REVIEW
SPRING 2016

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Mill Valley Historical Society is pleased to present our latest REVIEW magazine. As always, you will see that we have included a number of interesting articles by talented writers. The articles cover a range of topics of historic importance, including: local music, theater and art; notable immigrants; and public land preservation.

I will be leaving the board later this year and this is an opportunity for me to reflect briefly on how we have evolved during my tenure as well as the direction in which we are heading. Overall, we have had the opportunity to build on a strong organization and so our recent work has been to enhance activities that were already underway. We have expanded our First Wednesday Speaker Series to cover the entire year, and have broadened the scope of the topics presented. We have deepened our relationships with our Library and Outdoor Art Club partners through the Mill Valley History Room, the annual Walk Into History, the Oral History Project, and more.

Our board is also looking to the future. We live in an environment with ever more communications platforms, and a key initiative already underway is to identify the best ways to communicate efficiently and effectively with all of our constituents, and to be nimble enough to leverage new tools as they emerge. I am confident that this effort will support our mission of preserving and disseminating information about local history.

I want to thank all of our members for their support of our organization. Thanks to the contributors to this REVIEW, the volunteers who help bring the publication to life, and our advertisers, who believe in what we do.

Best regards,
Bill Stock

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COVER: Cypress Knoll, home of Hugh A. Boyle and Carmelita Garcia Boyle, n.d. From the house, built in 1871 and the earliest surviving house in Mill Valley today, the Boyles could look out at their dairy cattle grazing right where Park School is today. Mt. Tamalpais is covered in snow. Unidentified photographer. Courtesy Lucretia Little History Room, Mill Valley Public Library, contributed by Lucretia Little and Philip J. Planert.

The Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts, precursor of the Marin Theatre Company, owes its origin to a Swiss native named Salomon Lieberman, affectionately known as Sali.

As a youth in Zurich Sali (1912-1982)—whose family had emigrated from Russia to Switzerland to escape anti-Jewish pogroms—was drawn to the theater, but his father insisted he go to trade school, where he learned upholstery. Throughout his training, he kept his theater dreams intact. In the early 1930s he joined Zurich’s repertory theater, the Schauspielhaus, as a set dresser. He briefly worked with Bertolt Brecht, became involved in filmmaking, and learned about the business of producing while scouting locations, locating props and trouble-shooting for Praesens Films, Switzerland’s largest movie company. At Praesens he met Jean Clark, a shy American working on her Ph.D. in German at the University of Zurich. They married in 1940 and had two children, Stephen and Margot.

In 1945, the family moved to the United States, traveling on a repatriation ship packed with refugees. They settled in Hollywood, where Sali became part of a literary circle that included Brecht. He landed a job on the set of Arch of Triumph, a wartime romance written by Erich Maria Remarque, but barely began when a strike by the set decorators represented by the Conference of Studio Unions was called. The strike and subsequent lockout lasted 14 months. Sali’s only bright spot was spending Sunday evenings at Brecht’s house in Santa Monica, where intellectual and creative spirits gathered to talk theater—what it is, what it should be, and what it should mean. Sali listened and learned.

By the time the strike ended, Sali was broke. Disenchanted with Hollywood and uninterested in Broadway, he moved the family north. He worked as an upholsterer for big hotels in San Francisco and affiliated with the Labor Theater. The Liebermans then settled in Mill Valley, where Sali continued his dedication to cultural arts while earning his living as an upholsterer.

By Ivan Poutiatine

The First 20 Years of the Marin Theatre Company


Above: Golf Clubhouse interior during a MVCPA production. Courtesy Marin Theatre Company.
In 1966, recognizing that Mill Valley Mayor Albert E. White had an interest in the arts, Sali gathered 35 Marin County theater lovers at Dr. White’s house to discuss the formation of a performing arts organization. They called it Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts, MVCPA for short, and launched the organization with a board of directors including local little theater performers Helen Dreyfus, Arne Anderson, Maxine White, and Irene Pritzker. In its first year, MVCPA launched a series of chamber music concerts, a guest artist film series, and theater productions. The venue was the Mill Valley Golf Clubhouse at 276 Buena Vista Avenue. Pianist Julian White was the first to perform, followed by lutenist Stanley Buetens. The company’s first play was *The Physicists*, a satiric drama by the Swiss writer Frederich Durrenmatt, directed by Martin Ponch. *Epitaph For George Dillon* by John Osborne and *Rape of the Belt* by Ben W. Levy followed. Filmmaker John Korty showed his feature *The Crazy Quilt* and two short films. MVCPA screened Marlin Johnson’s documentary on the American Nazi Party, *The Time of the World*; and Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog*, examining Nazi concentration camps. All these events were produced by Sali Lieberman.

As a performance space, the multi-purpose room in the Clubhouse left much to be desired. The audience sat in rows of folding chairs perched on portable risers, and there was heavy competition for the room’s use. Despite those shortcomings, a citizen recalled, “It was great to have this kind of theater in a small town, and all of us happily went, in the otherwise tumultuous years of the Vietnam War.”

Twenty consecutive seasons were produced in the Clubhouse, and at the end of each evening, Sali Lieberman was the last person to leave, having folded up the chairs, put away the risers, and swept out the room.

**Expansion** In 1968, the company incorporated as a nonprofit organization, adding theater workshops, a poetry reading, some innovative new films, dance, and acting and stagecraft classes. Attendance was spotty; a veteran of the period noted that “a full house at the Golf Clubhouse was 99 faithful souls, but often we were lucky to have 30 or 40 curious theater-goers.” Sali’s daughter Margot remembers an audience of six at one performance.

The next year, 1969, the company produced Dale Wasserman’s stage adaptation of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, directed by Robin Jackson. In 1963 the play, starring Kirk Douglas, had bombed in New York, but the MVCPA production drew packed houses. A young stage director named Lee Sankowich saw it and arranged to take it to the Little Fox Theater in San Francisco, where it ran for five and a half years, the longest running drama in Bay Area history. Many years later, Sankowich served a long term as Artistic Director of the Marin Theatre Company.

In 1970, MVCPA inaugurated a children’s theater program and a year later produced *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a musical by Gian-Carlo Menotti. (It cost $477 and garnered gross receipts of $802.50, records show.) Although multi-disciplinary arts programming continued, the resident amateur community theater remained the main focus of activity. When the Mill Valley Film Festival asked for start-up support, MVCPA responded with $500, a large donation considering its resources. The festival is now acknowledged as one of the major film festivals in the country.

During the next few seasons, MVCPA produced Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*, and *The Rainmaker* by Richard Nash. Sali had great instincts for what made good theater, which along with his humanist values and political convictions, informed the selection of plays. He also enjoyed comedy. In 1974 (the year he became an American citizen), the company produced the Gershwin brothers’ musical *Oh Kay!* (book by Guy Bolton and P.G. Wodehouse), as well as *The World of Art Hoppe*, a new play based on the writings of the *Chronicle* columnist, and Noel Coward’s timeless *Blithe Spirit*.

**The Fire** Disaster struck at 3:53 a.m. on November 11, 1975, when the Golf Clubhouse was destroyed by fire. The previous year the city had spent several thousands of dollars to repair the building’s wiring so that MVCPA could continue producing there. Nevertheless, it was thought that faulty wiring was the cause. The company received many offers of costumes, lights and other equipment from Marin County theater groups and survived, barely, by presenting a few productions in other venues.


At a City Council meeting to discuss the future of the burned-out structure, Sali Lieberman said, “It’s a little hard for me to talk about it. It’s as if my own home went down.” Despite suggestions that a completely new structure be considered, the councilmembers elected to rebuild at a cost of $232,000. Meanwhile, MVCPA staged productions in 1976 at Edna McGuire School and Marin Veterans Auditorium.

Up until then, city officials hadn’t given MVCPA any real support, and many felt they didn’t want them in the Clubhouse at all. Will Marchetti recalled that this all changed with a second production of The Rainmaker in 1977. “It put us on the map,” he said. “The Golf Clubhouse was a tough space. But we finally convinced the city that the arts were essential. We produced a really fine Rainmaker, and that made them take notice. The mayor came, and the councilmembers came, and then we were taken seriously.”

The 1976-77 season was the first to offer season tickets. For $30, one could see six shows plus accompanying festivities. Each season now included an original work, which was consistent with a policy of showcasing emerging playwrights. As for Sali’s ideal—to present a wide variety of performing arts—it soon became clear that that was too big a meal for MVCPA to digest. Even a volunteer community theater needs to earn money to stay alive, so Sali agreed that survival required concentration on making theater that would bring people in the door.

In 1978 California passed Proposition 13, which imposed a limit on real property taxes, and Mill Valley instituted a $200/year use fee for use of the Clubhouse. MVCPA found it increasingly difficult to schedule rehearsal and show times. The facility had become very popular for service organizations’ dinners, parties, retirement events, and wedding receptions, and the city made no exemption from the use fee for a nonprofit theater company. In 1979, the City Council voted to endorse the company but stated that this did not imply any financial support (it would have been illegal to grant taxpayer money to a private entity). Led by the company, $8,000 was raised to offset Golf Clubhouse user fees and help with the maintenance of the building. A subscription drive attracted 350 subscribers. MVCPA established an advisory council, providing advice and counsel from past board members and community leaders. Progress continued with the emergence of the MVCPA School for Theater Arts, holding classes at Edna McGuire School. The Center got its first office, located over Davood’s Restaurant on Miller Avenue (now D’Angelo’s), with Sali Lieberman as the first Artistic and Managing Director.

Moving On Productions in 1980 included Arthur Miller’s A View From the Bridge and The Crucible, and Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest. After their Mill Valley runs, Bridge and Earnest were presented at San Rafael High School, and Crucible was presented in San Anselmo, thanks to a grant from the Beryl Buck Trust. By this time, MVCPA had grown and developed to the point that the Golf Clubhouse was completely inadequate. The sentiment of the board of directors was to seek a new and permanent home for the company. A search committee was formed to identify the best existing site.

In 1981, MVCPA launched a successful capital campaign to raise $3.2 million to purchase The Port, originally the Purity supermarket, then occupied by a deli, Mama’s Royal Café, a tropical fish store, and a host of hippie boutiques. The company received a matching grant of $842,500, and led by ex-mayors Dick Jessup and myself, the Building Committee retained the firms of Archer-Rawicz, architects, and Leonard Auerbach, theater consultants, to design a new theater. MVCPA’s first Three Year Plan, funded by a grant from the San Francisco Foundation, was completed in 1981.

Will Marchetti joined the Center as its second Artistic Director, succeeding Sali, who remained as Managing Director. Will continued in the post until 1983, when he went to Broadway to star in Sam Shepard’s Fool for Love. He was replaced by Karl Rawicz. (Marchetti returned as Artistic Director in 1986 and served until 1990.)
The Passing of the Founder  In February of 1982 Sali Lieberman celebrated his 70th birthday at the Golf Clubhouse. The occasion also honored MVCPA’s 15th anniversary of operation. It was Sali’s last hurrah. In October he died of cancer, and a great sadness descended on the company and its board.

“I think theater defined his life and was a source of immense personal satisfaction,” his son, Steve, said recently. “That was his passion and he devoted himself to it. He probably did not make a balance with work and family—the theater was where he wanted to be, that’s where his heart was. He would eat a quick dinner with the family and he’d be gone four or five nights a week. It was hard on our mother, who was a very shy person. He was the extrovert.”

Margot recalls, “He was very warmhearted and loving. We went skiing together as a family and on camping trips, but during regular life he was interested mostly in the theater. He hated the upholstery business. So I don’t feel bad that he spent that time away from the family. I like the fact that he did something he loved to do.”

Harry Perlis, who’d acted in many productions, stepped in as Managing Director. After a few intensive weeks on the job, he remarked that the place was a pressure cooker. The annual budget had grown to $93,000, and 373 people subscribed to the season. In order to raise funds, the board adopted a system of membership, attracting over 600 members, who paid annual “dues” which did not include tickets. Members were corporate share-holders and had the right to elect the company’s management at the annual meeting of the board of directors. It soon became clear that this was disruptive and inconsistent with good governance. The membership program was phased out in favor of concentration on season ticket subscriptions and a Group Sales Program.

Going Professional  By 1984, the board was contemplating the possibility of transitioning from an amateur, “do-it-yourself” community theater to a professional company. There was heated debate among those who felt that the time had come to “go professional” and live with the ensuing problems of labor/management and trade unions, and those who preferred the simpler, amateur “for the love of the art” organization that Sali Lieberman had strongly favored. At a meeting at the San Francisco Foundation, John Kreidler, Program Officer for the Arts, told MVCPA that he was fully aware that the board was sitting on the fence. He encouraged us to make up our minds, making it clear that whatever we decided, the Foundation would support us at the appropriate level.

This was all that was needed. The board decided that MVCPA would change its name to Marin Theatre Company, reflecting growth from a community theater to a regional company, with the goal of raising the quality of productions and reaching a broader audience. There seemed to be wide appreciation for the shortened moniker, and actors were paid for the first time.

The board had accepted the building committee’s recommendation to acquire The Port property from the Shapiro family, and the San Francisco Foundation was as good as its word, announcing a $640,000 grant to acquire the property and commence construction. At the same time, the board launched a $2.2 million capital building campaign. In 1984, earned revenue equaled 24% of total income. Of the remaining 76% of total income (unearned revenue), the San Francisco Foundation provided about 70% through annual support of the operating fund. Only about 6% of unearned revenue came from individual gifts.

Marin Theatre Company was one of very few theaters in California to be selected by the Foundation for the Extension and Development of the American Professional Theatre (FEDAPT) to participate in its Management Assistance Program. Based in New York, FEDAPT consultants worked with staff and board for six months to provide an evaluation of current operations and long-range objectives.

Construction on the new facility at 397 Miller Avenue commenced in 1985, and by August of the same year, the first of two performing spaces opened, the 99-seat Sali Lieberman Studio Theatre. The limited number of seats allowed MTC to workshop new scripts, give staged readings, produce children’s shows, and experiment, all without deferring to Actors’ Equity.

Although the capital campaign by this time had raised $291,000, it was not enough. The volunteer spirit that had set the Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts on its path was still vibrant. Members of the board, their friends, and community-minded volunteers collected on weekends to build stud partitions, climb on scaffolding, hang and finish sheetrock, and paint walls. After more than 70 productions, MTC said goodbye to the Mill Valley Golf Clubhouse.

The newly renamed company opened its 20th season in 1986 with Homesteaders by Nina Shengold, directed by JD Trow. The Chronicle pink section review awarded it “the little man jumping out of his seat.” By the following September the 250-seat main stage theater and on-site administrative offices were inaugurated, completing the $3.2 million facility. The venue was named the Herb & Grace Boyer Main Stage Theatre, for the project’s biggest contributor. Jean, Steve, and Margot Lieberman attended the grand opening.

Throughout its history, the Mill Valley Center for the Performing Arts always sought to create the “artistic experience”—that is, the experience of being profoundly moved by a piece of art. That is culture, and that is what we achieved.
How the Daijogos Came to Mill Valley

BY STEVE MCNAMARA

If you were told that one of the most celebrated teachers in Marin is a small, gentle, cheerful Mill Valley woman noted for teaching the principles of martial arts to her kindergarten classes for 32 years, and still does it at age 79, you might scratch your head in disbelief.

Unless you already knew about Janet Daijogo.*

Then it might not surprise you, either, to learn that in 1942, at age five, she was rendered speechless with fear for two and a half hours after Military Police banged on the door of her home in Pescadero to send her and her family to a concentration camp... and that 40 years later she earned two black belts in Aikido, dispatching much larger male attackers.

Between then and now there was a long series of adventures and accomplishments. Chief among them were a Milken Educator Award in 1990 and induction into the Marin Women’s Hall of Fame in 1996. And from Janet’s parents’ perspective, there was an even bigger accomplishment: building with her late husband Sam a hillside home in Mill Valley.

UPROOTING | In 1942 the U.S. Government rounded up 110,000 Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast—though not, bizarrely, the 157,000 living in Hawaii. The stateside Japanese-Americans were incarcerated in 10 remote western locations. The government called them “relocation camps.” But “relocation” is what happens when you move to a job in a new city. These camps were tar-papered barracks surrounded by barbed-wire fences and guard towers manned by soldiers who once shot and killed a man. It is now clear that they were concentration camps.

*Pronounced Didoğō
Among the 8,000 mostly American citizens held at the camp in Topaz were Mutsumi Janet Muneno, her mother and father, who were both U.S. citizens and graduates of Cal Berkeley, her sister Sharon, and brothers Hito and Ronald, who was born in camp. Her parents had farmed sugar peas near Pescadero until that day in 1942. The soldiers searched the house and within days sent them to barracks in the dusty, windy desert of central Utah.

Left behind was the farmland they leased and Janet's brown puppy. Never left behind was the fear that gripped Janet on the day the MPs banged on the door. To this day she is rattled when there is a knock at her door, even if she has seen a friend coming up the walk on a planned visit: "I think it's a body imprint from back then."

The two years at Topaz were endured. In that grim desert setting the ever-industrious Japanese-Americans set up a well-functioning village with self-governance, schools, social groups, arts projects and sports teams. A big factor was the Japanese tradition of “gaman,” which means to cope with the seemingly unendurable with patience and dignity.

The camps were closed in 1945. It took another 43 years for the U.S. Government to officially apologize and grant each surviving victim $20,000. At that point Janet's mother, who had never complained, wept and told Janet, "No amount of money could pay for the humiliation." She never again spoke of the subject. Janet, as a child at camp, didn't process the situation until as a Cal student she read a book about the subject and was outraged. Still, she was silent about it until as a teacher she attended a self-esteem conference. "I got up and started talking about camp. The tears started flowing and I cried and yelled. Those buried feelings of rage finally, viscerally came out and exploded." Then it was over.

After Topaz the family moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, where her father taught Japanese to Navy personnel at Oklahoma A & M. After a year, it was on to Japan where her father translated at an Army base for nine years and Janet lived the life of an Army brat. Outside the base was Japan, but on the base Caucasians surrounded them; Janet never learned to speak Japanese. A friend later described her as "over-colonized." Her daughter Tane says she is a "banana—yellow on the outside, white on the inside." Janet insists she was shy, though she concedes that she was both a cheerleader and president of the senior class.

**SAM** Back in the States she was admitted to Cal and had a jolt: "I was not prepared. Army brats do not get a good education—the teachers are young people who come and go all the time." Making it worse was the fact her parents had insisted she live with an aunt in Richmond and commute to Cal classes. "I'm not cut out to live in isolation. As a friend said, I'm happier in a beehive. Riding that bus up San Pablo Avenue every day, having no social life. It was very dreary." For the second semester she convinced her parents to let her move to a dorm.

Janet had been seeing Fred Bremerman, a friend from high school in Japan who now lived with his parents in Mountain View. Visiting him there one weekend she met his friend Sam Daijogo, an art school student whose parents lived in Belvedere, where his father was a gardener and his mother a housekeeper. "I thought this guy was really funny. He was big; I think he weighed 210 pounds in high school, about 180 later on. His friends were all the popular guys from Tam High and he had been co-captain of the football team by his junior year."

By Janet's sophomore year at Cal, Fred was with the Army in Korea. Sam stepped in and won Janet's trust, even though "on our second date he introduced me as Alice, which was a minus. I found out later Alice was somebody he had dated from Stockton." Wrong name aside, it was clear to Janet and Sam that a wedding was in the works.

Sam's family, too, had been sent to a concentration camp, the one at Tule Lake, California, but he processed it differently. "Sam was a very optimistic, very authentic kind of person," Janet says. "He was the real deal. He was direct and he wasn't afraid. Sam was up there at Tule Lake and he said it was fun. I said, 'Fun? I was scared the entire time I was there.' He said, 'No, we used to soap our bellies up with soap and slide along the smooth concrete floors.' For him it was a great time to hang out with your little friends, play with marbles and slingshots. So that was a very different way of dealing with stuff. He didn't overthink that much; he didn't manufacture anxieties."

After graduation, they married and embarked on the professional journeys that would carry them forward—for Janet as a teacher to this day, and for Sam as a commercial artist until cancer took him in 1999. Sam was well known for his highly detailed pen and ink drawings of San Francisco scenes and a BART map.
Friends remember Sam with great fondness. Film director John Korty and his wife often swapped dinner parties. “Sam was as charming and fun to be around as Janet. He had a great laugh; they were a wonderful couple, and she was a great cook.”

Sam was very engaging in social situations and, Janet told an interviewer, “He was a really good dancer. He liked to polka and waltz.” But his main focus was his family. “He wasn’t exactly a hermit; but when he went for a bike ride up the mountain, which he did almost daily after he sort of semi-retired, his definition of a good day on the mountain was he didn’t meet anybody. So he was very happy in a circumscribed small area. He understood his own power. He understood who he was, and he was okay with that.”

Back at the time after Janet and Sam married, she taught in public schools in San Francisco and the San Diego area, where they lived for four and a half years, with a one year interruption while they took an adventure trip to Japan. Sam landed a job at one of Tokyo’s best commercial art agencies while Janet taught part-time at Nishimachi International School.

Despite their heritage, they were very much two Americans in a foreign land. Sam had picked up some Japanese from his parents, but it was an antiquated Hiroshima-ben country dialect that sent his colleagues into gales of laughter when he spoke—so they asked him to trot it out at social events. Janet didn’t speak Japanese, which had an unintended benefit for Sam. Since Janet was silent at social gatherings, Sam’s friends praised him constantly for having such a nicely retiring and respectful wife.

**HOUSE ON THE HILL** | In 1963, back in the States after their Japan year, they gravitated to Mill Valley, renting an apartment above Strawberry Village shopping center while they assembled money to buy a place. First they scraped together $10,000 for a steep hillside lot on Tamalpais Avenue; then a bank loan enabled them to get started. Designed by Al Klyce, the house was built by Art Sestak, who finished the job in an amazing four months. The cost was $32,000, so the total cost of an architect-designed Mill Valley hillside home of 2,000 square feet was $42,000. It was a family project. Janet and Sam pitched in during construction, staining beams and helping where they could. Parents came on weekends, bringing plants for the hillside.

For Janet and Sam it was a happy event; for their parents it was much more than that. Janet told an oral historian from Berkeley, “It had much more charge for my parents and Sam’s parents than it did for us. It wasn’t just a little house, or a tract house or something. It was a unique house, architect-designed, it had flair to it, it had peaked roofs. So it was beyond just a shelter. It was something that was more the American dream.

“So it meant something huge to them, ‘Look, these children have arrived!’ Something that they could never have had, or believed could be happening, given where they came from. It seemed natural to us. But to them it was like a little miracle. I think every relative in the California area had to come to Mill Valley and see this unusual home. It’s the house Sam died in and the house our daughter Maki and her husband, son, and daughter live in now.”

It was a unique house...it was beyond just a shelter. It was something that was more the American dream.
TEACHING AND AIKIDO  

In 1966 with daughters Tane, two and a half, and Maki, one year, Janet told Sam that just being a mom wasn’t doing it for her; she missed the sense of purpose and personal value that comes from work. She went to work at the Marin Child Development Center for emotionally disturbed children, run by the redoubtable Beverly Bastian of Belvedere. She worked half a day while the girls were tended by Sam’s mother, who lived just up the road.

In 1977 Janet enrolled her daughters in Aikido classes at Tamalpais Dojo. A friend had introduced Janet to the idea, but she thought she was too old, so she took her daughters. “They trained for a year or so as I watched. One day I just got on the mat. There was something about my foot touching that mat that just called me. It was a magnetic draw. I loved it; I had this profound sense that I had to do it even though I was scared. I was 40 when I started, which is very old for starting that kind of journey, because it is very physical and I was not athletic.

“Aikido changed my life. I was obsessed. It’s so pervasive in my life that sometimes I’m not even sure how to articulate it. I trained five and six days a week, an hour or two hours. Sam got very mad at one point. Training was at dinnertime and he would be making dinner for the girls. He was getting madder. Then one day he said, ‘God dammit, I’m going to go down there and see what’s so much fun.’ So he got on the mat and he could do it immediately. He was like a year ahead of me; it made me furious. He had been good at football and had been in the Marine Reserves. He just got it. He signed up and we did it together. He was really good at it.”

Janet is less than five feet tall, and slim. How could she deal with big guys attacking her on the mat?

“Aikido isn’t like wrestling or football that rely on size and strength. You can do the right moves and put yourself in position in relation to your opponent that puts you at an advantage. You need to do some scary things, like entering into an attack when normally you would like to withdraw or run away. It means being able to get near that person’s center, being able to enter. Those are scary concepts for people who are shy, never mind small size or being an introverted person, which I tend to be.”

After five years on the mat she won a coveted black belt, then a second degree black belt. How does she relate this to being overcome by fear 40 years earlier when MPs banged on the door?

She says, “Until I was eight or nine years old, I read a lot of fairy tales. There’s always an evil and a good and the helpless person who meets the right people and turns it around. Aikido fits into that. Also, I’ve always been fascinated by butterflies. I deeply believe in metamorphosis. I believe you can change. Things in nature change so this change can happen in me. Aikido was the perfect metaphor for the journey. You learn to pay attention to the energy of the attack, the energy of how to blend.”

In 1984 Janet landed a job teaching kindergarten at Marin Country Day School. After the first semester she found herself chatting with Kathleen Jackson, head of the middle and lower school. Janet mentioned her immersion in Aikido and its philosophy. Kathleen remembers saying, “You should teach it here.”

Wasn’t that a bit weird, teaching a martial art to kindergartners?

Says Kathleen today: “I was really okay with it, not that I had ever done it. If Janet had been 21 and had been doing all the things that young people were doing in those days, probably it would not have happened. But I knew who she was and I knew that if it was important to her, it was something that should be done. To be centered, to be in the now—I felt that was an important thing. You don’t just learn through your brain, you learn through your body, too. Aikido is embracing somebody else’s energy. You work with somebody’s energy, not against their energy. That’s what she does with everybody, children and adults.”

Janet’s approach to learning had been honed during her 18 years with emotionally disabled children. “I look beyond curriculum and I really care. I’m just interested in seeing what’s up in the psyche and the soul. I love content and stuff but I really don’t care what it is. The content for me is only the bridge to the child. If you can move the heart of the child and can connect with them, then they can learn anything. That’s my simple philosophy.”

What Janet introduced to the children was not combat, but the five principles of Aikido, all tied together. Janet called them Energy Time and for about 30 minutes at the start of three school days the students do exercises in Centering, Grounding, Blending, Relaxation and Extension of Energy. The children learn that their body center is two finger widths below their belly button and if you focus on that place it will center you. The first greeting of the school day is “Center as You Enter.” At the end it is, “Breathe as You Leave,” or just “relax.” The overriding concept is that to relate to other people and situations in a skillful manner, you must first be at peace with yourself.

John Hutchinson, an old friend of Janet’s and former colleague, describes her this way: “What makes Janet so special is the fact that she treats and loves each child as an individual. Each kid is special; she doesn’t have the attitude that the kid has to fit into her way of thinking. She understands that each child is different. She’s a good listener.”

And how would Janet describe herself? “I’m small, with a bigger spirit than my body. I have a lot of curiosity. And a lot of competitiveness—competitiveness with myself. Because I’m mature now I’m beginning to understand there is wisdom in quietness. I think there is strength in that. I am a person who asks these two questions: How are you a blessing in my life? How may I be a blessing in your life?”

In 1984, as the word about Energy Time spread from Janet’s class to the other two kindergarten classes, their teachers said, “Hey, what about us?” And so Energy Time mushroomed, first to the other kindergarten classes, then to first and second grades, then third grade, and then it blended into the upper grades as Mindfulness Training and other social-emotional learning approaches.

At Marin Country Day School, learning to center yourself and care for others is now embedded in all nine grades, 32 years after the school met the unlikely Aikido obsession of Janet Daijogo.

Veteran journalist Steve McNamara was owner, editor, and publisher of the Pacific Sun for 38 years, until 2004. He is a 2010 recipient of a Milkey Award for Contributions to the Community. He and his wife Kay live in Mill Valley.

Janet Daijogo’s and other oral histories can be found in the Lucretia Little History Room at the Mill Valley Library. A selection is also available online at millvalleylibrary.net/historyroom.
he story of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, now celebrating its 60th year, is as much about the celebration of a community as it is about art. One might say that art is an expression of the special way this place makes us feel.

In the late 1950s Mill Valley was a model small, suburban town. Its downtown was made up primarily of resident-serving businesses, from Mayer’s Men’s and Women’s Department Store to Varney’s Hardware. As a boy, I found Bennett’s Variety Store especially exciting. The glass candy counters just in the front door offered sparkling bins of candy corn and lemon drops that sold for 25 cents a pound. Heading off to a Saturday matinée double feature next door at the Sequoia Theater, with a small white bag holding 10 cents’ worth, was as close as a kid can get to heaven on earth.

Mill Valley was a uniquely creative place. Homes were highly affordable, drawing many artists and bohemians. Folks moved here for the sense of community, the spiritual beauty of Mt. Tam, and the wealth of nature. The creative arts, visual and performing, flourished, capturing the joy and beauty of the surroundings.

THE 1950s The beginning of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival—the first “Mill Valley Harvest Festival”—was held October 25-November 2, 1957. It was an ambitious nine-day community celebration in Lytton Square as well as a small section of Locust Avenue. Sponsored by the MV Chamber of Commerce Merchants Committee, it was conceived as a harvest and Halloween party. Festivities featured a fashion show, with styles primarily offered by Mayer’s, a costume parade, and elaborate sidewalk and window box displays of fall flowers and foliage, including cornstalks, pumpkins and scarecrows. Food and other concession booths filled the square in front of the Greyhound Bus Depot. Live entertainment was a combination of contemporary Americana with the area’s Mexican heritage. There were traditional Hispanic dances and Mexican music, square dancing, street dancing, strolling minstrels, clowns, and a ventriloquist. As a special presentation, more than 60 Marin artists organized an exhibit of their paintings in 80 storefront displays. These artworks were designed to bring additional color to the festive decorations. Prizes of $25, $15, and $10 were awarded to the most popular works, as voted by festival attendees.

The next year, 1958, the event was shortened to four days. Still an ambitious undertaking, it took place Oct. 30-Nov. 2, and was again held in Lytton Square. Sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and Mill Valley merchants, the entertainment level was expanded. The Fall Fashion Show returned and Hawaiian, Scandinavian, and Israeli folk dancers were added. Activities also included a Halloween parade, puppet show, ju-jitsu demonstrations, free kiddles’ show at the Sequoia Theatre, tricycle races and a hula hoop contest, as well as sidewalk food and game booths. A beauty pageant was added, complete with the crowning of Queen of the Festival at the Queen’s Ball in the American Legion Hall.

Mill Valley auto dealers and merchants made a last-minute request to close off Lytton Square for an auto show. This prompted an argument in the City Council, fraying tempers over downtown
parking and shopping issues. Happily, a compromise was found, and eventually the town's 12 dealerships exhibited 36 new models. Most notable were Larry Brink's new Lincolns and Mercurys from his showroom on East Blithedale. Larry had a great reputation in town, due to his fame as a past Chicago Bears football player.

With all this going on, art may have taken a back seat. Still, local artists exhibited over 100 paintings in stores, and the popularity poll and prizes were continued.

The festival returned in 1959 with a new name, “The Third Annual Fall Festival,” a three-day community event September 25-27. Again sponsored by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, it enjoyed a profound change in focus. Gone were the fashion and auto shows, and there was consciously more emphasis on art. The business window displays continued, with the addition of a gallery exhibit at the R&R Garage on Corte Madera Ave., and a special presentation of art and music in El Paseo. Pottery and other art process demonstrations were staged in Lytton Square, along with game booths sponsored by civic groups. There was an emphasis on elaborate sidewalk floral displays. The entertainment included a Dixieland band, banjo and guitar folk music, classical accordion, cello and piano, Elizabethan music, street dancing, and square dancing. Free kiddie movies at the Sequoia, marionettes, and children’s games and contests were presented, as well as the coronation ball for the Festival Queen and the selection of “Miss Artists Model.” An editorial headline of the day stated: “Festival has the right to develop into a community arts demonstration of rising importance on the Pacific Coast.”

THE 1960s The first year of the new decade saw the festival’s return as “Mill Valley Fall Festival Days.” The 1960 Festival was celebrated in conjunction with the city’s 60th Anniversary. During this three-day September event, art became the main attraction, with more than 200 paintings by local artists exhibited in merchant windows. Official judging was added to the public balloting. For the first time, a sidewalk arts and crafts exhibition in Lytton Square featured displays of paintings, photographs, serigraphs, mosaics, jewelry, pottery, and sculpture.

The festival maintained something of a carnival atmosphere, with cable car transportation and concession booths run by civic and nonprofit groups. Music, puppets, teen dances, a coronation ball and anniversary ceremonies capped the celebration. The next year, the event faced its biggest challenge. In the eleventh hour of August, 1961, the Mill Valley Junior Chamber announced they weren’t up to sponsoring and coordinating another festival. The Mill Valley Record editorial called for “some group to carry on and not let the burgeoning art event fall by the wayside.” By the end of that month, a new community committee of artists’ groups, including the Outdoor Art Club and the Marin Society of Artists, joined forces with the Jaycees and the American Association of University Women to meet the challenge. The city donated $400 towards the festival, which took place under its current name, “The Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival,” on October 14 and 15. Artists and their art were truly established as the main focus—not dart throwing and hot dog stands—during this renaissance year. The festival’s goal of “cultural rather than carnival” redefined the event as a town-wide gallery for professional and amateur artists and craftsmen. Three hundred artists were personally invited, and an open invitation was extended to all Bay Area artists. The end result was 61 artists displaying 100 paintings in store windows, and another 64 artists exhibiting 192 paintings on pegboards in the parking lot behind the Depot. El Paseo showcased an additional group of Mill Valley artists and craftsmen, and the Outdoor Art Club hosted artists’ demos in the patio, while local musicians of professional caliber performed. This “adult” entertainment included ballet, classical guitar, and recorder, folk singers, and dance exhibitions.

The official founding of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival took place in the following year, 1962, when it was incorporated under its current name as a nonprofit service organization. The new organization’s goal was to provide a venue that would support art in the Mill Valley Community. The festival was moved to its current location in Old Mill Park and followed the presentation guidelines as established the year before. The format—individual artists showing multiple pieces of their work in a collective show—became the defining structure. Music by local performers enhanced and gave balance to the event and complemented the art.

From this point the festival’s future was reasonably secure. It would grow and prosper over the next decades. Today, it continues to be a source of pride and inspiration for the Mill Valley community even though the small town that was a haven for artists and the celebration of a bohemian lifestyle is a thing of the past. A new Mill Valley populace, with great wealth, has emerged. Older artists have been forced out by the high cost of living, and a younger generation of artists cannot afford to live here.

Yet Mill Valley remains a community that honors the arts, in part because of the Fall Arts Festival and the spirit it engenders. The festival continues to evolve and flourish. During recent years, it has replaced local artists with others from all over the country (although 50 percent hail from the Bay Area). This new demographic provides the opportunity to represent a broader geographic base. Although the event today may not realize the founders’ original goal of promoting and supporting local arts, it is still an important vehicle for showcasing exceptional creative arts in all media. It is a treasured local event, and Mill Valleyans old and new turn out in droves to enjoy two days of art, music, children’s activities, the chance to connect with old friends and make new ones.

The festival is designed, planned, and produced by a volunteer committee composed of local artists and involved residents. They work alongside a dedicated Board of Directors who maintain the financial stability of the organization. As it was 60 years ago, the festival is the direct result of the time, energy, and commitment of dedicated volunteers. It continues to be a great source of pride for all who continue its legacy.

The 2016 Fall Arts Festival will be held on Saturday and Sunday, September 17 and 18, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Old Mill Park. For information, go to mvfaf.org.

Thanks to Susan Gilmour, whose notes provided much of the historic detail for this piece. Steve Bajor is a Native Mill Valleyean. He has made a career of creating and producing community cultural events. Executive Director of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival for nine years, Steve received Mill Valley's Milley Award for Contributions to the Arts Community in 2009.
When my husband John and I began our search in 1959 for either a home or a building site in Mill Valley, we told realtors that we wanted to have a view of “that mountain.” One cynic said: “What, that old cliché?” But we persisted, and for 55 years I have watched the shifting lights and shadows, approaching rains, occasional snow, coppery sunsets, and summer fog billowing across Panoramic Ridge and Mt. Tamalpais. Every view of Mt. Tam is beautiful. Harold Gilliam, environmental journalist with the San Francisco Chronicle for many years, once recalled his distant view from his window in International House as a student in Berkeley. From his vantage point, he could look across the “sun-spangled Bay to the swinging arcs of the great bridge... and see the green hills of Marin and the long mystic ridge of Tamalpais rising like Vesuvius above the Bay of Naples.”

Several decades would pass before I would appreciate the complexity of the lands within my view. Certainly it is more than a mountain! Beginning in the southwest and moving from left to right, my view encompasses the ridges above Tennessee Valley, a ranch in the 1960s before being incorporated into the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA); Homestead Hill and Four Corners, where the lands of Homestead Valley Land Trust meet GGNRA lands; Mt. Tamalpais State Park to the west beyond Mountain Home; Mill Valley Open Space tucked between Edgewood and Cascade; Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) occupying most of Mt. Tam in the center of my view, with an extension of State Park along East Ridgecrest Blvd. to Mt. Tam’s East Peak; and to the far right, ridges and spurs of Mt. Tam known collectively as North Ridge, now owned and managed by Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD) as Blithedale Summit and Camino Alto Open Space Preserves, two of the County’s 34 preserves. Out of view but not far beyond are Muir Woods National Monument (GGNRA-managed), Stinson Beach (GGNRA,) and Bolinas Lagoon (MCOSD).

In the past, not all the lands within view had those names. Some were still privately owned. Those that were public dated from consolidation of the water district in 1912 and authorization of Muir Woods as a National Monument in 1908, both the handiwork of William Kent. Mt. Tam State Park had been established in 1928, but in 1960, it was just one-third its current size. As we settled into our new house overlooking Boyle Park, the town, and “our view” in 1960, I was like many who walk our trails—I didn’t have a clue as to who owned them or how lands had been acquired for the public. History happens while you are busy living your life, and that is how I would characterize the 1960s and 1970s—two decades that launched an “Environmental Movement,” which, together with the marches from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, would define the 20th century. Years would go by before I would circle back and fully appreciate the history that was taking place under my nose.

CONSERVATION in MILL VALLEY, 1960s-1970s Marin County in the early sixties was primed for more development: Freeways would span the county from south to north and east to west; Richardson Bay had just escaped a 900-acre fill and development, but Bolinas Lagoon might become a huge aquatic resort; the West Marin General Plan envisioned a new community of 150,000 on the shores of Tomales Bay; and development was planned to fill what we now call Bothin Marsh.

Driven by such threats, the conservation movement in Marin, fostered largely by the Sierra Club (founded 1892) and Marin Conservation League (MCL), was spurred into action. The MCL had been founded in 1934 by four women who could see that the Golden Gate Bridge, then under construction, would open the flood gates to developers. They were determined to set aside Marin’s special lands before it was too late. Other organizations had important roles. The Tamalpais Conservation Club (1912)
focused on Mt. Tam; Marin Audubon Society was formed in 1957 to save Richardson Bay. The Environmental Forum of Marin joined them in 1973 to educate citizen-advocates.

Asked many years later how the county became so environmentally oriented, Supervisor Peter Behr responded: “Well, I think it started with the Marin Conservation League, way back when...” MCL was where I turned when I retired from a career in environmental planning in 1998. It was largely through the MCL lens that I retraced land conservation in the 1960s and 1970s, especially as it involved the lands in my view.

It is not surprising that Mill Valley was, and continues to be, home to many active conservationist-heroes, surrounded as it is by natural beauty and integrated into the ridges and canyons of Mt. Tam. The names of Marty Rosen, Doug Ferguson, and Huey Johnson are familiar to all who have seen the documentary Rebels with a Cause. Elizabeth Terwilliger would lead two generations of children and their parents out-of-doors and show them how to make a “V” for turkey vulture. Gracie Finn Wellman, born in 1904, the second from the last of 11 children in the Finn Family household—“Wildwood” on Miller Avenue—would become a charter member of MCL. She would spend almost five decades rallying the Board of Supervisors with her gang of “nodders and frowners” to vote for the environment. Peter Behr was undisputed leader in the pantheon, a champion of the environment throughout his decades in public service; in retirement, he served on the MCL Board (President 1986–1988).

And there were many more conservation activists in Mill Valley. Any such discussion would have to include Nello Kearney, who worked throughout the 1960s into the 1980s with MCL, the Outdoor Art Club, and The Nature Conservancy. From her home perched high on the Middle Ridge of Mt. Tam above Summit Ave., Nello could view the mountain in one direction and the lands known as North Ridge in the other. She was an avid supporter of open space and kept meticulous notes of her activities.

In 1965, almost 200 members of MCL resided in Mill Valley, enough to form a “Mill Valley Unit.” Nello was prime mover, and her oral history (Preservation of the Natural Environment of Marin County: A Dialogue in Document Records) provides a detailed account of the unit’s activities. The unit set its own agenda but also worked with the larger MCL organization. It is hard to choose among the League’s conservation activities in those decades, with Mill Valley as an epicenter, but several are directly relevant to the lands in my view.

**MARINCELLO and GGNRA** 1965 was the year of Marincello. Hearings before the County Planning Commission on the developer’s vision for a planned community of 30,000 on the Marin Headlands were impassioned on all sides. By March, after many meetings, MCL opposed the plan “as presented.” Peter Behr will be remembered for his eloquent opposition in a three-two vote of the Supervisors in November to approve the development. MCL and Sierra Club threatened a recall of the Supervisors in favor.

Behr pressed lawyers to appeal the decision, eventually with success. The Board majority shifted and denied the project, and Huey Johnson, then head of The Nature Conservancy’s West Coast office, would negotiate purchase of the 2,138-acre property in 1970. Along with the forts overlooking the Golden Gate, the Marincello site became the first significant Marin piece in the newly-authorized GGNRA in 1972. Over the next few years, the boundaries were expanded, and one piece at a time, the mosaic of GGNRA lands in Marin came together.

**MT. TAM STATE PARK EXPANSION** As early as 1903, William Kent envisioned a Mt. Tamalpais National Park. Mt. Tam State Park was finally passed by the legislature in 1927 due largely to the efforts of the Tamalpais Conservation Club. Kent donated the initial 204 acres in Steep Ravine, and, with other negotiated lands, the park began with 736 acres. Lands were added in steps and stages. By 1965, conservationists were looking to add the 2,150-acre Brazil-Souza ranch property below Muir Woods. MCL plunged in to support what became a politically and financially controversial campaign, and the Park gained the embattled land in 1968. Along with acquisition of property above Stinson Beach in 1971, the State Park tripled its size to the present 6,300 acres during this period.
**CRITERIA FOR USES of MT. TAM** In 1965, three developers proposed reviving the railroad to East Peak and constructing a Tamalpais Inn that would “rise from the foundations” of the former tavern. MCL vowed that the mountain should be preserved as a natural area and not become a playground. “Commercial use (like this) would open the door for destruction!” To avert this and future similar threats, MCL formed a “Mt. Tamalpais Study Committee.” By February 1966, the committee, led by Nello Kearney, had drafted a set of “Criteria for Decisions on Uses of Mount Tamalpais.” It began with a declaration that “Mt. Tamalpais shall be preserved and restored as a natural area,” and went on to list compatible and incompatible activities and physical developments compatible or necessary within that overriding precept. The list included recreation—from hiking and horseback riding, to picnicking and sketching—and did not allow unauthorized motor vehicles or motor boating (the Criteria predated mountain bicycles). All commercial activities were ruled out except for the traditional Mountain Play. The “Criteria” were widely distributed and adopted by the six communities that abut the mountain, the county, and 14 other organizations. Harold Gilliam wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1966: “The members of Marin Conservation League, backed solidly by a phalanx of conservation groups, are standing guard at the gates of Tamalpais!”

**MMWD WATERSHED PLAN** In a similar vein, the League recognized that MMWD lacked a plan for managing the watershed other than for production of water. Nello and a colleague, supported by the MMWD Board, met with U.C. Berkeley professors Robert Twiss and Tom Dickert in the College of Design to contract for a comprehensive assessment of District lands. Thus, the first Environmental Planning Study for the watershed was completed in 1971. MCL then persuaded MMWD to employ its first manager of the new Land Management Program. Pam Lloyd, MMWD Director (1974-1983) would help guide the expansion of that nascent program.

**NORTH RIDGE and MARIN COUNTY OPEN SPACE DISTRICT** The grassroots effort to acquire 1,100 acres collectively known as North Ridge is one of the triumphs of the Marin conservation story. It began with a public meeting co-sponsored by MCL and the Outdoor Art Club in late 1969. The resulting North Ridge Committee became the primary force behind the success of Measure A, which established the Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD) in 1972. Nello Kearney can be credited with pursuing the idea of a county open space district and for keeping the dream alive for many years.

North Ridge comprised at least eight developable properties, linking Mill Valley, Corte Madera, Larkspur and Kentfield. Most visible for Mill Valley was the 190-acre property of J. Alfred Rider, U.C.S.F. physician. It would take 15 years and many volunteers from Mill Valley, bolstered by Supervisor Al Aramburu, to acquire that property. Among them were Pam Lloyd, responsible for bringing in $500,000 in pledges to the North Ridge fund, Jean Barnard, Marvin Haiken, Doug Ferguson, Kent Simms, Dorie Bassett, Sandy Ross, Joan Boessenecker, Robert Capron, and others. It took the cooperative efforts of the three towns, the county, the contributions of thousands—and almost three decades—to acquire all the properties.

**THE FUTURE** Now that all the undeveloped lands in my view have been secured, it would be nice to relax and say: “That’s done!” But every observer over the past century has sounded the same alarm: Can the lands around Mill Valley—what we now call “One Tam”—be “preserved for all time, as far as possible, in their natural and wild state” as William Kent hoped in 1903? Each generation, it seems, asks the same question, and the answer always comes down to us. Each generation has a responsibility for preserving these lands for the next one.

Nona Dennis is a retired environmental consultant and educator. She is a founding teacher and Honorary Life Member of the Environmental Forum of Marin and Past-President of Marin Conservation League.

Author’s note: The preceding account draws from detailed histories of Mt. Tam and its conservation by Barry Spitz, *To Save a Mountain: The 100-year Battle for Mt. Tamalpais* (2012); Lincoln Fairley, *Mount Tamalpais—A History* (1987); L. Martin Griffin, *Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast* (1998); Amy Meyer, *New Guardians for the Golden Gate* (2006); and MCL records. So many stories lie behind those histories and so many people worked to make the stories come true!
Herman E. Hein devoted his life to that most ephemeral of arts, the garden, and what finer place to practice than Marin, with its natural beauty and diversity of native flora? Few today know his name, but when he died in 1964, Hein was considered “dean of Marin County landscape architects.” We live in the midst of his designs.

From boyhood, Herman Hein was in love with nature. His distinctive style of design took all of its clues from nature. A Hein garden, while carefully planned, blended in seamlessly with the surrounding environment.

Born in Kassel, Germany, in 1902, son of a respected jeweler, Hein was too young to serve in the German Army during WWI, but not too young to experience the hardships during and after. At 18, he left home to apprentice on a farm in northern Germany. He worked for the farmer, Herr Lohsen, and fell in love with his daughter, Katharina Margaretha (Kathe). In a 1964 article in the Independent-Journal, Kathe related how Herman, just arrived on her father’s farm, asked him for the opportunity to sow the field, something for which he had no experience. Herr Lohsen refused, saying it was too exacting a job for a novice, and, “lost crops were lost money,” but Herman persisted, and the farmer reluctantly agreed to give the boy a chance. “You know,” Kathe told reporter Mellon Hunton, “Herman sowed a perfect field. I don’t believe there was one seed lost. Those were Herman’s well-coordinated fingers.”

In 1923, Herman and Kathe immigrated to “the fruit and sun of California,” pursuing better living conditions and working opportunities. They lived in Geyserville with relatives for more than two years, working on a farm and learning English, acclimatizing themselves to their new land. They were married in 1924 in Geyserville. In 1925 Hein turned down a “real” job in San Francisco because, as he said later, “Anything that is not furthering my goal, my feeling for the natural law of beauty, would not be honest…. I must create, must gain momentum alongside nature.”

That year the Heins moved to 158 West Blithedale in Mill Valley, and Herman took up gardening as his living. His first tools, his wife said, “were his hands, powerful hands that could move a hundred-pound rock or gently snip fading petals from a rose.” Their children, Richard (1925-2010) and Linde (b. 1929), were born in Mill Valley. They attended Old Mill School and graduated from Tamalpais High.

For those who knew him in Marin County, Herman Hein retains an almost mythic status. Besides his genius for design, he was very much an individual. He always wore shorts (he owned lots of pairs) and sandals, and was tanned all over. He adored the sun. He would disappear at lunch, find a private spot on the mountain, take off his clothes, and sunbathe. Or he would be gone for hours and bring back small wood carvings and fresh solutions for garden design. If someone visited the Heins, he would freely give visitors plants Kathe was carefully cultivating in her lathhouse.
There were times she wouldn’t answer their phone because she was tired of explaining to clients where Herman might be. He would show up for his appointments, but perhaps not be right on time.

In 1942 he was asked to teach a Victory Garden class at the College of Marin. He attained his credentials during that summer at San Jose State College and thereafter taught evening classes to adoring students at the College of Marin and at the Marin Art and Garden Center in Ross, where he was a founding member. Anyone who strolls through the Art and Garden Center will experience Hein's original 1940s design aesthetic of niches with benches, natural driveways following gentle contours, water features, unique giant sequoia, and a sweeping entrance to the center grounds—still stunning after 70 years.

Incredibly, one of the first Dawn Redwoods (Metasequoia Glyptostroboides) in the western world was planted by Hein in his West Blithedale garden in 1948. The seeds were given to him by an acquaintance of his who was returning from an expedition to China by Harvard's Arnold Arboretum, following the discovery of the species.

Hein took on hundreds of residential projects, from modest middle-class gardens to landscapes for the wealthy, and public projects, charging the same hourly rate for everyone ($25 an hour is what associates remember). He was generous with his knowledge. He mentored younger landscape gardeners, such as the late Scott Mills, who considered him a master and emulated his design ethos to work with the native landscape, “enhancing nature rather than insulting it.”

His most elaborate residential design in Mill Valley was on the property of Ellis Lando, in Fern Canyon. The parcel was originally developed in 1929, but in the early 1950s, Lando, a successful Venetian blinds dealer in Sausalito, hired Hein to design a garden rich with rock walls, developed streams and a waterfall, meandering paths, a complete underground watering system, and many freesias and anemones planted all over the hill. Hein designed a multi-storied garden with natural appeal. Stones and huge rocks were brought in for the walls and the waterfall, and the natural-looking streams. Hein's placement of these rocks are superb examples of artistic and natural-looking rock design.

Howard Folker was his foreman for this job and countless others. A contemporary of Hein's son, Richard, Folker was born
in Mill Valley in 1922 (his paternal grandmother was a co-founder of the Outdoor Art Club). He and his wife Erdie were the Heins’ neighbors on West Blithedale. According to Erdie, Howard was the one who did all the construction. “He had the front-end loader, he did the paving, had a 3-ton roller, did a lot of tree work. They took out 300 trees from Lando’s property, had a high line to haul them out, and established a couple of creeks from above. They had a huge tank up there to fertilize the garden.”

Erdie remembers Herman as a charming man with a buoyant personality. “He liked to play the piano and sing,” she laughs, “neither of them very well. He loved sausages. He’d rather have a hot dog than something else. He talked directly to you. He was very excitable, very enthusiastic. He and Howard related very closely to one another. Howard had won a prize for designing a garden, but when he worked with Herman he carried out what Herman wanted. When they were moving a rock it had to be just so.”

A Hein garden, studded with stones and stonework, might be rich with ferns, wild iris, dogwoods, wisteria, honeysuckle; camellias, quince, roses, freesias, bearded iris; bamboo for borders or privacy; Japanese maples for color; mint for scent; cotoneaster for the red berries beloved of robins and cedar waxwings; birches, juniper, pines, and weeping willow for greenery and grace.

The landscape gardener thinks in terms of future growth. Often Hein would start with quick-growing placeholder plants to fill space while slower-growing plants got their start, then thin or replace the “fillers” later. He did this on Mill Valley’s Miller Avenue. When the old train tracks were ripped out and a median strip with a drainage canal created, the City of Mill Valley hired Hein to design the plantings. He supervised the spacing of many cheerful flowering plants to please the eye while the saplings he planted came into their own.

Herman Hein Landscape Architects was headquartered in a brick office at #4 El Paseo (second retail space on the right from Sunnyside Avenue). In the summer of 1959, when Herman and Kathe took a trip to Germany, his son-in-law and associate of six years, Gero Marten, took charge, hiring architect Daniel Liebermann and landscape architect Eva Maria Shafer. (Having met through their work with Hein’s firm, the young couple married in 1960.)

Eva Liebermann, formerly a planner in the San Francisco Planning Department, recently recalled “a specific way Herman approached landscape design—not changing much, but working with the contours and plants already on the site. You would never find a sharp angle in his gardens. They were always flowing—serpentine, arabesques. He loved to play with rocks. He brought in these mossy-covered rocks and incorporated them in the design. He was working very often with natives at that time because that was his trademark, and his elements to work with.”

Hein didn’t insist that his young associates follow his style; he was content to do his projects and leave them to do theirs. He paid on time and didn’t interfere. It was a happy, though brief, association; the Liebermanns left to pursue other projects, starting in 1962 with designing and building two homes on Lovell Avenue.

Herman Hein died of a heart attack in February, 1964, in downtown Mill Valley. He was in his beloved Volkswagen convertible at the time and may have felt the attack coming on, for he was able to stop the car at the foot of the clock tower on Lytton Square before succumbing. Time had run out too early: he was only 62 years old.

A Herman Hein Memorial Fund was established at the Art and Garden Center. Linde and Gero Marten already had planned to move to Germany, and Kathe soon followed them. Richard, an architect, remained in the Bay Area. After retirement he and his wife, Alice, moved to Guemes Island, Washington.

Asked once if he considered himself a success, Herman Hein responded, “If you mean an accumulation of money I am not a success. If you mean am I ‘satisfied,’ I am not satisfied, yet—so I am not a success. If you mean am I happy, am I doing what I like to do each day? This I call ‘success’ and therefore I am successful.”

Abby Wasserman is REVIEW editor. In the 1940s, Herman Hein designed her parents’ Homestead Valley garden. Much of the biographical material and Kathe Hein’s quotations in this article are from Mellon Hunton’s Dec. 26, 1964 feature in the Independent-Journal. Other information was generously provided by Linde, Holle, and Helmut Marten.
Boyle Park: A Legacy

The bright green vista of Boyle Park appears, to a walker, as a field of light. This is a jewel of a park: the charming baseball diamonds, the little railroad tie bridge that spans the creek, the children’s playgrounds, the overarching branches of the ancient oaks that shade the picnic and barbecue grounds, to the tennis courts, where players scramble for balls and execute sharp serves. Up the hill the oldest home in Mill Valley still stands. It belonged to Carmelita Boyle, who dreamed up this bit of park heaven. Her story, like the park that bears her family name, like the growth of the city it resides in, unfolds with controversies and triumphs in each of the fields it contains—baseball, meadow, playground, and tennis courts, all of which have been enjoyed by generations of Mill Valley families.

The Beginning  In 1903, Carmelita Boyle suffered the sudden loss of her soon-to-be-married, only daughter, Sarah, age 33. Sarah was described as a “child of the mountain and a creature of its woods and hills.” Nobody, it was said, knew more about the natural world of Mill Valley than Sarah.

Two years later, still mourning the death of her daughter, Carmelita began developing a subdivision plan with her son, Hugh, for the 30 acres adjacent to her home. Her memories of the view from the top of her hill of their dairy ranch below, the railroad tracks and the Bay, her livestock grazing, and most importantly, the sounds of her children playing among the trees and creeks in the meadow at the base, were treasured ones. She donated two of her choicest acres in the subdivision for a town park. In order to increase the size of the park the city purchased an additional six acres from the Boyles in 1908 and additional lots in the 1930s.

Carmelita Boyle’s family names dot the map of Mill Valley and are immediately familiar. Her mother, Hilaria Reed Sanchez (the street Hilarita is named for Carmelita’s stepsister) first married John Reed, the man who put the “Mill” in Mill Valley and the “Reed” in Reed Street. Reed had been granted nearly 5,000 acres of southern Marin land from the Governor of Mexico. His mill supplied the lumber for the San Francisco Presidio, where Hilaria’s father was comandante.
Reed died in 1843 and Hilaria remarried. Carmelita was born from this union. In time, Hilaria divided the land she had inherited from Reed among her descendants, including Carmelita and Carmelita’s Missouri-born husband, Hugh A. Boyle. They received 325 acres then located outside the town limits, the land on which their dairy and children thrived.

A bit off the beaten track from Sycamore and Sunnyside, it’s an area with exotic names taken from Greek mythology, like Thalia and Euterpe streets, mixed with more ordinary names like Sidney, named for Carmelita’s grandson.

In the late 1800s, the little village that was to be Mill Valley was made up of dairy farms and rustic agricultural life. A transformation was to take place as the residents wrestled with the arrival of electrified rail service, a vote in 1900 to incorporate the town and take control of its future from the Tamalpais Land & Water Company, and finally, the effects on population growth of the San Francisco earthquake and fire. These events would directly affect Carmelita. Seven years before, she had been nearly paralyzed in a railway accident in Mill Valley, and had moved to San Francisco to be near medical services.

After the earthquake, Mill Valley experienced the largest demographic shift it would ever know, and the demand for housing exploded. By creating the subdivision on their land, naming it Boyle Park, the Boyles were responding to that demand.

The Boyle Park subdivision proposal came up for review by the Trustees of Mill Valley in January 1906, just months before the great earthquake struck. Carmelita’s gift of the two acres was accepted. Tragically, she was caught in the earthquake conflagration, and died of injuries later that year. The acceptance of the subdivision plan was delayed until 1908.

A Park for Recreation When the Trustees finally turned their attention to Boyle Park, there were only two other public parks in the town—Old Mill Park and Cascade Canyon. It’s hard to imagine hitting a ball with a bat in either of those parks, much less being able to find a ball in the overgrowth of ferns, ivy, and redwood sprouts. Neither park was meant for organized sporting recreation; they were prime open land perfect for hiking, walking, and exploring, and they remain so to this day. But the idea that there could be a sports recreational park inspired the Trustees and the public. A bond of $8,000 for the purchase of parkland had been raised by voters and the search for a site ended in a debate among the Trustees as to which park parcel to purchase. There were those who preferred another subdivision, the Cuthbert Sollom Tract, nearly 22 acres of mostly marsh-land, adjacent to the Sausalito-San Rafael road, over the acreage that could be added to land already donated by Carmelita. Advocates wanted the choice to be made by a public vote; however, the Trustees decided (3 ayes, 1 no) to avoid a public vote and present the Boyle Park Tract as a bond issue proposition. Mill Valley got its perfect park by a vote of what today appears to be a handful of people—189 votes for, 71 against—just enough bodies to squeeze into the stands at Boyle Park.

At a Trustees meeting in 1909, the question was raised that if park funds needed to be spent, why not spend a few dollars fixing up the most popular spot, the baseball grounds? It was true that baseball was the most important sport in town, although the field was worn and rough. There were no structures, trees, or shrubs between Buena Vista Avenue and the pitcher’s mound. Fielders often stood on Buena Vista to catch fly balls. (Today the fields are surrounded by tall trees, but standing on the charming little double-diamonds, it is not hard to imagine what a joy it was for players to batter up among the open fields and hills of their town.)

Six hundred dollars were found in the budget to make some improvements, but for years the fields neither had sod nor fine dirt in the infield. By 1910 the locally sponsored Bass Heuter Baseball Club petitioned for use of the ball grounds on alternate Sundays during the months of good weather, August to October. A year later, lumber was furnished by the Mill Valley Lumber Company to construct a grandstand in the park. Teams competed on the Boyle Park fields against Bay Area town teams, company teams, and other traveling semi-pro nines. Monies to augment the funds for local baseball teams were earned by “passing the hat,” and according to the oral history of Tommy Bickerstaff, in the early years around 1910 nobody coached the teams. Because Mill Valley had a winning team, they were able to get big leaguers to come over and play, including players destined for the Hall of Fame. Unquestionably, there was vigorous competition for the baseball fields of Boyle Park.

Standing on the fields today with their charming dugouts, wood structures, vintage-looking cyclone fences, and signs encouraging fair play and tolerant sportsmanship (directed at the spectators, by the way), it’s no wonder the television pilot for “Parenthood” shot its heart-wrenching kids’ baseball scene here in 2009. In real life, too, against the backdrop of the Boyle Park baseball field, drama was played out.
This Is My Field, Too! The biggest controversy and perhaps the most far-reaching triumph came in 1972, when nine-year-old Jenny Fulle put on a baseball cap, tucked up her long blond hair, and, pretending to be a boy, tried to sign up for Little League. She was quickly unmasked and dismissed. Jenny was just one of a long line of girls interested in sports. She could have easily taken the road of young Helvetia Maurer, photographed in 1910 crouching, bat in hand, watching the flight of a pitch, playing street ball with friends on Lovell Avenue. Instead, she tried the following year to gain a position in left field with the Mill Valley Bears and was again denied a chance to join the League. This was not a child pressed by parents to accomplish their agenda; Jenny was fighting this battle on her own. She called the American League President, Pete Wolfle, and heard in person his immediate objection to her request to play. She spoke with women involved in Little League who were rooting for her, but as she reported at the time, "The men just said no!" Finally, Jenny wrote a letter to the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, in March of 1973, explaining her desire to play, stating that most girls were good enough to make the Minors, and she hoped the President would do something.

Jenny had learned from the Office of Civil Rights that legislation was pending to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act, disallowing discrimination based on sex in all school activities when using public facilities. The National Little League stood their ground, stating that safety was the only reason they didn't allow girls to play with boys, but others joined Jenny's side. Representatives from the National Organization for Women and an attorney from the ACLU went into action, joining her fight with the League headquarters in Pennsylvania. Time was running out for Jenny, as she would soon turn 13 and wouldn't be eligible to play in Little League.

Four hours after a decisive 1974 court-ordered temporary restraining order was issued by Marin County Superior Court Judge Joseph Wilson, stating the Mill Valley League could not ban her from play and the National League could not rescind Mill Valley's charter in reaction, Jenny Fulle showed up for practice with the Bears. She led the league in home runs her first season, and the following year more than 30 girls signed up. Today, hundreds of thousands of girls "play ball!"

Neighborhood Objections The Boyle Park fields where Jenny's baseball ambition was realized inspired other aspirations—of peace and quiet. The air is still and sweet in the fields, and birds twitter in nearby oaks. But during the Depression, over in the meadow area, Mill Valley resident Hugh Cervelli, who sponsored a semi-pro baseball team that played in the park, got the city's permission to serve barbecue steak dinners to the players and spectators. His plan was to turn over to the Unemployment Relief Fund all money over and above the amount needed to cover his expenses for the team. One can almost smell the steaks on the grill and see the lines of spectators and players, hot and dusty, waiting to eat. And hear the objections brought by some about using the beloved park for "commercial purposes." The Boyle fields were divided into two playing diamonds and devoted to Little League competition. The semi-pro baseball teams (apparently the big offenders) moved to the fields adjacent to Mill Valley Middle School and what was to become Bay Front Park.

Eventually, use of Boyle Park for picnics sparked more controversy. By 1957 the first letters of protest were submitted by nearby residents questioning the wisdom of allowing "outside groups" to use the picnic sites, as residents wanted them reserved for "family units." The blowing of barbecue smoke over their properties was objectionable. The complaints stated that "large groups were present every Sunday in September, often arriving at 6 a.m. and departing late at night." Loudspeakers played music, and chicken bones, cans, and paper ended up in the creek. The hill-dwellers were fed up, and stayed that way for nearly 20 more years, when a Thalia Street resident, Bruce Blinn, along with neighbors, renewed objections to the Little League baseball games. Blinn, a former college and semi-pro pitcher, filed a suit against the city in Marin County Superior Court, but before the trial date, the city resolved the issue by temporarily closing the dirt parking lot and concession stands, ruling that the park would close at sunset, and promising they would consider the future of the League in Boyle Park. The ante was upped a year later, when the infant Mill Valley Soccer League sought permission to bring 40 teams and 500 players to the fields. Residents raised furious objections, one stating her "strong sense of outrage after 17 years of trying to preserve Boyle Park." If the soccer teams arrived, she pointed out, residents might only get two months a year of "peace and quiet." The Mill Valley Soccer League moved to the spacious fields of Bay Front Park.

Neighbors have continued to complain about amplification since it was first used at Boyle Park during baseball games.
In response to complaints, Mill Valley’s Park and Recreation Department, in 1975-1979, gave permission for amplification to be used only at the first and last game of the season. Today, there is no prohibition for amplification at Little League or the Summer All-Star series. Petitions with over 200 names complaining about the noise were submitted in 2006, 2007, and 2008. Hopefully, a compromise can be reached for this neighborhood ball park.

Playing It Safe  In 1912, in response to the Mothers Club’s desire to establish a play area for their children, the city’s Trustees had instructed the Town Engineer to make surveys of park playgrounds, but it took until the 1950s to incorporate a play area into the Boyle Park meadow. At one time, an old jet fighter resting on a concrete base was considered an appropriate play structure. It was removed in the 1960s and hauled by truck back to Hamilton Air Force base. In 1966, an Active Play Area was installed, featuring climbing columns, spiral and chute slides, a cargo and net bridge, fire poles, and sand. The Mill Valley Jaycees, the Joseph Memorial Fund, and the city raised the money, while members of the Jaycees volunteered to help build the site.

Two decades later, fundraising efforts began for another new playground in Boyle Park. Old wood posts were dismantled and used to build benches in the park, while new structures were added in two phases for a couple of age-appropriate playgrounds, both ADA-approved and safe. The community needed to raise half the money for the improvements for both, and a tile-making day, where kids and even pets gathered to leave their imprint on a tile that would make up the façade of a retaining wall, was a great success.

Among the touching memorials in Boyle Park the most bitter-sweet is the rock next to the children’s playground that bears the words, “Dedicated to the happiness of the children of Mill Valley by the friends and family of Debbie Joseph 1969-1972.” Boyle Park is a perfect natural setting for children, with the creek running through it, sun filtering through the trees, and room in the meadow to run free. One can feel the presence of Sarah Boyle and Debbie Joseph and countless other children and sense the joy the park has brought to people of all ages. Undoubtedly, it will continue to be so, as long as the littlest among us can swing on a swing.

Stephanie Krames’ last article for REVIEW was “A Walk in My ‘Wood” in the 2013 issue. She walks frequently in Boyle Park with her dog, Spirit.

Fore!
The Mill Valley Golf Course, originally part of Carmelita Boyle’s land, was conceived in the first decade of the 20th century as a private social club. Interrupted by World War I, the club evolved into the Mill Valley Country Club, and was signed into being by the charter members with the purchase of 42 acres from Hugh Boyle II and his second wife, Ida, in 1919. With the onset of the Great Depression, many local private golf clubs failed. A financial crisis also beset Mill Valley, and membership dwindled dramatically. The club offered its beautiful acreage, buildings (including the Golf Clubhouse), and equipment to the city of Mill Valley at a bargain price of $25,000. Mill Valley, knowing the development of parks and playgrounds is of great importance to a town, has been proud to operate the public golf links and recreational park for the benefit of its citizenry ever since.

...and Love!
For nearly 80 years, players have gathered at the Boyle Park Tennis Courts for the love of the sport, to compete, train, or just relax while lobbing balls for fun. The town purchased several residential parcels from the Boyle estate, widening the park along East Blithedale Avenue, and in 1938, three public courts were built. The next summer, six exceptional tennis players launched the courts with rounds of play while the public watched from a grandstand built for the event. Afterwards, the courts were opened for public use, with the unique addition of metered lighting for night play, costing a quarter for 30 minutes. By 1958, two more courts were added. Over the next decades, civic funds and the ongoing energy and commitment of the tennis community made improvements possible. In 2003, tennis aficionados and others donated both structural and landscape design, and volunteers helped build a new pavilion and a tennis pro shop.

Three years ago, however, the courts were nearly 75 years old and in dire need of upgrading. The city committed over $400,000 to the project, the community raised $150,000, and the United States Tennis Association provided a $50,000 grant. The courts, completed in early 2016, have new drainage, energy efficient lights, California corner fences, retaining walls, and ADA accessible paths. A significant improvement, included in the original proposal, is the addition of a modern, automated system for the collection of fees and a fee-based control of court lighting, a throwback to an earlier day, improved with today’s technology. Mill Valley and the tennis community have aced this one!

—Stephanie Krames
When I was a graduate student in Boston, I owned three records: The Lovin’ Spoonful, Tim Hardin, and the Knob Lick Upper 10,000. I had no idea they were all produced by the same person—someone named Erik Jacobsen. One night my roommate’s sister-in-law, who happened to be Judy Collins, popped in with her guitar. We stayed up playing and singing, and when she heard some of my own songs, she said, “You know who would like your songs? Erik Jacobsen.”

Two years later, when the Boston snow turned crusty and gray and I found myself “California dreamin’,” I gave my resignation to the principal of the school where I was teaching, bought an old VW bus, and headed west to L.A. with a friend from my all-girl band, The Three Faces of Eve.

However, when we got to Los Angeles, Randi decided to go back to Michigan, so I drove up to San Francisco alone, in my dying car, to look for a job. When I got there, I took a map and started picking out towns where I might teach. One of them was called Mill Valley.

School was starting in a few days, so my chances were slim, but when I called to inquire, they told me the Strawberry Point School kindergarten teacher had decided to stay in Mexico, and I could come for an interview that Friday. As I drove into the quaint little town nestled against the magnificent Mt. Tamalpais, I knew I was where I wanted to be. The Superintendent of the Mill Valley Schools, Jim Collins, was a very nice man who at the end of my interview said soberly, “I have one concern…you haven’t mentioned music.” I blurted out, “Music?! I AM music!!” And the job was mine.

After teaching in an East Boston school with bars on all the windows, I thought the Strawberry Point School, perched on the edge of the sparkling bay, was paradise. And arriving on the heels of the Summer of Love, I found the Mill Valley schools to be so open and flexible that I thought I’d landed in Shangri-la.

On a balmy Christmas Day in 1969, I was walking across the Mill Valley plaza, feeling grateful for my new-found home, when the thought came to me that such a peaceful and beautiful place should have a song written about it—a song simple enough for my kindergartners to sing. So I sat down on a bench, and the song kind of wrote itself. It was catchy but sentimental, and at first, I was too shy to share it with anyone.

Not long after, I was at a party where I noticed a tall, blonde, rather mysterious young man sitting by himself. Someone whispered that it was Erik Jacobsen. I didn’t meet him that night, but when I ran into him again, on the dock where he kept his houseboat, I got up the courage to introduce myself. I told him I had written a song about Mill Valley for my kindergartners to sing. He said coolly, “Norman’s thinking about doing a kids’ song—send me a tape.” He had just produced what was to be the number one record of 1970, Norman Greenbaum’s “Spirit in the Sky.”

So I set about making a demo of the song. I taught it to my little students, and we recorded it on the school’s old Webcor tape recorder, with me pounding it out on piano under the kids’ screechy vocals. I planned to mail it to Erik, but then I ran into him a third time, at La Ginestra Restaurant. Emboldened, I asked him to come over and listen to the demo. He said, “I never listen to music.” With uncharacteristic nerve I persuaded him, and soon I was setting up the old tape recorder, fingers trembling with anxiety, with Erik Jacobsen himself sitting on my couch, mechanically leafing through a magazine.

As the sound warbled out of the tinny speaker, I wondered what I thought I was doing, playing this hodgepodge for such a bigtime record producer. The song ended, and, not looking up, Erik said quietly, “Play it again.” I obeyed, heart in my mouth. After four rounds of the song, still turning pages and never looking up, he said the six words that would change my life forever: “I like it. Let’s do it.”

He recited what the arrangements would be as I sat there in a euphoric daze. We would be co-producers, record it in the classroom, I would play piano and recorders, he would bring in the best musicians, the kids would be compensated in a manner to be determined. The details flew by me as I struggled to grasp the reality of it: a song I wrote would be produced by the same person who produced “Do You Believe in Magic,” who would then take it to Warner Bros. to see if they wanted to put it out on their label.

At some point Erik said, “Let’s add ‘California’ to the lyrics”—which I had not originally done. He wanted to add a touch of that “Summer of Love” magic, which was fine with me. But I don’t think either of us had any idea that would inspire people to come to, let alone move to, Mill Valley.

When I asked Superintendent Collins for permission to record in the classroom, he said, “On one condition—that I can be there.” Word
spread, excitement grew, and the big day finally came. By the time my kindergartners trooped in, dressed in their Sunday best, the classroom had magically morphed into a recording studio. The musicians Erik brought in were seasoned pros who had played everywhere, except in a kindergarten. But despite the bemused looks on their faces, they were up for it. As for me, trying to play my electric piano and forget being the teacher was daunting. The children performed perfectly at first. But as the session wore on, with its endless retakes and live recording challenges, their fatigue grew, until they had wilted like thirsty flowers. At last their work was over, and my waiting began. Weeks went by with no call from Erik. And then, one sunny day at a hippie gathering on Mt. Tam, I ran into him, and in his brusquely direct way, he said, “Rita, I listened to the tape, and it sounds AWFUL. The kids were screaming.” My heart sank, but Erik had no intention of giving up. We simply would find older children to do the singing. The third-grade teacher generously offered his class, and we were back in business. The kindergartners, whose exuberance had been adorable but atonal, didn’t seem to notice the difference, and they remained proud of their accomplishment.

The rest is history. Instrumentals and my vocals were meticulously recorded, track by track and mixed, and the song was presented to Warner Bros., who loved it. Quicker than I believed possible, it was released on their label. San Francisco DJ Terry McGovern was the first to give it air time. When Terry called to alert us, the whole school crowded into the teachers’ lunchroom to listen on a little clock radio.

A media frenzy followed. Warner Bros. commissioned Francis Ford Coppola to make a short film. The song was soon recorded in different languages, including Japanese and Swedish. Fan mail flowed in. Members of Congress from both parties asked to pose for pictures with us. But only when the plumber who came to fix my sink turned star-struck, the gardener outside my dentist’s office whistled the song, and Jon Stewart of the Kingston Trio told me he heard it over the speakers at Grand Central Station, did I realize how famous it had become—which explained the day that a Mill Valley bank teller named Theodora Stone yelled at me across the crowded bank, “Do you SEE all those strange people lounging around outside?! They never even knew where Mill Valley WAS before your lousy SONG!”

I’m sorry, Theodora. I didn’t know. And I’m glad I didn’t, because 45 years have gone by now, and the memories are still so fresh, it sometimes seems as if no time has passed. And what most amazes me is continuing to hear from people about how our song has touched their lives. When all those years ago I sat down on that bench to write that simple little song, who knew that it would live happily ever after?

Rita Abrams reluctantly moved from Mill Valley in 2014; she now lives in Novato. She can be reached at mvmusic@aol.com. The Francis Ford Coppola film of “Mill Valley” can be found on youtube.com.
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