



Mill Valley Memories

by Dave Forrest

DAVE FORREST

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*For my precious grandchildren,
may you make many happy memories of your own.*

It is true that most people write a memoir after an achievement. I, however, skipped the achievement part and moved straight to the memoir. This is because I truly believe that everyone has a story and everyone's story counts.

- FIROOZEH DUMAS FROM *FUNNY IN
FARSI*

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Mill Valley Memories



*Sign holder for the Indians - 1966 Mill Valley Little League
Pennant Winners*

My earliest memories are of the redwood grove behind our home at 37 Ethel in Mill Valley. I'd bound out the backdoor, skip across the creek, to the stand of giant red trees. I spent hours playing in that circle of redwoods, with the sun shining through their dark green branches. When I tired, it was down into the creek hopping along rocks and searching for crawdads, a perfect afternoon for a little boy.

These early memories are happy ones, perhaps unusual for a young child who had been burned head to toe and lost his older sister in a house fire only a year before. But the doctor turned out to be right, "let him talk about the fire as much as he wants" he told my parents. And sure enough all the painful memories of the tragedy passed from my early memory replaced by happy childhood recollections of freedom, living in a small village just fourteen miles north of San Francisco.

We lived outdoors. My friends and I rode our bikes to Boyle Park to gather for pick-up baseball games. Andy and I borrowed our neighbor's dog, exploring the trails of Mount Tam. Jan and I built treehouses with three or four stories in his backyard eucalyptus trees. We collected old railroad spikes on the pathway of the former mountain railroad. Some nights friends and I slept on platform in a tree in my backyard, listening to the sounds of the creek and watching the stars through the trees.

Of course, there were challenges, too. At five I started elementary school at Old Mill. My mom packed a peanut butter and jelly sandwich each day. I walked along the creek all the way to the school. Each morning an old goose living under the foundation of a nearby house chased me as I passed by. I ran, with heart beating fast, as the watch-bird attempted to

peck at me and grab my lunch. But I made it to Mrs. Shehi's Kindergarten class triumphant, although often with wet tennis shoes and a little disheveled.

Old Mill Elementary had a lower yard for younger children and an upper yard for the higher grades. I soon distinguished myself by walking on my hands the distance of the lower yard. Apparently, my feat did not impress my second-grade teacher Mrs. Meadows. She kept me and my friend David after school almost every day for talking. My mother had to negotiate on my behalf. She suggested that David and I be given extra work in class, so that perhaps "idle hands" would be put to more productive uses.

In any event, I managed to graduate to the upper yard and benefited from several influential teachers. My 4th grade teacher Mrs. Bartolucci was strict, but she let me run the class movie projector, thus launching me on my earliest experiment in educational technology. Mrs. Teather, my dignified 5th grade teacher, provided wonderful lessons on the American Revolution nurturing my passion for history. Mr. Hull taught his 6th graders to make ceramic dishes. As I recall, I volunteered at lunch to help him fire the pots, mainly so I could ask Mr. Hull more specific questions about his lessons on sex education.

No discussion of my Mill Valley memories could be complete without baseball. My dad treated me each year to a trip to Candlestick Park in late June to celebrate my birthday. We watched the epic Giant-Dodger rivalries, starring my childhood hero, Willie Mays. Not surprisingly, when I started Little League at eight I chose to play center field. I felt I had to prepare to replace the great Giants center fielder when he retired.

My dad taught me the basics of baseball. He and I would play catch many evenings. As I became more confident I asked my

dad, who had been a pitcher, to throw harder and harder to me. My baseball career was almost cut short when I took my eye off the ball, and my dad's throw nailed me in the forehead. Down I went, but it didn't cool my passion for baseball.

As the Bears smallest player, my coach Lloyd couldn't find a regulation Little League batting helmet small enough for me. He creatively substituted a child's motorcycle helmet. Although I could barely hit the ball out of the infield, he batted me in the leadoff spot. With such a small strike zone, I almost always walked.

The strategy proved effective until one day rounding second I was decked by a hard-hit line drive. I was out cold, and as the story goes, Lloyd lifted me off the infield by my belt. When I came to, I asked, "you aren't going to take me out are you?"

The first couple of years we really were the "Bad News Bears." But Lloyd was a patient coach. He followed many of his players into the Little League majors, becoming the coach of the Indians. At twelve, our final year of the Little League, we won the pennant. I played catcher for the league All-Star Team, retiring at the pinnacle of my baseball career and robbing the SF Giants of a successor in centerfield.

In the main, "I was a good kid," as my dad used to say. However, I did have a few lapses in conduct. The earliest transgression I can remember was grabbing a flaming stick from a campfire and running through the trees with the burning branch. My dad subdued me by grabbing me around the waist. I attempted to shift the blame to him by yelling, "he's choking me." My dad who had kept me from burning down the forest, worried that this single incident might have kept my mom from marrying him. Fortunately, I was not believed. On a slow day, Andy and I shot metal tipped arrows up into the redwood trees.

The excitement was watching them careen down, bouncing off the branches to see where they landed. The game quickly ended when one of the arrows pierced the tip of my tennis shoe, luckily missing my toes.

My most serious brush with a life of crime began in the local barbershop. “Ray the Barber” often sent me with a sack full of cash to the local bank to make his deposits. In return I never paid for a haircut. When I was much older my dad explained that “Ray the Barber” ran a gambling operation in the back room of his barbershop, and that my deposits were really the proceeds from the operation. However, he assured me that I was never really in danger of being arrested, given that many of the gamblers included the local police chief and city fathers.

Mill Valley in the days of my childhood really was a village. We knew all the shop owners: the Greens ran the pet shop where we purchased parakeets and fish. You could get a picture framed at Dimitroffs and next door eat the best burger in town at their Palette Restaurant. The largest variety store was Bennett’s, but the best candy was purchased at the small five and dime, whose owner had one arm. Toys were purchased at Santa’s, clothes at Mayers, and for shoes you went to Moshers. Si stood outside his liquor store greeting all who passed by. Our very favorite stop was Baskin and Robins 31 Flavors for ice cream.

My mom used to say that I knew everyone in town and would one day become the mayor of Mill Valley. I doubt I could have been elected to this high office, especially if my opponent had discovered my early career as a money launderer for “Ray the Barber.”

As I was growing up the grove of redwoods that I first played in was cut down to make way for an apartment complex.

Fancier restaurants and boutiques replaced small shops. Although still a beautiful place, Mill Valley became too expensive for many of its original residents.

Nevertheless, the Mill Valley of my childhood memories was a perfect place for a small boy to lose himself in creeks and canyons. It was a village where a child could head downtown without an adult or explore the mountain with a friend, as long as you checked in with Mom or Dad by five o'clock.

North to Oregon



*Oregon relatives: (top row) my dad, Cousin Christy, Uncle Sam
(middle row) my mom, Aunt Hilma, Grandma, Grandad (front row)
Lisa and me*

At least twice a year our family loaded up the station wagon and headed to my Dad's family in Oregon. I loved the journey north, winding through the northern California redwoods on Highway 101.

The trip usually took two days. We stayed at the Thunderbird Lodge in Eureka, dining on pancakes in the morning. It was on to the Trees of Mystery Gift Shop, guarded by a gigantic statue of Paul Bunyan. The final leg of the journey we traveled along the rugged southern Oregon coast.

Our most memorable journey north was at Christmas time in 1964 when torrential rains flooded the roads. Fortunately, we stayed a few hours ahead of disaster on Highway 101. The Klamath Bridge collapsed behind us, its landmark, sculptured, bears floated down the river.

When we arrived, the Coquille Valley in southern Oregon was completely flooded. We could only see the roofs of houses and barns barely showing above the swollen river. As we pulled up to my grandparents' home, nearby flooded neighbors paddled by in canoes.

We waited out the storm for several days, trying to escape home on Route 5 through the Siskiyou Mountains. But heavy snows stopped all traffic at Ashland, as huge semi-trucks jackknifed on slick, icy roads. Dad turned around and, as family lore has it, found the last remaining hotel room in Ashland. While my parents worried if we would ever make it home, my brother, sister and I played in the snow at Lithia Park.

In later years, my Dad admitted that driving through the storm was one of the stupidest things he ever did; however, I remember the trip through the eyes of a ten-year-old as a great rainy adventure.

We always received a hero's welcome when we visited

Grandma and Granddad. Grandma put out a huge home cooked meal and capped her extravaganza with a lemon meringue pie, baked especially for me.

After our meal, I sat in my Granddad's workshop, where we built a wooden model of a stagecoach. "Did you know that my uncle was a stage coach driver in Wallowa?" my Granddad said, as he told his stories of growing up in eastern Oregon.

"How did you lose your thumb?" I asked.

"Chopping wood on the ranch as a teenager." He replied.

And so, the conversation went late into the night, until all of us kids were bedded down in sleeping bags on my grandparents' living room floor.

For the first few years, my Aunt Hilma, Uncle Sam, and cousins Jimmy and Christy, lived just a block away from my Grandparents in Coquille. Later the Shultz's moved to the nearby seaside town of Bandon, Oregon.

I loved the summers in Bandon, especially visiting the local beaches. My aunt and uncle's home was on several acres. In their back yard were two or three head of cattle. They were supposed to provide steaks at a future time, but always escaped their fate by endearing themselves to the family. In addition to cows, there was an old pickup truck, which my uncle let me drive around his pasture.

By the time I was in middle school I was begging my parents to stay longer in Bandon. My parents agreed to let me spend a summer with my Aunt and Uncle. I slept in my cousin Jimmy's room, as he was away serving in the Navy. On weekdays my Uncle Sam would wake me up at the crack of dawn. He would cook us a full breakfast of eggs, potatoes, and bacon, before we set out to sell cars. Some mornings we checked in with his dealership in Coquille, but most days we would drive into

the green Oregon countryside, talking to farmers and ranchers about Buicks, Volvos, and Jeeps.

These long excursions gave Sam a chance to educate his nephew about cattle. I soon became the only kid in Mill Valley who could distinguish a Hereford from a Holstein or knew the anatomical details of how a bull became a steer. Sometimes in the afternoons we would stop at the local livestock auctions, my uncle warning me not to raise my hand or speak, lest I inadvertently ended up buying a sheep or a cow.

I loved my Uncle Sam. He was a huge man, of German stock, heralding from the Midwest. He had slogged through the mud in Europe, fighting Hitler's army during WWII. You could tell he was crazy about my aunt Hilma, whom he called "Clemmy." He gave her a huge bear hug every time he returned home.

There was only one area where Sam and I didn't see eye to eye. He was an outspoken Republican, and I had been raised in a Democratic household where Franklin Roosevelt was revered. So, Sam and I debated whether the New Deal had saved the nation or led the country to hell in a handbasket.

The evenings were reserved for discussion with my aunt Hilma. She told me stories of working in the Portland shipyards during WW II as a "Rosie-the-Riveter." She sat at the dining room table with a twinkle in her eye, coffee in one hand and cigarette in the other. We talked late into the night about books, politics, or family until I headed off to bed to get a few hours' sleep.

One morning Sam was in front yard working on an old truck propped up on blocks. His legs jutted out from under the front of the car as he asked, "Davey, hop in and turn on the engine for me, so I can see if I've got it working." I got in the truck cab, and turned the key. The engine started, the chassis shook,

and the truck fell from the blocks. Before I could get out of the truck to see if I had crushed my uncle, Sam popped up from under the truck grinning.

At the end of the summer I returned to the Bay Area. My parents let me take the Greyhound bus home all by myself. I peered out the window spotting a herd of cream-colored cows. "Those are Charlets, imported all the way from France." I authoritatively told my adult bus seatmate.

Paul Bunyan still stood stoically guarding the Trees of Mystery Gift Shop as we continued down the redwood highway. We passed Eureka and the Thunderbird Lodge until late in the evening we arrived at the Mill Valley Bus Depot.

"Can I visit Uncle Sam and Aunt Hilma again next summer?" I asked my parents as I jumped from the bus.

I was sure I just needed one more summer to convince my Uncle Sam that FDR really had saved the country.

Preparing for Bears



Boy Scouts - My Troop 34

It was a big moment when my parents said that I could spend a few days in Yosemite's backcountry without adult supervision. My dad, who had spent summers tending sheep alone in Oregon's backcountry as a teenager, figured I was ready for the trip.

Kevin and I were only twelve, but I had lots of experience in the outdoors. As a boy, I loved camping with the Cub Scouts, even though it usually rained. By the time I was in the Boy Scouts I had backpacked in the Sierras and Trinity Alps with my troop and scoutmasters.

I knew the basics of safe backpacking: hike in pairs, carry enough water, and hang your food at night over a tree limb safe from hungry bears.

My dad dropped us off at the trailhead in Yosemite, and Kevin and I hiked up the beautiful Little Yosemite Valley. We had enough food for about four days. Our plan was to catch some fish in the clear, cold water of the Merced River and Merced Lake.

All went well on the hike. We even caught and cooked some fish the first night out. We dutifully hung our food from a high branch, keeping it out of reach of the bears. The stars were out in full force. We warmed our hands around the campfire, before bedding down for the night in our two-person tent.

In the wee hours of the night I was awoken by a grunting sound. In the doorway of the tent an enormous brown bear diligently rooted through Kevin's pack.

Only a few feet away, a wide-eyed Kevin stared in astonishment. We both froze. The bear took one huge paw and sliced through the pack, delicately picking out a package of M&M's. He proceeded to slice open the bag, curling his long tongue around the chocolate treats. Then he turned, lumbering off

into the night.

When we were sure the intruder was gone, we ran out of the tent and stoked the fire, arming ourselves with pots and pans. There was no sleep that night and little the nights after.

Although we met a bear with a sweet tooth, our first solo trip to the backcountry was a success. As I recall, I was much older before I told my parents the story of how we were almost eaten.

This was not my only moment of terror bargaining with bears. On a hitchhiking trip during my college years, Jim and I thumbed our way to Glacier National Park. We backpacked in the beautiful Montana Rockies. The first day on the trail we spied a moose, munching grass in a marsh, framed by a spectacular granite peak. We camped at Loon Lake, listening to the eerie calls of the birds the lake was named after. No bears in sight.

Throughout the back packing trip Jim and I nervously joked about dangers posed by grizzly bears. We had both read about the two women mauled to death one night in Glacier Park, in separate grizzly attacks.

“No worries, run downhill” Jim suggested, “since bears can’t run as fast on their shorter front legs.”

One evening, as we made dinner at the campfire, it appeared we would have to test Jim’s theory. The ground shook, branches snapped, as loud sounds came from the nearby trees. We didn’t wait to see our pursuer. We ran pell-mell into the lake, forgetting bears could not only out run us, but out swim us, too. At that moment, two horses broke through the forest glade, their riders staring quizzically at the two of us waste deep in the glacial lake.

We stared back, freezing idiots.

I had survived two bears, one real, the other imaginary.

Sports for Short People



Diving at Tam High - Reverse 1 1/2 somersault

Marianne Wilke and I led the graduation procession at Edna Maguire Junior High. She was the shortest girl in eighth grade and I was the shortest boy.

My small stature posed two problems for a freshman boy entering Tam High School in the fall: what sports could I play and would high school girls be interested in a 4 foot 10 inch freshmen?

Perhaps thinking I would solve both problems at once, I decided to join the freshman football team. I was assigned to third string quarterback, where I worked on memorizing the plays. Mercifully, I wouldn't see any action. At the end of one game, a lost cause, the coach put me in. However, I couldn't see the receivers when the offensive line stood up.

Football Coach Hector, seeing my dilemma, pulled me aside, "Forrest, you are too small for football, but come out in winter for the wrestling team. In wrestling, you compete by weight."

Tam's first preseason match was with McClymonds High in Oakland. Wrestling order was determined by weight, from the lightest to heaviest. So, I was the first Tam wrestler to walk across the mat and shake hands with my 95-pound opponent.

It was six minutes of screaming, the fans in the auditorium yelling for the small McClymonds wrestler. At the side of the mat my teammates were hollering for me. The three periods were a blur, but in the end, I hung on to win a close decision 3-2.

Apparently my McClymonds opponent did not agree with the referee's scoring and back in the locker room he angrily confronted me, "We are going to finish the match in here," he yelled, shaking a cake cutter comb in my face.

Behind me I heard the voice of Tam's varsity heavyweight wrestler Charlie McBride. "Hey little buddy," he said to the irate

McClymonds wrestler, “how many lights on your auditorium’s ceiling?”

“I don’t know,” my adversary snarled.

Charlie broke into a big smile, “well you should know, Forrest had you on your back long enough you should have been able to count them.”

And with that, Charlie put his huge brown arm around my shoulders, saying “come along Lil’ Forrest” as he whisked me toward our team bus.

Wrestling gave me a feeling of accomplishment and belonging at Tam High School, however the workouts were grueling. In spring I joined the diving team to see if I had any of my dad’s natural talent. Compared with wrestling practice, diving workouts were pure joy.

The winter rains had given way to warm spring days. After school, I gathered with the small band of springboard divers. While our swimming teammates swam endless laps, we catapulted ourselves into the sunshine, flipping in the air, before we dove into the cool, deep water of the diving pool. After our practices, we would dry ourselves and relax by lying on the warm cement. I earned varsity letters in both wrestling and diving at Tam High my freshman year. I had found sports for short people. My next high school project would be to find those girls.

5

On the Road



Jim and Dave - Biking and hitchhiking partners

Recently I decided to revisit my glory days with a bike ride in west Marin. As I huffed and puffed up the hill to Nicasio on a weekend morning, throngs of Marin bicyclists passed me by wearing space age helmets, skin tight suits, on bicycles made from carbon fiber aircraft alloys. Although the hills seemed steeper than I remembered, even at my turtle's pace there was something very special about gliding through the bucolic green hills and meadows on an elegantly simple machine, powered only by human legs.

My bike riding did not have an auspicious start. One day when I was toodeling around the deck at 37 Ethel on my little red bike with training wheels my dad suggested that we go to Boyle Park for a lesson. The training wheels came off, and my dad seated me on my bike at the top of the grassy knoll. Down the hill I went, hurdling toward the bottom of the knoll until the bike flew one way and I the other.

Although I was not a "natural", the following weekend my dad suggested we try the lower yard at Old Mill School. Here the stakes were higher. A fall off the bike meant cuts and bruises on the asphalt. After several spills, I began to control the bike.

Soon I graduated to a larger bike, still a one speed, with big balloon tires. I rode my bike to school, bypassing the large goose that terrorized me each day as I walked to school. The bike and I were inseparable: there was no need to ask mom for a ride to Little League, the swim club, or a friend's house. I was still riding my one speed several miles up the Ethel hill when our family moved to Mirabel Avenue.

In middle school I was introduced to gears, my first 10-speed bike with thin road tires. And oh, how the world opened up! I could ride over the hill to Corte Madera or up the Mountain. By high school, my best friend Jim and I were riding 40-50

mile loops through Marin. We'd head over to Point Reyes and back home by Bolinas and Stinson Beach for a final climb over Mount Tam.

Then our idea came: we added a small metal rack on the back and a canvas bag between the handlebars in the front. We strapped down a sleeping bag, pair of jeans, and jacket to the rack with bungee cords. In the bag, we put food, a one burner backpacking stove and small aluminum pot. There was no stopping us now. We headed over to Point Reyes and just kept pedaling north on Route 1.

The craggy coast north of San Francisco was spectacular. The mornings were often covered in a cool blanket of fog, as we silently whirred over the two-lane road-heading north. We pedaled along the winding highway, passing the beautiful bays and beaches of Marin and Sonoma counties.

Most afternoons the sun came out. As we pedaled we had deep blue Pacific views to our left and steep green hills dotted with poppies on our right.

We measured our journey in 10 mile segments. Our long days were 60 to 100 miles. Strong headwinds confined us to short days too, of 50 miles or less.

In the evening, we contributed a dollar or two to a state campground. If none existed, we unfurled our sleeping bags in a cow pasture or a clearing near the road. We used our backpacking stove to heat up dinner: soup, spaghetti, or chili from a can. And we lit it again to warm our frozen hands on cold evenings or mornings.

Up the coast we went. After several days, we reached Mendocino before we turned around, retracing our journey for home.

At Tam High School bicyclists faced a great debate: road

bikes versus mountain bikes. A small and adventurous group of my classmates invented mountain bikes. They salvaged old balloon tired clunkers that we road as kids and outfitted them with gears to ride the dirt trails of Mount Tam. Their exploits became legendary and several of these classmates became the fathers of the Mountain bike craze, complete with frames, bikes, and even companies named after them.

It was a tough choice, but I chose the road bike. And so, to prove the superiority of our sport, our exploits had to become bigger, better, more exciting than our mountain bike competitors. It was in this context, that I announced to my parents that I would be riding my bike to Mexico. And somehow I convinced them to let me go.

The summer between my junior and senior year, I headed down the California coast to LA, pedaling south instead of north on route 1. The real excitement began on the train in northern Mexico, where we traveled third class. We had our bikes; pigs and chickens accompanied the farmers riding the train. Each stop vendors would sell us local delicacies through the train windows.

Once we reached Guadalajara we hopped back on our bikes and traveled through the small towns of central Mexico. People in the villages were so nice, often sharing their meals with us. Mexican teenagers wanted to talk with us about rock'n roll bands, despite our broken Spanish. In the evenings, we relaxed with a stroll around the town square or watched the fireworks celebrating Saint's Days.

When we reached San Miguel de Allende, I attended language classes for a couple of days. But the lure of the open Mexican road became much too strong. Back on our bikes, we headed north to the historic city of Guanajuato. Down the long

mountain road to the beautiful cobblestone city we road.

Some of our explorations were by bus. For example, we went to Mexico City, visiting the murals at the Presidential palace, the national museum of anthropology and the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon at Teotihuacán.

Once I conquered the southern border, I wanted to ride my bike to the northern one. I set out for Canada from the Bay Area. It was a beautiful ride, but not without perils. We dodged logging trucks on the narrow Redwood Highway and fought headwinds on the Oregon coast. As early bicycle touring pioneers, we didn't have the benefit of biking guides, which now always instruct Pacific Coast riders to start their journey in Seattle and ride south to avoid headwinds. Who knew?

In my late 40's I began bike riding again. There were conditions. My kids asked me to forego the skintight shorts and shirts of today's bicyclists. My wife didn't want me to buy a bicycle currently in stores that cost as much as our car.

For my 50th birthday, Marilyn suggested that Jim and I relive the bike rides of our youth. I planned a week of rides in northern California. We loaded our bikes into Jim's BMW.

We packed light. No sleeping bag or camp stove necessary. We had reservations at some nice hotels, with a hot shower and meal at the end of our day. No back rack or front bag for gear on our bikes, just a slim little credit card in the back pocket of my riding pants.

We rode our bikes down the beautiful old Redwood Highway, through the trees and along the river, on an elegantly simple machine, powered only by human legs.

6

On the Road, Again



Graduation from UC Berkeley - 1977

In high school, I vanquished the southern and northern borders by bicycle. In college, I decided to travel from the west coast to the east coast, by thumb.

Hitchhiking was not a new form of transportation for me. After a tough wrestling practice, I sometimes hitched a ride from the 2 AM Club a couple of miles up the Molino hill to my home on Mirabel. And on warm spring days Jim and I were known to have left Tam High School a little early, hitchhiking over the mountain to body surf at Stinson Beach.

In the late 60's and early 70's hitchhikers were everywhere, depending upon the kindness of motorists. And so, during the summer before my sophomore year at CAL, I took my position among dozens of fellow travelers on University Avenue. My sign simply read: "East Coast."

The first ride was a good one, taking me through familiar California scenery on Interstate 80 over the Sierras to Nevada. The trick in the desert was not to get caught in the blazing mid-day sun or the freezing night for too long. But I was prepared. Inside my handmade leather pack was a down filled mummy bag and a warm change of clothes.

I quickly caught rides though Nevada and Utah, only to have my luck run out in Colorado. My heart sank when I saw the flashing light of a Colorado state trooper. In most states hitchhiking was legal, but in Colorado the penalty for hitchhiking was a night in jail. However, this state policeman had something more mischievous in mind. He drove me to a remote farm community, miles from I-80. "Have a nice day," he chuckled, as he dropped me off on a small rural road surrounded by cornfields. A farmer waved at me as he ambled by atop his tractor.

It took me a better part of a day to get back to I-80, but I

managed a couple of long rides through the Great Plains. Most people were so nice. Sometimes drivers were travelers en route to vacation destinations, lonely for company. Local people gave rides too, wanting to hear tales of the road. Part of the allure of hitchhiking was talking with so many different kind strangers.

There was only a few times when I didn't take a ride offered to me. One was outside of Joliet, Illinois, home of the state penitentiary. When a man in an orange jump suit opened his truck door and said, "hop in," I decided that I probably shouldn't catch rides with prison inmates, either going to or escaping from jail. "No thanks" I replied, "I'll wait for a ride all the way into Chicago."

The fun of hitchhiking was that you never knew what adventure would greet you at your next stop. In Chicago, I walked along the Lake, visiting the art museum, and listening to several concerts in the park. In New York City, Van Gogh's "Sun Flowers" were on display at the MET; in Baltimore, I attended the rock musical "Hair", in Boston, Jim and I camped out on a Harvard dormitory floor, and in Washington DC, I walked among our national monuments and memorials for my first time.

The East Coast cities were full of culture and crime, great beauty and crushing poverty. Out of money, I remember spending one night in a rescue mission in Camden, New Jersey, amongst the poorest of the poor. The next day we crossed the river into Philadelphia and visited Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell.

In Philadelphia, I decided to earn money unloading trucks. Long haul truckers would pay up to \$15 to have their freight carried from trailer to warehouse. My career unloading trucks was a short one, when a veteran "lumper" ran me off with a

baseball bats for poaching his territory.

Without an itinerary, motel reservations, or much money, you never knew where you would end up. A flood buried Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania while we were staying with at the American Friends Service Committee in Philly. We joined their rescue efforts, spending a couple days digging mud out of flooded homes.

In Massachusetts, we had the address of famous author John Updike. He was a relative of a Mill Valley friend. We met him briefly in his home, where he asked if we had any interesting tales from the road. Before we could finish telling him our first adventure, he dismissed us to his barn, our overnight accommodations.

Although we may not have been a big hit with the literary luminaries of New England, we had one of our best adventures camping in Maine. We caught a ride in the back of a truck through Vermont and New Hampshire, winding our way through the Green and White Mountains with the blue sky above.

In Maine, we followed the craggy coastline dotted with fishing villages until we reached Bar Harbor. We camped, living on fresh clams dug from the beach and blueberries we picked. With a gallon of milk and a few potatoes from the local store, we cooked our own fresh clam chowder. There were campfires, singing, and lots of laughter on that wild beach. In Maine, the life of a hitchhiking vagabond was good.

That summer I traveled over three thousand miles by thumb. I always begin recollections of that coast-to-coast journey with my daughters with the warning: "don't do it, hitchhiking isn't safe."

It was a different time, a different place than the America of

today. There was something very special about depending only on your thumb and the kindness of strangers.

7

My First Car



First Car - a MG Hatchback

By the time I was twenty, the romance of cross-country trips by bike and thumb gave way to the practicality of having a car. And so I became the proud owner of my first car, a used MG hatchback (think old Mini Cooper).

Jim proposed the price for his dark blue compact, "Give me \$90 now, and \$90 more if the car makes it back from your trip to the east coast. It has a cracked engine block, so you'll have to put in oil each time you fill up for gas." Deal.

I packed my car, complete with a case of 30 weight Pennzoil motor oil and set out east, leaving a greasy trail as I headed up the Sierras, through the Nevada desert, up over the Rockies, and through the Midwestern Plains. The car chugged along, a little slow on the up hills, but it successfully arrived at the east coast. I was diligent in adding a quart of oil at each gas station stop. After a successful tour the eastern seaboard and a visit with friends in Minnesota, I headed back west on route 80 in my little blue car.

On the long, straight road of the Salt Flats, west of Salt Lake City, a young man held out his thumb. It was etiquette of the road that a fellow hitchhiker, while driving a car, had to give a ride to a person in need. I opened the door to the hitchhiker, who lamented, "I was going east but I got stuck in Utah. Apparently, the Mormons aren't giving rides to black men, so I give up, I am heading back to California." I was glad to have the company on the long ride, as we swapped hitchhiking stories into the evening.

The MG cruised through the moon-like terrain of the eastern Nevada desert. A few miles past a small town, there was a loud thud as the rear end of the car collapsed, screeching to a stop on the freeway. My passenger put his head in his hands, "I am never going to get back home."

We got out, pushed the car to the side of the road and surveyed the damage. A broken rear axle was the culprit. "I am walking back to the town to spend the night. Do you want me to send a tow truck?" asked my companion. I thought for a minute. "No thanks, I couldn't afford to get an axle fixed, even if it was towed. Good luck."

I sat in the front seat alone in the cold desert night. Out the window millions of stars burned brightly in the black night sky. I considered my options. Then, I gathered up all my belongings, took the registration from the glove box, unscrewed the license plates, and pushed the broken vehicle down the sand embankment at the side of the road.

I was once again a hitchhiker. On the bright side I reasoned, at least I wouldn't have to pay Jim his additional \$90 for my now abandoned car. I waited for a ride heading west in the freezing wee-hours of the Nevada desert. No ride came. The wailing of a coyote broke the silence. Did the desert have wolves? Still no ride.

Far off in the distance came a low rumble, and then I could see the distant lights of a vehicle heading my way. I moved from the side of the road into the right lane, arm and thumb fully extended. As the van approached I could hear music. The van stopped, the door opened, and a swirl of pot smoke and pounding rock'n roll poured out of the welcome ride.

"Hop in, where you headed?" the longhaired driver asked.

"Back to California, thanks for stopping."

"Where in California?"

"The Bay Area."

"The Bay Area, cool, that's where I'm heading. Where in the Bay Area?"

"Berkeley."

“Berkley! That’s where I am from. Where in Berkeley?”

“Walker Street, it’s only a block from Shattuck.”

“Walker Street, I live on Walker Street.”

On my way home in the warm van I imagined a highway patrolman following the oily trail to my abandoned car at the bottom of the desert sand dune. Had I successfully erased all evidence of ownership of my first car? I hoped so.

And as my neighbor dropped me at my apartment, I also hoped that my hitchhiking passenger had somehow found his way home too, evading both Mormons and coyotes.

8

Camping



Girls camping at Samuel P. Taylor State Park - circa 1995

The phone rang. “Hey Pop, it’s Miko. Corey and I are heading to the Catskills to go camping this weekend.” A week later Miya called, announcing that she was driving to the mountains east of Seattle to camp for Jose’s July birthday.

Samuel P. Taylor State Park is where the girls’ love affair with camping began. Each spring and summer we’d throw the girls in the car along with camping gear and head for the beautiful redwood park in Marin County. It was just an hour’s drive from our East Bay home. Our first choice of campsites was a spot next to Papermill Creek, winding its way through Samuel P. Taylor.

After the girls helped set up the family tent, they waded knee deep into the stream. Sticks in hand and Jamie Lynn in tow, the girls spent hours exploring the creek’s pools and eddies.

In the afternoon, they took short hikes on a trail dotted with colorful native flowers: buttercups, milkmaids, and Indian paintbrush. Here a fallen redwood, worn smooth became a slide. There, the trunk of a giant redwood carved out by lightening became a perfect spot for hide and seek. And if little ones became bored with the park we could drive to the beach or over White’s Hill to Fairfax for ice cream or a movie.

In the evening, we cooked hotdogs and star soup. With great fanfare the girls sharpened sticks to roast marshmallows, which were sandwiched between graham crackers and melting chocolate, the perfect camping desert. There were S’mores, stars and stories around the campfire, until tired little ones crawled into warm sleeping bags. I burned the camping lantern’s midnight oil with my book, guarding our campsite by throwing shoes at marauding raccoons.

Those early camping trips to Samuel P. Taylor spurred a love

of nature among the girls. They also built self-confidence and physical strength. On one camping trip in northern California, Jamie Lynn took her first swim in the Eel River. Standing on her tiptoes, with head barely above the waterline, she shouted, "Look everyone, I am swimming in the Evil River."

As shorter legs became longer, I took each of the girls on their first backpacking trips to nearby Point Reyes National Seashore. Miko, on her first night at Glen Camp, felt panic when she awoke to a tent surrounded by baby quail, Point Reyes' deadliest animal.

On our early backpacking adventures I carried the heavy gear. However, when Nicole and Miko reached high school I loaded them up, but they were still leading the march up the steep trail to Mt. Wittenberg. On Jamie's first trip, Miya and Miko serenaded their little sister with a medley of Disney songs to make the long trek from Coast Camp to Sky Camp seem a little shorter and her pack a little lighter.

One evening at Wildcat Beach the girls wanted to know if the campground was named for wild cats that roamed the area. To stem the panic I said no. I was proven a liar the next morning when a bobcat darted across our hiking path. So much for trusting dad.

Your mom did not grow up a camper, although she did receive our camping award for a valiant stay at a northern California campground. She was also somewhat skeptical of the supervision that I provided on several trips. For example, she did not share my belief that it was OK for Jamie to eat dirt, as the other girls had done as babies on their first camping trips. It also leaked out that on one occasion I lost the girls at Samuel P. Taylor, when a confident Nicole led her sisters on an exploration a little too far outside the boundaries of the park.

And it was true that Jamie had fallen off a log into the stream, but attentive sisters immediately hauled her up from the depths. No harm done.

Despite my missteps, I think that those early experiences in the wild did all the girls good. The shady redwood canopy of Samuel P. Taylor State Park, provided them with a taste of freedom that I experienced growing up among trees and creeks of Mill Valley and Mount Tam.

Camping trips were a time for little ones to explore, to stretch their legs, and live a few days in nature without the distraction of TV and telephone. We all had a chance to live without the schedule of school. I hope that the girls' children, my grandchildren, will have a chance to walk among the redwoods, explore the creeks, and eat S'mores under a sky full of stars.

9

No, No Regrets



My Girls - Nicole, Tamiko, Jamie, and Miya

The question started over thirty years ago before Tamiko was born, “Do you want a boy or a girl?” I gave the standard answer, but one which I really felt, “I don’t care as long as the baby is healthy and happy.”

I got the question again before Miya was born, but in somewhat different form. “Well now that you have a girl, wouldn’t you like to have a boy.” I explained my feelings the same way on the subject (but I don’t think people believed me.)

When I had the good fortune to inherit Nicole, someone quipped, “too bad you didn’t get a son to balance out your girls.” So, I was not surprised several years later, when people were asking after Jamie was born, “Are you going to keep trying, so you can get a boy?”

Admittedly, in early days the questions were more often said aloud and later more often asked in a whisper. Progress. And in fairness, they were always asked by people who had never met my girls. The people who really knew my daughters didn’t ask these questions.

Still, the questions chaffed. Behind each one was the notion that I would somehow be disappointed if I didn’t have a son, robbed of a special father-son relationship.

As a father of all girls, I wanted to put to rest all of society’s spoken and unspoken questions:

Who will you throw the baseball with?

Well, that would be Jamie; it’s something we have done since she was a little girl.

Won’t you be disappointed you didn’t watch your son play sports?

Nope, I’ve had endless hours of enjoyment watching Nicole in the pool, Miko on the basketball court and Miya and Jamie on the soccer field. They’ve been most valuable players and

won championships. They have lettermen jackets decorated with awards that would put most boys to shame.

Won't you miss the adventures of father and sons?

We've biked, hiked, backpacked, camped, and skied together. We've traveled across the country and ventured to Spain, Canada, and Japan. No shortage of adventures with my group of girls.

And it is fair to say that on top of all their accomplishments, my girls are also kind and compassionate, smart and funny, super moms, and great girlfriends, too, just all around wonderful people.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have anything against the male gender. I adore my grandsons. I love my son-in laws. I'm so proud of my nephews... "some of my best friends are men."

However, after 30 years of answering various versions of the same question, perhaps I haven't answered it clearly or forcefully enough, in a way that the people asking can really understand. So, let me try again:

I'll put my daughters up against your sons, anytime, anywhere, in any arena you want: on the sports field, in the classroom, or at work. Bring it. You choose the event, whether it involves smarts, drive, or physical prowess, and my girls will kick your boys' asses.

And no, I have no regrets that I didn't have a boy.

10

My Hero



Mom

My mom has always been my hero. She saved me, literally, pulling me out of our burning home when I was only two and a half. A PG&E worker came to fix our gas heater in the basement. He accidentally left the gas on, filling the bottom part of the house. When the pilot light touched the gas, the house exploded into flames. I was sleeping in the living room near the front door, and my older sister Carol was sleeping in a back bedroom. I was burned badly. My mom scooped me up and took me outside to safety. She was burned on her forehead, but returned to get my sister. Too late, by the time she reached the bedroom and brought her outside, Carol had died of smoke inhalation.

I didn't fully appreciate my mom's bravery until I had children of my own. How awful it must have been to lose her first-born; how incredibly difficult it must have been to live with that loss.

My father, who had been working in San Francisco the day of the fire, blamed himself for not being home. He returned to a mental hospital soon after the fire, leaving my mom to care for me.

I spent six weeks in the hospital, bandaged from head to toe. My mom used to laugh describing me, "You only had a small slit in the bandages for your eyes. We knew you would recover when you were found running all over the hospital, bandages streaming behind you."

I returned home, my wounds healed. I recovered fully, enjoying a carefree and happy childhood in Mill Valley. But the marriage did not survive the fire or my father's mental illness. My mom was alone, raising my younger sister and me.

My mom was a strong person, with a calm demeanor. She wasn't easily ruffled. I expect having lost a child, the small difficulties of daily life paled in comparison. One of the great

gifts she gave us was to put the trials of daily life in perspective, especially in the face of the big issues of life and death. I never saw my mom be petty.

My mom was not a single parent for long. Jim Leonard met my mom at a party in 1961, and they were married in June of 1962. Our family moved from Ethel Avenue to Mirabel Avenue.

My new dad did all the important activities a small boy needed. He taught me baseball and how to ride a bike. We made model airplanes together, and he took me on rainy Boy Scout camping trips.

However, it was my mom who provided moral guidance. She taught me about being kind, especially to the less popular kids in the neighborhood. She made sure that I learned to respect various religious traditions by encouraging me to visit the local churches and synagogues of my friends.

Although Mom did not raise her children in her Jewish tradition, she taught us to recognize the great idea of love in all traditions. Through her daily acts of kindness, she demonstrated that one did not need religious doctrine to practice love. She was known to all for her graciousness. Family and friends spent a lot of time at our kitchen table at Mirabel, mainly to talk with and be near my mom.

My mom also passed on her great love of books. She read to me when I was little. In grade school, she found me books like *Jason and the Golden Fleece* and *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, sparking my little boy's imagination. In Junior High she suggested Steinbeck, *The Red Pony* and *Of Mice and Men*, and London's *Call of the Wild*. Thanks to my mom, by high school I was reading late into the night.

She taught us to love books by her example. On most evenings, you could peek into my Dad's home office and see

my mom stretched out in the big easy chair reading her latest novel.

My mom was my rudder during difficult teenage years, too. At sixteen I was passionate and opinionated, a real know-it-all. My dad and I went round and round, arguing about the events of the day at the dinner table. He challenged me to provide facts to back up my opinions.

My mom took a different tact. An excellent listener, she often brought up her ideas when the heat of the dispute died down. She preferred the carom shot, not directly challenging me but calmly introducing alternative ideas for me to chew on. She was effective getting through to her intransigent teen.

Mom always seemed wise to me. Even my dad seemed smarter as I became older. So, I returned to Mirabel Avenue to discuss all the important decisions of life. We would confer at our kitchen table. Mom would have a cup of coffee in one hand, cigarette in the other. She would listen, and we would talk until I could see my way forward.

I was so grateful that my daughters had a chance to sit on my mom's lap, listening to their grandmother read stories. However, when she was diagnosed with cancer at 70, I wished desperately that each of my girls had more time with her. We were not ready to accept the finality of her diagnosis. But she was tranquil, accepting that her time had come. In the hospital she had pain. Nevertheless, my mom faced her final suffering with dignity, grace, even humor, just as she had lived her life.

My hero saved me. My mom taught me her gospel of love. This is what I hope to pass on to my daughters, their Grandma Fran's great legacy.

My Olympian



My dad painting at painting at Sonoma Grove Trailer Park

When I arrived mid-morning at the Sonoma Grove trailer park I was met with a familiar sight. My dad was painting outside his trailer. Oil paints covered the canvas, the palette, and my dad's brown tweed jacket in equal parts. My dad greeted me with his typical bear hug and tobacco kiss.

"Hey Davey, it's a beautiful morning, what do you say we head to San Francisco for a swim and lunch at the Olympic Club?"

"Can we just show up?" I worried. I felt embarrassed that the exclusive Olympic Club members might think my Dad looked more like a homeless person than a Bohemian artist.

"Sure. I'll bet you didn't know that I am a lifetime member of the Club?"

"Well I knew you dove at the Olympic Club in middle and high school and that you played handball as an adult at the club. Have you been back recently?"

"Not in years, but a lifetime member can go anytime and use the facilities. We could swim and grab a bite."

In fact, my mom had told me how my dad had been one of San Francisco's most promising young springboard divers as a teen. The Olympic Club had a grand tradition of sponsoring young amateur athletes. Memberships were granted for free and the best Bay Area athletes used the Olympic Club facilities; some even became Olympians or top pros in their respective sports.

I also knew that the Olympic Club was one of the most exclusive clubs in San Francisco, whose members were among the city's elite. How would my dad feel if we showed up and we were denied entrance to the facilities, (or perhaps more to the point, how would I feel)?

My Dad, still upbeat, insisted, "Let's go."

“OK,” I nervously conceded.

An hour later we arrived at the Downtown Olympic Club on Post Street. Above the stately wood doors hung the winged “O”, symbol of San Francisco’s oldest and most prestigious athletic club.

My Dad, still wearing his brown sports coat covered with oil paint, confidently addressed the young man sitting inside the entrance, “Milt Forrest. Lifetime member.”

After a minute or two, the young man replied, “OK Mr. Forrest. What did you have planned for today?”

“My son and I thought we’d swim and get some lunch.”

“Very good Mr. Forrest. Do you know your way to the pool?”

“Sure do.” My Dad said confidently.

In the locker room my Dad left his Cotati clothes behind as we changed into our swimsuits. He gracefully dove into the swimming pool. Even in his senior years my Dad was still a powerful swimmer, moving effortlessly through the water.

After several laps an older man in the pool called out, “Milt. Milt Forrest?”

My dad immediately recognized the fellow swimmer. They chatted briefly and my Dad proudly introduced me. “This is my son.”

“Great to meet you. Did you know years ago, whenever we’d have a handball tournament, everyone wanted to be your Dad’s doubles partner? He was the best!”

Feeling relaxed after our swim, we dressed and headed for the main dining room for lunch. A maitre d in formal attire greeted us.

“My son and I would like lunch.” my Dad requested.

“Very good, sir. However, we require formal attire for the main dining room. You’re fine, but your son will need a jacket.

We have several we can loan him.”

I blushed as the maître d offered me one of the Club’s loaner jackets.

Now properly attired, I headed for lunch with my Olympian.

12

On Turning 59



My Marilyn

Today is my birthday. Not one of those round birthdays like 30 or 60, or consequential ones like 16 or 21, but a birthday, nonetheless.

I don't dread birthdays, as our culture suggests we should. Getting older has its advantages, like distinguished grey hair and wrinkles around the brow and eyes, that some mistake for wisdom. And as you get older, you care less what others think, but you care more about those you love.

Which is really the point of turning 59, or any age for that matter, this issue of love. The foundation for a good life is loving parents (I was lucky to have 3.) And life is great when you have a wife and children whom you love and whom love you. That's it; the real secret to happiness and a good life is to be surrounded by love.

This morning and this evening my Marilyn calls from San Diego. (She is so beautiful it hurts to think about it.) She is worried about missing my birthday, but we will celebrate tomorrow. Happiness doesn't have a special day; each day is special when you are married to the great love of your life. I am happy thinking of her and Nate, waking up the animals at the San Diego Zoo.

Nicole calls to wish me a happy birthday, too, after a long day of unpacking boxes. She and Nate sing "Happy Birthday." And so the love expands with grandchildren, as I have recently learned.

Miya is on the phone. She is happy building her life with Jose. Today they are talking about buying a home; tomorrow it will be having children. Whether they land in the Bay Area or stay in Seattle, there will be a bridge of love between us.

Poor Jamie, the sole representative of our clan at home, has the pressure packed responsibility of celebrating my big day.

“What do you want to do for your birthday Dad?” she asks. “Let’s go for a bike ride,” I suggest. It is a perfect blue morning, as we whizz past the green pastures, horses and cows of Cull Canyon. Although she climbs the hill much faster than I do, all my muscles and joints are working. Health is important, too, especially at 59.

When I arrive home, Miko calls. She has moved out of her apartment today, with the help of friends. I don’t know what the future will bring for her and Corey, but she is grateful to be surrounded by friends on a difficult day.

So, let’s add friends, to health and love. Jim, my best friend, calls me to wish his old buddy happy birthday. We’ve traveled many a road together, both literally and figuratively. And I have Caryl and Len, Will and Diane, and many other dear friends. (That is correct Miko; I do have more than one friend.)

Today a new book of photos I made of Logan’s recent graduation arrives in the mail. The kids look jubilant and beautiful on their special day. So yes, having a job you care about makes for a good life.

Along with the book I received a manila envelope from my cousin, Georgie, too. It contains a family tree, filled with names. I learn that in the early 19th century an ancestor from Russia traveled to the holy land. On the first day of his pilgrimage he fell off a donkey and died. (I check the dates to see if he was 59.) So, we all live each day without knowing the future, or how many birthdays we might enjoy. Best to make the most of them.

I also learn we have distinguished rabbis, an Israeli nuclear scientist, musicians, and businessmen in the branches of our tree. I don’t know any of these accomplished people, but I wonder if they were loved, if they were happy, too. Was love

passed from generations past to me in an unbroken chain?

In a recent email, Miko said that I have entered the “Grandad” stage, like my father, who had everything he might need, no presents necessary. She is so right, but sends great gifts anyway.

I’m 59 and so lucky to have been raised by loving parents. I’m 59 and surrounded by my beautiful wife and daughters who love me. I have good health, great friends, and a job I enjoy. So far 59 is not so bad at all. I’m having a good birthday and am hoping my first day at 59 will be followed 364 more happy days, as well.

Gotta go now, Jamie has brought the makings for birthday ice cream sundaes. Ok, let’s add ice cream sundaes to all the other important things that make for a good life.



About the Author

When he is not writing stories, Dave Forrest enjoys visiting his grandkids on three continents. He spends his favorite days walking in the trees with his loved ones.

You can connect with me on:

 <http://daveforrest.net/memories>

