

# Diablo Honors.....

## Gun Johnston

**By Jan Novak**

Gun Södling was born on an Eastern island of Sweden in 1936 and attended a tiny, very rustic school. As there was no high school or college on her little island, she moved to the mainland at 13 and boarded until she completed college. That experience made her very independent and curious about the world. Those traits continue to this day, as Gun has visited 65 countries in a life full of adventure and dedication to helping others.



**Visiting Bhutan**

Gun is a lifelong educator. Following college, she taught 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grades in Sweden for a decade. Seeking adventure, she moved to Liberia for two years to teach the children of employees of the Liberian-American Mining Company. It was a transformative experience as the students were from many parts of the world. After teaching in Africa, she was one of a dozen teachers from Europe and Sri Lanka who were awarded an 18-month Fulbright Travel Grant to teach in the United States. She began by teaching outdoor education and Head Start in Ohio before moving to far away East Islip, Long Island. As Gun says “Have map, will travel in my little red Saab!”

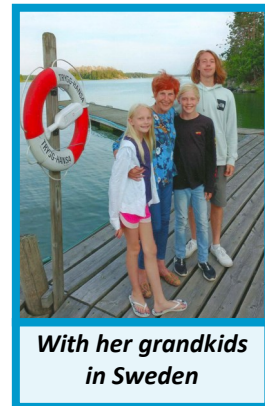


**Jim, Eric, Gun & Bo**

While in Long Island, she took a vacation to Acapulco. While waterskiing, she met an Orthopedic surgeon from Oakland, Jim Johnston. He liked her Iliac Crest (her hip bone)! They managed a long-distance relationship for a bit and Jim proposed while they were vacationing in Hawaii. They married in Sweden. Shortly after, Gun learned that the terms of her Fulbright Travel Grant required her to remain in and teach in Sweden for two years. Always a fighter, Gun managed to win an exemption and to join her new husband in California.

They had two sons, Eric and Bo, and settled into a rental home in Walnut Creek. When their lease expired, they looked to buy in the Danville area. A realtor suggested they look in “far-away” Diablo. They immediately fell in love with the beauty, the nature, the serenity of upper Mt. Diablo Scenic and bought their home in 1973. Although her marriage didn’t last, Gun and Bo and Eric stayed in Diablo. She was tempted to return to Sweden—and actually did for a year, but thought the United States would provide more opportunity for her sons. They loved their childhood in Diablo—the horses, chickens, pool, neighbor kids and easy access to Mt. Diablo. Bo and Eric were typical Diablo kids, attending Green Valley, Los Cerros and Monte Vista, where they were quite involved in music. Bo played the trumpet and Eric the clarinet. They also both were scouts, achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. Gun was the only woman involved in scouting leadership at the time, attending meetings and outings and writing the troop newsletter. Much of her boys’ Eagle Scouting work focused on Mt. Diablo, including building the North gate entrance sign and planning riding trails.

Once her children were older, Gun returned to teaching, primarily working with children with autism and Down’s Syndrome during her 20 years in the San Ramon Valley Unified School District.



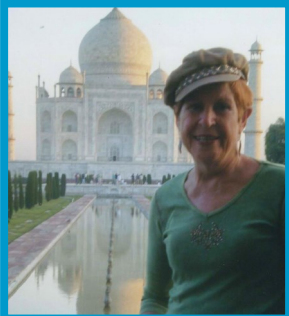
**With her grandkids in Sweden**

Her younger son, Bo, is a pilot. Among his other adventures in piloting, he worked for Emirates Airline, lived in Dubai for 5 years, and flew the world's biggest airplane. He now flies for Spirit and lives in Colorado. He is also a busy father of Gun's 3 grandchildren: Lars (19), Leif (14) and Annika (12). Leif and Anika were born in Dubai and Lars attended international school there.

Eric is now a "computer wizard", having worked for Microsoft for many years and continuing in a leadership role in the tech business. He is married to his wife Carol and lives in San Ramon.



*Sharing her Swedish heritage*



*At the Taj Mahal*

Her family often joins her in Sweden, where Gun owns a home on the island on which she was born, for part of her month-long visit every summer. Her grandchildren love Sweden and she loves them!

Gun is a very active and caring person. She is devoted to Peace Lutheran Church and has invested a lot of time volunteering in the Danville Art Gallery above the community theater, the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and visiting seniors in retirement communities—bringing along her Diablo chickens, kittens and sons, along with her Swedish heritage. She has been active for decades in the Swedish Women's Educational Association, teaching Swedish and organizing and fundraising to bring Scouts from Africa to a jamboree in Sweden.

Her travel bug and curiosity about the world never subsided. Her home, which has incredible views of the mountain and valley below, is filled with visible memories of her many adventures. It is also quite full of cats. Kicka, which means "little girl" in Swedish, disappeared for weeks on some type of adventure in Diablo. So, last Labor Day, Gun adopted kittens Kit and Kat. That apparently inspired Kicka to return home.

Gun is an amazing woman. She is funny, lively, welcoming and kind and smart, with so many interesting stories to share. She cares deeply about the people of the world and at age 86 is still volunteering. She is a great neighbor to her upper Mt. Diablo Scenic friends. We are happy that Sweden gave us such an inspiring neighbor for the past 50 years!



*Celebrating her 80th birthday in Guatemala*

***Sponsored by the Diablo Property Owners' Association***