

Congregational Church of Belmont

**Our
Fiftieth
Anniversary
Storybook**

**Congregational Church of Belmont
Fiftieth Anniversary Stories**

**OVER
THE
YEARS**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BELMONT UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

By John Brooke

The building which houses the Congregational Church of Belmont was built in 1925 as the Belle Monte Country Club, as a sales promotion for the "Country Club Estates" lots which were sold in the surrounding area. Complete with a nine-hole golf course and an Olympic-size pool (where the back parking lot now is), the ballroom included light fixtures which featured crossed golf clubs.

In 1981 I had a baptism for a baby, whose grandfather stood up with the family for the Sacrament. After the service he told me that where he stood for his grandson's baptism was almost the same spot where he had played his trombone for a country club dance 50 years earlier!

The country club went bankrupt during the Depression. It stood vacant for some time, then successively was used as a military training facility during World War 2, then a medical research facility by several groups, the last being the Kaiser Corporation. Mrs. Kaiser sold the property — the building essentially as it is to this day — and over four acres of land to the Northern California Conference in 1953 for \$45,000.

Usually a new church begins with a handful of folk who meet in a garage or a school until they can afford to build the first unit of their church building. In Belmont's case, the building preceded the people. Sam Owens, still part of our church family, was among a group of members from the Congregational Church of San Mateo who went door to door early in 1954 to find people interested in being part of this new church.

The first service was held on the first Sunday of March, 1954. The first controversy was whether to hold the first service in the ballroom or the dining room. It was decided to use the smaller dining room so the worshipers would not be dwarfed in a large space. The dining room overflowed that Sunday, and henceforth the old ballroom became the sanctuary!

The first minister was Terence Stoker, who had been Assistant Minister at the San Mateo church before being called to help form our church. Charter members, a total of 285, were received during the first three months after services began. Bob and Betty Pex and Stan and Jessie Lawson were among the charter group. Owen and Hally Rogers joined later that first year.

Harold Cram was called as the church's second minister in 1955, serving until 1964. Some of the pillars of the church during those early years included Roy Mollenkopf, who supervised the building of our present pews by the men of the church; Guy and Helen Kitson, beloved for their devotion to young and older people alike; and Howard and Reba Brandenburg (Reba was church organist from 1960 to 1988; "Captain" Brandenburg — Brandy — was a legend in his own time; son Gary, together with Steve Cram, son of Harold and Louise, built our pipe organ from a cast-off of the Mt. Carmel Catholic Church in Redwood City, who sold it in pieces for \$300 — Gary and Steve hauled it away in pickup truck loads to the Brandenburg

garage, where it was rebuilt — and the process continues as Gary's lifelong avocation to this day).

Pastorates which followed included Paul Donovan (1964-1967); Byron Light (1967-1973); Philip Oliver (1973-1979); John Brooke (1980-1992); Wendy Taylor (1988-1997 — co-pastor with John 1988-1992); and Kristi Denham (1999-some time in the new millennium). Interim ministers served over the years, the longest tenures being Frank Jagers (1979-1980) and Lee Cruise (1997-1999).

Worship has been central to the life of our church from its beginning. Increasingly lay members have shared in the worship leadership of our church, including preaching, lay leading, sharing time with our children, and providing music.

Music has always played a prominent and important part in the life of this church. Organ builder and organist Gary and Reba Brandenburg have already been noted; other talented musicians who have served us include (just a sampling) choir director Dave Iverson, organist Craig Norris, choir director Tina Baird; eclectically-talented Barbary Grant; and organist-choir director Joe McClain. Always we have had a strong choir, who have especially outdone themselves on Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve. Fine vocal and instrumental soloists have offered their services over the years and also in recent years a folk chorus known as the Caz Chorale.

Several generations have served devotedly as Sunday school teachers and youth leaders. Our children and whole congregation have participated in experiences at Cazadero in Sonoma County.

Mission and outreach have broadened and deepened over the years. Our giving to the wider work of the church has gradually increased as a percentage of our annual budget. Some of our members have been leaders in projects of compassion: notable examples are the "Children of Chernobyl" project pioneered by Micki Carter and the founding of the Interfaith Network for Community Help (INCH) by Jan Heise. At times we have had the highest per capita participation in the life of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the UCC of any church.

Maintaining and improving our historic old building has been a continuing challenge for Trustees and congregation over the years. For 19 years, from 1970 to 1989 we had a "Renaissance Man," Art Armstrong, as our live-in custodian — and so much more. Much of the handiwork around the church (for example our Communion and narthex tables and memorial stand) are his creations. In 1981 the ramp was added to the front of the building. Recent major projects have been the refurbishing of the parlor, the remodeling of the kitchen and the landscaping of the front yard. Many other projects have been undertaken and many remain.

Inclusiveness has been an evolving theme in our church's life: from the exclusive crossed golf clubs to the inclusive cross of Christ; from male-dominated leadership to our first woman Moderator — Ella Mae Donovan in 1973 and our first woman minister — Wendy Taylor in 1988 (two women have been ordained in our church: Janell Osborne Nickols in 1979 and Wendy in 1988); from an inaccessible building to a ramped building with accessible bathroom, large-print bulletins, hearing aids, ASL interpreted services for several years, thanks to Tony Lewis and Don Lawrence; from a friendly, but not clearly open-to-all fellowship to an

Open and Affirming stance adopted in 1992; and from fairly set ways of doing things to an increasingly open-to-change style.

We have learned to enjoy playing together, even when we are raising money. The long-established rummage sale is fun as well as a fund raiser. Even more so is our unique Chocolate Fest, established in 1983 and an increasingly-anticipated event in the wider community ever since.

PREPARING THE BUILDING IN 1954

By Sam Owens

Charles Judd and I were members of the Board of Trustees of the San Mateo Church. We both moved to Belmont in 1953. We were "selected" to help get the new proposed Belmont Church started.

As you know, Mr. Albert Watson had twisted the arm of the Kaiser Foundation (who then owned the building) to sell it to the San Mateo Church (for next to nothing).

Charlie and I cleaned out the basement area which had been used as a cancer research facility. And it was a mess. But after a lot of work, we made it half-way presentable and usable.

We also cleaned up the parlor, did some minor electrical work and installed new lighting. As I recall, the kitchen was in fair shape. We also cleaned that up and made it usable.

CONSTRUCTING THE PEWS

By Sam Owens

Roy Mollekopf was the brains and guiding light behind the pew project.

The congregation decided we needed pews for the sanctuary. The price was beyond our means. Roy suggested that perhaps we could build them ourselves.

He went to a pew vendor and studied the pew construction. He then drew up some plans, priced material costs and came up with a price of \$50 per pew if we built them ourselves.

Church members purchased the pews. (You have seen the brass plates identifying the members who subscribed.) We set up an "assembly line" in the back parking lot on the weekends. I cannot recall how long it took us but it went pretty fast.

Roy had designed them to be fairly easy to construct. I think that the product speaks for itself

I cannot recall who all worked on it. The only names that come to mind are Roy, Bob Pex, Vern Allen and myself. There were others, but I can't recall.

CCB CARETAKERS

By Lois Shouse

Our caretakers have been very much a part of our storied history built around this beautiful old building. From the very beginning, caretakers have lived in the roomy, drafty upstairs apartment. Even before they became the continuous residents of those seven rooms, there were lots of colorful stories related to "the rooms upstairs" when this was the Belle Monte Country Club — but that's another story!?!?!

Katie was the "original" caretaker. Everywhere in doing her job, she kept this place cleaned, locked and always ready for many years. Ahead of her time, this woman did a man's job very effectively and to the satisfaction of the church leaders.

Time passes, though, and it took its toll on Katie's physical ability to live upstairs in the apartment and do an effective job. The task of ending that long partnership was a difficult one.

Finding our second caretaker was a lovely mix of timeliness and happenstance. Several church members, including Bob (Shouse), had their hair cut at Carlmont by a barber, Arthur Armstrong. Chitchat during haircuts led to his application to become our "man of all trades" for our building. He was ready to quit being a barber, and we needed a man with his many talents and wonderful gentleness.

A match made in heaven, Art was perfectly happy with the minimal amenities of the apartment and with the challenges of the variety of his tasks. Being on his own time schedule, for the most part, was a delight for him, and he loved doing outdoor jobs.

All the space of the apartment was heaven for him, and he immediately set up a shop in one of the bedrooms. Soon, besides more than adequately meeting all the needs of the congregation and the building, he was busy making beautiful pieces of furniture for the church and members of the church. We use and enjoy two carved communion tables he made and gave to the church. The decorative pillars and woodwork around the organ pipes were made and installed by Art, as well as the walling that shapes the front of the church. We were fortunate to have Art build a beautiful mantel for our remodeled fireplace in our newly decorated living room in Belmont.

Work Days were fun days for Art. He always had a list of things to do, and he always brought the beer. Bob remembers a work day when Art was riding a three-wheeled bicycle (maybe from the rummage room) and took a bad fall over the side down the back side of the parking lot. Luckily, he wasn't hurt but really shaken up about falling in front of people.

Annual Meeting was always enlivened by Art's Annual Report. We all waited anxiously for what he would come up with to bring us all a few laughs as we did the annual business of the church. Reminders of Art's long tenure here are everywhere for many of us.

As a part of Art's "retirement" at the age of 80, John Brooke and I collected pieces of his craftsmanship, photographed them and showed them as a slide show for Art's retirement party. Amazingly, Art is still going strong and living with his daughter-in-law in Greensboro, N. C.

HERSTORY OF WOMEN IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF BELMONT

By Ella Mae Donovan

Kristi is our Minister and we have had three women Ministers before her. Joe plays the organ and directs the choir. We have just elected women moderators and probably all boards will be chaired by women. The candlelighters and ushers can be couples, women, men or children.

FLASHBACK FEBRUARY 1961 Women's Sunday

With our hats, gloves and shaky knees, the women ushered, greeted and received the morning offering. Harold Cram was our Minister, Reba Brandenburg, organist and Harry Altman, choir director. Men were the ushers and boys lit the candles for worship service. Chairmen for all boards and the board of trustees were men. At this time women in hats, with the tablecloth of lace and silver coffee pots, served coffee or tea after church. Things have really changed.

Women's fellowship met monthly for lunch and a program. We had three fundraisers per year. One was the rummage sale. The big seller was boys' suits and sport coats; they were worn to church, so you saw the same suit on different boys through the years. The other fundraisers were our spring and fall hat sales. A vendor brought in several styles of hats and no two alike. We invited our neighbors and friends to attend the sale and, of course, the members bought two or three for the season. We served sandwiches, cookies and tea.

In the mid '60s, the program was a book report on "The Feminine Mystic" by Betty Friedan. We put away our hats and went to work outside the home.

Then in the late '60s, women could now serve communion; before this time we prepared, cleaned up and the men served. Also women could participate in the Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service. Now we had voices for men, women and teen-agers.

One of our youth was ordained in our church in the early '70s. Janell Osborne was a military chaplain and her husband is a pastor at a church in Virginia. She and her family visited in 1998. That ordination is still one the highlights of our congregation.

John Brooke brought us inclusive language. I sometimes have a problem with familiar hymns and especially Christmas carols, but if all girls feel included, then I am pleased.

Highlights for me: Being the first woman moderator, participating in the Tenebrae service, lighting the candles for Phil Oliver, watching the first girls, Terie and Valerie Montgomery, light the candles and then my serving communion with John.

A three-generation church was a dream, but we have exceeded that and are now a four-generation church.

OUR PIPE ORGAN

By Kathy Simmons

From its humble beginnings in 1919, in another church, our pipe organ has gone from a modest seven sets of pipes to the 15 sets we enjoy today. Considering there are roughly 60 pipes per set, our organ has 900 pipes, plus the 36 pipes for the pedals. That's a lot of lung power!

Pipe organs are an old technology; they've been around for 500-600 years. However, in the '60s there was a trend to take the old pipe organs and give up on them in favor of electric organs.

I spoke to Gary Brandenburg one morning in June, 1995. He told me about the history and workings of our pipe organ.

In 1955-56 an electronic organ was donated as a memorial. In 1959 Gary's Mom, Reba Brandenburg, became our church organist and Gary sang in the choir. They both dreamed of a pipe organ for the sanctuary. Gary said, "The poor little electronic organ didn't have much variety of sound, but it did well. It got us to 1963, when we got wind of a pipe organ in a Redwood City church."

Eventually the Redwood City church said, "We'll let you have our old pipe organ, if you'll just take it out!" Gary remembers that the CCB congregation felt they should pay church something. "We picked a dollar amount out of the air. We offered \$300 and they accepted. It was a ridiculously low price, even back then."

The Rebuilding

There was no place at the Congregational Church of Belmont to put the organ for the tune-up work that needed to be done. Gary's parents had a garage and that's where the organ was re-built. It took Gary a year to go over every part and re-build it. Once it was ready, Gary tested it out in the garage. "I started to play, and it just came alive."

The organ's motor has 1 1/2 horsepower, and, after he finished playing, Gary went outside and saw that the power of the motor had blown all the leaves off the tree that stood above it! This is why the motor now sits downstairs at the church, cradled in insulation. As Gary said, "We had to get the motor as far away from the organ as possible or else it would drown out the music."

A thermostat and heater were installed to take the chill off the air in the winter. "The cold temperature causes the pipes to change pitch. The reeds, especially, are a real problem," Gary noted.

The reeds are fragile due to their delicate construction. A note goes dead if a reed has specks of dirt on it. The other pipes need no maintenance. Gary speculated, "Maybe the air blowing through them keeps them clean. They hold their tune pretty well."

A pipe organ can't ever be perfectly tuned because, as soon as it is tuned, it starts to

drift. Therefore, the pipes will always have a slightly different pitch. People think that's the beauty of the organ," Gary said, "to have it slightly out of tune."

The Pipes

The big, gold pipes we see that frame the back of the altar are the foundation of the organ. Played alone they have a big, lush, romantic quality. "Then you add other sounds around the foundation to give it other qualities. The organ can play down to a whisper and up to the full sound of a symphony," Gary explained.

In 1964, the organ was set up in the church, and almost immediately another set of pipes was added. In the classified section of an organ magazine, Gary saw an ad for a set of trumpet pipes for \$65. Gary said, "I bought them, but the trick was to add them on."

A retired contractor and church member named Ed Dougherty built a room off the back of the church just for the pipes.

Over the years the pipe family has grown to include an oboe, clarinet, figato, clarim, mixture, celeste, and a pedal trumpet, because, as Gary explained, "When you add a lot of stops, you need to beef up the pedal or else it's not balanced; it sounds tinny."

Another set of trumpet pipes came along that was too good of a deal to pass up. Gary described this second set as a "loud, brassy sound with strong bite and attack. The first set of trumpet pipes is mellow and gentle. Together the two have a lot of muscle."

To amplify the low notes, and help give them some depth, there are 15 foot woofers in the floor behind the altar

Designing, re-building, enlarging, and maintaining this wonderful instrument has been a labor of love for Gary for many years. Each Sunday we who sit in the pews are able to benefit from his experience and care.

One thing is for certain, our pipe organ is unique, and nothing can match its sound!

THE EASTER BALLOONS

By Lois Shouse

The Easter tradition of balloons began in the '80s with John Brooke as the driving instigator. What a wonderful idea! The joy of lifting up this colorful tribute on the uplifting day of Christ's resurrection was a "match made in heaven" in my mind, and our veranda was an ideal setting. Stories abound related to this annual event.

The first helium-filled balloons in the church were held down by the recently created GOLD BRICKS (used bricks sprayed gold) we had "sold for \$50 each" as a church fundraiser gimmick. Nothing goes without multiple uses in our creative history.

The Brooke family were the "fillers of the helium balloons" for the first few years. Then, the Pattersons took on the task and have been doing it for, lo, these many years. Now, that's a task that truly has to be a "labor of love."

For the first several years, the congregation moved to the veranda with balloons in hand.

At a signal from our minister, we'd release them and feel the exhilaration as they dancingly flew away to the heavens. Talk to young adults, and they'll smile fondly over the memory of that colorful family event on Easter Sunday.

With the concern of naturalists for the welfare of birds who were choking on the rubber of these balloons that got stuck on wires and in trees, this part of the ceremony changed.

Fortunately, the celebration of the color of the balloons in the sanctuary stayed, and they were given to the children attending church for their pleasure. The array of colors was fun as the children ran on the front lawn to find their Easter eggs.

TAKING CARE OF THE OLD PLACE

By Bob Carter

Taking care of the church building is like taking care of our aging bodies. Pipes need to be unclogged, the heating system needs to be recharged, the roof needs a replacement and the façade needs a facelift.

Art Armstrong, our loving caretaker for 20 years, used to take care of a lot of things that we never knew about — replacing electric switches, unplugging drains, stopping leaks, touching up where needed, etc. After Art retired, Kelley and Doug Woods took over for a few years and then moved on. Meanwhile our 1927 building aged with less grace and beauty.

There were times when water poured in the west windows of the fireplace room and rivaled Noah's time. After a number of attempts at stopping the floods, we got David Carter, (the younger) to dig a 2-foot-deep trench in the front of the building, we filled it with gravel and lowered the ground level to below the window sills, and the floods have come no more into the fireplace room.

After the front repair, we needed to remove the old smelly carpet, so a CPNS parent and Bob Carter undertook the job of removing the carpet and leveling the floor. (We need to remember, this area was a men's locker room, and then a mouse facility for medical research, so the floor was not a smooth flat finish). Professional carpet layers installed a new carpet (glued down for permanence and durability)

In the late '80s, it was time to revamp the basement bathrooms. Two toilets in the right bathroom didn't work, and one needed slalom poles to navigate the opening into the bathroom. A church crew undertook the project and discovered that the reason for the jog was that there used to be urinals on the old wall. After removing the old plumbing, plugging the drain in the floor, rerouting other plumbing for a new sink, re-activating one of the two toilets and moving partitions to make a handicapped accessible toilet, the downstairs bathroom was ready for use. Later CPNS redid the left bathroom with small toilets appropriate for 3-5 year olds, but not easy for grown-ups.

Of course once the surface plumbing is working, it is time for the buried pipes to object. After several spills and a TV camera in the pipes, we learn that there are two drainage systems under the floor, and one needs to clean out the correct one to prevent sewage back ups. Oh, the wonders of 1927 design.

The basement lighting was installed during the 1962 renovation, and consisted of high energy -using, inefficient 8-foot fluorescent fixtures. With the help of a PG&E rebate, we installed 55 new efficient T-8 fluorescent fixtures that consume about half the energy, and at the same time we installed LED illuminated emergency signs that consume about a tenth of the electricity of the old incandescent fixtures. And we don't have to replace burned out bulbs.

All these internal repairs didn't address leaks into the building in the dining room, parlor or the basement classrooms. We had a contractor install a rubber membrane roof over the parlor to stop the leaks into the parlor (until other roofers installed gutters and didn't fold the membrane down properly). With the parlor leak stopped, we were able to fix the ceiling, paint the parlor, install new windows, get new cabinetry and install new carpet, and make the parlor a pleasant place to have meetings.

Prior to the parlor upgrade, we had the Fleming brothers upgrade the front bathroom (remember the sink on the outside wall?) and convert the choir closet into an accessible bathroom. The choir got relegated to a closet off the fireplace room. Does anyone remember what it was used for before the choir moved in?

The dining room wall to the side deck used to have a French door when we were a country club, however the door was removed and sealed up and the wall leaked into the basement classrooms. The first leak that I recall in the wall was caused by the redwood gutter end rotting out and pouring water into the wall and down through the fire hose closet into the classroom below. Art was still here, and the problem was solved by cutting off the end of the gutter and sealing up the wall. (Why would one terminate a gutter inside a wall anyhow?)

Leaks started again after Art left, and we had to hire a carpenter to completely rebuild the wall and that slowed the leaks mostly. It was not until we replaced the pitched roof

that the leaks in the wall were finally abated.

All the outside deck areas were beginning to show their ages, and cracks began to show. Art had used tar to patch the cracks and it stopped the leaks, however like all of us aging people, more wrinkles and cracks kept showing up. We finally had All-Deck material installed which consists of a fiberglass matting with several coats of sealer over the glass. This material seems to be holding up well, but we may need to put a top coating on soon.

Two major projects that needed to be addressed in the early '90s were the pitched roof and the exterior painting. The roof was the original roof of 1927 made of asbestos shingles, and we weren't anxious to spend many dollars to remove the asbestos and abate the problem. Our solution was to encapsulate the old shingles in a metal roof that carries a 60-year warranty.

We hired the local dealer for the roof, but they were not prepared for the job they undertook. They underestimated the roof area by over 300 square feet and had to provide the extra material at no cost. I had to train the crew on how to install flashing on the dormers and how to do stucco repairs. However, we now have a roof that none of the current members need to worry about. If only the roofer had replaced the gutters around the decks, we'd have fewer of our current water problems.

After almost 30 years without an external paint job, the building was beginning to look shabby. The painting project started out well, with our receiving three bids from contractors. However, two backed out when we asked them how they were going to handle the lead based paint that was found in some places on the building. We needed to be sure that it was handled properly as we had two tenants who served children using the basement area.

After some gut wrenching, the design committee decided on colors and the painting started. The contractor spent a lot of time preparing the surfaces to be painted and in many places the wood had dried out and cracked. Although we were left with the high bidder, they did provide us with a 15-year warranty on the paint. Hopefully the next time around won't be as expensive.

**Congregational Church of Belmont
Fiftieth Anniversary Stories**

**THE
EARLY
YEARS**

THE EARLY YEARS OF BELMONT CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

GET READY, GET SET, GO!

By Betty Pex

In the fall of 1953 when we were members of the San Mateo Congregational Church, we found out that the Northern California Conference was purchasing the former Club House of the Belmont Country Club. It was then owned by Kaiser Permanente Foundation, which had used the building for laboratories.

Terry Stoker, assistant minister of the San Mateo church, was to be the first minister, and some of the members who lived in or near Belmont were asked if they would like to become part of the nucleus group to start the new congregation. We were delighted to have a church so close to our home, so eagerly joined.

In the first two months of 1954, preparations were made to have the first service on the first Sunday in March. I remember spending many mornings varnishing plywood sheets that became tables once legs were attached.

Although the fledgling church had been well publicized, no one had any idea how many people would show up. Rather than be embarrassed by having only a handful of people in the "ballroom," the group decided to use the dining room until we had a sufficient congregation. The dining room was the sanctuary for only one service! Although we were not there on that eventful day (we were away on vacation, camping in Southern California deserts before Bob was to start spring quarter classes at San Jose State), we heard that the room was full to overflowing.

The following Sunday the folding chairs were moved into the sanctuary. The Belmont Congregational Church was on its way!

One year later Terry and Jo Stoker moved to the San Joaquin Valley, and Harold and Louise Cram arrived from Tulare. Harold was the minister for the next nine years, a period of growth. The congregation's size required two services on Sundays to accommodate the crowds. Sunday School was held during the 9:30 worship service with a "junior church" held for the children prior to their classes, usually one class for every two grades.

I remember playing the piano for junior church and then going upstairs to the sanctuary for the rest of the worship service there — if I wasn't teaching Sunday School.

ORGANIZATIONS DURING THE FIRST DECADE OF THE CHURCH

CONGREGATORS

One group we remember fondly from the late fifties and early sixties was a couples club known as the Congregators. We met once a month for social evenings, sometimes joining with the Men's Club for such annual events as the Men's Club Barbecue, cooking supervised by Guy Kitson at the grill! The sole purpose, as I recall, was to get acquainted and to have

fun, thus promoting the spirit of friendliness that has always characterized our church.

WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

This group was very active when the church was formed with monthly daytime meetings for all the women of the church. Annual events sometimes included a "Hat Sale" held shortly before Easter so that we could have a chance to purchase our Easter bonnets and benefit the church at the same time. Photographs of the tenth anniversary of the church provide evidence of the success of this venture.

Within the Women's Fellowship were several circles which also met monthly: Heather, Laurel, and Ivy. Ivy Circle included primarily the older women of the church, while Heather and Laurel were for the younger members. I believe one of these met in the afternoon and the other met in the evening when husbands could baby-sit young children.

Although the Women's Fellowship had more serious purposes than Congregators, it sponsored an all church ice cream or strawberry social during one of the summer months.

STUDY GROUPS

"Jesus As Teacher"

One year during the late '50s, a group of about a dozen women met one morning a week with Amelia Rathbun, wife of a Stanford University professor, for in-depth discussions of a book that focused on the teachings of Jesus. We examined chapters, paragraphs, and sentences, relating their significance to our own lives. It was a meaningful experience for everyone in the group.

The "Slip" Group

In the early '60s, there were several groups of couples that took a kind of personality analysis test, many pages with hundreds of questions that involved choices. One example might have been: "Would you rather a) have your picture in the paper with a famous politician or b) not have your picture in the paper at all?" These tests were evaluated at an office in Burlingame that also stocked religious books and materials. Results of the evaluation were prepared at this office and distributed at the group meetings.

The groups of perhaps six couples each met two evenings a month in the same home for each group. On the first meeting of the month each person would receive an envelope containing a slip of paper, stating the percentile rank of that individual with regard to one personality trait. Obviously, there were no "right" answers, with individuals ranging on "openness" (though I don't think that was the term used) from very shy to very outgoing, for example.

There was no obligation to share your ranking with other members of the group. But, each slip also contained a homework assignment: a Biblical passage to be read and considered carefully and prayerfully before the second meeting of the month. I remember that at least on two or possibly three occasions, I was given the book of Acts to read — each time

focusing on different elements. At the second meeting, the discussion was a sharing of our "assignments" with regard to the personality characteristic. This was the most unusual method of reading the Bible I had ever encountered. It was interesting, and it was fun!

THE PEW PROJECT

By Betty Pex

For the first few years of the church, we used folding metal chairs that were not the most desirable seating. They were cold or hot, hard, and often noisy. We longed to have "regular" pews, but the prices for such furniture (about \$450 per pew) seemed well beyond what the congregation could afford.

I believe it was Roy Mollenkoff who spear-headed the idea of having the men of the church build pews themselves. A committee (of course) must have considered various designs and materials before getting estimates of costs for the lumber and the upholstery.

Finally it was time to put the ideas before the congregation — which adopted the project with enthusiasm. Individuals could "purchase" a pew, dedicating it in memory of a loved one or simply donating it. Today brass plates on each pew identify these gifts to our church.

The announced price was approximately \$50. Many people signed up immediately after church that Sunday. Bob and I really wanted to sponsor a pew, but we were a single-income family with three children living on an extremely limited budget. We needed to check our finances carefully before we could commit ourselves. By the following Sunday we had decided we could manage the expense, but discovered that all of the pews had already been pledged! We were disappointed that we weren't a part of the project, but thrilled that there would finally be real pews!

Soon work schedules were set up. Bob and several other men brought their table saws to the basement and set them up, each man usually spending at least one night a week working. This went on for many months. The project seemed to require frequent changes of saw blades — and by the end Bob's saw was totally worn out and had to be replaced.

The Sunday when the pews were dedicated was a great day, indeed! That these pews have lasted for 45 years is a testament to the quality of the wood and upholstery selected as well as to the "sweat equity" and skillful workmanship of those men.

CAMP CAZADERO

By Betty Pex

Camp Caz came into being when we were members of the San Mateo Congregational Church. It was a comparatively primitive place in the early '50s. But early on, the decision was made to build a swimming pool on the property. Men from various Congregational churches went up to Caz to do the work. Although Bob was working full time and going to school, he was able to go one weekend and helped with mixing and pouring the cement. When he returned, totally exhausted, he vowed he was going to enjoy every dip he eventually took in that pool.

We went to family camp for a week in the summer of 1952. Camp was led by Dick Norberg (then minister at Hayward Congregational church), assisted by Rev. Eschelmann, who had been a chaplain at Alcatraz Prison. My parents had come out from Chicago to see their granddaughters, then 2 1/2 and 6-months-old.

Facilities were very basic. There was no indoor space except the individual cabins. All meals were eaten out of doors, of course, regardless of the weather. Shelves along the side of the old "ranch house" (where the cooking was done) held place settings of dishes. Each camper had an assigned set, being responsible for washing the dishes after each meal and putting them back in place. This didn't seem at all unreasonable — in fact, it was luxurious to have meals prepared for us as we enjoyed a week in the redwoods at this special place. And Bob enjoyed every dip in the pool with special joy!



Vesper Point at Camp Cazadero

After the Belmont church was founded, there were opportunities for our church to use Camp Caz in the fall. In those days, it was usually a weekend in October. The summer staff was not available, so church groups had to bring all the food and prepare it. Again, it seemed to be Guy and Helen Kitson who usually were in charge of organizing the meals. Everyone pitched in, helping with the preparation of one meal during the weekend. Even so, this was a tremendous undertaking as I remember we usually had at least 50 to 60 people there. It was a time of wonderful togetherness for our church family.

It was a tremendous improvement when the old ranch house was replaced by Gill Hall. The old kitchen had been very cramped to work in, and the new kitchen made such a difference.

The dishwashing system was far more sanitary, too. The greatest change was that eventually staff were on site to prepare the meals, greatly simplifying the organization of church weekends.

Caz has always had a special place in our hearts — though once we played hooky and went to a family camp week with our three children at Camp Tamarack in the Sierras!

CONGREGATORS (Parents' Night Out)

By Ella Mae Donovan

We enjoyed being on the committee for this fun and entertaining potluck for adults only.

A committee of about five couples had a potluck at one of the homes to plan the decoration and program for the Friday night social. In February the decorations were for Valentines Day, in March St. Patrick's Day, etc.

Some of the programs were a belly dancer, a Hillbarn Theater one-act play or a play directed and acted by the committee.

The meal was a potluck, with the committee providing the dessert and it was surprising that with five people preparing the same recipe, how different each looked.

All attendees had a fun evening with conversation and little work. It was an important social function of that era.

MONEY MATTERS: THE FIRST TREASURER

By Ella Mae Donovan

Adam Schmirer was the first Treasurer (the large cross window on the east side of the sanctuary is in his memory).

If he did not have enough money in the offering, he would make a loan with no interest to the church to pay the salary and bills. I do not know if the Church ever paid up these loans.

Bob Donovan became treasurer in the early '60s. He brought home the Sunday offering, we counted it and recorded the pledges.

On Monday I took the small zippered bag to the bank, as soon as the bank opened the doors. The Catholic priest was there at the same time. He had two large bags that he kicked along, as they were heavy. So the two of us met weekly with our Monday deposits.

After the by-laws were completed, we had a Financial Secretary to record the income and two Trustees to count the money and make the deposit.

THE FIRST BAPTISMS

By Betty Pex

Rev. Terry Stoker conducted the first baptisms in our "infant" church on June 27, 1954. There were four or five children presented for baptism, including Mary Beth Schulz, daughter of Art and Mary Ellen Schulz, and David Allen Pex, our son who had been born on June 10, 1954. Mary Beth was about a year old.

BASEMENT REMODEL

By Bob and Ella Mae Donovan

The Children's Sunday school was in the former country club men's locker room with cement block walls and very little division of rooms.

A congregational meeting was held to consider a remodel of the basement, at which time a negative motion was made but the motion failed by one vote. The remodel was to go forward.

Church members did a lot of the work under the guidance of Ed Dougherty, a general contractor and member of the church.

The fireplace room was for all the children to gather for song and opening prayer. Separate rooms were provided for the different ages to study the lesson of the day. We were so proud of our remodel that we held a lot of meetings in our new Fireplace Room.

Now we rent out a lot of the lower level to CPNS (Carlmont Parent Nursery School), OT4Kids and such groups as Al-Anon and the Beekeepers.

THE CHURCH ORGAN — as I remember it

By Betty Pex

When the church was first formed, I believe we had the use of a borrowed piano for music. Sometime within the first couple of years, there was talk about getting a small electronic organ.

The Benson family had been planning to purchase a new car, but decided to underwrite 90 percent of the cost of the electronic organ, using the down payment they had planned to use for the car and making monthly payments. This was to be a memorial to a deceased son. Members of the congregation pledged the remaining 10 percent of the cost, and the organ became a reality.

The end of the story was incredible. The month that they made the final payment on the organ, the Bensons had bought a ticket for a raffle the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church was sponsoring. The top prize was a new car — and the Bensons won! So, the church had an organ, and the Bensons finally had their new car!

About 1962 or so, St. Pius Catholic Church in Redwood City found that they were having difficulty maintaining their pipe organ and decided to replace it with an electronic organ. The existing pipe organ was available at a very nominal price. Gary Brandenburg arranged for our church to obtain it.

He and Steve Cram organized the pick up of the old organ. Bob used our station wagon to help with the move. Everything was transported to the Brandenburg garage where everything was taken apart, repaired or replaced, and reassembled. The first time we heard Reba play the organ was in the garage shortly before it was moved into the church. This had been a tremendous task for which everyone in the church was extremely grateful.

Gary has enhanced the organ with additional ranks of pipes over the years. Today it is many times more than the organ it was in St. Pius. It was a special thrill for me to take organ lessons from Reba Brandenburg on the church organ during the '60s — and on several occasions when there was a need for special music, Reba and I played duets (I was playing the electronic organ.) Those times are very precious memories I have.

HARVEST DINNER

By Ella Mae Donovan

In the late '60s Women's fellowship decided to celebrate the wedding anniversary of our then minister and his wife, Paul and Florence Donovan, on November 20. We had tables set up in the dining room, parlor and Narthex. Families had such a good time, it became a yearly event and was renamed the Harvest dinner.

CHURCH KEYS

By Ella Mae Donovan

We were driving three youth to Twain Hart for the yearly snow trip. Bob got out of the car to supervise putting on the chains.

One of the youth asked who had the church key. I got upset and asked why anyone would bring the church key to the snow.

I found out he was asking for a Coke can opener. That was before the tab opening.



Sunday School class of 1955

RECOLLECTIONS — THE EARLY DAYS

By David Iverson

Dancing, yes, dancing in what is now the sanctuary in the pre-church country club days — late '40s, Big Band sounds, junior proms, Spring dances, etc. Full moons and romancing on the veranda, and warnings to stay away from and out of the swimming pool.

Pastor Terry Stoker's leadership and diligence in getting the church off and running and his commitment to making a choir an integral part of his efforts.

Co-operation and support of San Mateo Congregational Church Pastor Ben Gaskill, the San Mateo Church and the Conference in the organization of our church — including organization and support of a choir — loans of music, ideas and even volunteer singers!

Jackie Iverson was Terry Stoker's secretary and put in many helpful hours.

Rattling metal folding chairs and the rickety, old upright piano in our early services — most of them, I recall, including the very first one (Terry Stoker agrees), held in the ballroom.

Following in Terry's footsteps — true shepherds all of them — Paul Donovan, Byron Light, Ray Welles, John Brooke, Phil Oliver and Harold Cram (and his Louise).

And so many stalwart, devoted members of the choir — Harry Altman and his outstanding and loving leadership for so many years, his wife Janet, Barbara Frost, Alice and Bill Slater, Lorrie Hancock, Erma Emerson, Phyllis Manning, Vida McIlmoil, Don Barker, Sam Owens to name a few. Doris Brown and Gary Brandenburg are still there — God love them!

And the Brandenburgs! Reba, Howard, Gary, Carolyn, Mark and Galyn. The loving touches and influences raised the church's musical offerings and the choir to new heights — Reba and her unforgettable pipe organ renditions, stirring our very souls, and her indispensable help in choir rehearsals. Such devotion — all of them.

And Gary, making our great pipe organ a reality for the church! Countless hours of personal commitment to his great project and indispensable as a major choir soloist and, thank goodness, his ability to double on tenor and bass!

And, finally, the Congregators, providing us with so much special bonding and fun!



Reba Brandenburg

**Congregational Church of Belmont
Fiftieth Anniversary Stories**

**THE
CCB
COMMUNITY**

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

By Paul Anderson

One common reason that folks join churches is to find community. That's why I joined CCB in 1976. A friend, who had attended once or twice, invited us to come along with her. While we stayed, I don't recall that she ever came back, and I'm not sure what that means. Possibly we found community and she didn't. What was it that we found? What is community?

I have a book that is a collection of essays on community, most of which include a definition of the term, none of which are the same. One that I like was written by the late John Gardner, founder of Common Cause and most recently a professor at Stanford. He lists 10 characteristics of community, against which I decided to measure my experience of CCB.

1. Wholeness Incorporating Diversity — where independent people do their own things while at the same time sharing and working toward a common purpose. While most of us pretty much look alike, it seems to me that we are quite diverse in less visible ways such as how we think and where our interests lie. Our common ground (beyond the physical place) seems to be the liberal UCC theology, which ironically welcomes diversity.

2. A Reasonable Base of Shared Values — again, not agreeing on everything (not one of our problems!), but agreeing on something significant. It seems, for example, that we all agree that Micah 6:8 (and its values of justice, kindness and humility) is very important.

3. Caring, Trust and Teamwork — This includes treating one another humanely, respecting differences, trust, inclusiveness, recognition for hard work, a sense of belonging and a spirit of mutual responsibility. While I think we do well in this category, those who have not stayed might have a different point of view. The idea of continuous improvement applies.

4. Effective Internal Communication goes beyond email and The Messenger — It means open and honest conversation, which includes really listening to one another — especially when we disagree. This quality varies with the people involved and the setting. How well do you feel we do this?

5. Participation includes shared leadership and not just hearing all voices but hearing them with an egalitarian spirit where all of us can have influence. One reason I joined CCB was my experience of this at my first annual meeting. I was invited even though I wasn't a member. The room was full for this business meeting. Ella Mae Donovan was the moderator — I hadn't experienced women in church leadership positions before. I heard a wide variety of viewpoints expressed, often with great passion, and it seemed that they were listened to equally. Participation is foundational to democracy.

6. Affirmation in a community means it builds its own morale. While acknowledging its shortcomings, it has confidence in itself. My sense is that we do this well, we can always do better, and we occasionally need to balance this with a little of that humility mentioned in the Micah passage.

7. Links Beyond the Community — CCB needs to maintain open, constructive, and extensive relations with the world beyond its boundaries, while at the same time maintaining its

uniqueness. Our participation in the NCN Conference, in Belmont civic activities and in interfaith organizations are examples of this. My view is that to maintain our vitality we need to be more effective in communicating how we are different.

8. Development of Young People — I happened to join CCB with several other families with small children, and together we countered the national trend of declining church participation by children. Recently we have experienced the beginning of another upswing. It seems obvious that we need to be intentional in our efforts to keep this momentum going — augmenting public education with what we feel our children need to fully develop into tomorrow's leaders.

9. A Forward View means to know where we are going and to visualize what we might become. While we worked hard to articulate our vision a few years ago, my concern is that we who participated in that effort are forgetting it and the meaning of it is not being instilled in folks new to CCB.

10. Institutional Arrangements for Community Maintenance — This takes a wide variety of form, governance (structure and control), architecture, training, staff (paid and volunteer). Some of these forms have been in place essentially unchanged for our entire 50 years of existence. Yet form follows purpose. As the world about us changes we must constantly revisit that purpose and re-examine our forms to insure that they serve that purpose, even if that purpose remains unchanged. So we must regularly ask questions like: What is our purpose? How well is that purpose served by our governance system, our physical space, our worship service and Christian education curriculum? While it may be human nature to ignore this type of thing and to maintain the status quo, the risk of not doing so is to slip into a rut and even slowly fade out of existence.

I have remained at CCB for as long as I have because I value our theology and I experience community. While it is good to reflect back on our time together, it is also good to look into the future.

Perhaps sometime soon we might convene a series of conversations to further share our stories about why we came to CCB, why we stay, and where we want to go together. I'd like to continue to co-create a place where people find community and support for their personal and corporate spiritual journeys.

CCB AND THE POWERS THAT BE

By Jan Heise

One of the oddities of the CCB mindset is its passion for the wider church, be it the Association, Conference or National structures.

I'm not aware of the origins of this commitment but given our "congregational polity," it certainly isn't because we have felt morally or politically coerced into being involved. Nor have we, as a relatively small congregation, needed to find additional opportunities for leadership for our members.

And yet, particularly over the last few decades, the Belmont church has provided members

to a vast array of committees and boards of the wider church at all its levels. In fact, when our current Conference Minister Mary Susan Gast first came to NCNC/UCC, there were so many CCB folks on the Conference and national scene that her initial assumption was that CCB was one of the "larger" congregations in the Conference.

What a surprise it was when she learned that all this talent came from a church that, during much of its recent history at least, has rarely hit more than 100 members.

What has been true of our willingness to share our time and talents has also been true of our willingness to share our financial resources. During both good financial times and bad, CCB members have fought to maintain our support of OCWM (Our Churches Wider Mission). In fact, so concerned were members that our denominational giving never be held hostage to annual budget debates and deficits that the congregation established a policy that OCWM giving be at least 6 percent of our total budget expenses.

During recent years, that level has actually increased and there are many members who look forward to the day when this congregation tithes its giving. We are one of a small number of churches within the conference who have consistently supported OCWM at a generous level as well as participated in all five denominational special offerings.

They say that you can tell about a people's priorities by where they chose to spend their money. If that is true, then support for the "whole church" and support for outreach and mission have got to be this congregation's highest priorities!

The truth seems to be that for whatever reason this mindset has developed, this congregation truly believes that we need and believe in the UCC as a denomination and just as importantly, we believe that the UCC needs US.

HUGAMONGUS MUST MEAN GOOD Or... Rummage through the years.

By Laurie Carter

We had lived in Northern California for two months and had attended the Belmont Church once when Phil Oliver overheard me say I liked rummage sales. The next thing I knew (Phil had a real gift for involving new people) I was chair of Rummage Sale '76.

That first year we followed the tradition of meeting on Wednesday mornings, taking bags of rummage from the storage room, sorting them, rebagging the rummage and returning it to its waiting area. I don't actually remember the sale itself, but I think we earned the church somewhere between \$300 and \$600.

Sometime in the next couple of years, a few truckloads of leftovers from another church sale were left on our doorstep. Many items seemed higher class than rummage and begged to be sold at a garage sale instead where they could demand higher prices.

With the help of Joe Boyes' turquoise flat bed truck, and many strong young bodies, we transported all the "better" rummage to the Carters' home in San Carlos. Everything was

set up, a yard sale was held and the leftovers hauled back to the church. The next week the sale was repeated in our building. The many signs we hung all over the surrounding towns described these joint sales aptly as "hugamongus."

When additions to the Carter home began extending into the back yard, we once again had to brainstorm ideas on how to market the "better" things at the church. That year the "2-Story Rummage Sale" was born.

Carolyn Brandenburg and Laurie spent many hours painting new signs advertising it as such. They also fought hard to keep the increasing profits out of the general budget. All that hard work should allow the church to do something special, not pay the electric bill.

Over the next few years Bay Area companies started donating seconds and leftover merchandise to non-profits. Sunset Magazine, Cost Plus and Mervyns were among our donors, and the most remembered, Koret, outfitted most of the women in our congregation. These donations helped to bring our profits over \$3,000, and upped the marketability of our event. When these companies began donating directly to the needy, our windfall dried up, but for a good cause.



Rummage Sale in the Carters' backyard.

The biggest increase to our sales after that took place the year John Brooke and Don Hughes advertised to all on Belmont Garage Sale Day that they would pick up the leftovers. Over 30 truckloads later, the biggest ever sale was set up. These events haven't coincided again, but Don Hughes continues to be the king of donations, gathering unsold items at sales all over the area and stuffing them into any storage space available. Much creativity is needed each year to come up with space to display our wares.

Our Rummage Planning picnics instituted by Bob Auleb provide opportunity to work on this. The burden has also been lifted from a few people by instituting a plan of many area chairs. People sign up to be in charge of one room or area.

What to do with the remainders from our sale continues to create our biggest hangup. Many years ago groups would happily load large trucks with everything that didn't sell. As we become a more disposable society, it gets more and more difficult to find someone willing to accept our leftovers. We now have to take things to many different places, and a lot ends up in our dumpster. Tassie Collins and Paul Kassner began the angel program, asking church members to each transport something somewhere.

While this fundraiser requires a great deal of work for not a huge amount of profit, the camaraderie between church folk, the service to the community, and the act of recycling so much make it all worthwhile.

INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK

Weaving Together the Social Fabric

By Jan Heise

Sometimes the social services within a community are like a patchworkquilt; there's the piece of a service here and another piece there, but too often individuals in need experience gaps and they are trapped in between the places where help could be provided. It is at these times where the church can be an essential source of healing and support. It is at these places where the Interfaith Hospitality Network functions.

Because of the high social mobility and the high cost of housing in this community, we have many families who find themselves temporarily without housing and have no family network near by to which they can turn for assistance. A mother might suddenly find herself as a single parent with small children and no affordable child care to allow her to search for a living wage job or it might be a father who has lost his job and can no long cover all the basic needs of his family.

Fortunately, we have a good Family Shelter Program in the county which is willing to work with families to resolve these temporary crisis. Unfortunately, the Shelter is often full and families are faced with a waiting list which can take weeks or even months before support is available. This is where congregations can act to both help heal the pain of the families and help support the efforts of committed social agencies.

IHN is a nation-wide ecumenical program which provides a model for congregations who wish to develop a program in their own community. Our program began its efforts at the end of the '90s through the efforts of a local Episcopal minister.

CCB was involved in the process from the very beginning and has remained active at every step of the way. The concept is deceptively simple. Rather than establishing a competing program, we instead work in harmony with the public programs which already exist. "Guests" are referred to IHN from existing county shelters because it is felt that this family can not wait on an existing "waiting list" for as long as would be required.

IHN operates a Day Center at Peninsula Hospital which serves as a "home away fromhome" during the day. It is also the place where professional and volunteer staff can help family members work through the issues which must be handled in order to stabilize their life. In the evening, the families are transported to one of the 10 overnight sites which are located in local congregations and work on a rotating weekly schedule.

Here guests share an evening meal, socialize with hosts, sleep overnight and have breakfast in the morning. The overnight sites are run completely by volunteers. Our role is not to be therapists, social workers or evangelists but simply to be present and share a common meal and time together with our guests. It is the role of providing hospitality to people in times of need, a role that should come naturally to people of faith.

The experience has been a gift for both hosts and guests. Hosts have had the opportunity to meet some wonderful people and have learned thatmany of their stereotypes about the homeless were completely withoutbases in reality. Guests have found a supportive

family where people offer their time and concern simply because they truly care and that has often given them hope that they are not so isolated and alone. Many times the families are able to resolve their problems while they are with IHN and never have to enter a shelter but go directly into an apartment of their own.

Sometimes guests actually experience some sadness when the time comes to leave the program because IHN has become a part of their extended family, a source of friendship and encouragement during a difficult period in their life.

CCB has every reason to feel both proud and honored by their association with IHN and we hope this association continues for many years to come.

THE 2001 MIRACLE

By Margaret Cross

Jeff, our soccer-playing son, sickened mysteriously, nearly died, was blest with a living donor liver transplant, and now lives fully once again. There have been other miracles in our church family, but the one that occurred for Jeff in 2001 involved us all.

He first asked for prayers during Joys and Concerns in a service the summer of 2000. The mysterious pain in his feet simply would not go away despite the best foot doctor treatments. That day Donna Stanger sat in the narthex with Jeff and compared symptoms. Was the pain here? And here? Did it feel like it was unbearable? Surely Jeff wasn't going to be cursed with the awful nerve malady she had been suffering with for years! That was unthinkable, yet the latest doctor had suggested that he did indeed have RSDS and a morphine drip was the best treatment.

The morphine did drip, but the pain did not go away. Then, one night Jeff looked at his eyes in the mirror. One eye was bloody and he realized that he couldn't see out of it. JoAnna bundled him into the car and off to the UCLA Emergency Room. Doctors here routed him to an eye specialist who was able to relieve the immediate discomfort, but rendered a very sobering diagnosis—something was wrecking havoc with his nervous system.

More tests were ordered before surgery to repair his eye could be scheduled. Jeff was poked, scanned, and mutilated in an effort to name the relentless foe. Finally, in the spring of 2001 he wrote: "I may have some kind of amyloidosis. Don't look it up on the Internet, it's too scary." The treatment was a bone marrow transplant and that had less than a 50-50 chance of improving his quality of life. Again, they made the trip north to visit and again Jeff asked for prayers. By then, almost everyone knew he was enmeshed in something awful and at the same time Kirk Wilson was also struggling with a horrible condition. These two bright young men should be speculating about the 'Niners, not their own possible deaths!

As you have read in the articles, JoAnna simply would not accept this probable death sentence. She sent out urgent emails describing his condition and within hours made contact with Dr. Gertz at the Mayo Clinic. Dr. Gertz wrote, "Get on a plane, I can see you on Wednesday". They did and although they reeled at the culture shock of Minnesota they

came away with smiles. Jeff could be cured, return to active life, if he had a liver transplant.

It suddenly seemed that everyone was looking for a liver! On any day in the United States there are 16,000 to 18,000 people waiting for a new liver and fewer than two dozen available. Again, JoAnna went into high gear. Somewhere there had to be a liver! My older daughter Melissa, a physician in Phoenix, had been following Jeff's progress via email and she wrote that U.S. News and World Report was carrying a story about a live liver donor. Others mentioned this possibility too and an alert went out to the email supporters. "Are you a blood match for Jeff?" "Would you give him half your liver?"

Three friends replied and from them Doug Andrews proved to be the best candidate. By now Jeff was really weak. He visited in August and again asked for prayers. By then he was leaning heavily on his cane and no longer stood when we sang a hymn. Tears leaked out of our eyes that morning as we wondered if it would be the last time he'd be with us there. His heart muscle was thickening and every movement was an awful effort.

Mid-September, just about Caz weekend, Doug flew to L.A. to begin the donation process. We gathered strength from our church family at Caz. October 1 we flew to be with them for the scheduled surgery. All of our spiritual resources were marshaled. C.C.B was praying, all the email supporters were praying and the prayer web was flung out over the country and eventually over the globe. Prayers were offered in the Vatican that day on his behalf.

Caught up in this mesh of support we kept talking, even laughing as they went through the final stages of preparation for the Big Day. Before dawn we formed a circle around Jeff's bed and lifted up his healing to God's care. During the day as we waited we had no less than three spiritual leaders with us—Kirsten, Jeff's UCC pastor, the pastor of the Methodist Church on Wiltshire, and a Baptist pastor. For the dozen of us who waited that day the word "miracle" took on a very personal meaning. Late that evening we talked to him again—he was alive, all had gone perfectly.

Today, Jeff's survived a wedding, works everyday, delights in his god-children Isabella and Jake, but he never fails to give thanks for the spiritual support that fueled this miracle.

FELIX KELLY

By Jake Shoemaker

A number of years ago, Felix Kelly, a man of about 40, lived with David and me for many months. He moved on with a new lover who cared for him lovingly through his dying illness of AIDS.

We received an invitation to a memorial service for Felix to be held at CCB, a church I did not know about at that time. All were asked to wear white. When we arrived, the sanctuary was full and presented a sea of people all dressed in white.

Wendy Taylor was pastor and led a very loving service for our friend.

A few years later when I was looking for a new church home, I found and joined CCB because my earlier contact had been a dramatic showing of the meaning of "open and

affirming."

After all, Felix wasn't even a member but did receive a loving memorial service from this church. Since that time, David too had died and the Metropolitan Community Church which was home to me had to dissolve.

CCB was waiting as God's blessing for me.

CAMP CAZADERO AND GUNS

By Lois Shouse

One of the treasures of this church family is the ability to agree to disagree and to go on as a family. That has been true over many issues because we have always been a very diverse group— one of our strengths!

Way back in the '70s, it revealed itself yet again during our weekend at Camp Cazadero.

A large group attended that year, and a great group of youth were there. The Bob Winters family came, and it was the Shouses' first trip.

Rob Winters, Tim Wellings, David Boyes and David Shouse were Sunday School buddies, and they were having a ball at camp. Their greatest adventure occurred Saturday morning. Bob Winters took a group of young people to a shooting range near Camp Caz. Loris Shouse and Beth Winters went, too. I must admit, some of us went along out of some concern about this activity. Our unease was quickly relieved by Bob's wonderful process in teaching young children about guns and their use.

David is not and never was interested in guns, but this is a vivid experience from his youth. It's the first thing he'll mention related to Caz, though he has many good memories. Learning to load and shoot that gun left an indelible memory and experience. Loris, all girl and unathletic, likens this experience as incongruous to her interest — but fascinating, bruising and scary. Later events at Caz revealed this activity was probably frowned upon.

Along came Marty Brown, with his memories and passivism — very anti-war after his experiences with Vietnam. Yet, he was a gun collector — out of love for their mechanical beauty and design. He kept them safely in his home, he tested their ability, and he showed them "for their style and variety."

When we acquired a hand gun that had belonged to Bob's step-dad, there was a debate about turning it in to the police. Donating it to Marty's collection became a more viable solution for us. It remains there to this day, as far as we know.

In both of these experiences, the key seems to be proper education about guns and the reality of their existence and their place.

Later, as this church became a place where even toy guns are "thrown in the trash" rather than be allowed to be sold at rummage, these memories have been even more incongruous. Certainly, it's more examples of our diversity which are sprinkled throughout our history.

FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL (but in reverse order)

By Jerry Coleman

The Coleman family first came to this church in late 1964.

We had moved to Belmont, looked about, and decided to attend this church which was just up the hill from our house. (Neighbors were puzzled: we had two small children, went to church every Sunday, but they didn't see us at Mass; they were surprised that some Protestants also went to church each week.)

Except for a few years when we defected to the Carlmont Methodist Church we have been here ever since.

In 1981, Marilyn lost her battle with cancer. The church was packed for her memorial service, much of which was actually a sermon she and Jerry had been planning to deliver together.

Mary and Jerry were married in 1983; our gift to the church was several cases of champagne glasses, as this was the first wedding at which alcohol could be served.

Daughter Linda and then son Mike and Ruth were married here in 1989, and Ruth's brother in a few years later. That last wedding had a unique cast: the groom's best friend was a Presbyterian minister and the bride's family were Catholic. So Wendy Taylor "hosted" the ceremony, while a Presbyterian minister and a Catholic priest officiated.

LILLIAN BREITENWISCHER

By Lois Shouse

Although everyone has a Lillian story, I just want to voice a couple of mine.

The obvious things are related to the "woman ahead of her time" who did so many extraordinary things in the most unextraordinary way. She took life in stride and "just did it" when challenges arose. Her story may be more fully pieced together by these stories we tell.

Always the "perfectly put together lady," Lillian arrived at church with pazzazz to take her regular pew. Everything was right with the world when Lillian was there.

Her family lived in San Luis Obispo, and we shared that in common while Loris attended Cal Poly. We commiserated over treks to SLO. For so long, it was an easy drive for her, and it was really difficult when she couldn't do it any more, tho' I suspect she did it past the point of it being a safe drive. That was part of her determination to live life to the fullest and "do what she wanted to do."

Lillian loved the holidays. Always artistic, she created beautiful ornaments for Christmas trees. She made a darling bird feeder that I admired once. Sure enough, she arrived at church one Sunday with one for our tree. I'm equally as enamored of clever projects to do each year and my accumulation of ornaments is beyond space on our tree, but hers stands the test of time, though it gets a reglue once in awhile. We received that ornament about 15 years ago, and our tree is not complete without Lillian's ornament. It keeps her memory alive at the Shouse House.

ROY SAMUELS

By Lois Shouse

In doing the Photo Histories for our 50th Anniversary, I couldn't help but go down a lot of "memory lane" trails. One that just won't go away takes me to Roy Samuels.

Roy was that rare breed of man of dry wit, endless charm, yet irascible moments, too. Able to charm the socks off you, he could also whittle you down to size in one big hurry. His tenure here at CCB was during my "growing years", and he never missed a chance to point it out to me. He'd greet me in the Narthex with a "sizing up" look and have some choice comment.

Fortunately or unfortunately, it didn't bother me or make me do something about it. I guess it just endeared him to me in his truthful spirit. Beyond that were so many wonderful moments with his worldly experiences and just plain fun.

Roy came to California from the east coast to be the director of San Francisco International Airport. That was fascinating to me. Listening to his tails of happenings at such an important facility were always illuminating and worthwhile.

He and his wife, Marjorie, came at a time when CCB was in need of a "resident character" who greeted everyone and never met a stranger. Tall and lean and very Gary Cooper-like, everyone soon knew Roy, and he was always fun to be around. He did his share to add to the fun of the Talent/NoTalent Show on Shrove Tuesday, and children of all ages could relate to his humor and warmth.

On another side, he was the first to have an alarm set on his watch to indicate "it's time for church to be over". We all got used to that alarm going off in the Sanctuary at 11:30 a. m. (Yes, there was a time when church service was very close to just one hour long), but it rarely did more than evoke a chuckle from many of us, as well as a bit of disdain from Marjorie, who could never get him not to do it. John Brooke and Wendy Taylor got used to it.

I miss some of those memorable quirks in our storied history.

GUY KITSON

By Lois Shouse

Our library in the recently remodeled parlor is called the Guy Kitson Memorial Library. Several reasons prompted this honoring of a wonderful past member of our church. Not having had a chance to know Guy Kitson is a true loss. He was definitely "one of a kind" with "kind" having a special significance here.

In the '70s and '80s this was a thriving place for teens. Part of that may be attributed to Guy. A man who loved this church and the youth of this church, he was everyone's Grandpa. Always there to lend an ear or a helping hand, all the young people treasured time with him.

Before church, on the steps after church, you'd find Guy in the middle of a group of young people having animated conversation, nurturing their interests and needs. The "man in moccasins" brought the gentleness of Indian culture in his approach with young people, and he was a much beloved patriarch of the church.

The children came alive in the warmth of his circle. I suspect his respect for them had much to do with their feelings of belonging to this church and kept them coming to Sunday School, Church and Teen Groups. All who were a part of that time in our history have a special place in their hearts for Grandpa Kitson.

Bob and I feel fortunate to have known them in another setting, too, where we shared a common interest in photography. Helen was the photographer, but Guy brought that same gentleness and friendship to his participation there.

Guy and Helen brought their love of books to the church, and they always encouraged the love of reading "to find out" about all sorts of things. Their efforts were the start of our collecting and sharing books. A Kitson Memorial donation enabled us to complete the remodel of our parlor and the construction of the permanent Library shelves.

VIRTUAL COMMUNION

By David Coleman

My best memory is John Brooke doing the "virtual" communion. He was in the final stages of the selection process and performing communion was one of the tasks.

Unfortunately, it would seem that someone forgot to put the bread out and also failed to put the juice in the cups. Unfazed, John went through communion working in pantomime style with no real bread or juice.

Everyone went along to the extent that as we stood around the edge of the church in a circle, we all consumed the sacrament in unison. I seem to recall that the bread and juice really were in the kitchen, so it wasn't just a test of his creative skills.

THE CALL

By Micki Carter

Most people thought we called John Brooke to be our pastor in 1980 because he was a compassionate and thoughtful man, an intelligent peacemaker who could knock wits with Howard Brandenburg without knocking heads.

Most people thought that his ability to pantomime the sacrament of the communion elements (which someone forgot to prepare on his candidating Sunday) convinced any doubters that CCB needed him.

Most people thought that wife Gretchen sealed the deal.

But the truth is somewhat more complex.

We all appreciated John's pastoral gifts, his intelligence and his wife, but we knew we absolutely had to sign John when we learned that he was a left-handed first baseman who wasn't afraid to slide.

In those days, CCB joined the Community Church of San Carlos at Family Camp at Cazadero every September, and our softball games were not casual competitions.

What team could pass up a left-handed first baseman — even for an entire seminary of ministers to be named later?

BIG HAIR BLESSING

By Kristi Denham

The Congregational Church of Belmont folks have given me a "Big Hair Blessing" that is more powerful in its acceptance and inclusivity than I would ever have imagined.

When I was a little girl with thick curly hair, my mom insisted on keeping it cut very short, in what she called a "pixie cut" until I was old enough and big enough to refuse. I was 12 before I finally got permission to grow and style my own hair. That was 1961, and I was already headed toward the wild child freedoms of the hippie generation. Long hair became my badge of identity.

When God called me to ordained ministry almost 30 years later, I was sure, at first, that She must be joking. I followed God's odd sense of humor into my first position as associate pastor in a large church in Atlanta, Ga. Each Sunday after worship, invariably someone, or many someones, would compliment my hair if it was neatly tucked in a tight bun at the back of my neck or suggest I would look so much better with short hair if it was down. They also regularly suggested I was "too California," which finally motivated me to find my way back to the Bay Area where this



Rev. Kristi Denham

beautiful little church was looking for someone to lead them into the 21st Century.

My first meeting with the Search Committee was a miracle of heart connections and serendipity. My subsequent visits with the congregation culminated in your unanimous vote to call me as your pastor in July 1999.

My return to California was full of joyful affirmations of God's timing, purpose and love. But I continued to self-consciously knot my hair in a bun most Sundays in hopes of maintaining your affection and approval.

Then, one Sunday, after worship, as I was about to head up stairs to take off my alb and stole, Mary Coleman stopped me. She had been a member of the Search Committee so I had known her from day one with CCB. She said, "Kristi, one of the reasons we picked you, is we love your wild red hair. So stop hiding it in a bun all the time!"

In that moment I realized I truly had found home. Your "Big Hair Blessing" has meant more to me than I can say. You are the inclusive, compassionate, courageous community of faith that calls me to be and to grow into all that God has created me to be. I love you. Happy 50th Birthday!!

CHOCOLATE FEST

By Micki Carter

Joan Venturino had the idea, back in 1983, that perhaps CCB could put on a chocolate-tasting as a fundraiser.

Several of us had been tossing around thoughts about a fundraiser that would raise a substantial amount without tapping the pocketbooks of the people who were already filling the collection plate on Sunday. That was the problem with bazaars and silent auctions — the people who supported them were members mostly. We were looking for something that would attract the community.

We gathered on the deck of my house on 39th Avenue in San Mateo on a warm May afternoon. I remember Laurie Carter, Carolyn Brandenburg, Lois Shouse, Betty Anderson, Joan Peceimer and Ella Mae Donovan. Many others joined the effort as it began to take shape.

The name Chocolate Fest was chosen that afternoon, and we set out some important goals: It would be classy and elegant with music and champagne, and we established the three-session format that we've used ever since. Door prizes were part of the initial plan as well although we've reduced the number of intermissions to announce them from three to two.

The date, the second weekend in October, was set to take advantage of candymakers' increased inventory around Halloween and to avoid conflicting with Half Moon Bay's Pumpkin Festival.

We hoped for 15 vendors that first year. Several of us agreed to start contacting

vendors, and on my list was Preston's Candies of Burlingame, among others. We all discovered that getting commitments from businesses when you had no track record was not easy. But, after many phone calls and two personal visits, Art Preston agreed to participate.

Then things got easier. We could go to other businesses on the Peninsula and tell them that Preston's was going to be there. We got our 15, including A-Lot-A Gelato, Kathy's Kreative Kakes, La Tempesta and Bud's Ice Cream who have been with us ever since.

By all accounts, we put on a terrific event that first year although we only made a couple of thousand dollars. But we were onto something.

In the next few years we found Marilyn Trippy and her Golden Strings for our string quartet, and Bob Donovan built our wonderful lighted "CHOCOLATE" sign that gets hoisted in place over the front door each year.

Over the years, we established lasting relationships with vendors such as Violets' Toffee, made by John and Marie Violet of Belmont, and Aida's Opera Candies in Burlingame who started out as vendors but later became donors of spectacular baskets of chocolates which we raffled (sometimes with quilts) each year.

In 2001, we made a significant investment in a banner that would be placed across Ralston Avenue the week before Chocolate Fest, and we have essentially "sold out" ever since.

We knew we had truly become a community institution when the Belmont Park and Rec Department started offering a summer class in chocolate tasting to prepare residents for Chocolate Fest in the fall.

The first year we made a little over \$1,000; now we've just about maxed out at \$12,000 unless we choose to add another session on Saturday afternoon. Ticket prices started at \$10 20 years ago; now they've gone up to \$17.50 for pre-sales. And we've achieved our goal of tapping other pockets for this fundraiser — CF aficionados travel from all over the state for our annual event!

**Congregational Church of Belmont
Fiftieth Anniversary Stories**

**HOW
WE FOUND
THIS
CHURCH!**

HOW I CAME TO DANCE IN CHURCH

By Ann Keiffer

In 1999, the furor over gay and lesbian marriages had already begun.

The Knight Initiative, banning such marriages, was on the ballot as Proposition 22. On the eve of the election, a number of clergy and faith communities on the Peninsula gathered for a candlelight vigil in support of gay and lesbian people across California.

I was a member of First Presbyterian Church in Palo Alto, the site for the vigil. As was so often the case, I got tapped to create a special altar for the service, and I had covered our enormous communion table with heaps of rock salt and candles — you are the salt of the earth, o people. Because I was there early, I had a chance to meet some of the participating clergy. One pastor had really big red hair, really enormous earrings, and a simply colossal smile. Word was, she was also a dancer. I was intrigued.

By January of 2001, I was seriously ill, so completely exhausted I ended up in the ER. I had to withdraw from the world for months to regain my strength. By that time, I knew a number of things in my life would have to change. Among other things, I decided I needed to find a church closer to home. I remembered the pastor with the dazzling hair, earrings, and smile. And I decided to go check out Pastor Kristi's congregation, my first time out of the house for church in a very long time.

What a curious, funny little church it was! Mondrian-type stained glass windows, French doors along one long wall, a fireplace in the sanctuary, golf-club emblems on the light fixtures, a be-jeweled chandelier in the dining room that made the place look almost like a ballroom in a country club. And how wonderful! On the altar, flowers I didn't have to put there!

I sat toward the front of the church. When the pastor brought the microphone around, I introduced myself. A few minutes later, when another visitor introduced herself from the back of the church, I nearly broke my neck swiveling my head to see. It was Diana, my former pastor! She had recently left parish ministry — and somehow we had both chosen to visit this little church on the very same day!

The people of the Congregational Church of Belmont came across as friendly and full of fun. The sermon was riveting. The organ sang out with the verve of a pipe organ in a cathedral. And the congregation sang out full-voiced, too, as if they truly loved to sing.

When it came time for the final hymn, Pastor Kristi, announced "In the Midst of New Dimensions" and invited all who wished, to join in the dance. Oh, how glorious, how amazing! Kristi danced on the chancel and in the aisles. Many in the congregation joined in the movements as they sang. I was nearly delirious with joy that church could be so free, so celebratory, so full of beauty, so full of life, so inclusive of the body in all that is holy!

After the service, my former pastor Diana and I found each other. She said, "During the dancing, I was thinking, *Ann must be ecstatic.*" And then, "Ann, I think you could be very happy in this place."

And I have been. And that's how I came to dance in church.

HOW I GOT HERE

By Margaret Cross

One golden summer Sunday in 1988 I set out to find a new church home.

I knew I needed one. My life was totally unmanageable and I needed help, now. My husband was sick and could not go with me, my son was 16 and off with buddies, my daughter, 12, disdained anything but Pak-Man, so it was up to me by myself.

Armed with a list of the Protestant churches in a five mile radius, and their starting times, I set out. My first stop was Hillsdale Methodist on 37th Avenue in San Mateo. The service was to start at 10.

I found the front door and seated myself maybe 10 minutes before the hour. The summer sun filtered through the colored glass gave a soft golden glow to the room and I sank into a wonderful, relaxed meditation — finally a moment to listen for God's voice in my personal chaos. I heard a shuffle of feet behind me and voices shattered my peace.

"I hate to miss the pregame show! This is critical. The 'Niners gotta get it together now before the season starts. . ."

"Yeah, it's really silly to be sitting here. . ."

That was enough for me. Quickly I walked from the sanctuary. It was really silly to try worshipping among people who wanted to be somewhere else.

My list showed that the Congregational Church of Belmont was the next close one and that service didn't start til 10:30 — plenty of time. Jessie Lawson was standing in the open door as I walked up the steps.

"Welcome!" she said and her whole face smiled. "Glad to have you with us this morning."

We exchanged names, I took a bulletin and the organ boomed out the prelude. Others spoke to me, too, and everywhere I looked I saw smiles and heard people who were glad to be together, happy to be in a place of worship and activity.

It turned out to be the Sunday of Wendy's ordination, but that didn't mean anything to me at the time. While that was truly a special, festive Sunday, that same air of welcome and warmth is present here every Sunday.

I kept coming back because it works here!

HOW THE THORNHILLS CAME TO CCB

By Sarah Eggen-Thornhill

I had visited CCB twice in 1995 while I was living in Belmont and going to college. I felt a real connection there and the sermon delivered resonated with me both times. I moved down to San Jose, then San Francisco, and didn't return until six years later.

Greg and I married in 1999 and had been church-shopping for some time. We must have visited 15-18 churches and for various reasons none felt right for us.

We had spent the first month of Alyce's life in the hospital and the power of prayer had become very evident to me again. It was also important to us to baptize her in the same church that she'd be raised. I remembered the feeling I had gotten at CCB, so I decided to make the trip down from San Francisco one Sunday. Greg was out of town on business so it was just Alyce and I. I believe she was about 2 months old and only about 6-7 pounds because she was born so prematurely.

As soon as we walked in we were greeted by the sweetest smile. The woman could see me looking for the restroom with Alyce in my arms. She offered to hold her for me. She was the first stranger I had let hold my very small baby (of whom I was quite protective), but without hesitation I handed her over. There was something about this woman that reminded me of the many surrogate Grandmothers I was privileged enough to have in my own church growing up.

To be honest as soon as I saw her smile, I knew we'd be returning to this church as a family very soon.

Again, the message delivered that day spoke to my heart. The church felt warm and welcoming. The typed words in the front of the bulletin stating that this was an "open and affirming church" accepting ALL, passing no judgment, seemed to define everything I had been taught of true Christianity.

About a year later we happily had Alyce baptized. On the altar with us was the same sweet woman who'd greeted us smiling on our first day — Belinda Sims.