



The Historian

Preserving Today for Tomorrow

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Marion Neuberger - My Days as a Counterspy



By Tammy Dunn

Leisure World News Staff Writer - September 9, 1982

I was what I considered a typical housewife with two little children...I guess I was a joiner, an idealist," she said, speaking eagerly with hands resting one on top of the other in her lap.

But Marion Miller's "typical" life, as she called it, changed in 1950 when she became a counterspy for the FBI. "I received a letter inviting me to go to the reorganization conference of the Los Angeles Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born," she said.

Her late husband, Paul, who had done some counterintelligence work for the United States during World War II, recognized phrases such as "war monger" and "police state" as being communist expressions.

They could not understand why Mrs. Miller had received the letter, since she is not foreign-born. However, an FBI agent explained to them later that the Communist-front groups liked to have women

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Our Neighbors - The Willows

In February 1972, Rossmoor Corporation publically announced that it had started construction on the first phase of The Willows, a \$2.6 million private community development next to the Village's Gate 8.

Lee D. Wackman, an early Willows' Pioneer, wrote "The Story of The Willows Foundation By One Who Was There." describing how this facility came to be. In 1956, a group of talented and devoted Christian Scientists arranged to



The Willows Administration Building. The Willows is located on Santa Maria Avenue, adjacent to the Village's Gate 8.

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MUSINGS

Marion Miller Neuberger

While I was looking through the Leisure World News in search of some Bits & Pieces from 1982, I came across the article about counter-spy Marion Miller who you probably know as Marion Miller Neuberger. Marion was kind enough to dig through her archives to provide the pictures contained in the article. The portrait of Marion, above the piano in the picture on Page 1 was a gift from Ralph Edwards for appearing in a segment of his television series, "This is Your Life."

Marion and Paul moved to Leisure World in 1981. Paul died 5 weeks later. In 1990 Marion married the late Burton Neuberger.

The Society selected Marion Neuberger as Leisure Worlder of the Month of June 1996.

The Willows

I always wondered how The Willows came to be located adjacent to Gate 8. With the help of Sandy Toner and Jeff Lane, The Willows Administrator and Business Manager respectively, the question is now answered. The pictures in the article were taken from The Willows web site.

Society's Honoree of the Month

I would like to congratulate Dick Tyhurst, our Laguna Woods Honoree for the Month of August; Maggie and Tom Letcher, our Honorees for the Month of October; and Jim Hart, our Honoree for the month of November.

We are grateful to the Avalon Las Palmas and Avalon at The Regency for funding this program.

Board of Directors

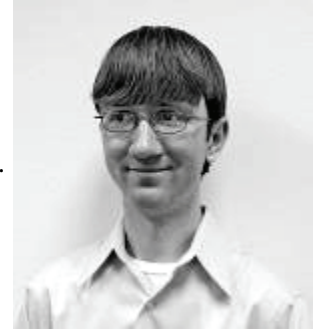
We are rapidly approaching that time of year when the Society's Nominating Committee nominates people to serve on the Board. This year there are five seats on the Board. If you are interested in the services that the Society provides, and you are a "worker bee," please make an appointment with Trish Cassidy so that she can provide the information that you will need in order to make your application.



Bob Ring

CCHS Member

The Historical Society is a proud new member of the California Conference of Historical Societies (CCHS). This state-wide organization helps "historians, and others who are interested in history, to connect and share information—joining efforts to preserve records, artifacts, sites, and buildings".



Chris Macon, Curator

As part of our initial involvement with the CCHS, the Historical Society will be submitting a collection of pictures representing the early development of what is today the City of Laguna Woods. These pictures will be made available on the CCHS website for all to see! We will also be using them to create a new exhibit for the Society's lobby.

We Need Your Help

We know that so many of you have wonderful pictures of the people, places, and events that have shaped this city. If you have any that you would like to submit for consideration, not only for the CCHS project, but also for a special collection at the Historical Society, please call our front desk at (949) 206-0150. All original pictures will be returned to their owner after we scan them into our brand new computer system.

Orange County Public Library Program

The Historical Society is excited to be partnering with the Orange County Public Library on a state funded pilot program. Over the coming months, we will be supporting the Library's efforts to gather and record stories matching the theme of "California of the Past". Stories will be turned into "mini-movies" which will then be accessible online and at local library branches (including the mini-branch at City Hall). We will have more information on this program in the next issue.



Counterspy (from Page 1)

work for them, “because they are the hardest workers for a cause,” Mrs. Miller said.

Millers Contact FBI

The couple contacted the FBI, telling them about the letter and its contents. A few days later while Mrs. Miller was bottle feeding her infant daughter, Betsy Lou, an FBI man came to her house and asked if she would go to the meeting and report back to the Bureau. The FBI suspected that the Committee for Protection of Foreign Born was a Communist front organization.

“I thought, I can’t even play poker without giving it away,” she laughed. But the day after the agent asked her to volunteer her services for the Bureau, she read accounts of the Korean War in the newspapers. Some of the Miller’s neighbors’ sons had been drafted and the war on communism hit home.

“They (the draftees) were giving their lives,” she emphasized and “I saw some relationship between the communist fight abroad and the less violent one being waged in the United States with propaganda letters and leaflets at home.”

The Korean police action occurred about the same time as Senator Joseph McCarthy’s personal war against communism. However, Mrs. Miller insists she was “not a McCarthyite,” and what she did was completely separated from the senator’s attack on communism.

The First Meeting

Mrs. Miller agreed to go to the meeting described in the letter and when she asked the FBI agent what she was to do, he told her to take a knitting bag and listen, then report to the Bureau what she heard.

The meeting was held across from MacArthur Park in Los Angeles in what Mrs. Miller described as a “seamy area.” “There were all kinds, all shapes and sizes of people from all backgrounds,” she remembered. They numbered about 75.

“Some of the speakers said our boys were committing atrocities in Korea,” while others praised China and the Soviet Union. It was those comments and others that “shook” her, she said.

She wrote the report and gave it to the FBI. Mrs. Miller assumed that would be the end of it. But the Bureau liked her report so much, they asked her to keep attending the meetings.

So with knitting bag in hand, Mrs. Miller went to the meetings and reported to the FBI under the code name of Susan Wilcox.

It was her knitting that interested one woman, Delphina, who was an advocate of the communist cause. She would engage Marion in talk about knitting and eventually Delphina asked if she would come to work in the office on weekdays doing typing and other clerical duties for the Committee for Protection of Foreign Born.

Miller Infiltrates Office

The FBI thought that was a great opportunity for Mrs. Miller to infiltrate the office and get material evidence of the Committee’s suspected activity as a communist front group.

“They played right into our hands,” she said.

But, she couldn’t tell her mother or any of her friends what she was doing. Her mother would babysit for the two children while Mrs. Miller was doing her volunteer espionage.

“My mother was worried because I was going out at all hours of the day and night,” Mrs. Miller said grinning. She asked an FBI man to talk to her mother and assure her that all was well. He did and her mother kept quiet about it.

The duties for the Committee got a little tense, Mrs. Miller said, because “they didn’t trust you,” referring to the people who were supposedly on the same side. While she was typing, people would look into her purse or they would drop in on her at home without calling.

The Millers were asked to join the Communist Party and because of what it might have meant to the FBI, they did. “It’s a distorted way of life, absolutely blind, lacking a complete sense of humor. They were always checking, never trusting,” she said.

Joys of Party Membership

After they became party members, others from the group would walk into their home unannounced, Mrs. Miller said.

“Sometimes, it was just like in the movies,” she laughed. She would smuggle a letter or other article out of the office where she did the volunteer typing, go to a phone booth and give it to an FBI agent for the item to be photocopied.

Letters from Tass and Pravda were among the things

Counterspy (from Page 3)

she sneaked to the FBI in order to prove that the Committee for Protection of Foreign Born had communist leanings.

It was sometimes scary and always nerve racking for Mrs. Miller. She feared she might meet with an accident, or someone could have made it appear that she committed suicide, "which had happened," she said.

Because the Committee did not want to risk being detected by the FBI or other government agencies, meetings usually consisted of small groups, or "cells" of only three or four members.

"We would meet in somebody's home or in cars," and the hardest part for Mrs. Miller was acting interested in the discussion of things such as Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto, which she described as not being very interesting reading material.

One night, she thought she was being followed on her way home from one of the meetings. It was late and dark and the car behind kept up with each of her car's movements. After she had reached a speed well beyond that of the posted limit and had gone through more than one stop sign, Mrs. Miller realized it was a police car.

"When the officer walked up to my car I nearly cried I was so relieved," she laughed. He did not give her a citation, she said, after she explained that she had been afraid she was being followed. "Of course, I couldn't tell him I was a counterspy," she laughed again.

While she and her husband tried to keep a sense of humor about the situation, the tension caught up with Mrs. Miller after five years and she had to take a leave of absence to nurse stomach ulcers. During her recuperation, government attorneys decided they had enough information to go before the Subversive Activity Control Board.

Revenge

And five months pregnant, Mrs. Miller testified for seven days about her activities as a counterspy in the Committee for Protection of Foreign Born. The SACB hearings were in Washington and when she returned to Los Angeles, she found that the Communists had sent 500 smear letters to her neighbors and friends.



Ronald Reagan, Jeanne Crain flank Paul and Marion Miller, subjects of 1962 G.E. Theater presentation, "My Dark Years."

The letters said she had been spying on the PTA and her temple. The children were shunned by their schoolmates, just as the adult Millers were shunned or ignored by their neighbors.

Finally, a neighbor spoke with the local newspaper in Mrs. Miller's community of Rancho Park. The paper printed her story and slowly, the neighbors came around.

J. Edgar Hoover, former FBI director, and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, among others, sent her supportive letters.

This is Your Life

She appeared on Ralph Edwards "This is your Life," and had then actor Ronald Reagan portray the part of her husband on the General Electric Theater when her story, "My Dark Days" was performed.

The Committee for Protection of Foreign Born was legally declared a Communist front organization.

Would she do it again? She pondered. The experience had been difficult on her oldest son, Paul Jr., who was alienated from schoolmates after the Communist smear on the Millers.

"I feel I did what was right at the time. It (Communism) was a threat." Pausing and shifting a little, she finished. "Under the exact circumstances, I suppose I would."

Willows (from Page 1)

purchase an eight-acre site in Garden Grove. They incorporated as The Willows Foundation, Inc. On the first page of his account, Wackman wrote that the original site in Garden Grove was named for the two large willow trees which stood near an adobe house.

As the idea grew, so did the size of the property—from eight to 20 acres. In the early 1960's, during a two-year period, 90 one-and-two-bedroom units were built. The planning started in the early 1960's, after The Willows Foundation had been notified by the State that its existing retirement community in Garden Grove would have to be relocated in order to make way for the 91 Freeway.

Search for Sites

The Site Committee, chaired by Leisure World resident Tom Heslup, started to evaluate sites in January, 1969. They quickly concluded that the land costs of sites in and around Garden Grove exceeded their budget.

Heslup approached Rossmoor Corporation with the idea of purchasing some of the property that was included in the Rossmoor Planned Community. The initial meeting was not productive because the Willows wanted to build single family homes and Rossmoor executives tried to sell the idea of a Rossmoor Towers type facility in order to reduce the acreage required for the project.

Cortese Makes a Deal

A few days later, Ross Cortese contacted Heslup and scheduled another meeting. As a result of this meeting, Cortese met with Harry J. Krusz, President of the Willows Foundation. The negotiations resulted in the 20 acre site adjacent to Gate 8. In Mr. Wackman's words, "The site was free from excessive noise and heavy traffic, with fine views, close to excellent shopping and near several Christian Science churches" and was available for \$200,000 less than the Foundation's budget.

With all this came a substantial bonus for both parties. Rossmoor offered to construct the site using Leisure World's La Casita, Casa Bonita, Encanto and Hermosa floor plans. The price was much lower than The Willows might have secured from any other contractor. This proposal was made in March, 1971 and



Residents enjoy the scenic walkways at The Willows.

accepted 5 months later.

The timing was perfect, the Willows Corporation reached a settlement with State of California for the Garden Grove site. The State's prompt payment allowed construction to start in August, 1971. The weather was favorable and much to everyone's surprise, residents started to move into the first phase of 112 residences in August, 1972.

The Ambiance

The centrally air conditioned homes have 1, 2, or 3 bedrooms with color-keyed kitchens that have built-in ovens, ranges and garbage disposals. All are carpeted and draped and have private patios. As built, The Willows was a barren landscape. As the trees and shrubs were planted, one of the newly planted trees was a willow tree. Today, eight additional willow tree flourish on the site as a result of planting branches from the original "grandfather."

Today The Willows has 152 units and is located in the City of Laguna Hills. The purpose of The Willows has been and continues to be to provide resident living for Christian Scientists who are older adults. While each of the homes has a fully equipped kitchen, residents are provided one meal daily, and optional evening snacks four days each week.

The Willows, like the Village and the other residential facilities in the community, is a success story that attracts people from all over the World.

Journey to the Past **Joan Long**

In the last issue, I recalled how the telephone poles and volleyball netting came to be installed at the tenth tee outside the back entrance of Clubhouse II when an errant golf ball bopped a swimmer on the head about 36 years ago.

That reminded me of why the barbed wire on top of our walls came to be installed at about the same time. The community was still quite new, and changes were frequently made as problems arose. Moulton Road, affectionately known as “Skunk Alley”, was two lanes and poorly lit. The poor lighting made it easy for teenagers to scale the wall and go for joyrides with the golf carts. This caused a lot of damage to both the putting greens and the carts. Obviously something had to be done.

One afternoon a member of GRF stopped by the office for a chat. He was telling me about this problem. I didn't live here then so my interest was somewhat superficial, but now I wish I had paid more attention.

I do remember, however, he said he was proposing installing, in his words, “bob wire” on top of the walls to keep out the intruders, but he was meeting with a lot of resistance. The main objection, he said, was that the barbed wire would create a prison-like atmosphere. He said, “I told them that Queen Elizabeth has got “bob wire” on her walls at Buckingham Palace, so why can't we?”

As we now know, that nameless gentleman prevailed and his “bob wire” was installed, providing us with an increased feeling of security that we have all come to appreciate.

I do hope you enjoy reminiscing with me from time-to-time. I will see you again when my “Time Machine” decides to take another journey.

IN MEMORIAM

Blanche Miller
Society's first employee

Emma Hemming
One of our Historically Advantaged

Archive Corner **Fran Lindberg**



One of the walks some of us are not aware of is the Aliso Park route. Its a circular walk with the creek flowing through the park. Aliso Creek winds about 18 miles from the Cleveland National Forest through Lake Forest, Laguna Woods, Laguna Niguel, and Laguna Beach and then empties into the ocean. As we walk through the park we hear many species of birds chirping and it's fun to watch the ducks and mallards waddling through the creek waters. Most fascinating is the Egret, pictured above, a stately white bird that resembles a swan. The park abounds with numerous types of trees, many of which are labeled. There's a tree that draws one's attention and that's the mammoth Sycamore tree which was planted almost 500 years ago, prior to the Pilgrims' landing.

So many residents walk their dogs, especially early morning. There are benches throughout the park to rest your weary bones. You will pass friends who greet you with a "hello" and some who like to chat.

To get to the park, enter Gate 1, proceed on Avenida Sevilla until you pass Ave. Majorca. The entrance is on your left about 150 feet past Building 596.

BITS AND PIECES OF LEISURE WORLD HISTORY

(Selected from the *Leisure World News*) **Mari Jan Vested**

40 Years Ago — September, 1967

Old West excitement comes alive with pageantry as cowboys, clowns, drill teams and horses perform in an authentic rodeo held at the stables. 5,000 persons are expected to attend the two day rodeo.

All residents are asked to leave their phone numbers at the gates so that the gate screening of visitors can be increased.

First Arts and Crafts Fair features unique originals including hand crafted items. Leisure World residents contributed items for Christmas stockings, mosaic cocktail tables, fishing tackle, hand hooked rugs and many different hand made items.

“Sing Sunday” delights audience as featured artists raise their voices in song at Clubhouse I.

A “Fashion Game” was incorporated into Leisure World’s first showing of the Fall season when Buf-fums of Santa Ana presented “The Art of Fashion.” Two fashion models wearing identical dresses, one perfectly accessorized and the other plain, paraded before the audience.

LW population hits 9,392 in 5,367 occupied manors with only 12 manors available for sale.

October 1967

LW residents launch their own “People to People” program to promote personal diplomacy by Americans at home and abroad, an idea conceived by President Dwight .D. Eisenhower in 1956.

A three day bazaar by Temple Judea’s Sisterhood and Mens’ Clubs is reported to be a “colossal sale.”

Veterans of WW1 and Auxiliary hold a pancake breakfast.

The Mayflower Congregational Church forms at Leisure World and joins the circle of organized churches. Rev. Niedringhaus was called to serve as the first pastor.

More than 100 artists participate in the 2nd Annual Art Exhibit held in Clubhouse I.

25 Years Ago — September 1982

Rossmoor Liquidation Trust asks the Orange County Environmental Management Agency to review a request for a zone change and General Plan amendment for 179 acres located off Moulton Parkway and designated as the Laguna Hills Garden Center.

The LW Chapter of B’nai B’rith holds gala luncheon for Children’s Home in Israel at Clubhouse V.

The Southern California Association of Governments four-year \$600,000 search for a new airport site ended last week with the announcement of its decision to name the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro as its choice of a prime location for a new airport site. The decision met with stiff opposition from local community leaders.

Scandal erupts when two former residents are arrested for forgery and grand theft after posing as RN’s in a effort to obtain \$120,000 from a resident.

October 1982

The Golden Rain Foundation took action at its meeting, to officially “endorse” the recommendation of the Committee on Incorporation that Leisure World become a city. By October 28th over 2,300 signatures had already been submitted, or 79 percent of those who had been solicited. Petitioner Dave Blodgett was the first person to hand in a completed petition.

United levies golf cart charge of \$39 for the cost of electricity to charge golf cart batteries.

LW Security guard is attacked by resident’s son after a disagreement over entry into Leisure World.

The traffic congestion at the intersection of El Toro Road and Moulton Parkway, which studies say will continue to worsen, could be solved by construction of an overpass.

Coast Federal Savings advertises an interest rate of 13.35% on 3½ year Certificates of Deposit.

10 Years Ago — September 1997

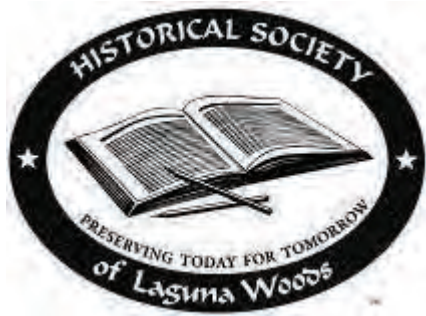
Security continues search for the “cat” burglar. Residents confront marauder who says he wants money. He leaves if they claim that they have no money.

Residents hear plans for moving the sound wall on Carlotta.

October 1997

GRF Board approves additional \$1.2 million for cable rebuilding, bringing the total to \$18.1 million.

In a stunning victory for opponents of the proposed new airport at the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro, the County’s Environmental Report is found to be seriously flawed.



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