



Nicasio Historical Society

Fall Update 2020

Letter from the President

The Times They Are A'Changin'

As you all well know, our lives changed abruptly and significantly in March this year due to the worldwide threat of COVID-19. Ordered to remain sheltered in our homes, we devised new ways to occupy ourselves and stay connected to our families and friends.

NHS is Changing Too

Not being able to open the museum or hold events these past six months and into the future has made it necessary for the Nicasio Historical Society to make some changes too.

In our last meeting, we NHS Directors decided we could no longer afford to rent our museum space, now closed for six months with little possibility of reopening in the foreseeable future. Additionally, due to COVID-19, fundraising events are also on hold; it required significant fundraising to support the museum rental and related insurance costs.



Although we all regret the loss of our place on the square, it just didn't seem to make sense to deplete our hard-raised funds to maintain a closed museum.

Fortunately, however, we will not need to seek a storage facility elsewhere for our archives as we had assumed. Patrick McNeil has agreed to rent the front

(museum) room, paying the lion's share of the rent, and we can retain our office space in the rear room. We hope this arrangement will be long-term, but, as for now, it's set up as a six months trial.

NHS Continues its Mission

Nonetheless, the Nicasio Historical Society will continue to energetically pursue our mission to *Research, Document, Preserve, Share and Celebrate the Rich History of the Nicasio Valley*.

Joe McNeil founded our organization back in 2003 and since then we have held 28 major events and published two books and three booklets. It wasn't until 2014 that we secured our museum space and since then we mounted eight museum exhibits. We now plan to return to the event-based organization we were in the past.

Hopefully, we will be able to hold a ranch tour in the not-too-distant future. We also have ideas for new and entertaining community events that we plan to develop. We'll keep you posted.



Additionally, we intend to eventually produce the *The Horse in Nicasio, Past and Present* exhibit that had been scheduled to open in our museum in late Spring 2020. We hope to display that exhibit as well as selected past museum exhibits short term in alternative venues, possibly Toby's Gallery, Druids Hall and at outdoor fairs and festivals

As far as publications go, I am currently working with Troy Alders on a new book, *NICASIO: Oldtimers, Newcomers and Remarkable Guests*, a collection of 60 or so interviews conducted and written by my Nicasio School students for our classroom newspaper, *The Nicasio News* between 1994 and 2012. I decided to produce this book when I realized the important historical chronicle of life in Nicasio these interviews represent. They are full of interesting information, anecdotes, clever writing and humor. I expect you will find it an entertaining and informative read.

Nicasio Covid Days



In July 2020 we sent an email to all Nicasio folks inviting them to participate in a history project to document changes to their daily lives during Nicasio COVID Days in both photos and words. The submissions are posted on our webpage: nicasio.net/nhs

Halloween and the holidays that follow are soon upon us, a wonderful opportunity to take note of and document the changes that the corona virus

has brought to our usual holiday activities. Submit photos along with a word or two about it. I will continue to post submissions for all to enjoy. Email your submissions to eddoss@mac.com

Martha's Birthday Party

We held a festive party at Rancho Nicasio outdoors on the back deck with six-foot table spacing and facial coverings to celebrate our 17 years as a nonprofit organization and Martha's 79th birthday on August 8, 2020. We NHS Directors and guests enjoyed emerging from our Covid-19 seclusion for a social experience, drinking *Wines That Deliver* from Patrick McNeil and eating delicious Rancho appetizers. But the *pièce de résistance* was Martha's demonstration of her remarkable prowess with the Yo-yo, performing the tricks: *Walk the Dog*, *Rock the Cradle* and *Around the World* with skill and grace.

A Huge Happy Birthday to NHS Director Grace Farley who turned 92 earlier this month. Martha and I enjoyed lunch and wine tasting with her at McEvoy Ranch.



Ava Jean Brumbaum (1922-2020)

A Remembrance



Ava Jean had enormous capacity for forgiving, accepting and embracing others--in short, a great capacity for love.

She would tell you that she was blessed with a wonderful life, and yet she endured a huge amount of loss. Rather than let it overwhelm her, she let it shape her into an even better person and used her experience of that loss to help others.

Ava Jean grew up in Berkeley in the 1920s, 30s and 40s; it was a wonderful time to be there. From childhood, her family summered at Fallen Leaf Lake where she enjoyed hiking and boating with her cousins and long-time family friends.

Ava Jean was passionate about classical music, an interest that started in college when she was a student representative with the San

Francisco Symphony Student Forum. She was invited to join the Symphony's Board of Governors and was actively involved well into her nineties. In that role, she represented the Symphony on San Francisco's Committee for a Performing Arts (created by Mayor Alioto in 1970 to address the need for a world-class performing arts center) and became involved with the architects and designers in the building of Davies Hall.

In the 1950s, Ava Jean was invited to join the Board of the San Francisco Music Conservatory. For sixty years, Ava Jean and the Conservatory took promising young musicians under their wings and nurtured their careers with scholarships and performance opportunities. She remained lifelong friends with many of these students and delighted in following their careers.

Ava Jean met her first husband, Harold Pischel, on a ski hill at Soda Springs when he helped her up as she fell off the rope tow. She was 22 and he was 46. Harold was persistent in his courtship and they were married at her Berkeley family home in 1945. When Ava Jean was pregnant with her first child, they purchased Melvin Belli's house on Sixth Avenue in San Francisco where they raised their four children. For a brief time, the couple moved to Switzerland, put their children in boarding school, and traveled extensively throughout Europe.

In addition to music, Ava Jean was passionate about skiing, tennis, writing and investing. She was part of a standing weekly tennis game for 37 years with her legendary foursome tennis pals Joy, Mary and Anne. They started at the Julius Kahn

playground and eventually all joined the California Tennis Club. For fifty years she belonged to a memoirs writing group called "The Parachutists." They met once a month, reading their stories aloud, and helping each other critique and improve their writing.

In 1962, Ava Jean and Harold went on a cruise in the Canadian Gulf Islands and fell in love with the area. They bought a cabin on Shell Island and spent many happy summers there until Harold's death in 1985.

Ava Jean experienced a great deal of hardship and grief in her life. Ava Jean's two sons died of AIDS, each when he was 37 years old. Ava Jean was supported through her grief and bereavement by the Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon. She joined the Chaplaincy of the AIDS Interfaith Organization to train to become a Chaplain Aide. For several years Ava Jean volunteered her time as a chaplain in the AIDS ward at the San Francisco General Hospital. Drawing from her experience and her desire to help others, she made several speeches to church groups and hospice grief conferences about homosexuality, AIDS and faith.

Ava Jean entered into a new and happier chapter of her life when she met Harold Brumbaum. Harold was an Episcopalian minister and they were introduced in May of 1987 at a friend's dinner party. Harold invited her to hear his sermon the next day, which touched her. The day after that, Ava Jean invited Harold to the Symphony. She says that during the performance, Harold leaned in close to her and whispered, "I'm in heaven." That was that. They were married by September and moved to Nicasio in 1988.

Sorrow intruded again when, not too long after their move to Nicasio, Ava Jean lost a third child, her only daughter, Ava, who collapsed of pulmonary failure folding laundry in her basement and never revived. Ava had worked as a hospital nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit. She was only 38.

Ava Jean spent 20 joyful years with Harold in Nicasio at Rock Acre Ranch until his death in 2007. They loved their life together here. Ava Jean contributed to the Nicasio community in lots of ways. She was a regular volunteer in the Nicasio School kindergarten classroom and never missed a graduation or school play. She could be found selling tickets at the Nicasio School Foundation Barn Dance, planting daffodil bulbs around St. Mary's Church, helping stock the emergency food supply for the Nicasio Disaster Council and supporting the Nicasio Volunteer Fire Department. She was an active member of the Nicasio Historical Society and the Ladies Auxiliary.

Ava Jean passed on February 2, 2020, survived by her son Thomas Kaspar Pischel, his wife Carol Knepple, their daughter Kristen and by daughter Ava's widower Lloyd Elliot and their three children Evan, Aaron and Ava Elise.

Ava Jean inspired so many of us with her great capacity for love and her vibrant exuberance for life. She will be missed.

Leanne's personal remembrance:

I feel grateful to have known Ava Jean so well. We were very close friends, and she was like an adopted grandmother to my three children. We accompanied her to Shell Island, Fallen Leaf Lake and the Symphony, so we were able to appreciate first-hand how wonderful and magical these aspects of her life were. We will miss her delightful company, and we will especially miss playing Rummikub with her after dinner.

Madeleine's personal remembrance:

Ava Jean's strength and courage through so much loss and her generosity of spirit towards others were inspiring to me. I loved how direct she always was in conversation and how direct I could be with her. Among other things, she was wonderful company, easy to be with, delightful to talk to and open to new experiences. She did not want to slow down. In 2013, before Mike got transverse myelitis, the 3 of us drove to Sun Valley, Idaho for the Sun Valley Music Festival. We rented a house for a week and went to concerts almost every night. AJ and I would frequently go for a "hike" in the daytime. She was in her 90s and moving pretty slowly but determined to keep moving. On the way home, we spent the night at a casino hotel in Reno. Though she'd never been to a casino, she embraced the experience, not hesitating to try out the slot machines and hamming it up while we took pictures of her in the process.

by Leanne Greentree and Madeleine Sloane

