

# BEACHCOMBER

SINCE 1946



A TRIBUTE TO **Shirley Nygren** 1950-2022



*Shirley and Eric at Eric's wedding reception at the Portagee Hall in Sausalito. Photo from Shirley's album.*

Longtime resident Shirley Nygren died January 20th while visiting her son Eric and his wife DeDe in Roseburg, Oregon. She died of complications of kidney failure.

Shirley was born 71 years ago in Jim White's house at 170 Pacific Way and lived most of her life at 308 Pacific Way. Her home and neighboring house were built by the original Portuguese families who came from the Azores in the 1930s. Many people today knew Joe Rodrigues, the "mayor" of Muir Beach, who lived next door, but few of us knew Shirley's father Joe Sousa. Both houses overlook Big Beach, and like Jim White's, are in the cottage-style homes popular at the time. (They have recently

appeared in old photographs in the Beachcomber.) Only Eric Groneman and Amadeo Banducci were here when Shirley's grandmother lived here. In the late Sixties Joe built the ranch style house at 310 Pacific Way, currently home to Pam and Craig Eichenbaum, where he moved giving Shirley the house she's lived in to the present.

Shirley grew up attending the Mill Valley schools. Her father Joe was the school bus driver as well as the custodian at Tam High. As only a few folks lived here at the beach the community that helped to raise her was that of the Sausalito Portuguese composed of fishers and farmers and their families and centered around the Star of the Sea Church. Annually, they held a parade where Shirley was a princess and later as a teenager the queen.



*(As seen in the Beachcomber August 2019.)*

*(Above) Shirley said, "I had my best year ever entering Succulent Gardens at the Marin County Fair."*

*(At right) The Basket, Shirley's succulent art was featured on the cover. Photo by Janet Tumpich*



*Joey and Shirley – wondering what's wrong with Costco cookies? (Baking before the 36th MBVFA BBQ. Photo by Julie Smith. Reprinted from Beachcomber July 2008 page 14.)*



Shirley was an active member of the Garden Club for years making glorious Christmas wreaths with her dear friend Joey Groneman, and she could always be seen serving food or selling nachos at the MB Firemen's Barbecue. Remember that fabulous picnic?

*Continued on next page*



## A Tribute to Shirley

*Continued from previous page*

Sports played a large part in her life. She adored her Niners! The SF Giants were treasured too. Her living room was bedecked with Forty Niner paraphernalia interspersed by family pictures including formally framed photos of austere ancestors from the Azores. Son Eric, himself an athlete, was an accomplished pitcher and longtime Little League umpire in Marin. In Larkspur at the Joe Wagner Field there's a plaque honoring him. She was deeply proud of Eric and his son, her grandson, Kyle now 22 who played football all four years of high school. Fishing continues to be Eric and Kyle's shared passion; it's in their Portuguese blood.

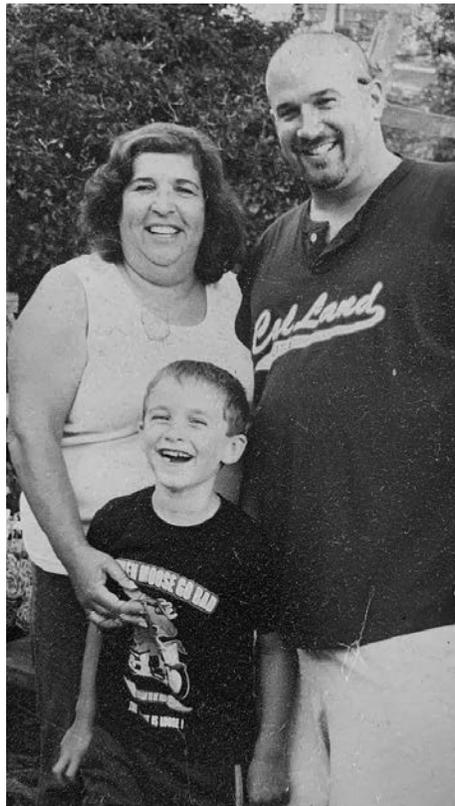
For 37 years Shirley worked full-time at the Muir Woods Café before retiring. Even in her early teens she worked there on weekends. She had the opportunity to watch the park become a major destination point in the Bay Area.

She had another job: Monitoring Big Beach. With her expansive view of the beach nothing escaped her. If a seal washed up on the beach she called the Marine Mammal Center. If a wild party got too wild she called the Park Service. She was on top of it. Her neighbors were grateful.

Several years ago many of our community members gathered at the stables as Shirley recounted tales of growing up here before most of us discovered this paradise. She was the youngest of the "old timers," Shirley, Amadeo and Eric. Before John John and Kathy. Before the Onoratos. Before the Pearlmans.

We will miss her.

– Joey Groneman and  
Trish McCall



*Shirley, Eric and his son Kyle taken in her yard several years ago.*



*Shirley with her younger sister Cathy Raudio. Cathy lives in Corte Madera.*

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## ON THE COVER

*Untitled*  
36" x 36"  
Oil on canvas  
Kerry Wynn

*Choose from where to look and see what's to be seen.*  
– Kerry

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*Beachcomber* is a community newsletter published quarterly by and for residents, friends, family and former residents of Muir Beach. Published since 1946 (on and off), circulation 160 (more or less).

Submissions may be sent to:  
**Beachcomber mailbox** on mailbox row,  
or to [editor@muirbeachcomber.com](mailto:editor@muirbeachcomber.com).

Contribute your essays, poems, stories, photographs, artwork, announcements, reviews – anything that celebrates Muir Beach and our community. To subscribe, email [editor@muirbeachcomber.com](mailto:editor@muirbeachcomber.com).

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Circulation/Website: Maury Ostroff  
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# Our Firewise Team

To address this risk, under the guidance and sponsorship of the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department, we have formed a team, called *Muir Beach Firewise*. Here is our team:



We appreciate the work of Sophie Conti in 2020 and 2021. Sadly, she needs to focus on other things this year. We have an opening on our team and would like someone to join us!

## What is Firewise?

Our Muir Beach Firewise team follows the guidelines of *Firewise USA* - a national program that helps neighborhoods to organize their wildfire safety efforts – to improve the ignition resistance of homes and become more fire safe. In addition to support from the MBVFD and Firewise USA, our team coordinates with Firesafe Marin, the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA), and individual wildfire leaders from fire departments in Marin and across the state.

## What have we learned from other wildfires?

From the many fires that have occurred in recent years across the West, fire organizations have learned a lot about the most effective measures to prevent loss of life and property. Our team is focused on applying those strategies to Muir Beach. While the initial ignition point of a wildfire could be in Mt. Tamalpais State Park or the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, there is limited influence that our community has on their efforts. In simple terms, **the most effective strategy is for individual property owners to prepare their own**

**property from the “house out.”** Owners should first *modify their house* including upgrades to crawl space and roof vents, screening of the undersides of wooden decks, removal of stored wood and other flammable materials. Next, the focus is on vegetation management, starting in the “immediate” zone within five feet of the house. Last is management of vegetation further away from the house in the intermediate zone (5-30 feet from the house), and extended zone (over thirty feet). Experience from recent catastrophic fires including the Camp Fire in Paradise, CA has shown that individual houses that are well prepared have the best likelihood of survival, and if entire communities are well prepared, it can prevent fires from building into infernos that burn entire neighborhoods to the ground. In other words – ***if we all prepare, we have the best chance of 1) the entire community emerging unscathed from a fire and 2) preserving insurability.***

## What is the opportunity for wildfire preparation in Muir Beach?

In late 2021, our team surveyed the fire readiness of Muir Beach properties. We found that there are opportunities to harden houses by removing dry leaves and pine needles, stored lumber from under wooden decks, and firewood or lumber stacked along house walls. Owners can also install screening of under deck spaces and replace existing roof and crawl space / basement screens with WUI compliant vent screens. There are also opportunities to remove more vegetation in all three zones: immediate, intermediate, and extended.

We built our MB Firewise team to make residents aware of risks and cost-effective mitigation measures. To date, Muir Beach residents have accomplished a lot by taking advantage of free “Chipper Days” – community residents removed about 80 truckloads of vegetation in the last 18 months! That is a great reduction in fuel! Also, our Fire Chief Chris Gove is working with Marin County to secure a \$150,000 grant for removal of vegetation below Highway 1 between Seacape Drive and Overlook Drive.

## What is the Muir Beach Firewise team doing to help prepare?

Beyond the above accomplishments, the structures and vegetation in Muir Beach still need work and our residents need to be well prepared for an evacuation (if

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## Firewise

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one is ever required). The Muir Beach Firewise team is here to help the community to address our remaining risks. We are focused on the following areas in the next two years. 1) **Communicate** to the community about mitigation measures (building retrofit and vegetation reduction) and educational and financial resources to help residents get the job done, 2) **Establishing, measuring, and reporting progress metrics**, so the community can see progress and remaining risk areas, 3) **Identifying specific “acute hazards”** in the community (e.g., highly overgrown areas, and areas prone to fire due to topography and prevailing winds) and working with residents of affected properties to reduce their hazards, 4) **Conducting community-wide fire drills** so that we are well prepared in the event of a real fire.

## What can you do?

When it comes to wildland fire, you help yourself and your Muir Beach community! 1) Educate yourself about risks and mitigations. There are many resources available. A good place to start is to read documents and view videos posted at <https://firesafemarin.org/>. 2) Harden your home and create a fire smart yard. If you need financial, physical, or other assistance our team can help secure resources to get the job done. 3) Participate in upcoming Muir Beach Fire Drills. 4) Become a member of our team. We have one opening. Please contact any one of us if you are interested. 5) Give our Firewise team feedback and ask us questions. We are a resource to you to make your home and property Firesafe!

*– Don Piotter and Chris Gove*

## REMEMBERING

### Deborah Kamradt

1953 - 2021

Our dear former neighbor and friend, Deborah Kamradt, age 68, left us December 19, 2021 due to complications of adenocarcinoma, a lung cancer with a rare mutation. Deborah is survived by the love of her life, Jim Kamradt. Deborah had always loved Muir Beach as a young woman so when Jim & she married they bought a lovely home on Starbuck. Deborah loved walking the trails & the natural beauty here.

Her career started with UC Berkeley degrees, an MBA, and a business career licensing intellectual property, especially artwork. Working with high profile clients including LucasFilms, Grace Slick, and most notably, the J. Garcia Estate, where she was the Licensing Manager responsible for the ultimate success of the J. Garcia tie and clothing line.

Along with her active work life, Deborah offered her services as a CSD Board Member during the time when our water rights were in question. She worked with deep commitment to our community from 1996 - 2006 and eventually accomplished her major goal of confirming those rights. A major & complex



achievement and from which we have all benefited.

Her real passion, however, was Traditional Chinese Medicine. She shifted her life to this study & opened her practice in 2000. Deborah flourished in this work and her clients deeply love her for her capacity to heal and her selflessness

in this process. Deborah maintained her Marin practice over these years though she & Jim sold their Muir Beach home because of a job location change for Jim.

Deborah asked that we all be kind to one another, especially when someone is angry, hurt or afraid...no one truly knows what another is going through, so be kind. Walk in nature often and think about those who have helped you in your life.

A memorial service will be scheduled in the future. If you are interested in attending, please register at: <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/debkamradt> where details will be provided.

*– Marilyn Laatsch*

## Elderberries Plan Community Fete

Encouraged by signs that the Covid-19 pandemic might be easing in Marin, the Muir Beach Elderberries are planning a community-wide event at the Community Center this spring.

The plan is to hold a free beer and wine gathering on the deck from 5-7 PM. Two dates are under consideration – March 25 or April 29. The final date will be announced in Laurie Piel’s events letter and mailbox fliers.

The intent, according to organizers, is to reignite community spirit, celebrate neighborliness for which Muir Beach is renowned, and get to know new residents who arrived here during the two-year Covid crisis.

After consulting with CSD Manager Mary Haley and determined to hold a “safe” event, Elderberries decided that guests must be Muir Beach residents – no outsiders. Everyone will be required to show proof of vaccination. Beer, wine and non-alcoholic beverage stations will be scattered throughout the deck. Wrapped snacks will be available. Entry to the inside portion of the Community Center will be restricted to restroom user only.

Muir Beach residents are encouraged to keep both dates—March 25 and April 29—open. Community alerts will be sent out as details are finalized and health conditions evolve.

– *Paul Jeschke*

## Beachcomber Financial Report 2022

*By Maury Ostroff*

The Beachcomber staff and the entire community of Muir Beach would like to thank those who contributed to our membership drive this year. It is your donations that allow us to continue printing the Beachcomber.

The Beachcomber operates on a financial model similar to PBS; we rely on donations which we euphemistically call annual memberships, but we distribute a printed copy to every mailbox in Muir Beach whether they have donated or not. (Just like you can still watch or listen to Public Broadcasting without having to respond to any of their many pledge drives.)

The table below shows how much money has been raised each year starting with the year 2014, when the new Beachcomber team took over. The last row shows how much was received for the most recent appeal, The Average \$ per Donation is generally above \$25 because we have many people who give more, sometimes \$50 and even \$100. Once again, a big Thank You for everyone who has contributed not only this year but in other years as well.

<b>Year</b>	<b>\$ Amount</b>	<b>Number of Donations</b>	<b>Average \$ per Donation</b>
2014	\$3,100	83	\$37
2015	\$2,005	59	\$34
2016	\$1,850	51	\$36
2017	\$125	5	\$25
2018	\$1,655	40	\$41
2019	\$2,445	65	\$40
2020	\$2,590	67	\$39
2021	\$3,106	65	\$48

For those who are reading the details in the data, we did not have a membership solicitation in 2017 because we missed a few issues in 2017. You will notice that average \$ per donation has been gradually increasing over the years. This is because we are receiving more donations above \$25, and this past year we had a significant contribution that can be considered a grant. (Thank You – you know who you are and it will be remembered.)

Printing costs account for nearly all of the budget, as all the labor done by the Beachcomber staff is volunteer. A typical issue with only color on the covers cost around \$600 per issue, while an issue with color pictures in the middle costs about \$800. (Price also varies with number of pages.) Perhaps if we raised more money, we could print more pages and more pages in color. All we would need are more individual “subscriptions” of \$25! And we’d accept less.

Don’t forget, we also have an online archive of the Beachcomber:  
[www.muirbeachcomber.com](http://www.muirbeachcomber.com)

# The Watery World of Muir Beach

By Mia Monroe

WOW! The Atmospheric River gave Redwood Creek a boost and broke open the bar in October. In rushed chinook, alot of them! to spawn in the upper reaches of the watershed ...this is an amazing story (**Kings Ride the Atmospheric River into Unexpected Places (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)** and then December featured a run of coho (silver salmon) so we have lots of eggs tucked in the gravels (maybe by the time you read this we will have also seen steelhead come up to spawn, too!). NPS project manager Carolyn Shoulders reports that recent work held well with structures in place and features such as pools, undercut banks and connectivity to the forest during flood events showing improvement...we hope this means a good nursery for young fish later this spring.

Have you checked out the work state parks is doing in the middle reach to move trail out of sensitive stream channel, offer good crossing for all especially our equestrian community and help build up the aquifer to store then later provide water later in the season! What an improvement! Work soon “done.”

In Big Lagoon we again saw otter (become an otter spotter, report observations to River Otter Ecology Project) and did you know you can hear two species of frog? Nearly two decades ago the wetlands just in front of the picnic area was restored and the nightly chorus of the Pacific Treefrog returned! Then, when the Banducci ranch was restored red-legged frogs were returned to our watery neighborhood and they eagerly spread down in to Big Lagoon...here's some interesting info about them:

**Ask the Naturalist: Does the Moon Phase Affect Frog Calls?** ([baynature.org](http://baynature.org))



*Western spadefoot. (Photo by Zach Lim).*

*Frogs typically begin their mating rituals with the coming of steady rainfall in late winter to late spring. (Some species, such as the foothill yellow-legged frog, may continue breeding into the summer.)*

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Some more good news: The turtles, once abundant here, have been reared by the SFZoo and released to again make their home in Big Lagoon thanks to a bold program recently featured in the Marin IJ (Marin coast project aims for turtle restoration, [marinij.com](http://marinij.com)). Look for them sunning themselves along Kaashi Way, and Green Gulch residents report a few sightings!



*A multiagency effort to reestablish California's only native freshwater turtle species in southern Marin County after its disappearance nearly three decades ago has shown success.*

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## Pop quiz:

what is our state amphibian?  
where can you see our state tree?  
can you pick our state flower?  
where can you see the state rock?  
do you know our state lichen?

Please share what you find combing the beach, scanning the hillsides and peering into the creek...i love ferns and banana slugs this time of year! see you on the trail....

– ranger mia

## Mild Cognitive Despair

John Crowley wrote an engaging piece about learning to live with his aging mind. (The Old Imperium Harpers Dec 2021). He describes how at the age of 72 he noticed symptoms that led to his being tested and subsequently diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment. His wife first noticed, and pointed out to him: “wrong word choices, failures to come up with a common name, instances of fumbled choices, misunderstandings in daily activities” and the classic instances of forgetting where the car was parked, or opening the closet or refrigerator and standing immobile unable to remember what was wanted.

Such occurrences are affectionately known as “senior moments” in polite society. But among many seniors they are also feared as a possible harbinger of the more serious condition of early Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s is more easily diagnosed from pictures of the plaque buildup affecting the neuron-transmitters in the brain. Cognitive impairment on the other hand is largely determined through multiple written testing procedures over time, and evaluating the differences that have occurred in the test scores. The degree of cognitive impairment is then determined on the basis of these strictly quantitative procedures.

Crowley’s test scores over the years placed him in the mild cognitive impairment category and, from the looks of the copious examples he cites for his own experience, so are the millions of the elderly population who have experienced the same symptoms that he has. It is a condition of the aging process for which there is no apparent treatment. You can write about it as Crowley has so ably done, but there is little you can do about it.

My concern about the aging mind has a more qualitative bent than mere quantitative analysis. It has to do with “the end of possibility” that affects the elderly in their end time. It is the opposite of youth’s sense that everything is possible, and you have only to set your mind to it. There may be myriad reasons why “possibility” is foreclosed for the aging mind: imminent death, other health problems, limited resources, and limited energy for uncertain outcomes. But whatever the reason, the result is the foreclosure of what is possible in the remaining time left to you.

Mild cognitive impairment is no picnic. It is both frustrating and embarrassing, but I would gladly trade it for a “possibility” that would enrich my old age! It is the sense that anything is possible that fuels youthful ambition, and generates the energy necessary for accomplishment that is absent for the aging mind. It is precisely the uncertainty of exactly when your demise will arrive that frustrates anything resembling long term vision. There is only one certainty that awaits you—the end of your life.

A second significant concern confronting the elderly is their clear irrelevance to the present moment. At this moment in history most of their lives will have been spent in the last century and, try as they may, they will find little comfort in the digital age. Some will do better than others in the required adjustment necessary to negotiate the new technological terrain, but most will seek the help of younger minds to navigate the myriad nooks and crannies of the ever changing digital universe.

Their children, while not exactly ignoring them, will not be apt to solicit their advice on anything of importance to them. In a rapidly changing world they cannot help but appear as anything but what they are: old fashioned. Most likely the elderly will be regarded as needing the help of their children rather than being able to offer any sound advice to them. So the aging mind is confronted with a total role reversal of the last century’s idea of “older being wiser.”

Taken together with other aspects of modern life like the pandemic and climate change, the absence of possibility for seniors and their irrelevance to the present moment in history is not the best picture for the aging mind to take note of. The absence of possibility in the lives of seniors does not make for a happy hunting ground; and the irrelevance of seniors to modern times is likewise an unsettling prospect. Minor cognitive despair maybe as likely a state for the aging mind as minor cognitive impairment. One thing is for sure and that is that the aging process is not for the feint hearted. But maybe there is still some sense of possibility out there and all it takes is a powerful imagination to find it!

– *Gerry Pearlman*

# Greener Pastures

By Maureen Pinto

We at the Golden Gate Dairy Stables, home to Ocean Riders, are blessed with so many beautiful trails to ride. But for us, it's not just about the riding. Many stables require horses to go to retirement facilities once the boarders no longer ride but we know our aging horses have so much more to give. Because it isn't just about the riding, it's about the relationship. These recent past years we've had at least a third of our horse population age into their thirties, the equivalent of humans in their nineties, and many of our equine residents have enjoyed decades long partnerships with their humans. It is a great privilege to share these wise elders with program participants who learn so much from the relationships they build with them. Horses whose arthritic joints may not be able to carry us up the hills any longer still have much to give from their hearts and souls and many of our elder horses have found "second careers" as teachers and therapists. Horses of any age are masters at relationships and it is within the experience of a strong attachment that transformation occurs.

Of course, along with those gifts comes the painful responsibility of helping them pass peacefully when they let us know it is their time. Two years ago Jessica Pinto started an altar at the end of our front stall row nearest the house to honor Ziggy, a horse deeply and widely loved who had a very special bond with our mascot, Buddha Bulldog Chunk. The altar offered a place for us to celebrate his spirit. Chunk joined Ziggy several months later and amidst the pain of that loss the altar offered a comforting reminder that these best friends were reunited in the Great Beyond. Since then we have also had to say goodbye to Alazon, Mojito, Q, Freedom, Rascal, and Jalapeño. These amazing beings will be held forever in so many hearts and we are grateful they spent their golden years at the Golden Gate Dairy, home of happy horses (and dogs and humans!). Q, Rascal and Jalapeño are all true locals, their humans being longtime "Muir Beachers". Cori and Karen Valentine helped care for Jalapeño during Jane's reluctant trips back east, always hating to be away from Jalapeño, her partner for 31 years. Karen treasured her weekly healing walks with him. We are so grateful for their care and support while Jane was away as we all worked to make sure Jalapeño's quality of life was not declining. When it was time, we respected Jalapeño's wishes and allowed him to lie down

gently for the last time in our hay barn, our previous horse spirits helping lift him to comfort and peace. We will always be grateful for Jane's generosity, sharing Jalapeño's gifts with both Ocean Riders programs and the Muir Beach Community.

Little by little we let go of the loss, but never the love for these amazing horses. Please feel free to visit the altar, and feel the beauty of so much love these very special animals gave and received in their incredible lives and how they continue to have an impact on us, connected forever in spirit. It is yet another reason the Dairy is such a special place.

*See back page for photos.*

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## *The latest news from the* **Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Association**

We continue to move forward with plans for the 2022 Muir Beach Volunteer Firemen's Barbecue on Sunday, May 29 – Memorial Day weekend and we would love for the whole community to get involved. It takes the neighborhood to put on this important and festive fundraiser for our volunteer fire department.

The Muir Beach Fire Association Board members have been reaching out to community members that head up the various departments (parking, garbage, wine/beer, porta-potties, desserts, chicken, etc.) to see who is available to help out this year, how their teams of volunteers look and to find out and questions, concerns and issues. We are surely going to have to make a few adjustments this year due to the pandemic and we will abide by all county and state health regulations to make this as safe as possible. Some of the ideas that are being tossed around are requiring proof of vaccinations, encourage mask wearing, eliminating the inflatable bounces houses, bundling tickets and more.

There will be a kick-off meeting in February, and we welcome all to attend via Zoom. The date and time will be announced shortly via Next Door (Muir Beach only), Laurie's newsletter and mailbox fliers. Please consider attending and bring your enthusiasm and fresh ideas.

– Denise Lamott

# The Critter Report: Live Music

By Dave MacKenzie

With the Pandemic winding down (we hope!), we can now try to get back to something closer to normality. How about a live music concert? The performers are ready!

But for the concert I am looking forward to, no expensive tickets or complex travel is required. Honey tongued musicians are on their way to Muir Beach, and a free live concert is scheduled for any minute.

Every spring, expert bird songsters wing their way to Muir Beach from their winter vacation spots in Los Angeles, Mexico, Columbia, and even Chile. First come the brightly colored males, and they stake out likely spots for nesting and feeding, and then they sing their hearts out to attract females, and to challenge encroaching males. Of course, humans, especially teenagers, do similar activities, even if they don't realize they are behaving similarly to these little birds!

I have often had questions about some song or other heard by a neighbor, and of course I am always happy to help identify the source. American Robins, Wrentits, and Saw-Whet Owls have confounded MB'rs from time to time. But can anyone learn birdsong?

Identifying birds by sound can be challenging, and even long time birders like me are sometimes stumped by individual songs and their variations. And then there are calls, which are less musical offerings, usually consisting of contact notes, alarms, or feeding sounds. But with a bit of technology, we can figure this out!

The “Merlin” app, from the bird-friendly Cornell Laboratory, provides a free way to decode your mystery sound. First, make a recording (phone recording apps work well, if you work to get the cleanest, closest recording that you can), and then let the Merlin “Sound ID” tool analyze the result. Thanks to the internal AI engine, which improves every year due to more learned examples, the app provides surprisingly good results.

To learn a bit of birdsong, I suggest you pick 3 Muir Beach birds to get to know by song. Perhaps White-Crowned Sparrow, American Robin, and Bewick's Wren, which are residents, would be good places to start? Or whatever you see/hear in your yard. You won't figure everything out, so don't worry.

They'll be back to regale you every year.



Merlin app



American Robin



White-Crowned Sparrow



Bewick's Wren

# One Foot on the Platform

*By David Leivick*

I remember the day  
When you and I first met  
Not a clue  
Bout all the days to come

You led me to your room  
At the top of the stairs  
Man my heart  
Was beating like a drum

And we've got one foot on the platform  
And one foot on the train going home

It was cold that morning  
And it was cold that night  
It was cold  
Around mid-day

We went looking for that sun  
So warm and bright  
But it must  
Have been on Holiday

And we've got one foot on the platform  
And one foot on the train going home

We walked through that graveyard  
And read all the tombs  
Their names  
Were strangers to me

I thought of the Incas  
And all of their ruins  
And the early  
Deaths that never had to be

And we've got one foot on the platform  
And one foot on the train going home

You know that I love you  
And I always will  
There's nothing  
Can keep us apart

My heart is yours and  
Your heart is mine  
I guess—  
We knew it from the start

And we've got one foot on the platform  
And one foot on the train going home

You know we all are dying  
And our tears could fill the sea  
It's only  
Just a matter of time

So pack up your sorrows  
And give them to me  
I'll add 'em  
To the tower of rhyme

And we've got one foot on the platform  
And one foot on the train going home



The Beachcomber thanks you for sharing all your beautiful art and articles, and supporting our neighborhood news.

The newsletter is published four times a year, February, May, August, and November with deadlines for submissions a few weeks before printing.

Submissions can be emailed to [editor@muirbeachcomber.com](mailto:editor@muirbeachcomber.com) and early submissions are eagerly accepted, late submissions will be saved for the next issue.

*Happy New Year and Happy Lunar New Year!*

# Finding My Walden at Muir Beach

9/4/20-11/4/20

Karen Marker

On the Friday afternoon before Labor Day, I drove along Highway 80 with a relentless stream of traffic across the Richmond Bay Bridge, then turned south on 101 past the parched hills and suburban grid of cities in Marin. When I exited onto the ever-busier Tam Junction and started winding up along the Coast Highway I had no idea what I would find at the end of the twisted one lane road called Sunset Way.

The cabin where I would be staying for two months, it turned out, was exactly the size of the one Henry David Thoreau had built and stayed in for two years, two months, and two days at Walden Pond on the outskirts of Concord, Massachusetts. Just a few steps north the road dead ended at Spindrift Point, four acres of steep rocks and pine trees, closed to the public, that a world sailor and writer named Charles Borden had willed to the Nature Conservancy in 1968, to be “preserved in perpetuity.” Resting there atop the rocky cliff, overlooking the ocean, was the one-room cabin Borden had built of glass panels with redwood beams and planks, modeled on the interior of a ship that he had also referred to as his Walden. Now just as it had been for Charles Borden when he had lived here on Spindrift Point, as it had been for Thoreau back in the 1854, at Walden Pond, this place of retreat in Muir Beach, so close to the wilderness, became my Walden too.

Here everything I had built up in the linear journey of my life stopped. There was no more moving forward, no counting the years I had travelled around the sun. My time was measured by the movement of the stars across the sky, the circling of the moon as it waxed and waned, its pull that shaped the tides, and the steady metronome of my heart and lungs.

Thoreau wrote as he began his stay at Walden Pond: *If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal- that is your success.* As I stepped out of walled space and fully occupied my life from the perch of a deck, where there was nothing but the view of the sea at my side, greeting each day with joy became my success too.

With the rising sun came layers of sound, the wings of dragonflies and flocks of finches, ecstatic in singing, swirling around the exotic succulents. I listened, blending in, studying birds as guides and sources of protection who left behind the gift of feathers Golden-crowned and violet-green sparrows along with the hermit thrushes and yellow goldfinches multiplied among the jasmine, daisies and pink cosmos in the gardens, singing longer into the fog drenched mornings, taking off then landing again, dipping down to drink from the tube-shaped orange and red snapdragons. Migrating monarchs, pipevine swallowtail with blue wings flitted among the vines. A red-tailed hawk circled above me, keen eyes ready for small rodents, then suddenly fell from the sky into the bushes. Farther off, brown pelicans moved in low formation across the sea, scooping up fish as they went. Turkey vultures found dead sea birds on the shore of Little Beach and stood watch from the top branches of the pines, swooping in to feed. They were joined by the crows and the ravens, messengers of divine prophecy and keeper of secrets, while egrets sailed off over the corner of Spindrift Point where the cormorants dwelt.

When the sun set behind the cabin I watched its reflecting crown of light brushing the pines at the edge of the hill tops while the birds again went mad with song. There was no sound of oncoming cars, no streetlight to block the rising of the moon. At night there was only the humming of the cicadas, the constantly shifting symphony of the crashing waves, dependent upon the rocks holding and pushing back and the wind they caught. Farther off the stars, pricks of light, were popping, speaking of those who came before.

During my time at Muir Beach I felt like a child who is learning how to speak and loves to name what they are seeing. Just like the Coastal Miwok who had names for every individual rock, tree and bush everything had a new relationship to me when I named it. It was not just any bird, plant, sea creature. Every day I was tested on more than what I could learn from books. Not just on “what is this?” but “what this is.” In Thoreau’s words *the perception of beauty is a moral test* and the most important book was this living book of nature’s beauty.

Mostly it was the ocean, with all its interplay of winds, tides, currents, and waves, that became the source of my most constant study. From the tidal charts I learned

*Continued on next page*

the times of the minus low tides and the high tides that would erase the sand at Little Beach; from my body I learned how it felt when I entered these waters every day. It always started with a surge of tingling in my feet, trepidation, a magnetic pull in and a push away, my heart pounding stronger, negative ions gathering in my lungs. The rest was constantly changing. Sometimes the waves were light caresses in a sea that was gently sleeping, the water flat, clear and calm enough to see to the bottom, where there are undulating ripples in the sand as jellyfish swim past, reaching out their long tentacles towards my arms. Other times there was a buoyancy, energetic short-crested waves with a playful eagerness to engage with me. Then there are times that the waters were rough and bewildering. Turbulent eddies whipped me around with the sand and the dark debris of wood, seaweed, the many bodies of tiny crabs. And there are those days when the water was muddy, ominous as a deadly red tide, when everything underneath was hidden.

One Monday morning, when mists were lying over the mountains of the distant coves like a prayer shawl which parted to crystal skies, I had Little Beach all to myself. Although the ocean temperature has fallen to 57 degrees I ventured in without a wetsuit, inspired by those I had watched going in for long daily swims as a form of meditation. A seal looked up for a minute at my naked body, acknowledging our kinship, and then disappeared. I took deep breaths, ridding myself of the images of the biting cold, rip currents and sharks, then let myself go drifting out into the deeper waters where there were no more big waves. Here where the sea and sky merged and the rocks were my landmarks, where I trusted that the tides coming in would not pull me away, the ocean was my Walden Pond.

During my last weeks at Muir Beach I reflected more frequently upon Thoreau's words. *How important is a constant intercourse with nature and the contemplation of natural phenomena to the preservation of moral and intellectual health.* For Thoreau the deep study of nature was inextricably linked to a sense of social justice. It was both a mirror and a door he walked through to his work as an abolitionist and social reformer who later inspired leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King. He joined others in his circle like Ralf Waldo Emerson, and spoke with anger about the Fugitive Slave Law and the role the North played when they did not condemn

and rise up against the horrors of slavery. He took great personal risks as a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Muir Beach forced me to ask myself about the risks I was willing to take to right the scales of justice, and the moral accounting we would all have to do when we have forgotten to care for this environment and its most vulnerable inhabitants. In his documentary *A Life on Our Planet*, David Attenborough talked about his observations from the ninety plus years of his life as a "witness statement about the world's devastating biodiversity loss as the human populations exploded on this earth." So too my observations at Muir Beach became my witness statement of life on this planet. Everything was laid out here so clearly. I was aware that the waters were warmer than they had been here forty years ago. The fires were bigger, longer, destroying redwoods and sequoia trees that had survived for 1000's of years. More dead birds, deer and sea mammals washed up every day onto their beach graveyards. There were dolphins frolicking in an area that until recently had not been their home. I had seen whales swimming off on the horizon and knew that many of these grandest of our mammal relations would not make it in their journey of migration. Attenborough writes that if we are to survive *we need to learn to work with nature, not against it.* I thought of his call to action for a future where we allow for the rewilding of our oceans and forests that they may serve as "carbon sponges" and suck up the mess we have made.

The day before the presidential election I watched the sun set quickly over Spindrift Point from the far end of Big Beach, where people had placed single stem roses in the sand. In the morning I felt like the spindrift, a spray blown from the waves during a gale. It was my last day at Muir Beach, the final rising sun I would watch from my bed. As the voting was finished but the counting still going on, I went down to the beach and floated out into the glistening morning waters of an ocean that was always my greatest anxiety reducer. At Muir Beach, like Thoreau had done at Walden, I had begun the work of rewilding myself, learning how little I needed to live and what I could live without. There was still so much work to do going forward, our future so tenuous, but this was my greatest source of hope that I would always have this place to return to, where I could find my deepest soul, this beauty, reflected.

# Ode to Kathy

By Lisa Eigsti

When I first moved to Muir Beach almost 22 years ago, people that I would meet in the neighborhood would say, "Have you met Kathy and John-John yet?" It wasn't long before I did as they were both very present in the community. I believe I met Kathy at my first Bistro when the Quilters were there at the same time. At Bistro she chatted cheerfully with every neighbor old and new and you might have heard her say, "Lonna, is there any more D?" As in decaf coffee. And she'd take an extra scone if there were some left over.

Over the years of getting to know Kathy, these are the things that will always make me smile when I think of her: Her warm smile, her calm presence and demeanor, her huge involvement in the community. She once joked that she's at the community center practically every day and sometimes twice in one day, for Quilting and then Tai Chi. She was always present at community meeting and especially a community party! Oh how I loved to watch Kathy and John-John dance! (Tearing up now.) They had moves like none I've ever seen.

Kathy never ceased to amaze me with her ability, strength and perseverance to pull off the Holiday Quilters Fair. I think it was with sadness and reluctance that the Quilters decided to stop having the Fair. Luckily after only a one year gap, the fair was brought back by other community members.

Another post she aged out of was being in charge of the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Fighters Merchandise. Kathy informed me that in the early years of the BBQ, they were held in the volley ball area and the party consisted of some neighbors, bbq chicken, a few glass gallons of beer and the first t-shirts that were made for sale. She passed the merchandise baton to me some 8 years ago. This is when a new and sweet closeness came about between us as she taught me what she did for many years previous, such as what vendor she used, how she knew what to order, and how she always loved to have that "new" item to surprise and delight the community. It amused me that she never really did inventory, she'd just open up the cabinets and take a look at what was obviously low in stock. She very much disliked the technology of putting things on Square or running credit cards online.

With all of the instructions she gave me she would always say, "Now this is the way I did it, you can do it your own way." She talked about the Old way of doing things in Muir Beach vs. The New Way of doing things in Muir Beach. This was in reference to how the long time Muir Beachers did things sort of lopsidazically and magically things happened or the newer and younger generation that brought in new thinking and also technology skills. One day she asked me, "How do you operate?" I said, I more identified with the Old Way of doing things but also am open to New Ways too. She gave me the hugest smile.

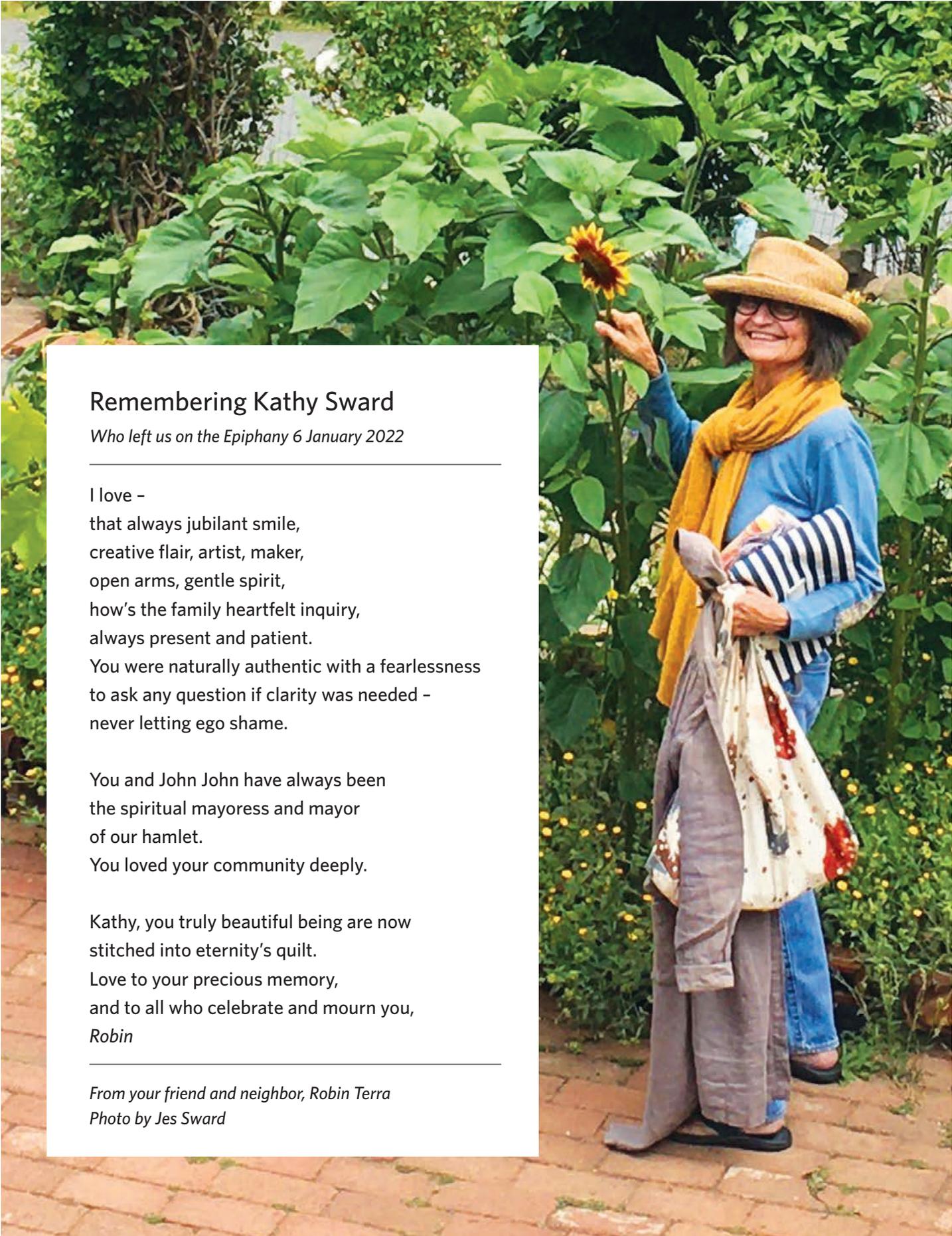
Whenever I got in conversation with Kathy, either in person or on the phone, we would talk effortlessly for long periods of time. Always the topics rambling from one thing to the next. I will miss conversing with her. Kathy's incredible talent in quilting and sewing as well as her general style is like no other. I was in my kitchen using a pot holder that she made many years ago, on the evening that she died. I looked at it and held it a little longer that night as I knew she wasn't doing well. I found out the following day that she had passed.

One more funny story. I think Hannah was in the 4th grade when a class assignment asked her to interview someone in the neighborhood and Hannah interviewed John-John. Hannah and I sat in Kathy and John-Johns kitchen and Hannah asked the questions she had hand-written on her binder paper. Kathy was part of the interview and to my surprise she nonchalantly and so smoothly made a reference to a time in the 70's that her and John-John were on acid! Hannah looked at me with a puzzled look. It was such a funny and also terrifying moment as I was worried that Hannah's next question was going to be, "What's acid?"

Oh Kathy, I'll miss you so as will your community. May your legacy of community dedication and artsy way of being, inspire us all to be involved and invested in keeping The Old ways alive.

We will celebrate you BIG TIME at the next Day of the Dead celebration, a community party that you cherished.

*Continued on page 16*



## Remembering Kathy Sward

*Who left us on the Epiphany 6 January 2022*

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I love -  
that always jubilant smile,  
creative flair, artist, maker,  
open arms, gentle spirit,  
how's the family heartfelt inquiry,  
always present and patient.  
You were naturally authentic with a fearlessness  
to ask any question if clarity was needed -  
never letting ego shame.

You and John John have always been  
the spiritual mayoress and mayor  
of our hamlet.  
You loved your community deeply.

Kathy, you truly beautiful being are now  
stitched into eternity's quilt.  
Love to your precious memory,  
and to all who celebrate and mourn you,  
*Robin*

---

*From your friend and neighbor, Robin Terra  
Photo by Jes Sward*

# Ode to Kathy

Continued from page 14

Photo notes: During the pandemic, I started to make stone memorials. Here's the one I made for Kathy. There's a little bit of symbolism mixed in, chat with me sometime if you're curious.

Kathy at the Faire. I saw her float down the community center stairs, Jes there to support her. Kathy was



beaming in her finest attire. She didn't stay long and I was able to catch her before she left.

This photo is extra special because it's with Maxx Moore. His mother was a Quilter and good friend of Kathy's who passed away in 2007. Maxx had his woodworking booth and his mother would have been so proud. That day of the Faire happened to be his mother's birthday and after the photo was taken, we had a moment of remembrance of her.

I sent Maxx the photo after Kathy's passing and we both remarked how we are thinking that Kathy and Ellen are happily chatting and quilting together once again.

- Lisa Eigsti



MBVFA BBQ 2007. Photo by Julie Smith



Day of the Dead. Photo by Laurie Piel

## Her Smile

by Suzanne Bender-Van Spyk

Her smile...

was shared widely and indiscriminately.

made you want to smile back.

turned a bad mood on its head.

encouraged you to say hello, stop for a moment to chat, speak your mind.

had you feeling you knew her, even if you had only met briefly.

hinted at bravery and a steel core wrapped in a cloud.

showcased a giving soul.

could be counted on, no matter the darkness of the day, the political climate, the pandemic.

made you want to do anything for her.

was a gift to anyone who encountered it.

Thank you, Kathy, for your smile.



Rummage sale.

## Kathy's Stories

Kathy Sward & John John were the heart of Muir Beach. Kathy meant so many things to so many people that it would be impossible for one person or article to encompass that entirety. So, we thought we would try to give voice to as many of those as possible and bring them together in one place. This is only a tiny bit of what Kathy was, but we hope it helps to touch people's memories.

– Outi Onorato & Laurie Piel

### Erica Henderson

My mom's passing is the most devastating loss I've ever experienced. If you met her, you know. She was the most creative little firecracker. She had the best style and smile. She was feisty and lovable. She fit under my chin when I hugged her. She's the best ever I could have asked for!

### Angie Banducci

Kathy will forever be Grandma Kathy to Jackson and Dean. She is loved and now forever missed.

*Continued on next page*



*Young Kathy. Photo by Erica*



*John John and Kathy at Graham and Brett's wedding. Photo by Pam*



*Erica on the way. Photo by Pam*



*Photo by Laurie Piel*

Kathy was supportive of and a promoter of all things Muir Beach! Always the optimist, we found her and John John enjoying themselves at every opportunity, like dancing on top of the beer truck at the 1991 MBVFD BBQ (photo by Debra). Dance on Kathy...!

– Robert and Debra Allen



*Kathy's Stories continued from page 17*

*Amy Utstein*

It's really hard to imagine Muir Beach without Kathy in it. She and I worked together for five years when I was the volunteer rental coordinator for the community center and she was the main facilitator of events in the space. Kathy was unflinchingly positive and helpful and I always knew that renters would be in great hands when she was present. She was also a friend - she supported me by taking part in the BLM protests of a year and half ago, and I always knew that if she was at a Muir Beach event it was going to be a great time. I will miss her smile and her laugh and her truly loving soul. In the Jewish tradition, we say, "May her memory be a blessing." Her memory certainly is a blessing to me.



*Protest. Photo by Lonna Richmond*

*Aran Moore*

My earliest memories of Kathy Sward are when she would babysit me at our house at 7 Seacape in the late '60s when I was about 6 years old. I will never forget when, on sunny days, Kathy would sunbathe naked with her friends on our deck. I was always way too shy to ask her for anything that I might have wanted like lunch, or a snack or ... well anything. I remember I would try to get the courage to go outside and ask her, but I would get so embarrassed that I would run to my room and close the door. When I would finally get up enough courage, I remember that I could not look at her. I would just stare at the ground and mumble something and blush.

*Continued on next page*



*Some of the Quilters who worked on the quilt Yukata Memories. The quilt was raffled off at the Quilters' April Fools' Raffle and Cocktail Party (Beachcomber August 2010 issue). Photo by Peggy Chiang*

*Bernard Halliwell*

I shall always remember Kathy Sward. I came to Muir Beach in 1983 and Kathy had long been here. We would meet at community events. I immediately noticed that she had a wonderful sense of community, and I liked and respected that. And I have to say that I shall always remember her beautiful smile, her bright eyes, and the fact that when we would meet and talk, she always seemed curious and interested in what I had to say and I felt she was always present. Those qualities should be common enough in the world, but in my experience they are not. I loved her love of quilts and I loved what she did with them, so very much. When she became ill, I signed up to take meals to her. I feel that people who are not well should still eat well. I shall remember each of those meals and how she received each one. Yes, with those bright eyes and that beautiful smile, in spite of her awareness of the path she was on. Those meals will help anchor Kathy in memory. It is so hard to lose someone who has been a part of the landscape of one's life.

*Charlene Modena*

When I think about Kathy, I have so many memories, and one that stretches out over many years is simply.... how much she loved flowers. We were always trading bouquets, and slips and starts of our latest favorite. Most recently, I recall how much joy she expressed over the flowers and plants that were brought to her during her valiant struggle. She told me how she had decided where to place the flowering plants in her garden, so that, as Spring and Summer arrived, she could see them in bloom from her kitchen window... Kathy was the loveliest flower of all.

*Coleen Curry*

Kathy was a Maker and an unconditional friend. Like the beautiful quilts she created, Kathy was a strong fiber woven through our Community.

*Danny Hobson*

When I think of Kathy Sward, I remember her on a barstool at Bistro with a big welcoming smile, full of sincere questions and curiosity, and fully engaged. Her colorful patched jeans or a hand-knitted scarf all evidence of her innate creativity. She was part of the heartbeat of this community, and I am so grateful to have known her bright spirit.

*Deborah McDonald*

I am blessed to have one of Kathy Sward's quilts hanging in the entry room of my house. I will forever be able to see it and think of my beloved creative friend.

*Gail Falls*

My earliest memory of Kathy is from 1970 or 71 when I visited friends on the corner of Seacape Dr. and Ahab Drive (I was living in SF then) and met Kathy as she was walking back from taking food to a sick neighbor and we talked a bit. I realized then that MB was the kind of 'suburb' in which I was interested and shortly after that moved here with husband and daughters Lesley and Ellen. I can still see Kathy doing yoga, making coffee and scones at the then new Community Center on Wednesday mornings. Kathy is why I'm here—I thank you, Kathy! And I am missing you, will always miss you...and I'm so sorry for all of us that you're not here.

*Jennifer Sauer*

Kathy was "the soul of Muir Beach" for me. She shared so many gifts, whether a ginger scone at the Wednesday morning bistro, an imaginative quilt, a tai chi class (for which she always refused payment), or an open ear when others had questions or wanted to share a story. Muir Beach could never be the same for me without her there, so I will imagine that she continues to preside over the Muir Beach Community Center in spirit the next time I come for a visit. My heart goes out to Kathy's family, friends and the whole Muir Beach community.

*Judith Yamamoto*

Kathy did so much for Muir Beach because she was such a good soul and, back in the day when she and I met, it was what it meant to be a Muir Beacher, embodied in the Muir Beach Volunteer Fire Department and the Muir Beach Quilters, or the Quilting Bee. This was in the 60's, and we were all a motley, easy-going, Peace and Love crew. Kathy and I loved getting together every week at Quilters' and talking and eating home-baked goodies, working on quilts which we raffled off (\$1 each entry) to raise money for the construction of the community center, and making our own quilts and going to the Pacific International Quilt Festival every year for a couple of days where we attended one of the workshops, spent hours admiring quilts in the big hall, ate dinner at the bar every night, and yakked for hours back in our hotel room upstairs. Our talking continued over the phone when I moved away from Muir Beach ten years ago, and our trips to the PIQF also continued

*Continued on next page*

*Kathy's Stories continued from page 19*

until a couple of years ago, when the pandemic ended them. Kathy is one of my friends whom I talk to every day, still; the talking will go on as good friends go on, in our hearts. I miss her. – *Judith*

#### *Judy Brooks*

When I think of Kathy, I see her beautiful smile and complete, heartfelt joy in the project du jour. She was genuinely interested in the projects of others and always had a kind word of encouragement and a smile. I will miss her presence and her creative spirit.

#### *Julie Smith*

No scrap of fabric is too tiny, worn or commonly utilitarian to inspire Kathy. Give her John John's old stained tee shirt, a used flour sack from a Kansas mill, a piece of transparent gauze, bits of fabric "too small to save" from a full-size quilt-in-progress. She had the imagination and skill with needle and thread to create something new and beautiful from what most of us would discard. Her art is an inspiration to me that I'll forever carry in my heart.

#### *Kathie Fischer*

I think of Kathy Sward everyday as I sit at my desk next to the Millennium quilt. I admire Kathy's fine work, the lovely geometric patterns made from tiny squares and triangles, and think about her collaboration with other quilters, how she honored and delighted in each person's work. When she called me to tell me I had won the quilt in the yearly raffle, she was beside herself with excitement and happiness for my good fortune. And she loved that the quilt would stay in Muir Beach. I think of Kathy as the heart and soul of Muir Beach,



*Kathy's flour sack apron, 2013.*

*Photo by Julie Smith*

always kind and cheerful, always helpful and resourceful. I feel so fortunate to have the work of her hand next to me every day. I miss her and treasure her life and memory.

#### *Laurie Brandt*

For decades I worked with Kathy selling Fire Department apparel at the Barbecue. Kathy's devotion to the Community will be sorely missed, but the spirit she imbued will continue to be felt in all future events.

#### *Laurie Piel*

Kathy touched lives and changed lives and believed in the community of Muir Beach. Finding a community was the reason we came to MB to begin with. We closed on our house the Friday before the MBVFA BBQ weekend in 2007 and volunteered to set up that Saturday, worked on Sunday and helped clean up on Monday. Apparently, volunteering without actually living at the beach seemed out of the ordinary. A few months later David and I were

having dinner at The Pelican (as we love to do) sitting in the pub. Across the room was a bunch of women (I didn't know them yet) and it sounded to me like they were discussing needing some help. So, I picked myself up, went over, introduced myself and offered to help with anything they might need. It turned out they were discussing the upcoming need for someone to take over coordinating the community center rentals because Ann Browning was not going to be with us for much longer. When I introduced myself, Kathy said "I know who you are and we were just talking about possibly asking if you might like to take over the job from Ann." They did, I did and my life was forever changed. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I have many more Kathy Stories but that is the origin story of my life at the beach.

#### *Lonna Richmond*

If you were lucky enough to know Kathy Sward you probably have many stories of your own, many fond memories of her. She was my next door or down the hill neighbor for many, many years and we worked on a lot of different things over the years. For probably 15 years I saw her every Wednesday doing tai chi and then at bistro. I always laughed when I'd clean up because I would ask Kathy if she used her plate, knowing that she had, as I'd watched her clean every last crumb with her finger. While cleaning up the quilters would arrive and they'd start preparing lunch with wine and then Outi's delectable and beautiful homemade dessert. When it became too much for Nancy Knox

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*Making scones at Nancy Knox's. Photo by Lonna Richmond*

to make scones, Kathy, Charlene, Janice and I would go over to Nancy's a few days before and take over her kitchen while we collaborated on scone-making. We'd always end up laughing at bistro because one of the batches would be wrong and we could never figure out what went wrong – we'd either put in salt instead of sugar, or too much or not enough baking powder, or baking soda instead – but I remember Kathy would often say, well, it doesn't taste that bad, and the others sometimes agreed, but many times not, and I'd send Kathy home with the whole batch.

As you know, she was a very talented and successful quilter having made many beautiful quilts, many of which are on the walls of several Muir Beach homes. She was also the best community member. She attended almost all of the board meetings, handled the merchandise for the BBQ for decades, worked at most of the elections and I would bet

that you could count on two hands the number of times she and JJ missed a party over the 50 or so years she was here...often dressed up for whatever party it was. One of my fondest memories is being out on the dance floor at our community parties, we'd have a band (often Steve's band, Freddie and the Freeloaders) and I'd make eye contact with Kathy and JJ out there dancing, and oh, it just warms my heart to think of that - she was beaming. She was a happy person, a beautiful person.

I was fortunate enough to drive her to some of her medical appointments over the last months and we'd have an opportunity to really talk, sometimes it was about politics, often times she'd ask about my brother who had that same operation she'd had and was having treatment - she would rarely complain about what she was going through, always more concerned with others.....one time we got talking about death and I asked her if she was afraid, and she

said no, I'm not afraid to die, I just have so many things I still want to do...and that's what she was--- she was a doer, she grew beautiful flowers, made quilts, loved and took care of her family, she was a loving person, the kind of person the world needs more of. We'll miss you Kath.

*Mary Bennett Layton*

I moved to Muir Beach in 1985 and wanted to teach Tai Chi so I contacted Kathy to see if it was possible for me to use the Community Center. She not only said it was fine but told me she'd love to try Tai Chi and that she might know of some more people that might be interested. She did and I became interested in the quilts she and Judith were talking about. After a while she suggested that I might join her and the Quilting Bee afterwards and learn to quilt. It was the beginning of a relationship that lasted until 1992 when I moved away. I will never forget Kathy's strength, sweet energy and her bubbly laugh. She was an incredibly accomplished artist. Her quilts are absolutely gorgeous and as unique and beautiful as Kathy herself. The precision and perfection, choice of materials of her creations...she could have easily been famous. Kathy had qualities of a woman from the good old days when the world was still kind and good. She was very humble and shy. I think of her as the heart of the Community Center in Muir Beach. Often assisted by John John and Judith she worked tirelessly on all kinds of community events. And they all were great fun! I feel grateful to have met someone so special and off the beaten path. My heart goes out to her family and the friends that will miss her so much.

*Continued on next page*

*Vanessa Workman*

“Take my gun” she said. “Or perhaps you’d prefer this one”. I looked at this petite lady with the largest smile in Muir Beach. I barely knew her and here she was entrusting me with weapons. “What else do you need, some ammo perhaps?” Kathy said. I was putting together a poster for my documentary and needed some props. Everything about this woman appealed to me, her trust, her generosity, the love and compassion in her eyes, and her wit expressed in her playful handmade French clothing. Thanks to Kathy, the poster was amazing. Over the years Kathy continued to embody pure love, proudly guiding total strangers with milestone events through our community center, sharing the jewel of the community, supporting everyone around her, and always, always with a smile. She is a life-model for my daughters and me. I just wish I had been closer in the last years. Good bye Kathy, we’ll carry you forever in our hearts. Vanessa Workman (formerly 50 Sunset way)

*Outi Onorato*

Kathy was my first and forever friend at Muir Beach. Our husbands, Terry and JJ, were childhood friends and neighbors and our children grew up together here and are lifelong friends to date. The Quilting Bee, which we started 48 years ago, became our lasting bond of friendship. Her astounding creativity will inspire me forever!

*Pam Eichenbaum*

Kathy Sward loved and treated her friends like a patchwork quilt. The patches of friends are like fabrics and she loved everyone equally and sewed them all together. We are all so lucky to love Kathy and so lucky to have been loved by her.

*Shokuchi Deirdre Carrigan*

I lived at Green Gulch Farm from 2007 until 2017 and voted in all the elections during those years at the Muir Beach Community Center. I knew Kathy from tai chi and I remember always seeing her there, sitting at the long (heavy) table in front of the windows looking out on Muir Beach and the headlands. I remember the smell of the volunteers’ coffee, the sound of light hearted chat with the voters and among themselves, and most of all I remember loving the feeling I had of voting at the MBCC. Warm, friendly, “neighborly” are words that come to mind when I think of those times. On those occasions, I felt part of a community of citizens. My last election voting there was the election of November 2016. I remember feeling so happy to participate in the democratic process with these lovely friendly helpful neighbors. Kathy’s warm smile and welcoming spirit will always be with me on Election Day, no matter where I am. I continue to practice Tai Chi with one of Master Tung’s students online. I will think of Kathy every time I practice. Actually, I already do. She was the solid leader of the students and I was always peeking at her to see where we were.

*Susy Stewart*

Greatness can come softly, quietly, with small steps that make huge waves. Kathy did not speak loudly but her compassion, her loyalty to friends and those she loved, her creativity, her love of the Muir Beach community, her integrity under fire; this is courage, this is greatness in action. She is a treasure that will be sorely missed in the Muir Beach community. It was an honor to know her.

*Tayeko Kaufman*

When I think of Kathy I also think of John John. They were the power couple at the beach for so many years, the core of the old beach. Their contributions will remain as part of the lore of the beach. I will remember Kathy for her zany style, creative and imaginative quilts, her willingness to always help, and her attention to details. She will be missed but not forgotten.



## OLD TIME MUIR BEACH AND KATHY

*I could feel a collective sigh of sadness along with many tears that Friday, when the tragic news reached us. Kathy had died.*

I could feel the community in mourning, even though I had yet to speak to anyone. Kathy Sward was Muir Beach. Even her house with John John, perched there by the new parking lot said, “Muir Beach” all over it.

If you had ever been in Kathy’s kitchen, then you would know what I mean; a sort of frozen-in-time comfort, dating back to the sixties, recognizable to many of us in its warmth, its authenticity, and most importantly, its love.

You might say, Kathy Sward was our institutional memory.

When I first came to Muir Beach, (having just left my husband), with an innocent little boy in tow, I landed at Gerry Pearlman’s house. He had gone off on one of his six-month adventures. My introduction to Muir Beach I now realize was historic.

Gerry, Harvey, Martha, Lee, Nina, John John and Kathy, along with Jim White, they were my first impressions of Muir Beach. I had no idea what I was getting into. What I did know was that I wanted a safe, sea environment for my little boy who was born in a Basque fishing village in Spain. And I was vulnerable.

Shortly into my stay I told Nina and Harvey that I felt afraid that my ex- husband might appear at Muir Beach. Their answer was, just go see John John. He was the fire chief then. And so I did – that first glimpse I had of that amazing kitchen, the kitchen of Kathy, right away I knew I was home.

If you ever saw Kathy’s Day of the Dead boxes, of which I have pictures, you would know how much she loved her parents, and her brother. There was a little girl quality about Kathy, an optimism, rarely seen these days; like every day was a new day, and it was all going to turn out well. I think that was the part that broke my heart about her illness. Kathy had supreme faith in the goodness of mankind and the world.



*Photo by Beth Nelson*

Community advocate, wife, friend, mother, loyal to Muir Beach life above all, I will miss your smiling face dear Kathy. You taught me so many things.

Adieu, adieu.

With love,

Your neighbors,

Beth & Tenn

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## Blessed Swim *For Kathy Sward*

I waited until the afternoon to swim yesterday, hoping the high winds would calm a bit. The sun was low and so beautiful on the surface of the water. The winds were still high enough that once I swam beyond the break and floated, when I turned my gaze towards the shore I witnessed the wonder of the wind as it lifted the crest of the waves into a spray which the sun’s light caught, and together they formed the most beautiful rainbows. The first one that appeared brought a smile to my face and I immediately thought of Kathy who had died a few days ago. I held both my smile and the beauty of the ocean’s rainbow in my heart and offered it to up to her.

– *Nina Vincent*

## Learning with Autisha

By H Mirra

What might it mean to recognize that autistic people—after a century of being pathologized—seem to be particularly aligned with certain of the qualities that are described in early Buddhist thought as supreme?

A key word in contemporary autism theory is *monotropism*. This is also referred to as “single attention,” “concentration,” or “perseverance.” Also mentioned, often anecdotally, is an “unusual concern” with non-harming, and an intense connection with non-human animals. The overlap with the paramitas (supreme qualities) of *virya* (perseverance), *dhyana* (one-pointed concentration), and perhaps *sila* (ethics), are conspicuous.

The diagnostic list known as the Broader Autism Phenotype Constellation consists of sensory awareness, non-conformity, attention, systemizing, object-orientation, and memory. While these traits are familiar among other human traits, some of us were born directly beneath this particular cluster of stars. In combination, I relate them to wide-open sense doors, “going against the stream,” relational interdependence, and an inclination toward and ease with *shamatha* (tranquility). To be clear, I am not proposing that to be autistic is to be awake, nor that one needs to be autistic to awaken. Yet I find this a compelling intersection to contemplate and a vivid edge of experiencing to abide in.

In 2018 I attended a retreat with Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo in which she expounded on the *Therigatha* (Verses on the Elder Nuns). She also shared Atisha’s *Lojong Root Verses*, or *21 Lines of Advice*, written in the 11th century. Thus I heard: *‘The supreme conduct is to be in disharmony with the world’... ‘the supreme generosity is non-attachment’... ‘the supreme patience is to take the lowest place’...*

The simple verses resounded, contextualizing the paramitas both *as* and *with* provocation, while also remaining mundane.

Having delved into the literature of autism, and plainly recognizing myself in descriptions of autistic people, I sought and received a diagnosis in early 2020. This afforded me an opportunity to look back to my childhood through a new lens. I was assessed by someone with long-term experience in the field, who confirmed that I

thoroughly fit the profile. The process was revelatory; until now I had eschewed identity labels of any kind. *‘The supreme wisdom is to not grasp onto anything as the self.’* And here I was, categorized, feeling like a fully-fledged autistic person, rather than like a non-human. I’d always felt estranged from our species in general; all of a sudden I felt included, and thereby, inclusive. Rather than reifying self, identifying with fellow Autists brought non-self into much brighter awareness.

*‘The supreme method is to be natural.’* My autistic awakening has included a gradual dropping of some subtle aspects of unconsciously passing, as my natural dysfluency and atypical physical behaviors have been emerging. Autistic people, especially those of us with female bodies, are known to camouflage our autistic qualities in order to be accepted by non-autistics. This takes a tremendous amount of energy. *‘The supreme effort is letting go of activity.’*

Being quite literal, as Autists are known to be, I am often literally walking on paths. One day, circling Mt Tamalpais counterclockwise, the thought came, “*A-tisha? Or Au-tisha?*” It let itself go, as thoughts do while a-walking. Some months later I read aloud the root verses, doing the best I could to share their candlelight with two friends whom I met in the summer of 2020 at Autscape, a conference by and for autistic people. (Organized in the UK and historically a place for autists to be in physical community together, it had been moved online, and therein became possible for people who wouldn’t be able to participate in person to e-attend.) One of these friends asked if I would read through them a second time. Without deliberation I did so, now substituting “autistic” for the keyword “supreme,” which recurs in most of the lines. This was not to draw an equivalency between the two words, but to replace a humble one for a hierarchical one. It seemed to all three of us to be appropriate and pertinent, describing—in an amalgam of reality, reminder, and aspiration—what we claim as autistic traits and tendencies, which can be cultivated by anyone.

I then wrote out the adapted text and together we refined it. The lines remain ambiguously between a proposal, a call, and a challenge, for perspectives and for directions

*Continued on next page*

## *Learning with Autisha continued*

to grow in. The context is the individual and collective experiences of rejection—both micro and macro—for autistic ways of being. It is a response to the claims made by clinicians, and widely accepted, that we Autists are selfish, preoccupied with unimportant things, move and speak inappropriately, and cannot cooperate. That we are unfortunate aberrations, rather than welcome participants in the matrix of life on this planet. We don't accept this, nor do we believe in a fixed conception of autism. An autistic identity is as elusive as any other. As E.H. Gombrich wrote in 1950, "there is really no such thing as Art. There are only artists," so it is for autism and Autists. Self-advocacy is a necessary response to discrimination if we are to shift from vertical to horizontal ways of ordering the world, from official judgments to conversations, with mutual recognition and benefit.

These verses are not meant only for autistic folks, but for anyone who is willing to let go of any supremacist views they may be holding—of course including those of race and class and gender, but also of physical ability, intellectual ability, and of species—in order to live wholly. Atisha's lines could be adapted into an even terser form, without any qualifying adjective. Please consider this version as provisional:

### AUTISHA'S VERSES

Autistic understanding is to realize  
the absence of self

The autistic mind is rewilded

The utmost autistic quality is vast *citta*

The autistic example is of continually  
observing the mind

The autistic remedy is to know that nothing  
has self-nature

The autistic pilgrimage disagrees with the  
worldly

The supreme accomplishment is a decrease  
of troubles

The clear sign of this accomplishment is a  
decrease of desire

Autistic generosity is non-attachment

The pivot of ethics is pacific

The peerless patience is to take whichever place

The greatest perseverance is abandoning activity

Autistic concentration is to not alter awareness

Autistic wisdom is to not conceive of anything  
as a self

The true friend questions our errors

& their counsel is to attend to those errors

The supreme companions are mindfulness  
and clear knowing

The best incentives are hindrances and aches

The autistic method is to be natural

The way of benefiting is to help others  
enter the open

Benefit is a mind that turns

Autists are known not only to sometimes use pronouns irregularly, but also to mix our metaphors, analogies, and similes. So, to close authentically: abiding in the particular pivot of the Buddhadharma and autistic awareness has felt like being in a lightning storm of insight.

There are many facets of this, and we hope to continue to slowly move within this particular and subtle alloy-sky of precious-ordinary elements.

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*This is an edited version of a slightly longer essay that appeared in Tricycle: The Buddhist Review in May 2021.*

# After the Fair was Over

By Laurie Piel

The 2021 Muir Beach Holiday Arts Fair is in the books! We had half of the number of artists but 100% of the fun. Accommodations were made for spacing, vaccine status was checked at the door, masks were worn and everything in the kitchen was prewrapped...and for the first time we had live music in our reimagined Café Q space on the mezzanine which I call “Upstairs at the Fair”. It is now mid-January and I’ve not heard of one case of covid from the event. There are many thanks to be given, but before I do, I would be remiss if I didn’t share the special relationship between Kathy Sward and the fair.

The original Muir Beach Quilters Fair ran for 41 years from 1972-2013. During the years that it was at the MBCC, The Quilters organized their booth but Kathy’s inherent understanding of how materials and patterns went together gave her the ability to see which artists should be in which location around the Center to show off each person’s artistry to their best advantage. Starting when Suzanne Miller & I took over the fair in 2015, we could not have made it happen without Kathy. She was by my side from day one every year, helping with artist choices, figuring out who went where and why and teaching me along the way. She had creative ideas about how to use the space and kept me from many a pitfall over the years. I was so grateful that Kathy was able to attend this year, if only for about an hour. The fair is better for having had her guidance and presence.

Here’s to all of the people who came out to spend their hard-earned cash this year. I know we were all ready to see each other and I am thankful that the fair snuck in between surges. How can I thank all of the people who volunteered to make this such a great fair? It’s a labor of love from the community and somehow a simple thank you seems insufficient and yet it’s all I have.

Let’s start with the kitchen which had its challenges with everything having to be pre-wrapped. Fortunately, it was a lovely day and no one missed the yearly hearty soup and chili donations. Alecia Singer assumed the responsibility for the kitchen and continued the all donations system including the hot dogs!

Our food donations came from Suzanne Bender, Joey Groneman, Leigha Heydt, Gail & Ken High, Anne Jeschke, Tayeko Kaufman, Brenda Kohn, Marilyn Laatsch, Gabe Leis, Shirley Nygren, Liz Salin, Julie Smith and Kate Somers. The Kitchen’s team of Janice Kubota, Melissa Lasky, Yeshi Neumann, Barbara Piotter, Barbara Poole, Julie Smith, Pamela Swarts and Nikola Tede ran like a well-oiled machine.

Without Café Q, Brenda Kohn moved over to take on the proof of vaccination table. It was a hard table to work as it is the front line of entrance and, unfortunately, not everyone was vaccinated and/or had their proof. Her team of Anne Jeschke, Charlene Modena and Kristin Shannon had their hands full. They handled everything firmly but delicately and there were no real incidences or ones that turned into real problems. If we are in the same situation next year, I will plan for more help.

Next I’d like to thank Alexis Chase who took on the Junior Artisans table again. Darcy Fitzpatrick, Danny Hobson and Frank Piazza (nice to be able to bring in a dad now and again) rounded out her team. The Junior Artisans had some of the most fun items for sale. We had some new folks at the table and some moved up to their own table. Our Jr. Artisans were, Francesca & Vincent Piazza, Molly Hatvany, Ella Brundieck, Jessica & Anna Rauh.



*Jr. Artisans Molly Hatvany & Francesca Piazza hold down the fort.*

*Continued on next page*

*After the Fair continued*

The Beverage Bar held up well under the resourceful watch of Harvey Pearlman and his team of Kathy Johnston and Paul Jeschke. The Beverage Bar would be missing much of its beverages without the annual wine donation from Peter Lambert & Linda Lotriet.... Thank You!!!

This year we actually had some people sign up as floaters which gave me the opportunity to have my very first table in the seven years that I've run the fair and I am personally grateful to Bernard Halliwell, Marilyn Laatsch and Barbara Poole.

Our new "Upstairs at the Fair" was brought to life by Simon Littler. It has long been a dream of mine to do that but have never had the time. The confluence of covid and a like-minded thinker in Simon Littler, made it happen. Our musicians were: the JBJ Acoustic Trio (Joe Massey, Bruce Barrett and Johnny Walsh) and the Muir Beach Grass Band (Bob Bowyer, Renee Boeche, Bryce Bowyer, Jane Bowyer, Michael Caulfield, Mark Pandapas, Chas Kingsbury and Sandor Hatvany).

Simon has said he would take it on again next year and I know he'll have some great ideas as we have great talent here at the beach. Also, we might be back to two days which will give us the opportunity to showcase even more local talent.



None of it happens without the hard work of setting it up and tearing it all back down... no one sees your dedication... it's from the heart ... so my heartfelt thanks to Susannah Kennedy, Robin Terra, Barbara & Don Piotter, Sonia Martin and Richard Chapman for their time and efforts.

If you look around the fair (or the BBQ) you can find the information you need from the signage. Muir Beach has a resident artist/signage maven who always comes through even with last minute requests... Brad Eigsti's talent is always on display no matter what the event is. We're lucky to have him.

There is more than one way to support the fair and financial donations are a major part of the equation. This year we had a large group digging into their pockets which made all of the difference in our donation. Their contributions allowed the fair to give to the CSD virtually the same amount of money that we did in 2019 which had twice the amount of days, artisans and table fees. Our contributors were: Beth & Durand Begualt, Heidi & Adam Brown, Ella Brundieck, Lotta Cole & Sandor Hatvany, John & Prital Jeffery, Wendy Johnson & Peter Rudnick, The Quilters, Jason Lee & Lea Shapiro, Levon Sagatelyan, Kristin Shannon and Bethany Villere.

Lest not we forget, our incredible artists were Florence Buchenroth, Lotta Cole, Kasey Corbit, Craig Eichenbaum, Jill Hamilton, Casper Cole Hatvany, Mira Klein, Evie & Bea Littler, Simon Littler & Vanessa Phillips, Paxton Miller, Janet Tumpich Moore, Maxx Moore, Laura Pandapas, Leslie Riehl, Tom Soltesz and our three legacy community organizations... The Garden Club, MBFVA and the Quilters. Needless to say, without them there would be no fair at all!

A good time was had by all and I look forward the Muir Beach Arts Fair 2022... see you all at the Fair!

*The Muir Beach Grass Band "Upstairs at the Fair."*

*Photos by Laurie Piel*

# Affordable Housing

By *Steven J. Moss*

“It costs the same to build an “affordable” house as it does a market rate one,” my friend, Chris Block, presently San Francisco’s Chronic Homelessness Initiative Director, told me almost two decades ago.

That’s still roundly true. Modest savings can be achieved by deploying different construction techniques, materials, and modular units, such as those manufactured by Factory\_OS. Mostly, though, the only way to significantly lower costs is to build (much) smaller units, with communal – shared bathrooms and kitchens – amenities, thereby reducing the number of appliances and fixtures that need to be installed; slash borrowing rates; or secure subsidies, such as tax waivers, credits or direct provision of land or services.

Despite knowing these challenges, several years ago I helped launch an affordable housing company in Rwanda, an East African country that’s home to more than 13 million people. Shelter quality there varies tremendously depending on income and location, with poorer people in rural areas mostly occupying mud walled homes, with little access to indoor plumbing or electricity. In contrast, over the past decade the capital, Kigali, has been transformed from a city of dirt roads, traditional clay and thatched roofed houses, and a handful of cafes and western-style restaurants to one in which even a five-star tourist would be comfortable. While asphalt-paved streets aren’t universal, the urban area now features a mix of modern medium-rises, elegant villas, and basic, tin-roofed brick homes that might fetch \$100,000 or thereabouts

in Detroit or Dayton. Few units are available for less than \$60,000; almost none below \$30,000.

See Far Housing – named after a Rwandan saying, “if you see far, you will go far” – was determined to build quality, medium-rise residences in Kigali, priced to be affordable to working class families: teachers, civil servants, tradespeople. We planned to offer a mix of studios to four-bedroom apartments that, if not at San Francisco standards, would pass muster as solid entry level homes in Michigan or Ohio, within reach of families with annual household incomes of roughly \$15,000. With apartment ownership roughly as desirable to Rwandans as it was to Americans in the 1950s, communal amenities – playgrounds, athletic fields, gardens, even a first-of-its-kind vehicle sharing pod – would be important selling features.

Neither I nor the rest of the management team drew salaries or were even reimbursed for the 20- to 25-hour flight to Kigali from the East or West Coasts. But we wanted to make a profit, mostly to be directed to Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village, which’d emerged from Rwanda’s mid-1990s genocide to take care of more than 500 vulnerable youth, and for which I was a founding board member.

When See Far started out the Rwanda government offered to provide public infrastructure –roads, water, septic, and the like – at no cost if a development either was medium density, or at least 70 percent of the units were priced at \$35,000 or less. San Francisco, where homes sell as soon as they’re built, requires no more than 30 percent of new houses in a complex be affordable. Securing infrastructure subsidies was essential

for the project to be profitable. See Far eagerly opted for the medium density scheme, voluntarily proposing that more than half the units meet the government’s affordable criteria. This was possible, in part, through the use efficient brick technology innovated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SKAT bricks, with the less expensive units tight three bedrooms or smaller.

To build homes See Far needed land. Our team identified a beautiful 7.5-hectare parcel not far from the Kigali International Airport, for sale at a quite reasonable price, mostly because it was zoned industrial. The City of Kigali was eyeing it for use as its first central sewage treatment plant, an unlikely outcome given that another site was already being developed for that purpose. Fortunately, the general plan was being revised, with strong interest in increasing housing supplies. See Far was able to rezone the property, for which we’d purchased an option, for medium density residences, sharply increasing its value.

We secured financing from sympathetic, extremely patient, American and Swiss investors, and started to build our first 52 units on a half-hectare, a stutter step to constructing another 600.

Every developer on the planet knows that nothing proceeds as planned. The trick with construction is knowing when to zig, when to zag, and sometimes, when to quit. The first brick in See Far’s wall, so to speak, was SKAT. Brick is beautiful and can be made in Rwanda using amply available clay. But SKAT’s approach wasn’t engineered for the up to five-floor buildings we were developing, civil engineers in

*Continued on next page*

*Affordable Housing continued*

Rwanda had little knowledge of its design capabilities, with the blocks notably more expensive than SKAT predicted, and difficult to source. Skilled bricklayers tended to slop on too much mortar, creating an uneven effect that wasted cement, expensively imported from Tanzania, degrading any lingering savings that might've been squeezed out of the process. Our expected profits ticked down a notch.

Not that there are many alternatives. A landlocked country with no rail access, importing anything into Rwanda is expensive. Other than clay, few natural resources are available: no significant forests for wood harvesting, limited capacity to produce cement, ceramics, or even metal frames. Experiments are underway to develop bamboo and recycled plastic as a roofing material; rammed earth offers niche opportunities. The only available cost-effective substitute for bricks is CLC blocks, dependent on imported bonding material and only recently available. Unskilled labor is cheap, accomplished workers hard to fund.

Construction was going well, managed by a quite capable South African, Johan Geldenhuys, with procurement handled by a dedicated and skilled Rwandan, Eric Kalisa. There were workforce issues, to be sure, with a deficit of truly skilled tradespeople and middle managers. The government was slow walking our infrastructure subsidy submission, requesting multiple, repetitive, rounds of redesign requests and clarifications.

Almost half the units were presold, with small deposits down. We'd engaged a spirited team of pro bono architects in Monterey and San Francisco who were carefully

planning the next phase. Then, COVID happened.

Supply chain disruptions; lockdowns; curfews; rapidly escalating materials prices; more lockdowns. See Far's immune-compromised (volunteer) chief executive officer, Micky Padway, contracted COVID. After more than a week of dire worry she surfaced back into wobbly health, but was largely grounded in New York, unable to risk travel. I flew to Rwanda several times during the pandemic, getting tested repeatedly, but left early from a trip in the fall of 2020, fearful of being trapped in the country lest I be virus exposed. Did I mention lockdowns?

After rendering preliminary approval for our medium-density scheme to receive infrastructure subsidies, the Rwanda government notified us that, given the ruin of their general fund, that was no longer possible. We'd have to hit 70 percent affordable, which'd open access to a largely unused pot of World Bank affordable housing monies.

We recrafted our pricing, stretching to hit 70 percent. It was impossible, especially given that, apart from an infusion of international financing, the global pandemic had flatlined the Rwandan economy. The number of presold units dribbled to a small handful. The government didn't respond to our Hail Mary infrastructure requests. Our homes wouldn't sell unless toilets flushed and lights switched on, at a cost of roughly \$1 million.

Insert the expletive of your choice here.

We zagged, securing infrastructure financing from a sympathetic social investor, betting that the government would ultimately return to its original medium-density agreement. Backed

by American and European donors, the government waived value-added taxes for investors, a conceptual 18 percent savings on materials, though challenges securing the exemption, and eligible vendors jacking up their prices, halved that value.

Construction delays, material price inflation, extra expenses for a vain attempt to secure government subsidies had eroded profits on our 52 units. But our land's worth increased, potentially making up for these losses in the long run.

We hope to finish the units next month. We don't (yet) have the \$100,000 needed to include a children's playground and athletic fields, amenities that'd fully demonstrate the benefits of medium density living. Still, sales are picking up, though the most expensive units, the four bedrooms, have yet to attract buyers. We're optimistic that once the homes are fully outfitted with doors and windows, lighting fixtures and water, they'll sell. Then again, if we weren't optimistic we wouldn't be building affordable homes in East Africa.

Like many a developer, if we knew how hard the voyage would be we'd never have started it. But then, 52 Rwandan families wouldn't have a nice place to live, for many their first step on the ladder of home ownership.

With almost no other affordable housing developers active in the country, the government is considering lowering its affordability percentage to 40 percent for medium-density complexes, making good on its original infrastructure offer. Our finger are crossed, while our minds anxiously mull over what to do next.

*See Far is raising funds for a playground; please email editor@potreroview.net.*

# Muir Beach LAN and *Lil Swift* Save the Day in the Farallones

By Beth Begault

## THE CHALLENGE

To provide reliable internet to a handful of researchers from Point Blue Conservation Science who live on Southeast Farallon Island (SEFI) a remote outpost of the Farallon Islands. SEFI is the largest island on the Farallones at 95 acres, and the only inhabited island that includes a circa-1853 lighthouse and several old outbuildings. One biologist and four interns live there for months-long shifts with no cell phone, no undersea lines from the mainland, and erratic satellite phone capabilities. Previously the WiFi connection ran from Twin Peaks in San Francisco, a distance of 31 miles from the SEFI lighthouse, while the new connection from Muir Beach shortens the distance to 25 miles.

## THE TEAM

Leighton Hills, LAN manager  
Joseph Ferraro, fisherman and boat owner extraordinaire  
Matt Porter, installer for Muir Beach LAN and Tomales Bay LAN  
Jon Rauh, fisherman and builder

## THE ISLANDS

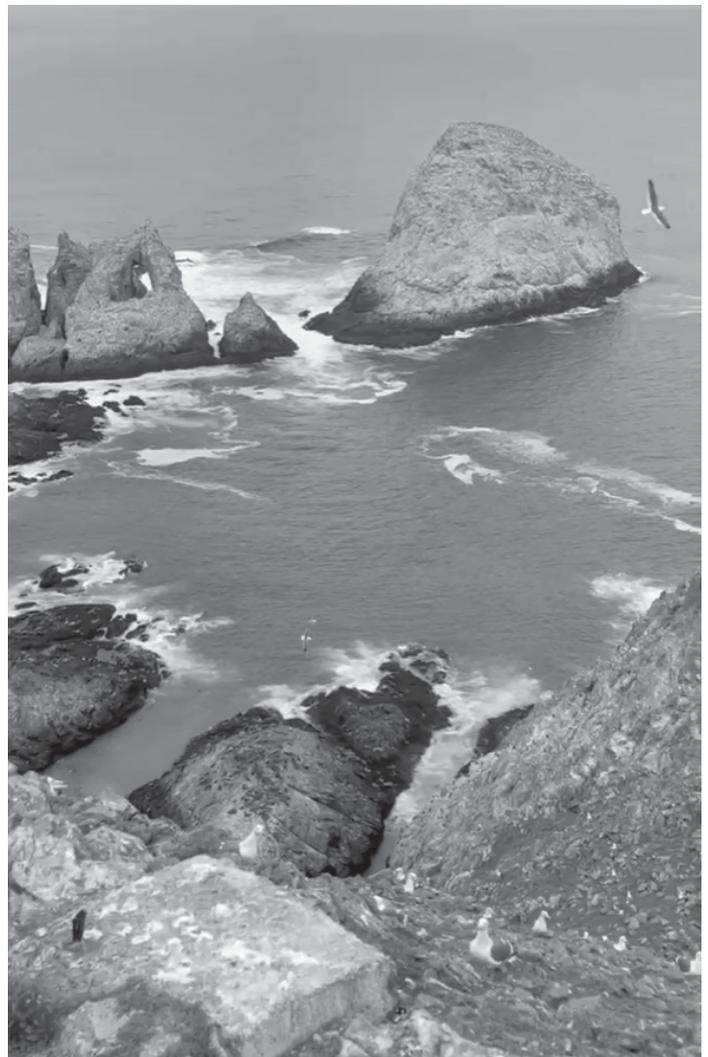
The islands are part of the city and county of San Francisco and have congressionally-designated wilderness area status, which severely restricts access in order to restore and preserve the flora and fauna that were decimated during the 1800s by excessive hunting, fishing, and egg harvesting. Preservation efforts began in 1909 when President Theodore Roosevelt signed an executive order that was expanded in 1969 and again in 1981. The waters surrounding the islands within a ½ mile perimeter are also protected as part of the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, with eye-popping fines for unauthorized ships that enter the protected area even accidentally. The islands are home to hundreds of thousands of seabirds, pinnipeds, and mice, resulting in various assaults to the human senses: cacophonous noise levels, fetid odors, and labor intensive challenges to sanitation and hygiene. During the nesting season, bird attacks necessitate the wearing of hardhats while outdoors (reminiscent perhaps of Hitchcock's "The Birds").

*The waters surrounding the islands.  
Photo by Leighton Hills*

## NAUTICAL DETAILS

The seas surrounding the islands are notorious for deadly shipwrecks, even as recently as 2012. Muir Beach's four intrepid sailors left the Bolinas Channel early on the morning of December 3 in capable hands on Joseph's 1972 21-foot Boston whaler, *Lil Swift*, having strategized the trip for a non-windy day. With a distance to travel of 18 miles as the crow flies, wind/tide/swell considerations rendered it impossible to motor in a straight line, increasing the distance to 20 miles. Conditions were favorable that morning, allowing them to travel at a speed of 16 knots/20 miles an hour. Leighton described the 1 hour and 25 minute passage as fun and fast, including whale sightings that were accompanied by an acute awareness of the rarity of this opportunity to visit the island.

*Continued on next page*



*Farallones continued*

**LANDING/OFF-LOADING**

The approach to the islands required a high degree of finesse by Joseph as well as some concentrated coordination with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and with the scientists greeting them. There is no beach, only treacherous cliffs (the name Farallones is Spanish for “pillars” or “sea cliffs”, a warning to all), so Lil Swift was buoyed 50 yards from land. An elaborate crane system with a 500 lb weight limit first offloaded the equipment, and then in a second hoist, Leighton and Matt. At this point in the morning, Joseph and Jon said goodbye, and they were free for a day of unfettered fishing, while Leighton and Matt set to work lifting hundreds of pounds of gear up the 250-foot climb to the lighthouse, surrounded by overwhelming numbers of curious, noisy seabirds never further than 6 feet away.

**INSTALLATION**

The installation was carefully planned in advance, down to every tool, wire, and screw, because a single missing piece of the installation puzzle would thwart a successful internet connection. The Muir Beach LAN provided \$10,000 of equipment at cost and offered the monthly service at a reasonable rate. Leighton and Matt worked nonstop from 9am-6:30pm the day they were dropped off, a very long day indeed that eventually necessitated busting out the flashlights and dodging divebombing birds. After a night of bunking in an old but comfortably-fitted guest house, work resumed the next morning from 8am-2:00pm.

**THE RETURN**

Leighton and Matt’s intensive installation efforts left them with a whopping 15 minutes of unstructured time to explore their surroundings before the return vessel—a sailboat and not Joseph’s Boston whaler—departed for Sausalito. The original 1+ hour trip to the island became a 5 ½ hour return to the mainland, with a king tide to deal with and other challenges that slowed the boat’s speed to 2 knots at times, all followed by the onerous tasks of unloading and returning equipment and tools back where they came from.

**THE RESULT**

The efforts were a resounding success: the previous, slower WiFi speed was increased nearly 5-fold, and the appreciative researchers can now even stream a movie if they want to. A remarkable effort, all around!



*Huge Ling Cod (above); Prehistoric-looking fish (right). Photos by Joseph Ferraro*



*Jon and Joseph on Lil Swift. Photo by Leighton Hills*



*Lighthouse. Photo by Leighton Hills*

## Greener Pastures

See page 9 for story.



“Best Buds” Rascal and Jalapeño grazing together. Photo by Cori Valentine



Ziggy and Chunk (above), for which the Alter (below) was originally created, but then added to throughout the past two years. Photos by Jess Pinto



## A Tribute to Kathy See pages 17-22 for more Kathy stories.

I remember Kathy for her smile, her down home family and community values and her unwavering sense of style and color. Kathy was one of the first people I met when we moved to Muir Beach in 2002 and I had the honor to share some time with her on various projects, from kid ‘crafternoons’ at the community center and organizing MBVFD merchandise for the Muir Beach BBQ to CSD meetings, where she was a constant source of local wisdom and values. The glass of life always seemed over-flowing around Kathy.. never half empty.... She just exuded gratitude and delight in all she did and was unflinchingly generous with her time. She attended our fashion shows and Mending Bars at California College of the Arts (with Janice) and student exhibitions at Stinson Beach Library, and even participated in our international Craft of Use research project (see images at right and below).

Kathy always showed up fully and with a smile.

– Lynda Silva



“I’ve noticed that .....many of my t-shirts start tearing here [mid line low front]. And this one I put a yellow patch on it and continued wearing it. And this one I think I want to put red on it, I like red and this avocado green.” – Kathy



“This little leopard skin dress, mom made when she was 80. ...I wear it loose or with this belt that she wore with it...”  
– Kathy

Photos by Paige Green