

Diablo Honors.....

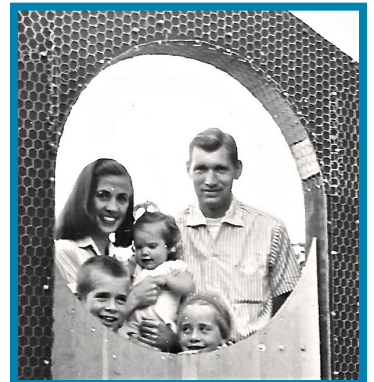
Marsh & Mugs Freeman

By Jan Novak

Marsh and Mugs Freeman met at Stanford 68 years ago when Mugs, the Indian Princess riding atop a homecoming float, stepped through the bottom of the float into the Jeepster that Marsh was driving. So, he actually first met her foot, but then met Margaret “Mugs” Stanley. Thus began a life together of adventure, family, careers, tennis, horses and exceptional contributions to the Diablo community.

Mugs grew up in Corona, CA. Marsh moved to the Bay Area when he was 9 years old. Marsh was student body president and a star basketball player at Acalanes High School, Mugs was student body vice-president and the valedictorian of her Corona High School. They married in 1955.

Marsh spent two years in the Air Force in Sacramento after graduation which gave Mugs the time to finish a BA and get a teaching degree. They moved around quite a bit for Marsh’s career as a sales executive for McGraw-Hill and Miller Freeman Publishing companies. They moved to New York, Boston, Southern California and finally the Bay Area. Marsh was familiar with Diablo as his grandparents, the Maynard Wrights, had a vacation cottage in Diablo in the 1930s. After a long search, they bought their home at 36 Campo Pelota in 1966 for \$55,000. It was a stretch, but they wanted to raise their three young children—Steve 7, Kim 5 and Patty 8 months—in this community.



The Freeman family in 1966



Tennis awards in the 70s, with Kathy Elaagen

As they moved into “Camelot Cottage”, their now 95-year-old home, they were welcomed by the tennis players just outside their home and they quickly became immersed in the highly social, highly competitive tennis community. As Mugs says, “Tennis then was what bocce is now”. Courts were always full and Steve became a Monte Vista Star. Marsh was singles champion in ’72, ’74 and ’76. Marsh and Mugs also won a mixed doubles championship. The Freeman kids were all on the Club swim team. Kim and Patty were in love with horses and competing in Hunter-Jumper events. Steve was into baseball, tennis, skiing and guitar.

According to Mugs “driving into Diablo in the 1960s was like driving into another world. Giant oak trees formed a lush green canopy over Alameda Diablo. Small Arts and Crafts cottages were set back from the narrow road and nestled into the park-like setting. There were few fences and no imposing gates. Corrals with horses adjacent to homes were common and dogs sometimes slept in the middle of the road.

Our children swam, played tennis, climbed the trees, roamed the hills and rode horses, bikes and mopeds everywhere in Diablo they chose to go. Kim even rode her horse to her piano lessons in the Haciendas and to the post office to get our mail. Our family of five sometimes rode bikes around the golf course in the late afternoons; teens skate-boarded on the tennis courts, and we later learned that our son and his friends sometimes slid down the hill at the end of the first fairway at night on blocks of ice.”



Kirsty Elgaen, Gretchen Sorensen and Patty riding the streets of Diablo in 1970

At that time, Diablo had its own horseback riding academy. Farfetched Farm, the Caballo Ranchero home of Steve and Lowrey Jones, started as a training center for three little Diablo girls—Kirsty Elgaaen, Gretchen Sorensen and Patty Freeman. That number eventually grew to 37 girls, but nine girls (and one boy) were the core of the “Farfetched Farm Fillies”. Trained by Lowrey with help from her husband Steve and daughters, Kim, Lisa and Brooke, the fillies rode off with an amazing number of ribbons, trophies and titles at Hunter-Jumper competitions throughout California.



Patty Freeman & Gretchen Sorensen

The Freemans’ love of horses began when their older daughter, Kim, was given a shaggy little Welsh Pony named “Babe” by the La Cava family. Connie La Cava trained her daughters Nikki and Steffi in dressage in an open field where tennis courts four and five are now located. Kim trained in Alamo with Bev Versteeg and also won many ribbons, medals and trophies.

Drive down Caballo Ranchero and you will still find the Farfetched Farm sign, although sadly no horseback riding academy. Visit Marsh and Mugs at home, though, and you will find plenty of evidence of the centrality of horses in their lives, including portraits of Cotton Beau and Bolero, Kim and Patty’s beloved horses. Kim went on to become the editor of California Riding Magazine for over twenty years and is still writing about the equestrian world.



Kim, Brooke, Lisa, Lowrey & Steve Jones

In 1975, Marsh decided he needed to build an airplane...in his backyard. An avid flyer, he was determined to build a Skybolt with the help of his soon-to-be neighbor, Dr. Jim Mandley. But once built in 1976, the challenge was to get it out of the backyard. A helicopter lifted it from their yard to the 18th fairway and it was then towed to an airport. He built three more airplanes, wisely moving construction to his garage. In 2001, he and Mugs funded and he and Jim Mandley organized and mentored a unique airplane-building program at the Athenian school, which is still operating.

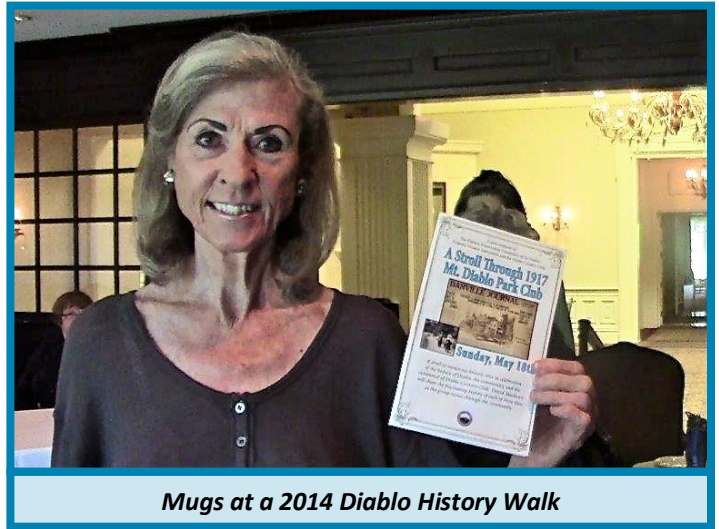


Marsh & Jim: Hmm, how do we get this plane out of here?

In 1977, Marsh was named President of Miller Freeman Publications, and after it was sold to United Newspapers in England in 1985, he served on the UN Board in London from 1993 until his retirement in 2000.

Mugs was busy teaching Special Ed and GATE (gifted and talented) students at Springhill School in Lafayette. Inspired by her work, she returned to Stanford to earn a degree in English in 1991 and then a Masters at Cal State East Bay in 1997 and taught 8th Grade English in Orinda. As she says “It was the most exciting and the most difficult thing I ever did. I just wish I had started about 40 years earlier.”

The Freemans have contributed so much to Diablo. Marsh was President of the Diablo Property Owners' Association (DPOA) in 1971. Mugs was a Director of the Community Service District from 1983 to 1987—the first woman to hold that position. She has also been “an unrelenting force for preservation and showcasing of Diablo’s historic homes”, according to David Mackesey, Dee & Tony Geisler and the DPOA. She has devoted three decades to ensuring that Diablo’s rich history is honored and preserved, which—with Jim Stone leading and the dedication of countless others—led to Diablo’s recognition as a Historic District in 2002 and the publication of *Diablo’s Treasures: The Historic Homes and Heritage Oaks of Diablo* in 2020.



Mugs at a 2014 Diablo History Walk

Marsh and Mugs continue to love life in Diablo and are now sharing it with their six grandchildren. Marsh’s brother, Leigh, lives next door. Leigh’s son Josh, his wife Chelsea and daughters Peyton and Ginger live next door to Leigh. As Marsh says “Diablo has been, and still is, the geographic and emotional focus of our lives for the past 50+ years”. Adds Mugs “We cannot imagine a better place to have lived or for our children to have grown up”. They would most like to thank Historian, Dr. Jim Stone; Navy pilot, endodontist and airplane builder, Dr. Jim Mandley; Farfetched Farm owners, Lowrey and Steve Jones, and Tennis Pro Dick Overstreet for their friendship and tremendous contributions to Diablo.



Jackson Gish, Marsh, Mugs, Alexander Gish. Back: Augie, Fritzie, Dave & Kim Miller, Kurt & Patty Gish, Kelsey, Megan, Lynn & Steve Freeman in 2014

We honor you, Marsh and Mugs, for sharing your stories, for being great friends and neighbors and for your extraordinary contributions to our community.

Sponsored by the Diablo Property Owners' Association