



Nicasio Historical Society Fall 2021

Two October Events

- Reservoir Talk & Walk, Saturday October 23, 1-4 pm -- Sold out --
- Book Talk and Reception, Saturday December 4, 3-5 pm in Druid's Hall

Letter from the President

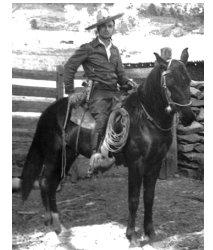
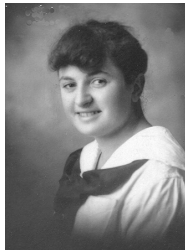
I'm really excited to tell you more about our new book, *Nicasio's Oldtimers, Newcomers & Remarkable Guests*. Producing this book was a labor of love for me. I worked assiduously as editor for many months to meticulously finesse the content, photos and layout.

This new book contains 68 interviews of diverse and interesting people, conducted and written by my Nicasio School students between 1994 and 2012. These interviews chronicle life in Nicasio from the early 20th century to the early 21st.

Interviewees include two ranchers born in the first decade of the 20th century, the Industrial Light and Magic's special effects manager who created the Eveready Energizer Bunny, a Holocaust survivor, Planet Walker John Francis and many others.

The lively, entertaining text is interspersed throughout not only with a portrait photo of each interviewee but also many eye-catching historical photos, all of which make for a very informative and enjoyable read. The interviews are organized into three main parts: "Oldtimers" whose families lived in Nicasio prior to 1958 when the dam project began, "Newcomers" who moved to Nicasio afterward and "Remarkable Guests," interesting residents of West Marin and visitors from afar.

(Several Oldtimers' photos below)



This is truly a delightful book, beautifully laid out thanks to the professional assistance of Troy Alders of Lucasfilm and with a striking cover photo of the Nicasio 2012 Sesquicentennial celebration thanks to Art Rogers.



Come celebrate with us the release of *Nicasio's Oldtimers, Newcomers & Remarkable Guests* at our festive Book Release Party on Saturday December 4 between 3:00 and 5:00 pm at Druid's Hall. Enjoy a book talk, appetizers and drinks in the company of neighbors and friends.



What's New? Our new NHS director, Kim Wallach! While her three children attended Nicasio School, Kim served for many years first on the School Foundation and then on the School Board, in which capacity she oversaw the creation and complicated permitting requirements of a new water supply system. She now owns and runs Susan Hayes Point Reyes, a clothing shop in Pt. Reyes. Kim said that it was Martha McNeil who inspired her to learn more about Nicasio's history. Thank you, Martha! We're delighted to have Kim onboard!



**This Issue is Dedicated to Three Recently Departed and Much Beloved Nicasio Women:
Martha McNeil, Heloise Tomasini and Hilary Stock**

**Martha Anne McNeil
August 8, 1941 – August 9, 2021**



Martha McNeil, beloved member of our Nicasio community, passed away peacefully in her home on Monday, August 9th, the day after her 80th birthday. Born to Ellen Redding McNeil and Joseph Dennis McNeil, Martha was the youngest of four siblings. She was raised in Los Angeles and traveled frequently to San Francisco, San Rafael and Nicasio to visit her grandparents and many cousins and other relatives. Her adolescent athletic feat came at the shy age of 13, when she was crowned the Duncan Yo-Yo Champion by the Los Angeles Times and the Parks and Recreation Association. Martha's independence, confidence and freedom were always paramount.

Upon graduating from college, Martha jumped at the chance to enroll in a AAA sponsorship program whereby she was able travel to Germany, purchase her 1964 Volkswagen Bug directly from the factory in Wolfsburg and drive it throughout Europe. She even included a jaunt to Algiers before shipping it to San Francisco. Her career path followed in the footsteps of her mother Ellen, who began her professional life as a one-room schoolteacher at the



Burdell School in Novato, riding her horse Bessie over Mt. Schroyer daily. Martha and Ellen moved to Nicasio in 1977 after Joseph passed, and Martha was resolute in the care and companionship that she shared with her mother during her final decade.

After serving as a long-term substitute in the Nicasio School Kindergarten, first and second grade classroom, Martha, also known as Miss Martha by students and parents alike, was hired as teacher for that class in 1986. Martha was a teacher through and through and she never missed an opportunity to remind her students, nephews and nieces of the Golden Rule. She also reminded her colleagues and friends of it albeit tacitly with a patient and meaningful smile.

She valued the long history of her family in Nicasio and always sought to preserve it. Her Antique Shop was housed in her great grandfather's butcher shop, where she was known to bootleg the best homegrown blackberry jam in the West.



Martha was tireless in her commitment to St. Mary's Church, Nicasio School, the Nicasio Historical Society, the Nicasio Volunteer Fire Department and Ladies Auxillary and, most importantly, to her family.

Once she retired from teaching in 2004, Martha actively enjoyed both a life full of travel and her life in the local Nicasio community, which included volunteering regularly in her old classroom at Nicasio School and serving as a Director of the Nicasio Historical Society.

Martha was one of a kind. Countless children, friends, family and passersby were touched by her kindness, commitment and generosity. It's hard to imagine Nicasio without her benevolent presence. Needless to

say, she will be greatly missed.

She was preceded in death by her brothers Joseph Dennis and Lawrence Patrick and is survived by her sister, Mary Ellen Hoffman. Donations may be made to St. Mary's Church P.O. Box 289 Lagunitas, California 94938

by Patrick McNeil

Heloise Marie Tomasini

November 2, 1923 - September 12, 2021



Heloise Marie Tomasini passed away on September 12th at home in Nicasio at age 97. She was born and raised in Sonoma in a well-known and civic-minded family. Her family heritage included Swiss Italian, as well as French and ancestors from Durban, South Africa. Her parents provided Heloise with both genteel opportunities, such as early piano and horseback riding lessons and the expectation to work. Her mother played the organ in their local Catholic church, and Heloise became a talented organist in her own right, a gift she shared for many years with St. Mary's churchgoers in Nicasio. She had one younger brother. Heloise loved school and learning and was always open to new ideas. After graduating from Sonoma High School, she was awarded a scholarship to UC Berkeley where she majored in French. After her father passed, however, she left college early to care for her widowed mother.



Heloise, since her early teens, had worked different summer jobs in Sonoma part time including with American Trust Company. When she was back in Sonoma after attending UC Berkeley, American Trust, familiar with her work ethic, asked her to return to work for them. That's where Heloise reconnected with Henry Tomasini, who also returned to work there after coming home from military service in Europe. They were soon engaged and on May 11, 1947, they married. A year later, their first-born arrived, a son named Terry. Hank, as Henry was called, was then transferred to the Tracy branch, where they were living when three more children arrived, Michael, Lisa and Jeff.

Hank's maternal grandfather had acquired a large ranch in Nicasio. Most of the land, later inherited by his mother, was leased out. Although both Heloise and Hank were town folk, they both thought it would be best for their children to grow up in a small town in the country with pets and farm animals to care for. So, Heloise and Hank remodeled the old Nicasio

ranch house and moved their family to Nicasio, where they raised polled Herefords.

Hank passed away in 1994 at the age of seventy-five. A number of years later, Heloise reunited with her grade school sweetheart, Henry Geric. They had a very happy late-in-life marriage until he passed away four years ago.

She loved animals and plants, especially her prize begonias in all their vibrant colors. She was passionate about education, literature, serving the under-privileged and her Catholic faith. She loved to walk along the reservoir and to contemplate the ever-changing view from the bench that she had placed in a propitious spot. Heloise was a founding member of both the Ladies' Auxiliary and the Nicasio Historical Society. She served as the first female foreman of the Marin County Grand Jury. She was also a dedicated volunteer at Marin Suicide Prevention, counseling troubled callers on the telephone. She was known for her great parties and was a charming hostess.

Throughout her final years, Heloise had loving caregivers. Her son, Jeff, said she was at peace until the end, even announcing her own time of death a week in advance. Her extended family was able to be with her on the day she had chosen.

Heloise led a full and interesting life. For those of us who knew her, we remember a fashionable, intelligent, passionate and fun-loving woman. Heloise's great smile and indomitable spirit will be greatly missed.

by Arden Wood and Grace Rogers



Hilary Mona O'Hara Stock

1931 - 1921

I met Hilary at one of the many art openings the San Geronimo Valley Community Center has held over the years. She was a vibrant and fun lady with a passion for flowers, jams and painting. I fell in love with her as I learned more about what an amazing person she was, with a very interesting life.

Hilary was born and raised in Ireland in a very large family. After completing her schooling, she went into a convent and became a nun, venturing to Africa where she stayed for several years. Her role was to teach young girls their ABC's and the basics of what we might learn here. Over time, she came to realize that these girls were receiving an education that had nothing to do with their environments and their culture and that would be of little to no help to them in their hometowns.



She developed a curriculum which she believed would better prepare these girls for the lives that they would live in their villages and sent this proposal through the channels of the religious community, waiting for approval to proceed. Finally, after two years, she received a letter from the Vatican stating her application for this new curriculum was denied.

She became so disillusioned that she left her religious community and went to London to teach. While in London she became increasingly desirous of being somewhere without the infamous London Fog and so, she decided to venture to San Francisco where her aunt lived, little realizing that San Francisco too, was notorious for its fog. She got a kick out of this, laughing off this misadventure while having the time of her life living in the Sunset, a particularly foggy neighborhood, where she and a girlfriend rented an apartment above a corner grocery store. In San Francisco,

Hilary was ready for fun and adventure. She related stories of the many parties she and her girlfriend threw and how she would lower a basket from her window to the storekeeper below, who would place bottles of wine in it. Hilary would then haul it back up for the party. Eventually she fell in love with this storekeeper; he, in fact, became the love of her life.

Her husband's family had been killed during the Holocaust. Nonetheless, he was a sunny-natured man and handsome to boot, just a bit older than Hilary. They never had children, but since this was his second marriage, Hilary acquired a stepson to whom she became very close. She also maintained close relationships with her Irish family, even though they were many, many miles away. Family meant everything to Hilary.

Hilary created her own extended family after her husband died. She sold their Kentfield home and found a large home with land in Nicasio, which she called "The Oasis." There she happily lived with her dog Hula. She created separate apartments, which she rented to long-term residents, one of whom was Earl Dancy and another, Scott Hunter. Both of them lived with her for many years, creating bonds that were so important in her life. They became her family. Earl faithfully brought

food for Hula, a whole chicken weekly, and was present in case she needed anything. Scott remained with her until her last days, even after her move to Novato, just in case she needed anything, including breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Hilary created an incredible garden which was a huge source of joy and pleasure to her. She supplied the San Geronimo Valley Community Center with bouquets of gorgeous flowers for the Senior Lunches and various events and made copious amounts of jams which she loved to share with her community.

At one of these art openings, Hilary and I got to talking and she found out that I taught acrylic painting. She had painted on and off all her life and was delighted to join our classes. She thoroughly loved painting portraits of her grand nieces and nephews and sending them off back to Ireland so that all her family knew how much they meant to her.



I saw Hilary last Friday, two days before she passed. She actually looked much better than when I had seen her the week before, she was taking medication which helped with the anxiety and pain. Pain that was all encompassing. She told me that she was on “Hospice to Live,” which I thought was a wonderful attitude. We worked on completing a painting she had started before the pandemic. Luckily, we completed it, which pleased her immensely. We talked about what she would like to start next, a portrait of another great, great niece.

Just before the pandemic hit, Hilary had sold her house and moved to a much smaller more manageable place in Novato with her dog Hula, bringing with her all her potted plants and creating yet again another magical garden. She felt very fortunate to have found this spot and she continued to be surrounded by the family of dear friends that she had created.

We were all lucky to have known this spunky vibrant woman with a great sense of humor. She will be missed.

Molly Rea for *Stone Soup, Autumn 2021*



A Sweet Memory

Docents in Costumes at our Town Square Tour, 2005.

NHS Director Ken Irving, Volunteer and Member Liz Daniels and Director Sylvia Lange displayed photos of and told visitors about the old Nicasio Hotel that stood where Rancho Nicasio Restaurant presently stands.

We remember them fondly and cherish these memories.