

Homestead Valley's Rich Art Heritage Part Two of Two

By Suz Lipman

Last month we began to explore Mill Valley's Homestead Valley neighborhood and its rich tradition of artists, which continues to this day. The article revealed Beat poets, playwrights, filmmakers, musicians, artists, the founders of the Marin Theatre Company, and others who are or were tucked into Homestead's hills and valleys. This month we'll highlight more creative neighbors who call Homestead Valley home.

Two prominent San Francisco Symphony members, husband and wife Peter Wyrick and Amy Hiraga, live in Homestead. Wyrick is currently Associate Principal Cellist with the symphony. He will be featured, along with soprano Dawn Upshaw, in a program of Leonard Bernstein works that the symphony will perform September 17-19. Hiraga is a violinist in the symphony. She has appeared as a soloist with symphony and chamber orchestras. Wyrick has also performed with various groups. His recording, with the Ridge String Quartet, of Dvorak's piano quintets, was nominated for a Grammy. The pair's teenage daughters, who attend San Domenico School, are also talented musicians - Mayumi Wyrick plays violin and Mariko Wyrick plays cello. Both won prestigious Marin Music Chest Scholarships this year.

Homestead has always had an extensive group of crafters. Weaver Ida Grae arrived in 1955 with her husband Dan, a contractor and woodworker. The pair settled into one of Homestead's oldest properties on the valley floor and had a daughter. Dan, who died in 2007 at age 87, was active in reconstructing the current community center in 1973. Ida wrote two pioneering books on weaving and natural dyes, "Dressing the Loom: A Handbook for Weavers" and "Nature's Colors: Dyes from Plants". In addition to exhibiting internationally, Ida did her weaving and teaching in a studio on the property that Dan built. She also founded an art school in Homestead with metal sculptor Victor Ries.

Victor Ries, who now lives in Danville, celebrated his 100th birthday last year. The sculptor, who still works in various metals and semi-precious stones, fled Germany in 1933 and settled in Homestead in 1948. His large-scale works are found in many Bay Area synagogues, including Congregation Rodef Shalom in San Rafael, for whom he designed the Torah ark. Reis has had one-man shows at museums such as San Francisco's de Young and Legion of Honor, the Jewish Museum in New York, and the Judah Magnes Museum in Berkeley, where he was Artist in Residence for many years. He constructed the Magnes' entrance gate.

Others are continuing the crafting tradition. Christina Oldenburg has worked in many different art forms since settling in Homestead in 1963. She is currently involved in fiber arts: dying, spinning, weaving, and knitting. Her fleece comes from Shetland sheep who live in Homestead. She recently dyed the fleece with natural and local eucalyptus and alder dyes, before spinning and knitting it. The resulting projects earned her a series of blue ribbons at this year's Marin County Fair, as well as a "Fair Theme" Award. She also does elaborate lace knitting. Sue Warhaftig also spins her own yarn from a variety of fibers, which she then knits. For the last two years, she has run a jewelry company called Tabernash. She creates earrings and other pieces from vintage, recycled, and new beads from around the world, which she sells mostly through shows. Her son Miles, who attends Mill Valley Middle School, recently joined her company.

Homestead also has an active quilting community. Nancy Reck regularly exhibits and receives awards for her quilting at the Marin County Fair, the Marin Quilt Show, the O'Hanlon Center, and other venues. She and Christina Oldenburg led a project to complete a quilt commemorating Homestead's Centennial celebration in 2003. That quilt, which was done by Nancy and Christina, along with Renee Glazier, Devi Brown, Roz Hamar, Abby Wasserman, Helen Beck, Alice Cleveland, Kat Ryan, and Suz Lipman, hangs in the Homestead Community Center.

Glass and jewelry artist Cathe Howe can often be seen firing and working in her Laverne Avenue home and studio. A regular participant in the Marin Arts Council Open Studios, Howe has been a board member of the Mill Valley Fall Arts Festival, Artisans Gallery, and various Homestead boards. Her work is in galleries worldwide. She is also an accomplished cook and ukulele player.

Longtime ceramic artist Alice Corning, on Ethel, also participates in Open Studios and has had her work in galleries and museums worldwide for many years. Philip Moyer is a landscape designer who creates pottery and sculptures, in addition to serving as longtime President of the Homestead Valley Land Trust Board. Martin Friedman lived in Homestead for more than 50 years before moving to the Redwoods Retirement Community. His pottery graces many Homestead homes, and he was known for his yearly pre-holiday show and sale. An avid hiker, Friedman is also the recipient of a Sierra Club Environmental Stewardship Award.

Ginna Fleming's photography has literally taken her all over the world - to the mountains, deserts, and villages of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific Islands - where she records indigenous people in rural and traditional settings, as well as the natural world. She's had many shows and her work has

been published in "Sierra Heritage" magazine. She has done extensive advocacy work for the children of the District of Columbia, where she lived for many years.

Mardi Horowitz, a Professor of Psychiatry at UCSF and an award-winning author in his field, also creates and shows work in a variety of media -- acrylic and oil paint, pastel, and sumi ink. He often participates in shows with his daughter, Ariana Horowitz, who is also a painter.

Other Homestead visual artists include Sue Beecroft, who paints and photographs bright cheerful images that often explore color and pattern. Irene Belknap is a well-known abstract painter. Deborah Bertola's oil paintings of animals, nature, and abstract designs are regularly exhibited in galleries and shows locally and around the country. Claribel Cone works in a variety of visual media, painting in oil, watercolor and gouache, in addition to creating collages, monoprints and other images for a series of handmade books.

Carol Cunningham has been printing since 1960 and making miniature books since 1972 through her Sunflower Press. She employs watercolor, oil painting, mosaic tile, block printing, and silk screen, in addition to other printing and illustration techniques. Cunningham has won many awards and her work has appeared in galleries and permanent collections worldwide. She is also a singer and flautist.

In the literary arena, writer Laurie Stoelting has lived in Homestead since 1974 and was a longtime Manager of the Homestead Pool. Her book, "Light on the Mountain" contains haiku inspired by years of hiking on Mount Tam. She also teaches writing at the O'Hanlon Center for the Arts in Mill Valley. Another haiku writer, Eugenie Waldteufel, came to Homestead from Sausalito in 1951. Eugenie does sumi painting and ballroom dancing, in addition to writing in other Japanese forms.

Like Stoelting, writer and hiker Matthew Davis has gained a great deal of inspiration from Mount Tam and his proximity to it. For more than 40 years, he has been leading groups on ritual walks around the mountain, which include the Buddhist mediation practice of pausing at various stations and chanting. The walks were begun in 1965 by poet Gary Snyder (who lived in Homestead), Allen Ginsburg, Davis, and others. Davis' book, "Opening the Mountain: Circumambulating Mount Tamalpais; a Ritual Walk," contains a forward by Snyder. He penned another book about his local ramblings called "On Foot in Homestead", which is available at the Homestead Community Center. Poet, teacher and writing guide Karen Benke also lives in Homestead. She is the

author of the poetry book "Sister" and teaches with California Poets in the Schools and at the O'Hanlon Center.

Abby Wasserman, who grew up in the Homestead house she lives in now, also leads writing groups at the O'Hanlon Center and served for four years as its Board President. She is the author and illustrator of the children's picture book, "Tosca's Paris Adventure", as well as three books for adults and hundreds of articles on art and artists. She is also a collage and assemblage artist and a prize-winning photographer. Her late brother John was an entertainment critic for the San Francisco Chronicle and Wasserman's book, "Praise, Vilification and Sexual Innuendo, or How to Be a Critic" combines his best work with a narrative of his colorful life. In addition to Wasserman's own wide-ranging creative work, she is the co-founder of Mill Valley's annual Milley Awards, honoring creative achievement.

Since Part One of this series ran, I heard from two Homesteaders currently residing in the home of a famous artist. Ron Shalhoup reports that his home on Reed Street was once home to blues guitar great Michael Bloomfield, who played in the Butterfield Blues Band as well as on several of Bob Dylan's albums, including "Highway 61 Revisited." Unfortunately, Bloomfield died of a drug overdose in San Francisco in 1981.

On a happier note, Matt Galland writes that his home on Castle Rock Drive was once the home of Rita Abrams, the Emmy- and Milley-winning music and theater composer, lyricist and writer who penned, sang and led the 1970 hit song "Mill Valley" by "Miss Abrams and the Strawberry Point 4th Grade Class."

There are surely other writers, musicians and artists in Homestead, just as there are in other neighborhoods throughout Mill Valley. If you wish to contribute an article or information about your neighborhood's art heritage or other local artists, please contact Suz Lipman at sooz@well.com. Thank you to Christina and Chuck Oldenburg, who supplied information about many of the artists.

Suz Lipman is a writer and parent in the Mill Valley School District. "Arts in Mind" is a series from Kiddo! that explores arts and arts education.