached out to us. She found us via Patty's husband's website, and in 2017 Patty and her husband, Jenk, traveled to Lyon to meet them, and Arminee, Astrid's mother, the daughter of Nishan and Nevart. Ron Bown too took his family to France to meet with Astrid and other Kalpakians. In 2018 Astrid, her husband and ten year old daughter came to Southern California, and had a wonderful reunion at Patty's house. One hundred years after the Kalpakians had all been dispersed from Adana, we were able to reunite and renew our family connections.

Patty MacKellar Stephenson too has carried on the Kalpakian legacy of foreign languages, teaching and international travel. For many years she took her students to live with families in France and brought the French "siblings" back to the U.S. Then in early 2000 she began to learn Chinese and co-founded a program that connected students at the high school where she taught, Saugus, to students in a Chinese school, a program that included exchange visits, deepening understanding and a commitment to deepening cultural ties. Hundreds of families in two countries learned about each other, enriching all their lives through Patty's efforts.

To know his children and grandchildren learned and spoke so many languages would have made my father so proud. Remember, when he came here, he had many languages, but English was not among them. He had to learn the language and support a family at the same time.

For myself, I did not inherit this family facility with languages. In college I studied business administration, even though history and literature were always my first loves. I have been a life-long reader. Late in life I was able to fulfill a long-held dream. I wrote a book, *Centennial Memoir: a Tribute to My Parents*, published in 2019 when I was ninety-seven years old. The book, complete with many pictures and stories of our family, details the strength and courage of my parents in leaving Turkey and emigrating to America, their path to becoming American citizens. It also tells of the happy, sunny, much-loved childhood my sisters and I had in Depression Era Los Angeles.



In 2008 Angie's daughter, Patty, bought me an airline ticket to come to Southern California for her mother's 90th birthday celebration. My daughter Laura took me to the airport and Helen picked me up in Ontario. We drove to Patty's house and stayed with her and Jenk. That evening we went to Angagh's house and Patty told her mother, "You have to come outside to get your early birthday present!" Angie and I fell into each other's arms, weeping with joy at our reunion. It had been such a long time. Betty and Harriett joined us the next day for a memorable lunch, a celebration of sisters.



Kalpakian sisters, 2008

None of us knew that the 90th birthday celebration would be the last reunion of all four of the Kalpakian daughters. Angie passed away before her 91st birthday in 2009. Sisters are sisters forever. Angie was the oldest daughter. She was Mama's #1 helper. She was babysitter to Betty and me when we were very young, she made dresses for our dolls, she helped us with our homework, looked after us when Mama was working in Dad's store; she was the capable older sister we loved and admired. Angie had all of the talents: musical, academic, mathematic, administrative, etc. She excelled in every endeavor she attempted. We are heartbroken. We will miss her forever.

In November 2013, I traveled with Laura to my daughter Helen's house in Mira Loma. With her BA and master's in education, Helen had taught middle school Special Ed for more than thirty years, retiring in 2010. Additionally, she was, and remains, very active in the equestrian world of Norco, Corona, and Mira Loma. She was an officer for years in the California State Horseman's Association and a leader in the Equestrian Trails Patrol, a volunteer group that looks after trails in the riverbed, and helps with rodeos and other events. Her house is small rancho with at least one horse and chickens as well as a vegetable garden and a wonderful lemon tree. I was delighted to come to her house and sit in the November sunshine while she and Laura planned an elegant KALPAKIAN GIRLS' REUNION PARTY. Patty came early and she and I and Helen made *derev* together and did much of the other cooking. Patty brought *lamajune* from an Armenian bakery in Los Angeles.

At the party, the three of us, myself, Betty and Harriett, surviving daughters of Haigouhi and Haroutune, were the guests of honor. Patty was joined by her sister Nancy. Barbara and Richard Bown, two of Betty's three children attended.

What a wonderful reunion party! Great Armenian food. Gifts for all the guests, and the taking of many pictures. Betty and I entertained everyone by singing (twice—the second time for the video cameras) our George Washington High School Fight Song and our high school Tri-Y Club song:

When a Tri-Y girl walks down the street,
 She looks a hundred percent from head to feet—
 She has a word, a smile, a winning way
 And when you see her, boy, you'll recognize her and you'll say now,
 There's a girl I want to know,
 She looks a hundred percent from head to toe—
 And just to be with her is quite a treat
 It's hard to beat
 A Tri-Y girl!

A few days after the Reunion Party, that November 2013, Helen and I were graciously invited to Bear's home for a memorable Thanksgiving. Laura did the cooking—she served dinner buffet style to twenty-one guests, seating them at an L-shaped table. (Raya was pregnant with Sonatine.)



Peggy, Harriett and Betty, 2013



Bear, Emmy and Maudie, 2013

Bear gave me a tour of his home sound-proof music studio and took a picture of both of us with his Emmy statue (which was very heavy). He also played piano for me in his elegant music room (my favorite room in his home). What a marvelous, exciting party-time trip for me! True happiness. (Footnote: I wore my new red patent leather shoes (two-inch heels) to this Thanksgiving Dinner. I had bought them some time earlier in the hopeful anticipation of an invitation to a party to which I could wear them. They did receive a lot of attention.)

November 2013 was my last trip to Southern California. After this trip, I knew that travel of any sort was and would be too much for me. Now I wait for my family to come up here to Washington, and they often do. At least twice a year, except for 2020 during the Covid pandemic. In 2021 they all came in the summertime and Bear and Raya and Sonatine again at Christmas. Brendan spent that Christmas with Zai at Helen's house because bad weather made it impossible for him to fly.



On the subject of wonderful women in our family, I must add Lynda to this memoir. It was a beautiful day when Brian brought Lynda Pettit into our lives. When he first met her, my initial thought and hope was that Lynda would take Brian into her already-established family—and she



Wedding of Brian and Lynda, 2016

did—but what happened immediately was that Lynda became an integral, beloved part of our family. She is like a daughter to me, and she was also very good to Bill. She did magic as well. She single-handedly painted my back porch, shampooed the carpeting, and has done countless courtesies, which made my life more comfortable and easier. When I returned home after gall bladder surgery in 2013 she stayed with me, looked after me. To this day when she visits me at Shuksan Healthcare Center

she sets my hair for me, and brightens my life in so many ways.

On February 14 (Valentine's Day) 2016, Brian and Lynda got married. Laura was the officiant, and I recited the Lord's Prayer. The wedding and the reception were held at the clubhouse of Lakeway Mobile Estates. It was one of the happiest days of my life to see my beloved youngest son married to such a fine person, to see Lynda become one of the Johnson women, and an honorary Kalpakian woman. She continues to delight all of us.



I passed my love of history and literature on to my eldest daughter, Laura who has a BA and an MA in history and studied literature in the PhD. program at UCSD. However, her talent lay in writing.

She took the name Laura Kalpakian, and became a novelist and fiction writer and some of her earliest stories recount my parents' early experiences as emigrants in America. One, in particular, "The Land of Lucky Strike," recounts my father's difficulties in learning English. In our family we call it "The Dumbbell Story."

"The Land of Lucky Strike," was sold in England to the BBC and on Christmas Eve 1982 an actor read the story over the BBC radio. A friend taped it and sent it to Grandma so she could hear it. I wish my father had been alive to hear it. I know he would have been so pleased.

For many years my daughter and I were close-working team. I brought my excellent typing skills to her work, turning her drafts into beautiful manuscripts. At first I typed at home on a Royal. But then I had started working as a secretary in the Orthopedic Surgery Department at the SB County Hospital. My typewriter there was an elegant German Adler which had a special nylon film ribbon which printed up much like today's computers, a great improvement over the Royal. With permission from Dr. George J. Weisseman, I came into the office on weekends and evenings after work. I would always leave with the shift change at eleven. On that office Adler I typed Laura's first novel, *Beggars and Choosers*, which was accepted by Little Brown Publishers (1978) after receiving the manuscript from her—no agent. With the money she received from Little, Brown,

Laura bought a new Adler typewriter for me so that I could type her work at home. I remember once becoming so overcome with emotion while typing a tragic scene in *These Latter Days*, that I stopped typing and went out into our yard to walk among the fruit trees in the sunshine—to calm myself.

I continued to use this Adler until I changed over to the computer in about 1992. The computer was at her house, and often she would be typing away in her room, and give that draft to me. We had set the computer up in a room that had been the kids' toy room, and I would work in there. Bear and Brendan have fond memories of the rattle of the typewriter keys and the computer keys in their childhood. Beginning in about 1998 Laura learned to use the computer herself, and since has typed and finalized all her own work. I too got my own computer for use at home.

Many of Laura's books have been sold all over the world, translated into many different languages. Her most recent, *Memory Into Memoir* (University of New Mexico Press, 2021) will be translated into Chinese, and will also have an audiobook in Chinese. And in this way, Patty can understand it and tell us if it's accurate!!

When Peggy Ann Johnson became Laura Kalpakian, she did so to honor her grandparents. Knowing that with four daughters, the Kalpakian



Kalpakian literary team, c. 2008

name would be lost, she chose to call herself that so that her grandparents' name might live on. How pleased my mother and father would be to know that now, all over the world, the name Kalpakian is an *American name*, the name of an American author.

SHUKSAN

I arrived at Shuksan Healthcare Center in an ambulance on a cold, rainy January day—January 18, in fact, my sister Betty’s birthday. It was a very rough ride from the hospital and I was scared. What was I doing here? What was happening to me? I kept repeating my birthdate to myself so I would not forget it. *March 26, 1922. March 26, 1922.*

I had had a heart attack a week earlier. Lynda came to my house and found me on the floor. She called 911 and she called Laura. An ambulance came and took me to the hospital. That first day in the hospital they allowed Laura to stay with me until evening, about seven p.m. when I had been put into a room. Then she had to leave. Because of Covid they would not allow her (not allow any visitors) to come back. I was all alone for the whole week it took for my condition to stabilize. It was a terrible week.

When the ambulance moved me to Shuksan Healthcare Center on January 18, 2021, my daughter Laura was waiting in the hospital parking structure for them to bring me out so that she could have five quick minutes with me. I was so scared and weak; I do not remember this. In her own car Laura followed the ambulance to Shuksan and waited there ’til I had been put in a room.

When I came to Shuksan, I was so weak I could not even sit up. I had to be brought in and put into the bed in a big sling like a bale of hay. Because of Covid I had to be quarantined for two weeks, apart from everyone else, no one but aides and medical personnel could come into my

room. Everyone had to be masked and wearing PPE to come into my room.

My room had a window that looked out to the front of Shuksan. In front of the window were some rhododendron bushes. My daughter, Laura would come every day and stand in the bushes and call me on her cell phone so we could talk briefly. My son Brian came every day on his lunch break for several days. I told him not to. He didn't have enough time. We could talk on the phone. He and Lynda came on the weekends. Lots of people sent me flowers and well wishes, but I remember almost nothing of those first two weeks. At the end of January, I went back to the hospital briefly because of trouble with my bowels. When I returned to Shuksan, again I was exhausted and barely able to sit in the chair for a while. At the end of that time, I could take about six steps, that was all, before being exhausted.

Slowly, I got better. I am in a wheelchair, but I can walk with the aid of a walker and a physical therapist by my side. Now I am strong enough to go three, sometimes four times around the whole building using the walker. Recently they have given me a new walker, and a new wheelchair, and physical therapy has concentrated on standing and transferring to the wheelchair. Because of new Covid restrictions, at the moment I am confined to my room. (Everyone is.) I find that maneuvering the walker in this smaller space is more difficult than walking the halls.

Though I get tired, I am not taking such long naps like I did when I lived at home alone in the years after Bill died in 2012. Now I find I just sit in my wheelchair and close my eyes for a bit, and meditate.

In May 2021 I moved into this private room. Laura brought many pictures from my home, family pictures and the poster from my *Centennial Memoir*. These are all along the windowsill and I can look at them every day. Later she brought the seagull picture from my house, and best of all, the ocean picture that was in my breakfast nook at home. I can look at this picture and imagine myself at Moonlight Beach, Encinitas.

By my birthday last year, March of 2021 Covid restrictions had lifted enough that Laura and Lynda could come be with me on my 99th birthday.

We sat in the dining room and had cupcakes and presents. I made a wish as I blew out my candle. I wished for good health for my entire family.

Covid restrictions mean that visitors must make an appointment, have their temperature taken on entering the building and wear PPE and goggles. Laura comes two or three days a week. Brian and Lynda come every weekend. I talk to Helen and Laura and Brian twice a day, each of them. In summer my grandsons Bear and Brendan and their families came to visit and we had a joyous reunion. The weather was fine and we could all be together outside on the grass and in the shade of enormous chestnut trees. The kids brought musical instruments and sang and played. My little great-granddaughters, Sonatine and Zai, played games on the grass. It was wonderful to see them every day that they were here. In September Brendan came by himself and I saw him every day he was here. At Christmas, despite the heavy snow, Bear and Raya and Sonatine came to see me, and brought me lovely Christmas presents. I Facetime with my faraway family at least once a week. I Facetime too with Patty and Barbara. Shortly after the New Year, new Covid restrictions were put into place, and visitation was curtailed. As of this writing, it remains curtailed. So now my cell phone is my lifeline to the outside world. Luckily, my family calls me all the time.

I am so very grateful to Shuksan. They take such good care of me. I am happy to be greeted every morning by the sweet cheerful faces of my young aides who take care of me every day. They never complain about their onerous jobs. They ask me every day “What would you like to wear?” I always choose something pretty so I get to feel good. They take care of all the laundry as well, so my clothes come back clean and folded. The nurses administer all my meds daily and on time, so I do not have to think about them or worry about them. In February and March, I had the two vaccines for Covid and later, a booster shot. The nurses give me my eye drops four times a day so that I maintain my vision and read for at least a while. I have a television to watch evening programs and Seahawks football games.

The meals at Shuksan are excellent and healthy. Sometimes they make foods that I have never tried, like dumplings. My favorite is their split pea

soup for lunch. When the Covid restrictions lifted last year, we got to eat in the dining room with others and I find this so much better than always eating alone. I made friends.

My windows face a small, enclosed garden with trees and birds and flowers. Sometimes I can see the reflection of the American flag that is on a flagpole near the back door. I like to sit at the window and watch the weather, whatever it is. There are two Japanese maples that have plum-colored leaves in spring and summer. Sometimes I just like to watch the wind ruffle through the leaves and branches. I have two birdhouses in front of my windows, one of them made by my son Doug. I also have a bird feeder attached to the window, Laura's early Christmas gift to me. I hear the birds all the time, morning and evening, talking, quarreling, making up. God takes care of birds. I find, living here, I have a new appreciation of nature and the time to enjoy it.

The day I came here in an ambulance, I had repeated my birthdate over and over to myself, *March 26, 1922*. I have spent this year as I move toward March 26, 2022, my 100th birthday, my centennial year, gaining strength and stamina. enjoying interactions with others when I can, reading when I can, and working on this book, Volume II. One hundred years is a long time and I am blessed to have such a fine family, all of them, even those no longer with us. I am blessed to be at Shuksan and every day I say my prayer, asking God for health and wisdom and the grace to understand.

PKJ

January 18, 2022



Haroutune Kalpakian, c. 1916

THE LAND OF LUCKY STRIKE

BY LAURA KALPAKIAN

Dikran Agajanian stepped back from the mirror and, with the pale green tiled splendor of the bathroom for a backdrop, regarded himself critically. The new shirt collar irritated his freshly shaven neck, the tie was slightly crooked. He adjusted the tie and smoothed his crisp, dark hair, freshened his mustache, checking that the ends stood up pertly. Very nice indeed. His face was old enough to have character, young enough to express enthusiasm. Today, the first day of his new job, both the character and the enthusiasm were visible. To the figure in the mirror, he said: “Cigarette? Cigar? Chewing gum? Candy bar? Thank you. You are welcome. Which one? Lucky Strike.” Pleased with himself, he rearranged the towels (borrowed from his brother-in-law) on the rack and surveyed the gleaming bathroom. The bathroom was his favorite room in the new house. These Americans, they thought of everything.

He heard a knock at the front door and his wife’s heavy step. She moved slowly these days; she thought the new baby would arrive within the week. His brother-in-law’s voice shook the bathroom door. “Ha! Ha! Little Armenoui!” (Dikran thought that probably Harry was pinching his wife’s cheek.) “How you doin’ today? How’s that big baby, Jack? When’s he gonna come out and meet his old Uncle Harry? Huh? Huh? Hey, Dikran! You ready for the big day?”

“Would you like to drink some coffee, Harry?” Armenoui Agajanian asked in her still pristine, book-learned English.

“Sure, sure, we got time for some coffee, Dikran, come out here and have some coffee.”

When Dikran entered the little dining room, Harry was pinching the fat cheek of the three-year-old, Angagh.

“Hello, Snooky,” he said, blowing his cigar smoke away from the child. “What you want Santa Claus to bring you for Christmas, huh? You want a big doll? You want a model train set? Your Uncle Harry get you anything you want, Snooky.” The child screamed with delight and, banging her spoon down on the tin dish in front of her, sent cereal flying around the room. “Hey, Armenoui, come get this kid. She gonna mess up my nice suit. Hey, Snooky, you cut it out.”

Delighted, Snooky sprayed more cereal. Armenoui lifted the child from the chair, removed her bib, and told her in Armenian to go wash. Then she picked up the cereal dish and took it into the kitchen, re-emerging with two cups of steaming coffee and another tin plate tucked under her arm.

“For your ashes, Harry.”

“Sure, sure. We gotta get you some ash trays. Who can work in cigar business with no ash trays in the house, eh Dikran?”

Dikran put a small amount of cream and sugar in his coffee and stirred. Harry always made people happy, he thought; Harry made them laugh. Harry paid the first month’s rent on the little furnished house for the Agajanians. What a fine man Harry was.

“Well, Dikran, you know all you gotta know today? Let’s hear it.” Harry struck a match and re-lit his cigar.

“Cigarette? Cigar? Chewing gum? Thank you. You are welcome. Candy bar? Which one? Lucky Strike.”

“Very good! You remember that Lucky Strike, don’t you?”

“I remember *Lucky*.”

Harry heaped sugar and poured so much cream into his coffee that it fell over the cup and splashed into the saucer. “You right, Dikran! You stick with me, you gonna be lucky all right. We make you rich man in no time. Next year this time, I bet you have a car - what you think? Send word to old country: ‘In 1924, Dikran Agajanian Buys Car!’”

Dikran smiled. The thought of owning a car was beyond his imagination - the little house, real, with its cool tiles in the bathroom, its blue hydrangea and stately palm in the front, that was enough for him. The hunger for the car was Harry's and that hunger trebled when Harry's daughter drove off with a young American donkey in the donkey's own car.

"You look real good, Dikran. You handsome man - good thing too: I don't want no ugly babies in this family. That baby, Jack, he better be beautiful before he calls me Uncle Harry, that's all I gotta say. Hey, Armenoui, you hear that? Good thing good-lookin' woman like you don't marry no *ugly mug!*"

Dikran laughed inwardly. Harry loved American slang; he had probably thought all the way over here how he would use that new one — ugly mug.

"I hear you, Harry," called Armenoui from the kitchen. She came into the dining room, since she had been taught at the Red Cross orphanage that only urchins yell. "What if the baby is a girl, Harry?"

"A girl," he blustered. "You ain't gonna have no girl. You already got one girl. What you want another one for? Girls nothin' but trouble. You have a boy, you take my word for it."

Armenoui laughed. She was a handsome woman, Dikran thought, in spite of her swollen body and tired face. She would be handsomer still when the baby came and she did not always look so tired and her face could assume its old, fine planes and contours, the firm mouth, the clear, intelligent eyes, the strong chin. Now her face was puffy; her usually smooth olive skin had a yellow cast to it. He was a lucky man, he thought, and then he laughed out loud: it was the first time he had thought the American word.

"Well, Dikran, we gotta go," said Harry, wiping his mustache with the back of his left hand. With his right hand he dropped some cigar ashes in the plate Armenoui brought him. "You wanna make money in this country, you gotta get out and catch the early worm. You ready?"

"Yes." Dikran rose and walked toward the front door.

"Hey, wait a minute. Ain't you gonna kiss her good-bye?"

“Kiss?”

“Yeah, you know — kisskiss - listen, Dikran, I gotta make an American outta you. When you go to work in the morning in America you kiss the wife good-bye. Everyone does. Me, I kiss Martha every morning. Good for you.”

Dikran demurred. He and Armenoui had never kissed in front of anyone in their lives; his wife could not bear for him to kiss her before another person. Armenoui blanched.

“Hey - what’s this? You two don’t like each other? You have a fight or something? Armenoui, he treatin’ you bad? You tell me, you just tell me.”

“No, Harry. Dikran is good to me always.”

“Then, what — Dikran, go on, kiss your wife,” he urged Dikran toward her.

Dikran bent his face down to hers. He did not touch her with his hands. She closed her eyes and raised her lips to meet his; it was a dry, soft kiss.

“Aha! That better. Let’s go now.”

All the way to the streetcar, Harry sang a song called “Jingle Bell.” He explained it was his favorite Christmas song. He sang with such gusto that people would smile at him as they passed on the street. On the main boulevard, the streetcars clanged and thumped, going in all different directions. They all looked alike, however. Dikran dreaded the day he would go to work by himself; imagine catching the wrong one, ending up in some strange place without the language to tell where he wanted to go. Harry sensed his confusion.

“Dikran, you ever get on the wrong car, you just tell them, ‘I work at Santa Monica Beach’ — you remember that? Say that.”

“Santa Monica Beach.”

“Right. You never get lost.” He went on singing “Jingle Bell” in the streetcar, and the woman behind them said “Merry Christmas” as she rose to leave the car.

The December sun was behind them; Dikran could feel it intensified through the window glass, shining on his shoulder. Everywhere he looked

out the window as they rode through the town there were red and green decorations, streamers, banners, figures of angels, and the face of a fat, bearded man. From the streetcar Dikran watched the store owners righting their goods, the clerks bracing themselves behind tills for the onslaught of shoppers, already poised before the glossy windows, clutching bags and the hands of small children.

Harry poked him in the ribs. "We get off next."

As the car rounded the corner, beyond the conductor, Dikran craned his neck to see the shining expanse of the bright Pacific. "Pacific," murmured Dikran. *Pacific Ocean* and *Lucky Strike* were Dikran's favorite English words.

"You gotta get off quick. They don't wait for no one. They gotta schedule to keep, you know."

The conductor said "Merry Christmas" to Harry as the two men alighted, and Harry tipped his hat.

The beach was bordered by a ragged sidewalk, and it was on this sidewalk, facing the ocean, that Harry's four tobacco and candy concessions stood at quarter-mile intervals. The one where Dikran would work was about as tall as a door frame, as deep as a large pantry, and a little longer than Dikran's arm span. Harry no longer worked in one of the concessions, though he had up until last year. He now had a small office in Santa Monica with an impressive sign over the door, HARKER CONCESSIONS in orange lettering on a red background. Harker Concessions was now so successful that Harry employed three full-time concession salesmen, two part-time, and one secretary (part-time).

"This is my Number One," said Harry, hitting the wooden stand painted to the brilliance of banana yellow. "Number Two, she is blue, Number Three, she is red, Number Four, she is yellow too for the Golden State. Number Five gonna be green. Nice, huh?"

Dikran nodded, but Number One was less impressive than Harry had led Dikran to believe. From his pocket Harry drew an impressive-looking key ring and set about opening the stand's four locks, two holding the wooden shutters closed in front and two locking the Dutch door which

allowed access to the inside. An orange and red sign in front said CIGARETTES AND CANDY. Number One itself was decorated with pictures of attractive young women advertising candy and handsome young men advertising cigarettes. When Harry opened the front, Dikran saw a brilliant panoply of colored cellophane on the shelf behind the counter, candy and cigarettes in shiny gold, red, brown, and yellow.

“C’m’ere, I show you all you need to know for the first day.”

Behind the counter there were a small folding chair and some newspapers. Under the counter were more boxes of goods, some rags and cleaning fluid. The stand was too small for the two men to occupy together comfortably, especially since Harry was chubby. Grunting, Harry pulled forth a small cash register from underneath the counter and set it up. “Now, I show you all this the other night, but here it is again. Easy. The five. The ten. The twenty and so on. You just push the one you want and bang - there she is. But, in case you need it, I got it all writ down for you.” He handed Dikran a piece of paper with money equivalents and cash register procedures written in a graceful-looking language that was more comfortable for Dikran than the sharp, bulky English letters.

A customer approached the stand, an older, well-dressed man. He did not look at Dikran or Harry. “Cigar,” he said.

“Which one?” said Harry.

“Havana.”

Harry expertly picked out one for the man and handed it to him. He tossed a coin on the counter and walked on. Harry said, “Thank you.”

“You see,” he said to Dikran. “Easy. Now where you gonna put this coin?”

Dikran was stricken with terror. All his life he had worked behind a counter, measuring out tea, coffee, spices. He had never been afraid. How could he do it, though, in a language he could barely speak, with coins that he hardly knew? Harry clapped him on the shoulder.

“Ah, Dikran - you gonna be all right. C’mon — what you do with this coin?”

Dikran glanced at the paper in his hand and hit the ten-cent indicator of the cash register. The machine chimed, the figure bounced up in the window, the drawer flew open, and he placed the dime in with the others.

“Very good. I knew you have no trouble. You just say, ‘Which one?’ to them, get them to point, you know. See - all the cigarettes on this shelf; candy on this shelf; cigars, matches on this shelf. Each thing I marked yesterday so all you gotta do is look at the thing they want, and there’s the price right underneath it — they hand you the money, you say, ‘You’re welcome,’ and you are fine. Well, I gotta go now, Dikran. I wish I could stay here with you and watch the pretty girls, not so many now ’cause Christmas, but I tell you — in the summer this right here, Number One, is the best job in the whole world.” He laughed. “I come by this afternoon, see how you doin’. Armenoui didn’t pack you no lunch, did she? Well, I’ll bring you something today; you gotta tell her you got responsibilities now and you gotta have your lunch. I think when I come back I bring some Christmas decorations, too. Too early, maybe. Well-I think about it.”

Dikran politely walked out of Number One: his brother-in-law was too fat to scoot by him. “Thank you,” he said in English.

“Ha! You learn in no time. You speak English good as me real soon now.”

The morning passed quickly and without mishap. He found that most people knew exactly what they wanted and pointed to it with no difficulty. He imagined, too, that each time he said *thank you* and *you’re welcome* his English improved and the customer could not tell he was foreign. In-between customers he dusted off the stock and leaned over the counter and watched the ocean roll in long, muscular waves. The winter surf gouged the bright sand. He could see the stunted reflections of the walkers in the wet sand. He had been a walker on the rocky Mediterranean shore, and he had been a crosser of the Atlantic, and he had always been a lover of the ocean. The Mediterranean, the Atlantic, what were they compared to the grand Pacific? He wanted to be the acolyte of the Pacific, to serve at Harry’s Number One and stand in perpetual awe, facing west.

Harry came back about one with encouragement, some sandwiches and soft drinks. He ate his lunch there at Number One with Dikran. He brought some shiny red and green paper loops, too, and draped them across the front of the stand. At either edge of the counter he placed a picture of the fat, pink-faced gentleman with a full, white beard.

“Who is that?” asked Dikran.

“That? - Whew! Good thing you ask me that question and no one else. They think you crazy and lock you up somewhere. That Santa Claus. Look. For Christmas here in America all kids believe in this Santa Claus — they say, ‘Santa Claus, please bring me dolly. Santa Claus, please bring me whatever they want, and believe me they always want something you can’t afford, especially when they sixteen and stupid.’” Harry’s daughter was sixteen. “Then, their parents go get it for them, and they say, ‘Here, Merry Christmas — Santa Claus bring you this.’”

Dikran looked puzzled. Armenoui would probably not like this one bit. She was very straightforward about such things, and he could not envision her telling little Angagh that this fat man brought her presents when in fact Dikran’s hard-earned money had paid for them.

“Armenoui know about Santa Claus?”

“Well, if she don’t, she’s goin’ to, we gonna get you a Christmas tree — have a real American Christmas for you. Martha tells me yesterday she gonna get you some candles for the tree - you light the candles, you sing “Jingle Bell” — what a great Christmas. Dikran, I tellin’ you, I’m goin’ to get that little Snooky the best present in the world, and if Jack gets himself born before Christmas, him too, him too.” Harry popped the last of the sandwich in his mouth and chewed reflectively.

Dikran still had reservations about broaching all this frivolity to Armenoui. He was afraid she would disapprove; she had had so little frivolity in her life, scarcely even a hair ribbon before she was married. Armenoui’s beauty was dipped in sorrow. She lacked humor, but not courage.

Shortly after Harry left, the trade slowed down in the afternoon. Dikran never tired of looking at the faces of the customers, but most of them ignored the man behind the counter, looking right past him, or

perhaps right through him. Then he had a customer who did look at him: she was the prettiest woman he had ever seen. She smiled. She was blonde; her glossy hair, cut short, curled around her face; she reminded him of the attractive young women in the ads who framed Number One. She had china-blue eyes and pink cheeks and a small, red mouth. Probably she wears lip rouge or paint or something, he thought, but she was so pretty, it didn't seem to matter. His eyes drifted from her pert, painted face to her body and the loose dress made of some kind of crushable material, and the brilliant green silk stockings that sheathed her legs. Since he had come to America, he had grown accustomed (or thought he had) to seeing women's legs, but not women's legs in green stockings. She rested her hand on the counter: her fingernails looked like pale little shells against her smooth, unpuckered skin. She took his obvious admiration not as a gift, but as though she were extracting a tax from him for the sheer pleasure of looking at her. He did not even notice: it was a pleasure. She chewed a little gum with which she made rhythmical clicking noises. "Cigarette? Candy bar? Chewing gum? Lucky Strikes?"

"Chewing gum."

"Which one?"

"There," she said, pointing.

"You're welcome," he said.

Taking her gum, she smiled again, and said, "Merry Christmas," as she walked off.

"Merry Christmas," he replied.

Harry had forgotten to show him where the lights were for Number One, but Dikran had found them just before the sun set. By 5:30 the beach was deserted, the tide out, the water barely visible from the concession stand, which glowed like a bright beacon on the dark beach. Just before he found the lights, Dikran had seen a man and a woman walking along the beach, and not too far from Number One, they stopped and kissed. The woman's head tilted back, the man's arms encircled her. Kissing in front of everyone must be American, Dikran concluded. He asked Harry

what he thought as they rode the streetcar home. He asked him in Armenian. Harry roared with laughter.

“So, that was it, this morning, huh? I am an American so long now I forget about old-country women. Ha!”

Dikran laughed, too; he thought he would like kissing Armenoui every morning before he went to work.

Armenoui did not like it. Not in front of Harry, she protested to him as they lay in their bed that night. He told her Harry didn't care, and that it was very American. Gradually she adjusted to the kissing each morning when Dikran left for work. Now he carried the keys for Number One himself and got off the streetcar at the beach while Harry rode farther into town. Armenoui packed him a lunch each day. They bought a thermos so he could take coffee with him, because in spite of the warm December afternoons, the evenings were brisk and chilly. He took an extra sweater to work and left it under the counter. His English improved gradually; he became acquainted with the particular brand names of chewing gum and cigarettes. One day he found himself singing “Jingle Bell,” as good as Harry sang it, he thought. And every day to his delight the lovely blonde girl came by the stand, bought some chewing gum, smiled at him and said “Merry Christmas” as she was leaving. Every day she looked more beautiful. One day he noted she wore some little bells and a fake spray of dark green leaves and red berries pinned to her lapel. Holly, Harry told him later, for Christmas. Dikran wondered what she would say to him when Christmas was past.

Some days were crisp and sunny, but when it was overcast the sky squatted over the ocean, turning it gray and lavender at the horizon. One day it rained all day. He had hardly any customers, some of the stock got wet, and the girl did not appear. Harry told him when it rained that much, to close up and go home.

If the rain beaded on the shiny cigarette packages, if it chilled Dikran, even if it sobered Harry, it did not alter the tide of shoppers who, unsmiling and intent and clutching their goods, streamed through the frames of Dikran's window as he rode the streetcar to and from Number One.

“Sometimes Christmas is no fun,” Harry said one day as they rode home. “No fun. No joy. Only buy buy buy. What’s the use, you not going to enjoy it? What’s the use you don’t enjoy buying the present? They don’t enjoy getting the present? Christmas is to make people happy, make them sing - look at them.” Harry shook his head, “Look at those faces.” Dikran did not reply. There seemed nothing to say. Harry was so seldom serious or sad that Dikran’s silence seemed the only appropriate response.

Harry was quite often mad, however, and grew very nearly violent when Armenoui insisted (just as Dikran suspected she would) that Santa Claus was not necessary for Angagh’s Christmas and that a tree of lighted candles would set the house on fire. Harry hopped about the room, sometimes on one foot, extolling the virtue of Santa Claus and Christmas trees until at last Armenoui relented. Then Harry brought the tree in; he had left it by the front door all the time. Martha brought in the candles and some shiny, opaque glass balls, and they decorated it. They lit the candles, turned off the lights in the living room, and watched the tree. The room smelled wonderfully of fresh pine and dripping, sweet wax. It was so quiet that they could hear the candles splutter and hiss.

One afternoon Harry left work early and with Martha and Armenoui took Angagh down to meet Santa Claus. Santa Claus listened attentively to what the little girl wanted, but she said it in Armenian so Santa could only smile and look at her strangely. He handed her back to her uncle with a pained expression on his face.

“Hmmp. Next year she talk English good as you,” said Harry to Santa.

It didn’t matter to Snooky; she was enthralled. The packages began to pile up under the Agajanian Christmas tree, lots for Snooky and lots for Jack, no matter what he was.

“If the baby comes before Christmas, honey,” Martha told her sister, “you can open them then.” Armenoui was so moved that she began to cry. They were the first tears she had shed in eight years.

Two days before Christmas, Harry showed up at Number One.

“You gotta present for Armenoui yet? You know Christmas in two days. You better roll it,” he said savoring the slang. “I’ll stay here and close up. You go get a present for your wife. That boy gonna be here any day.”

Dikran stood on the street with the shoppers he had so often watched. He let them jostle and move him as though he stood waist-deep in the Pacific’s breaking surf; he savored the electricity generated by their bodies, and the static in their uncrushed bags. As the afternoon waned, the lights everywhere grew more brilliant. The very streetlights seemed to conspire with the season as they blinked red and green. Dark-bonneted women clanged bells on the sidewalks, the wonderful and unrelenting cacophony of Christmas.

Dikran wandered from store to store, looking for something for his wife. Everywhere he looked, the merchandise beckoned, begged to be touched, stroked, bought. He bobbed with the crowd’s rhythm as they were forced, like musical notes on a staff, between waist-high wooden counters where soft pairs of gloves lay in repose and new umbrellas stood at attention. There were long aisles of silky slippers and stockings and fragile underthings, which embarrassed him, and he found another department of the store in which to browse. Led by his sense of smell, he circled the cosmetic counter where a woman whose face had to be peeled off at night guarded an unctuous galaxy of creams and pots and potions which wafted a cloying fragrance into the stale air. His eyes were drawn to rows of twinkling copper cookware and gleaming china dishes, frail glassware perched in triplicate on mirrored shelves. He passed through stores where substantial-looking furniture and lamp fixtures spread out in a panoramic living room, where rows of pianos stood upright, ornate and respectable. He explored a sporting-goods store with crisp, hard odors of metal and leather and wood, full of items for which he could imagine no earthly use. The odors and the fabrics and the people and the sounds of cash ringing and paper crunching and customers barking at salespeople melded, could no longer be distinguished individually. His senses rebelled, then revolted, then ceased to record, and the crowd moved his body like he belonged to them. A woman thumped his back and asked him a question he did not

understand. She asked only once. She was armed with a tin breadbox; she forged past him and he watched her back retreat as the packages of others crushed against his shoulders.

A man with a waxed mustache stood guard by a slick icebox in a room where iceboxes outnumbered the people. Dikran saw a young couple whose rapt and happy attention was riveted to a vacuum cleaner. Sewing machines gobbled up material under the expert hands of young women, and the vast network of pneumatic chutes hissed and spat and sped the money on its way to distant coffers. His eyes dried out and began to hurt; he squinted in the artificial indoor light, his lips desiccated and his throat parched. His brain pulled away from his skull; he lost his balance momentarily and tumbled against an ambulating overcoat which withdrew from him before he could regain his stance and he fell.

He got to his feet. He could not find the way out of this great commercial bin.

The familiar odor of chocolate accosted him. He bought a nickel's worth of chocolates and left the store and the downtown district altogether. He walked west. When he came to the Pacific he sat in the cold sand. He watched the dark water and ate the chocolates. The streetcar he caught for home was almost empty, and night had cleared the streets and lit the windows of Los Angeles.

Armenoui was pale with worry when he arrived home. Martha was with her. When he saw his wife he realized he had no present for her.

"Well," said Harry the next morning as they rode the streetcar, "what you get your wife?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? What you mean nothing?"

"Nothing."

"What's wrong with you Dikran?" Harry's bushy eyebrows shot up. "Tomorrow Christmas. What you gonna give your wife?"

He could not articulate his thoughts in adequate English; he could only paste them together intuitively in Armenian. People on the streetcar stared at him when he spoke Armenian. He knotted his fingers together.

“Too much,” he said in English.

“Too much? Too much what? You makin’ good money now, you makin’ enough for a nice present for your wife.”

“Not money. Too much. Too much. Too much. Too much...” Dikran’s knuckles went white. He cleared his throat; he clenched his teeth.

Harry’s shoulders sloped forward; he stared silently at the gum wrappers on the floor of the streetcar. The car made two stops before Harry said, “Dikran. I know. It’s hard in a new place.” His shoulders straightened and he brought his right hand down into his left with a resounding clap. “You know what I do? When I go to work, I call Martha and I tell her to go downtown and get Armenoui the best Christmas present ever, from Dikran—good idea? Martha, she’s got good taste; like they say, she knows things. Armenoui will love it. I promise you. Ha, ha— you gonna be a lot happier man after that baby get born. I’m sure of that!”

Without commenting on Harry’s estimation of his domestic life, Dikran thanked him. “Tell Martha I will pay her back tomorrow,” he said in his familiar tongue.

“No - not tomorrow. No payin’ back on Christmas. Day after.”

Dikran nodded. Harry always made people happy.

Late in the morning Dikran rested his arm on the counter and his eyes on the Pacific. Then his eyes ceased to rest, he smoothed his hair: the beautiful blonde was walking toward Number One with several other girls, all pretty, but not as pretty as she. She looked even prettier today, with red stockings and a green dress and the same now-bedraggled sprig of fake holly. She did not look at him today. She was engaged in an animated conversation with her friends. “Well, what did you tell him then, Ethel?”

Ethel laughed. “I told him he must have me confused with someone else. Just because I let him buy me dinner and bring me home, that didn’t mean anything.”

The young women burst into laughter at this.

“What did he do then?” asked the beautiful blonde.

“He was mad and he said he ought to get a kiss at least and I said if I let you have a kiss, next you’ll want to neck and pet.” The four arrived at

Number One, ignoring Dikran while Ethel finished her story. “I said I’d let him kiss me if he kept his hands in his pockets.”

“Did he?”

“What do you think?” replied Ethel, grinning.

Dikran understood the tone and mood and the words and the sound of *kiss* enough to wonder if young American women often related these intimate things in front of strangers. “Cigarettes? Candy? Chewing gum?” he said.

“Gum for me,” said the beautiful blonde without looking at him.

He was stunned that she would have bothered to tell him; he knew she wanted gum, he even knew what kind. He had it in his hand before she spoke.

“Get this for me, willya, Ethel? I haven’t got a cent,” she said.

“Got any Luckies?” asked one of the women.

“Lucky Strike,” he said.

“Get me a CocoaNut Bar, willya?” said another.

“Which kind?”

“CocoaNut Bar,” she replied, digging in her purse.

“Which one?”

“A CocoaNut Bar, I toldya. Are you deaf?”

Dikran was silent, hoping she would point.

“Are you deaf?” she hollered. Finally, she pointed. “You blind as well?” The girls all laughed again.

He handed her the candy bar.

“Gimme some change for this fiver,” said Ethel, pushing a bill toward him.

“Cigarette? Candy? Chewing gum?” he said.

“All I want is some change.”

Dikran stepped back so that Ethel could view the whole panorama of candy and cigarette counter to make her choice. He smiled. “Cigarette? Candy? Which one?”

Ethel’s lip curled. “Dumb-bell,” she said.

“Come on, Ethel,” said the beautiful blonde, walking away. “Get it changed somewhere else. Come on, he’ll be all day.”

Ethel’s gaze narrowed to Dikran’s smile. “Dumb-bell,” she repeated. Then she left.

Dikran stared out to the Pacific for a long time. He tried to think what *dumb-bell* might mean. Perhaps it was some relation to *Jingle Bell*. He would ask Harry. The bead of Ethel’s gaze still seared him; a metallic taste formed at the back of his throat. For the first time since he had been in America ambition gripped him, ambition alloyed with bitterness: Dikran had been a foreigner all his life, born to it; he did not want to die a foreigner too. Any Armenian who lived in a Turkish city learned quickly to say little, to tread easy, to fade inconspicuously if he could. He had not been sorry to leave Turkey. Then he had lived in London, one of many particles, one of the foreign fat who floated in the London stew, the first to be skimmed off jobs, out of housing, the dark ones who hovered together and hated each other, the Indians, the Jews, the Armenians, the blacks. He had not lived in London long. Then Athens. Athens was not so bad, but they had buried a child in Athens, and he had not been sorry to leave there either; a grave should not tie one to a city. He faced the Pacific now, and knowledge began to crystallize in his brain; he realized what his life as a perpetual foreigner had deprived him of, and he realized it in an instinctive way that he could not articulate in any language. It defied language. It rose up out of his guts like love. He had lived his whole life without so much as one tendril of a root to bind him, to make him wince when it was pulled up, to make him groan when it was transplanted in yet thinner soil. Not one white root bound him. He would not be one of those who sigh for the old home; there was no old home, there was no old country. There was only the new home and the new country and if he had to divest himself of the old ways in order to have the new home, if he had to strip his old self to wear the new country, so be it. Dikran wanted the rich, rolling tide of life in America to pick him up and take him too. Let it be too much. Let it be anything at all just so he was part of it. He hated the beautiful blonde.

Harry bustled up to Number One around two. “C’mon, close up,” he said. “We goin’ home. This is Christmas Eve Day! Anyone who wants cigarettes have to buy them from a Jew. This is Christian holiday, and by God, we are Christian. Wait!” he said, as Dikran began to lock up. “You and me better take some cigars in case Jack is born in the next day or so - you don’t want to come back here for cigars.”

“What for?”

“Dikran. In America when you have baby, you pass out cigars to all your friends. You say — Here, have one on me, my wife just have baby.”

“No friends,” said Dikran in English.

“What you mean, no friends? You got me. You got Martha. You got—” Harry’s hands waved through the air. “You gonna have plenty friends, by next year Christmas you have new car and plenty friends. Me, too. Oh, I got plenty friends now, you know, but I have new car then, too. Let’s go. What’s wrong with you Dikran? You sick?”

“No.”

“Well, when that boy born, you give me a cigar and I give you one and we both smoke. How’s that?”

“Good.”

They walked to the streetcar stop and stood with the sun at their backs and their shadows stretching out into the street. “Harry, what means *dumb-bell*?”

“Dumb-bell?”

“Yes.”

“Hey, you learnin’ the slang already, I told you so - you pick it up real easy with this job. It mean stupid.”

The streetcar came and for the ride home Harry talked about the Christmas dinner, the American Christmas dinner that Martha and Armenoui were cooking for the next day. He promised Dikran he would love turkey.

Christmas Eve Dikran lay in bed next to his wife. “Are you asleep?” he asked in the old familiar language. No matter how well he learned English, he thought he would always use Armenian in bed.

“No.”

“When will it be?”

“Soon. Tomorrow, maybe the next day, maybe the day after that. Soon.”

“Merry Christmas,” he said in English.

“Merry Christmas,” she replied.

Leaning over his wife, he kissed her mouth tenderly. He laid his ear on her swollen belly and listened to the heartbeat of the unborn American child.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peggy Kalpakian Johnson became a writer in her nineties. She published memoir essays in various venues and the book, *Centennial Memoir*, in 2019. She was born Pakradouhi Kalpakian, March 26, 1922, in Constantinople, Turkey, to Armenian parents who emigrated to Los Angeles the following year. Peggy became an American citizen in 1943. She was a student at the University of Southern California when she met and married a Navy man, Bill Johnson, in 1944. After the War, Peggy and Bill made a good life for themselves and their four children in Southern California. Later she and Bill moved to Bellingham, Washington, where Peggy still resides in this, her centennial year.

