

THE RECORD

Shirley Jackson: “Combining the horrific with the mundane”

SPRING
QUARTERLY:
Guest - Paul Regan
See page 5

by Joanne Garrison



McKinley Elementary School 5th grade - c.1927

The girl with the ribbon tie and penetrating eyes in the second row, fifth from left in the adjacent McKinley Elementary 5th grade class photo is acclaimed mid-century author, Shirley Jackson. Jackson, her parents, her younger brother and her maternal grandmother moved to 1609 Forest View Avenue in 1926. The renowned architect Maxwell Bugbee, Shirley's grandfather, made sure the home had four bedrooms. One was for Shirley's parents, one for Shirley and one for her younger brother, Barry (who at two years younger than Shirley, was handsome, blond, athletic and their mother's clear favorite). The fourth bedroom was for the architect's ex-wife—Shirley's maternal grandmother Mimi—who came to live with the family

after the Bugbees divorced. Grandma Bugbee had raised

Shirley's mother Geraldine to be a socialite and Geraldine appeared often in the San Francisco society pages: "One of the prettiest girls in the neighborhood, tall, brunette type, with quantities of brown hair and a lovely complexion", always stylishly dressed "with her sleek little feathered pillboxes and her leopard coat." Geraldine was proud of her ancestry in America, dating back to the Revolutionary War hero, Nathan Greene. Shirley's great-great-grandfather, Samuel Bugbee was a prominent architect who designed the Nob Hill mansion of Charles Crocker as well as Leland Stanford's home, among others. Thus, when Shirley's parents married, it must have seemed to many like a total

mismatch: Geraldine Bugbee, the San Francisco socialite with the pedigreed background was marrying Leslie Jackson, an English immigrant who had pulled himself up by the bootstraps. As a teenager, Leslie had become responsible for his penniless mother after his once-wealthy father lost all the family money and disappeared.

Burlingame in the 1920s was a lovely community, but its adjacent community Hillsborough was lovelier. The Jackson family settled for what they could afford at the time, the four-bedroom home on Forest View, just one block from the wall that

surrounded the 20-acre George and Caroline Newhall estate in the Town of Hillsborough (the estate was then called *Newmar*, but later renamed *La Dolphine* by its subsequent owner, Dorothy Spreckels). At the time of their move to Burlingame, Leslie worked for Traung Label and Lithograph Company, the first four-color press in San Francisco that made fruit packing labels and botanical images for seed packs; however, he had not yet climbed the corporate ladder that he eventually would to become the company's Chairman of the Board.

The location of the family's home, just outside Hillsborough's borders, seemed a metaphor for young Shirley's relationship with her mother. Geraldine always seemed to want more from Shirley. Shirley never seemed to be "enough," a condition that would affect her for her entire life. After Shirley's death, her grown daughter would declare that her grandmother "Geraldine wanted a pretty little girl and what she got [instead] was a lumpish redhead," with large bones who

was prone to weight gain. Indeed, Shirley's lack of girly fuss can be seen as early as 5th grade in the McKinley class photo: where the other girls have combed stylish hair and a smile for the camera, Shirley's red hair is pushed over in a lump and she is looking at the photographer with almost a defiant look on her face. One of Shirley's good friends from those Burlingame

days — no doubt to Geraldine's chagrin—was Dorothy Ayling, the daughter of the gardener of *Newmar*. The two girls were fast friends, despite the difference in

social status. Dorothy remembers playing piano duets, eating pomegranates and later playing violin and cello together in the Burlingame High School orchestra, all under the watchful and critical eye of Geraldine (advising that "fence sitting was *unladylike*"; warning them "about the



1927 aerial map of Newhall Estate near Jackson home



1609 Forest View Avenue in 2022

kind of girls who followed sailors"; "always asking us if we couldn't find something to *do*"). Dorothy also



remembered, with evident sadness, that in four years of friendship, she was never once invited to the Jackson home for dinner.

Newmar aka La Dolphine - 1980s

Perhaps that constant criticism and the sense of always being an outsider looking in, gave Shirley her writer's eye for observation and vivid description. She kept two diaries as a student at Burlingame High School: one with the typical facts of her daily life, the other recorded more intimate and personal reflections, such as her thoughts about a boy, who like Shirley, was in the school orchestra and for whom she harbored a teen-age crush. This latter diary had an image of an elegant young woman on the front titled "The Debutante" over which Shirley scratched out the girl's face with a pencil. As Ruth Franklin concluded in her biography of Jackson, *A Rather Haunted Life*: "if Shirley could not express to her mother her resentment about Geraldine's expectations, she could take it out in private."

Shirley's father received a promotion during her junior year at Burlingame High School that required a move to New York. She was devastated to leave California that summer of 1933 before the start of her senior year.

A few years later, at Syracuse University, the young Shirley met her future husband and fellow writer and literary critic Stanley E. Hyman. By the age of 23 she had married him in a "three minute" ceremony at a friend's Manhattan apartment. Friends were invited to "miss the ceremony and come for the liquor." Shirley's father and socialite mother were not invited and would not have approved—indeed, Shirley did not even tell her parents that she married until she was pregnant with her first child, Laurence. In the early 1940s, Stanley joined the staff of the *New Yorker*. In the Spring of 1945, the bohemian literary couple from Manhattan would move to Vermont, when Stanley joined the faculty of Bennington College. In the next twenty years, Shirley would have three additional children, while juggling the roles of author, mother, and faculty wife in a small town.

In 1948 she published her first novel, *The Road Through the Wall*, a thinly-veiled look at her childhood years on Forest View Avenue in Burlingame. Jackson once quipped that, "the first book is the book you have to write to get back at your parents." In the book, the controlling and critical Mrs. Merriam keeps watch on the neighborhood and her daughter, Harriet "a big girl, large-boned and stout." Mrs. Merriam

corrects the girl's grammar, snoops in her diary and joins the other neighborhood women in trying to enforce conformity to the neighborhood's social mores. In a prologue to the book, Jackson wrote that: "The weather falls more gently on some places than on others, the world looks down more paternally on some people. Some spots are proverbially warm, and keep, through falling snow, their untarnished reputations as summer resorts; some people are automatically above suspicion ...

No man owns a house because he really wants a house, any more than he marries because he favors monogamy, but all these men were married and most of them owned houses, and they even regarded themselves a

reasonable and unselfish and even, to themselves, as responsible. They all lived on Pepper Street because they were able to afford it, and none of them would have lived there if he had been able to afford living elsewhere, although Pepper Street was charming and fairly expensive and even comfortably isolated." Ouch. If Jackson's goal were to "get back at her parents" in her first book, she obviously accomplished it.

That same year—1948—Jackson's also published a now-famous short story in the *New Yorker*, titled, *The Lottery*. The story gives a very detailed, almost boring, account of the traditions surrounding a lottery that takes place every year in a small town. Only at the end, does Jackson reveal that the purpose of the lottery is to choose which person will be sacrificed that year in a death by stoning. After the jarring story was published, letters flooded into the editor of the magazine—some

300 in all by Jackson's count, only 13 of which were kind "and they were mostly from friends." Jackson's writing career took off after that story. In the next decade and a half, she published numerous other novels and short stories and won many awards for her writing, out-earning her husband in the 1950s at a time when she was also raising four children as a "faculty wife". Although many of Jackson's novels have a macabre twist, other works reflect her dry sense of humor, such

as her 1953 best-selling *Erma Bombeck*-like account of raising children, *Life Among the Savages*. Because of the breadth of her work, critics have had a difficult time assigning it to a specific genre. Some place it in a category of "literary suspense," some "domestic comedy" and some "horror

and mystery"—even "witchcraft." (Steven King is a fan). As for Jackson, according to her biographer Franklin, she "believed her role as a writer was to draw back the curtain on the darkness within the human psyche." Her signature talent was "combining the horrific with the mundane." Jackson did just that in her first novel, finding human darkness, even in a seemingly bucolic suburb like Burlingame in the 1920s, where one would "stop playing prisoner's base when the streetlights went on in the evening" and sit "on a fence eating pomegranates" with your dearest friend.

Shirley Jackson died in her sleep on August 8, 1965 during her customary afternoon nap, a life no doubt cut short by overuse of diet pills, tranquilizers and alcohol. She was 48 years old. The official cause of death was coronary occlusion due to arteriosclerosis.



Shirley Jackson, seen at far left, second row at McKinley School - 1920s (Courtesy of Tom Simpson)



Join us on Tuesday, May 24th 7-8pm via ZOOM (*)
The Burlingame Historical Society and Burlingame Public Library present:

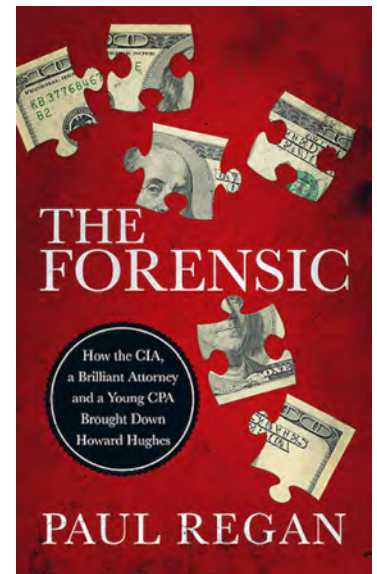
Air West, Regan and the Downfall of Howard Hughes:

*Come and hear Hillsborough former mayor, 12-year council member and 10-year school board member, **Paul Regan's** David and Goliath memoir of how he, as*

a young CPA, took down Howard Hughes in a massive securities fraud arising from Hughes' acquisition of San Mateo's Air West.

* **ID: 818 7643 1140** Passcode: 2022 or by phone: Dial + 1 669 900 6833.

Next, enter Meeting ID (same as above) and Press "#". To participate, press # again.



Many thanks for donations from: Carol Batte, Catherine Wilkinson, Doris Harvey, Steve Cady, Wallace Mersereau, Gary Heckenkemper, Ken Pearse, Russ Cohen, Carolyn Kane Daley, Diana Bruce, Phyllis Rogers Bedford, Donna Colson, Cathy Baylock, Rocky and Julie Allen, Mary L. Hunt, Nick and Stephanie Delis, Tom Carey, Linda Merrifield, JoAnn N. Quadt, Kirsten McCarthy, Thomas R. Friebe, Art and Arlene Citron, Jill Lauder, Jim Shypertt, Michael Wiebracht, Katherine L. Colman, Jim Nantell, Clare Cavanaugh, Donna L. Petersen, Dale Perkins and the Perkins Family in memory of Evie Perkins, and Ron and Robin Karp Philanthropic Fund. These generous donations really have helped to launch 2022!

*A big **SHOUT OUT** to **Jack Van Etten** for sponsoring the entire cost of the repair of the **Burlingame Police Department** neon sign, circa 1930s-40s, that will be on display on our museum. *If you are interested in similarly funding repair of the **Shoe Clinic** sign, or the **Hotel [Burlingame]** sign, please contact us: 650 - 340-9960.*

Thank you to our New Members(*) and Upgraded Renewals:

Donna Colson: ANSON BURLINGAME (!)
Catherine M. Wilkinson: INDIVIDUAL
Chris Chan*: INDIVIDUAL
Farris Horak: INDIVIDUAL
Pat Tyler*: INDIVIDUAL
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Walter Sorensen: HISTORY BUFF
Jill Lauder: HISTORY BUFF
Meredith Dunn: HISTORY BUFF
-In Memoriam:
JOHN GEER
LINDA PEBET

Many thanks to **Tom Simpson** (Forsythe & Simpson Men's and Boy's Clothing) for vintage photos of David Simpson's family, including images at school and various activities in Burlingame, circa 1920s, *shown at right*; **John Carey** for Burlingame-related memorabilia, including numerous circa 1960s and 70s Burlingame business cards and various promotional business items • the first issue of Burlingame Public Library "Friends of the Library" newsletter, November 1970 • Neighborhood Watch newsletters, and a number of c.1960s receipts from the old Burlingame Dump on Airport Blvd.; **Jim Kelly** for numerous San Mateo Times digital clippings, including one dated May

27, 1954: "Wreckers Raze Miller Manse" regarding the impending demolition of the approximately 30 year-old, 32 room mansion (1846 Floribunda Ave.) of Pacific Lighting Securities Corporation, Robert Watt Miller, for subdivision purposes. The article mentions that said residence, was one of several slated for the wrecking ball, including the Templeton Crocker home (in 1956 ultimately saved and acquired by the Crystal Springs School for Girls), and for a 1935 *SF Examiner* article about the home exhibit of the modern "PABCO HOUSE" (301 Bloomfield Road, demolished 2020) by architect William A. Garren, built by developer of the tract, J. B. Oswald, "using structural materials and colors of the *Paraffine Companies*, known by the brand name of Pabco—featuring modern composition materials...through economical arrangement: *An entrance hall separate from the rooms, with guest closet...connection from entrance hall with kitchen, dining room and living room, and a rear hall connecting bedrooms, bath and living room, with suitable linen and storage closets and privacy separating public living from bedroom and bath uses...* in the "fast-moving new suburban tract of Burlingables" • photos and an article about the erection of Tait Auction Studio, reputedly the largest on the



Procession (WWI related ?) on California Dr., circa 1919

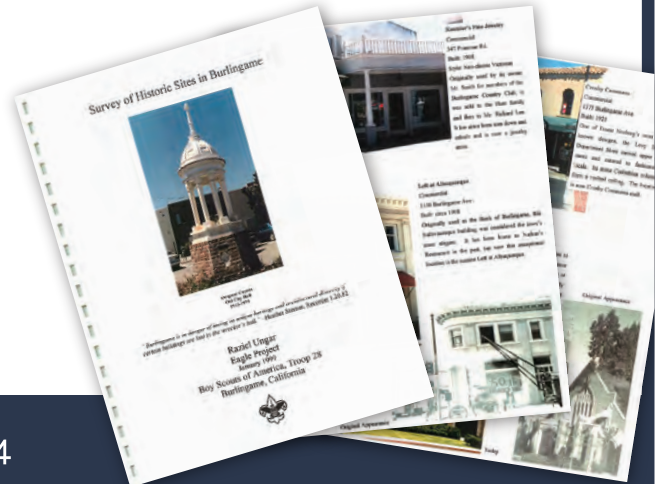
Peninsula, at 1209 Howard, designed by William A. Whifler; **Anne Fallon**, kindness of **Ann O'Brien** for various documents and memorabilia related to former Mayor Rosalie O' Mahony's (b.1930-d.2021) service to Burlingame; **Jim Shypertt** for two images of the neon Broadway Grill sign (1400 Broadway) undergoing (unsuccessful) repair on January 20th, 2022 • digital memorabilia, including photos and names of most of the Burlingame Rotary Club presidents since 1925, a photo collage in appreciation of Georgette Naylor longtime CEO of the Burlingame Chamber of Commerce, and a news story entitled: A Sweet Legacy, about Preston's Ice Cream and Candies 75th anniversary, published in PUNCH magazine,

February 2022; **Mark Lucchesi** and **Ray Tyler** for the interview/filming sessions of **Brian Delehanty** • **Irene Preston** • City Librarian **Brad McCulley** • local author **Joanneh Nagler** • longtime BHS teacher **Linda McLaughlin**, and to **Leslie McQuaide** for transcripts of all the above; **JoAnn Quadt** for a collection of digitized misc. memorabilia, including school classes, various sports teams and teachers from Saint Catherine of Siena School, 1940s through 1950s; **Richard Griffith** for a Burlingame Motor Co. b/w digital image of the business while located at 1321 Howard Avenue, circa 1936; **San Mateo County Historical Association** for various rolled maps of the Crocker Family Estates, as well as photos and other documents related to land acquisition by Caltrans for highway projects in the 1950s; **Linda Field** for numerous photos including post-indoor-mask-mandate business signage for Covid-19, suggesting continued mask-wearing by patrons; **Carl and Janet Martin** for various real estate ads, 2021-22, and a Burlingame Zoning map, c. 1973; and to **Fred Mincher** for digital memorabilia of his family home at 1116 Cortez including an original parcel payment book, and an Ansel M. Easton et al to Rosalind Stivers Deed, June 5, 1911.



RAZIEL UNGAR IS PROUD TO SUPPORT THE BURLINGAME HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

I've been a member since I was 17 years old when Martha May collaborated with me on my Eagle Scout project 'A Survey of Historic Homes in Burlingame'.



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Calendar:

**Burlingame Hillsborough
History Museum 1-4 pm 1st
Sunday of the month***

***Note: Currently Closed.**

We are reconfiguring our display
area. Please check our website for
updates.

NEXT EVENT

Quarterly meeting May 24th on
Zoom at 7 pm: see pg. 5 for
ZOOM information or consult
the Burlingame Public Library
website

**Please remember us
in your trust or will!**

President's Message:

We had a major milestone in February, when the Lions Club Hall was generously made available to us for our first "in-person" public presentation in two years. Thank you to those who joined us, and for those who could not, the full presentation is online on our website, under "What's New?"

Also of interest is the installation of a new piece of public art that has been erected along a pathway through the upper section of Washington Park, near Carolan Avenue. A collaboration between artist John Roloff and the City of Burlingame, the privately-funded artwork honors the values of Anson Burlingame, our city's namesake. Throughout his short life, his passion, not only as a diplomat, but also as a family man, was laser-focused on racial equity and justice for all- these ideals continue to resonate. Please take a

moment to visit the site that includes benches engraved with various inspirational quotes.

Sadly, I must also share with you the news that two of our longtime volunteers have passed away. Some of you may remember longtime resident and Burlingame Elementary School educator, John Geer. Among other things, he guided our walking tours on Broadway. John enjoyed sharing his memories with you, and it was an activity in which his very low, melodic, baritone voice came in very handy above the clamor of the traffic.

We were thrilled when Linda Pebet joined us a number of years ago. Always the enthusiastic task-master, she concurrently balanced her robust sense of outrage at news of the day, with a warm sense of humor. She will be missed. Our sympathies are with the families of John and Linda.

-Jennifer Pfaff

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