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BERYL JEAN SYMMES

**An Oral History Narrative
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Beryl Jean Symmes grew up in Richmond, Surrey, England. In 1943 she met Laurence M. Symmes Jr., an American serviceman. They married in 1947, and Laurence brought her to Mill Valley where he had settled after the war with his aunt Ruth Boericke White, the widow of Ralston White, who owned the Garden of Allah. Beryl and Laurence spent two weeks living at the famous Mill Valley residence before moving into their own home, named El Nido (The Nest), at 309 Tamalpais Avenue. In this written oral history narrative, read by the author on the recording, Beryl recounts the history of the Garden of Allah and El Nido, and that of their owners and inhabitants, in the context of major events like the 1906 Earthquake and the Great Fire of 1929. She recalls many friends and neighbors from over six decades of living in Mill Valley, and relates the development of the family she started with Laurence. Beryl also describes her foray into novel-writing, which commenced in the 1970s under the pen name Geraldine Boyce and led to the publication of three novels by the time this oral history was recorded, including the well-received *A Daughter's Inheritance*, published in 2012.

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Oral History of Beryl Jean Symmes
November 14, 2015

Were it not for World War II, I would not have come to America, and I would never have known about Mill Valley. I grew up in Richmond, Surrey, England (ten miles up the River Thames from London), where I lived with my parents and older sister Stella.

In 1943, when I was 17, I met Laurence M. Symmes Jr. at the home of a school friend whose parents often invited servicemen for a family meal. It was the first time they had entertained Americans. Larry was stationed at the American Embassy in London serving in the Army Signal and Intelligence Service. Later, he was billeted in Bristol until the invasion of France began in 1944. He then followed the troops on the second day to set up the communication lines.

When World War II ended in 1945, Larry returned to America directly from France. He settled in Mill Valley — living with his Aunt Ruth (Mrs. Ralston White — Ruth Boericke White, who was a widow) at “The Garden of Allah” (now the Ralston White Retreat). Larry had spent many happy summers there as a child, when his mother, Dorothy Boericke Symmes (who was the twin sister of Aunt Ruth) had brought her family to visit from New York. He had also spent a year with his Aunt and Uncle, and attended the eighth grade at Old Mill School.

During and after the war, Larry and I corresponded from time to time, but I never had any thoughts of going to the United States. As the years passed, however, our feelings for each other deepened and in April 1947, Larry asked me to marry him. I wanted to accept, but my parents were very against my leaving England and joining a family whom none of us knew. Then Larry wrote that he would travel to England with his Aunt Ruth and parents, Dorothy and Laurence Symmes, to meet my family. So he and Aunt Ruth drove across the country to meet his parents in Scarsdale, New York, and they all sailed to England together. We married in Richmond on October 25, 1947, and then spent our honeymoon in the County of Kent in England, followed by visits to Paris and Brussels. On November 20th, while waiting to sail on the *RMS Queen Mary* from Southampton to New York, we listened to the broadcast of Princess Elizabeth’s and Prince Philip’s wedding. When “God Save The King” was played, I stood up, followed by Larry; when we looked around the huge room, we saw that we were the only passengers to do so as the ship was full of Americans.

We arrived in New York on November 26th and drove the next day, with family members, to Philadelphia to spend Thanksgiving Day with relatives there. For the next two weeks we stayed with Larry's parents in Scarsdale. We attended many parties (some in our honor) and I learned of the generosity and kindness of Americans for there was a roomful of gifts awaiting us.

On December 11th, Larry and I began our drive across America to California via the southern route. Coming from such a small country, I had always imagined all of America was like what we saw in Hollywood movies. Crossing such a huge continent, I saw so many new sights for the first time. In the south, I was shocked to encounter segregated drinking fountains. I was amazed by the long distances between small Texas settlements of eight houses, a grocery store and gas station before the next one a hundred miles away. After asking where they got their supplies, I learned that Sears Roebuck department store's mail order catalogue could supply most of what they needed, even houses.

At last we arrived in Mill Valley on Sunday, December 18th. When we reached the corner of Miller Avenue and Camino Alto, I was awed by my first glimpse of the beauty of a sunlit Mount Tamalpais. We stopped at a gas station farther up the road so I could change out of my traveling clothes, so I would look presentable when I met the family.

We drove up East Blithedale and along Ralston Avenue (named for Ralston White), then turned up the long driveway to the "Garden of Allah." I asked Larry to stop a moment when the house came into view. It was such a beautiful and grand house, set among so many trees with the mountain overlooking it and the large heart-shaped green lawn in front. We drove up to the front steps of the house where 15 or so members of the family were waiting to greet us — an Uncle, Dr. Charles Boericke, his wife Peggy and three children, Patricia, Charles Jr. and Keith, who had come from Berkeley; Jean and Jack Barnard and their two young sons, Rally and Geoff, and Uncle Arthur Boericke — all of whom were living at the Garden of Allah. There were other more distant relatives too. BUT no Aunt Ruth, the lady of the house, whose ship, we learned with dismay, had been shipwrecked off the coast of Venezuela. Luckily her ship had been towed into port and she was staying with family friends in Venezuela until another ship bound for San Francisco came along. We settled into a guest room of the Garden of Allah, and waited for Aunt Ruth, who finally arrived home on Christmas Day — a gloriously warm and sunny day. I marveled that, even though it was winter, I was able to run on the heart-shaped lawn in the short-sleeved silk dress I had bought

in New York. I had very few clothes to bring with me from England because, although food and clothing rationing started in 1939, it continued in Britain.

Larry and I were to stay at the Garden of Allah until we could furnish our new home “El Nido” at 309 Tamalpais Avenue, which Aunt Ruth had kindly offered to sell to us. Housing was very scarce in Mill Valley then, as many servicemen had returned home from World War II, and as they married and started families they needed places to live. The best Larry could find for us had been a bedroom with a bathroom and shared use of kitchen, so we were so glad the small house El Nido was available.

The original El Nido (The Nest) had been built in the early 1900s as the summer country home of Dr. and Mrs. William G. Boericke, the parents of Larry’s mother Dorothy and her twin sister Ruth. The Boerickes lived on Washington Street in San Francisco, where Dr. Boericke was influential in his practice of homeopathic medicine. He was the author of *Homoeopathic Materia Medica* (1901), which became the standard text in the field. Larry’s grandmother, Kate Worcester Fay Boericke, was the daughter of Caleb T. Fay, a California “Forty-niner” who ran unsuccessfully for California governor in 1867. The Boericke family escaped San Francisco’s cool foggy summers by taking the ferry across the bay to Sausalito, and then arriving by horse and buggy at their Tamalpais Avenue home, which presented a magnificent panoramic view of Mount Tamalpais, as well as of the entire western ridge “embracing” Mill Valley.

The Boericke house, which they had named El Nido, was bigger than the house we were buying in 1948. The original house had room enough to accommodate seven Boericke children — five sons and two daughters — Fay, Harold (who died of typhoid fever at age 29 in 1918), Dorothy and Ruth (twins born on May 13, 1888), Garth, Charles and Arthur, in addition to Chinese servants. The property had a 300-foot frontage on Tamalpais Avenue (as it still does today) and extended down to another separate lot on Lovell Avenue. There were stables on the property as well as a Music Building. Dorothy and Ruth kept chickens and sold the eggs. Midway down the hillside of the property, Dr. Boericke had planted a row of Eucalyptus trees to serve as a windbreak; the labor of this tree planting and other work on the property was done by ex-prisoners who had served their time.

When the major 1906 earthquake devastated San Francisco, Ruth and Dorothy were traveling in Europe with their father. They were desperate for news about loved ones and friends, and were relieved to learn that their mother and brothers were safe, although the Boericke’s family home on Washington Street was badly damaged. Mrs. Boericke and the

rest of the household camped for a short time in San Francisco before they were able to ferry to Berkeley to stay with friends. They probably also lived for an extended time in their Mill Valley home.

In the Great Fire of Mill Valley in 1929, the flames reached the lawn of the Garden of Allah, but went no further. The Boerickes believed they would be safe at the El Nido house as the 309 Tamalpais property was located in a more protected part of the town with the wind blowing in a southern direction. But suddenly the wind changed and the fire swept up the gully, burning the house to the ground — leaving only a charred chimney. Before they escaped, the family in the house, who had been caught off-guard, quickly began throwing things out of the house, including a tray of rough diamonds. The fire destroyed so many possessions. Years later, family youngsters diligently searched for those lost diamonds, but without success.

After Dr. Boericke died in 1929, his widow built a small cottage for herself and her maid so she could continue to spend her summers in Mill Valley. The cottage consisted of a living-dining room (built around the surviving chimney, which remained a central feature of the house), two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a den, kitchen, a small laundry room and two outside decks. Unfortunately, Grandmother Boericke died in 1933, before she could enjoy her second summer in that cottage.

Mrs. Boericke left the Tamalpais Avenue house and property to her four remaining sons, not to the two daughters who were considered to be financially secure and comfortably well off, despite the devastating impact of the Depression. In fact, Ralston White, who ran the Tamalpais Land & Water Company in Mill Valley, lost a fortune in the great stock market crash, as did prospective buyers for his company's properties, so Ralston and Ruth White did suffer financially. In 1932, in order to augment their meager income, they rented the Garden of Allah, fully furnished, for \$250 per month. They gave half of the rent income to Alphonse Haapa, their gardener for many years, so he could take care of the property, and they decided they could best live off their remaining income if they moved to Europe, where they stayed mainly in Germany, often bicycling from place to place as they toured the Continent. The Whites returned to Mill Valley before World War II began.

The four Boericke brothers eventually sold El Nido's lower lot on Lovell Avenue; and they generously gave the upper Tamalpais Avenue lot and house to their sister, Ruth, so she could rent out the house for extra income. When Ralston White died in 1943, Ruth was

alone in the huge Garden of Allah house, so she welcomed other relatives to come and live with her there.

After our two-week stay at the Garden of Allah, on December 30, 1947 — a day viewed by many as the stormiest of that winter — Larry and I moved into our 309 Tamalpais Avenue home. Even after all the furniture we had bought had been unpacked, we had to agree that the house still looked rather unwelcoming as the high winds howled and the torrential rain poured outside. We felt cozier after Larry succeeded in coaxing a fire in the large fireplace (the one that had survived the 1929 fire, albeit restored since then) and I cooked my first dinner in the modestly-equipped kitchen as best I could. The rooms were still laid out much the same as planned by Larry's Grandmother Boericke around 1930.

Larry started work at his new job in the International Department of the Bank of America in San Francisco on January 2, 1948, the following Monday. He left for work early each morning, walking a mile down Tamalpais Avenue to catch the 7:30 am Greyhound commuter bus for the hour's drive to the City; each evening, after walking back up the hill, he got home about 6:30. He also worked half-days on Saturday.

I often felt lonely and especially missed my sister, Stella, but I kept myself busy getting to know Mill Valley and driving over the Camino Alto hill (then a main route to North Marin) to explore Corte Madera and Larkspur. I signed up for three courses at the College of Marin in Kentfield: French, Interior Decorating, and American History. I also preoccupied myself by trying to get a telephone. Telephone lines were very scarce at that time. After many visits to the local Bell Telephone Company, we were finally given a party line which we had to share with two other families. It was terribly difficult to make a call as the lines were always busy. Then we were given a party line with only one other family, but that was no better. After nearly six months, we were finally given our own telephone line. At last, we had contact with the outside world from our home.

My first visitor at the house was Alphonse Haapa, the White's gardener for the extensive grounds of the Garden of Allah since about 1917. The Whites had first engaged Alphonse, who was originally from Finland, as a butler, but quickly realized that his talents were best suited for the outdoors. He had married Selma, the Swedish cook at the Garden of Allah, in the 1940s; they lived near Muir Woods with their three pretty daughters. Larry had asked him to come to show me around El Nido's garden, a subject I knew little about. He pointed out a fully branched tree close to the house on the driveway and said it should be removed as it was making the living room dark. He then took me to a flower bed, which

looked eaten down to the soil. He said, “The renters tried to grow roses here but it’s impossible unless they are behind a fence. Roses are like candy to deer.” He also pointed out two large Eucalyptus trees — survivors of the Great 1929 fire and among those planted decades before by Dr. Boericke; the trees had now grown dangerously close to the east and west of house, so we arranged to have those cut down. We decided, however, to keep the row of Eucalyptus trees that Grandfather Boericke had planted as a windbreak down the hillside. Larry called Alphonse a “man mountain” because he could do anything in the garden: cutting down trees single handed, as well as being very skilled in making the rock walls defining flower beds and lining the driveway, as well as designing pathways and steps. We readily engaged him for this kind of work to improve our property; much of his handiwork survived for decades, even after I sold the house in 2011.

I learned so much from Alphonse about plants, but I also enjoyed hearing tidbits about the Boericke and White family. He told me about Mrs. Lovell White, Ralston’s mother, a woman he respected. Laura Lyon had come from Iowa as the young bride of Lovell White, and by 1859 they had settled in a mining town in the Sierra foothills. It was there that the couple experienced a great personal tragedy — the deaths of their two young children of a terrible fever, later thought to have been caused by their drinking water. In the 1970s when I was clearing out the Garden of Allah attic, I came upon a box containing the children’s locks of hair, and it made me so sad. In the 1860s, after Lovell and Laura White had re-located to San Francisco, Lovell became successful in the banking business. Mrs. White became a “woman before her time” writing about the harsh life in mining towns and the glories of California wilderness, especially the Redwoods, and she became a pioneer advocate for women’s rights and children’s welfare. Yet Lovell desperately wanted another child, so he asked if Laura, who was then in her late 30s, would agree, he would donate \$10,000 to one of her projects.

In 1877, their son Ralston (named for their great friend William C. Ralston) was born. When Ralston was older, Mrs. White became an active leader in the California suffrage campaign, and later traveled back and forth to Washington D.C. to save the Big Trees, which she succeeded in doing in the early 1900s. And she was a founder member of Mill Valley’s Outdoor Art Club. Lovell White died early in 1910, a few months before Ralston and Ruth’s wedding in April 1910, and the Garden of Allah was built as Ralston’s gift to his bride a few years later. Afterwards, Ralston’s mother tried to guide her son in how to handle his own financial affairs, but she feared he had not listened to her. After she died in 1916, she left her

estate to Ralston so that it would be paid out in installments over many years (rather than in one lump sum). Actually, this turned out to be a fortunate decision for both Ralston and Ruth, as they were able to count on this inheritance well into their later years; they used it to finish designing the Garden of Allah gardens, creek-fed pool, and tennis court.

Gradually, I met my Tamalpais Avenue neighbors. On the uphill side (where Tamalpais intersects Summit) was Mama Gravander, who was originally from Sweden and had previously run a famous pension in San Francisco. After she settled in Mill Valley, she had obtained a sales license from the City of Mill Valley (a special permit rarely given to home owners) to sell Swedish gift goods (wooden toys, textiles, and such like) from her home. Before the Christmas holiday, she gave a wonderful Santa Lucia Party for her friends and neighbors, where children enjoyed mulled cider while the adults enjoyed spiced wine. Each year she would select a young blond girl from the neighborhood to be Santa Lucia. The girl, who wore a lovely white dress and a crown of candles, walked through the darkened living room as everyone sang the song “Santa Lucia.” While she brought us light on the darkest night of the year, she passed out ginger cookies.

On the downhill side was a house (289 Tamalpais) rented to a young couple, Priscilla and Bob Rudebeck by the out-of-town owner, Mrs. Cady, who continued to rent it out to various renters until she sold it many years later to Sally and Richard St. John (later it was sold to the Jakob family who are still there). Priscilla Rudebeck wrote a social column for the *Mill Valley Record*, and even after they moved away some years later, we remained good friends. When Priscilla started a lady’s sewing group, we met every month, and there were always about 10 members, each taking turns to host the gathering at her home. Some members were also young mothers with children, so we also met so our children could play and grow up together. It seems amazing that this group lasted for decades — helping me establish what would become a large circle of Mill Valley friends. Indeed, there are still two of us left from that original sewing group — Irene Erskine, who left Mill Valley a few years ago to move to San Jose to be closer to her children — and me. We still phone and email each other and cherish our long friendship.

Almost a year and half after Larry and I arrived in Mill Valley, our daughter Marilyn was born on Friday, May 13th — on the actual birthday of her American Grandmother and her Great Aunt Ruth. Larry and I rose to the challenges all new young parents face as best we could. My mother had hoped to come from England to help us, but her health was not up to it. So Larry and I decided that I should make a trip to visit my parents in 1950. Thus began a

serious period of saving money and cutting back on expenses in order to pay for this overseas trip.

In April 1950, when Marilyn was 11 months old, she and I started off on our journey, flying first to New York so we could stay with my in-laws in Scarsdale for a week before continuing on our way. When it came time to leave for New York's Idlewild Airport (later renamed John F. Kennedy Airport), the whole family squeezed into the car driven by my brother-in-law; my father-in-law was also in the front with my 7-year-old nephew sitting between them. My mother-in-law, my sister-in-law and I sat in the back seat — me with the baby on my knee. After parking the car, all the family accompanied me to the gate, only to learn that the British plane was still in London. So we all returned to Scarsdale — an hour's drive away — to repeat the whole procedure the next day!

I shared economy seats in the front of the plane with another young mother and her baby, with cradles at our feet. The flight took 20 hours to reach Heathrow Airport (via a propeller plane stopping in Gander, Newfoundland, Iceland, and Glasgow, Scotland to refuel en route). My parents were eagerly awaiting our arrival, and for three weeks I enjoyed being with them at my former home, but I did miss seeing my sister Stella, who had married and moved to Hong Kong. A perambulator had been rented for the baby, and we took long walks pushing it into Richmond Park and on the Richmond Terrace with its magnificent view of the Thames (now a National Trust View). The weather was mainly good, although it did snow one day, very rare for April. It saddened me that my parents — along with all those living in England — were still affected by the rationing of food and other goods. The situation seemed barely better than when I had left, and this rationing continued until the mid-1950s.

Although I loved my visit with my parents, I missed Larry and realized that I missed being at our home, too. For my return trip back to California, Larry had driven cross-country from Mill Valley to New York so he could meet us at Idlewild Airport. After a week with his family in Scarsdale, we started off to cross the U.S.A. again. This time we traveled across the route taking us through the Midwest, Missouri, and Kansas, across the Rockies, then onward towards the Sierras and California. The baby happily played and slept in her filled-in backseat playpen the entire way.

After we returned to Mill Valley, Larry and I decided that we were tired of having to drive up the unpaved Upper Tamalpais Avenue, which was always muddy in winter and very dusty in summer. The road had blacktop paving until 225 Tamalpais Avenue, and then it was dirt road all the rest of the way. I applied for an Assessment District Permit at City Hall to

pave our street up to the end of our Property — 309 Tamalpais Avenue — where it joined a paved Summit Avenue. The City approved my application and it was now up to me to get approval from all the property owners, although many of them were absentee owners. While there were a number of lots, there were only two other houses on this stretch of road. I was relieved when all the owners agreed, although it meant accepting the fact that they would be charged the costs of paving their property frontages. Ours was the longest frontage, and so we were to pay \$1,250, which was a considerable sum for us at that time. The City decided to pave the road with cement, with a raised cement curb to form a gutter on the uphill side.

The Tamalpais Avenue and Summit Avenue neighborhoods were expanding, as new families were moving in. In November 1950, I received a phone call from a woman who lived on Summit Avenue. She asked me if I had heard that a black family was looking to buy a house in our neighborhood, and she said that some neighbors were against it. Remembering Larry's and my own difficulties to find a house, I said that because it is still hard for families to find homes, that I would not oppose it. The woman hung up and never spoke to me again. In 1951, Dr. Daniel Collins, who was the first black professor at UCSF's School of Dentistry, and his wife, DeReath, moved to their home on the dramatic hillside of 700 Summit Avenue, where they raised their four sons. While I would see DeReath from time to time at the grocery store we exchanged family news (indeed, as a young mother with little free time, most of my socializing in those days occurred while shopping). I knew their son Chip (Charles) the best, because I occasionally gave him a ride home as he was walking home after school. Also, the Collins family and the Symmes family shared the services of a weekly maid, Elizabeth Williams, who lived in Marin City with her three daughters.

In February 1951, our son Anthony was born. It was a very stormy day as we made our way to Ross Hospital, and we were delighted when he safely arrived. Later, we learned that Mama Gravander had been frantically phoning us to come to help her place sandbags at the top of the stream bordering on the far corner of her house. Rainwater rushing down Summit Avenue was flooding her property and threatened her house!

In the summer of 1951, Aunt Ruth had a large party to celebrate her donation in trust of the Garden of Allah house and property to the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco as a memorial to her husband. This news caused dismay among her San Francisco and local friends who had enjoyed attending her large summer teas over the years. Aunt Ruth realized that she was not able to keep up with the rising costs of maintaining such a large house and acreage. Yet her agreement with the Academy permitted her to live there still,

which also meant that her relatives could continue to enjoy the grounds and swim in the creek-fed pool. Her decision also meant that all our large family get-togethers would now be held at El Nido, and Larry and I loved hosting everyone at our home.

I became an American citizen in 1954 in San Francisco's City Hall. The room was filled with hundreds of elderly Chinese people who wished to become U.S. citizens. Because they could not speak English, it took a long time for each of them to be interviewed in their native language. Twelve of us Europeans waited hours through the process to the final citizenship ceremony. Jean Barnard and Catherine Karrer of Mill Valley were my two sponsors; Larry treated us all to lunch afterwards to celebrate. I remember how much I had studied for the verbal test, which was much more difficult than I expected, and I was sorry for those who were not fluent in English.

In 1956, Larry was assigned to work for three months at the Bank of America in Mexico City, and we decided that the entire family should go. We drove all the way from Mill Valley, crossing the California-Mexico border at Tijuana, then continuing down the west coast of Mexico, stopping at Mazatlan and Guadalajara before we turned eastward to Mexico City. We settled into an apartment in a delightful neighborhood near Chapultepec Park, where there were wonderful, colorful free concerts. The children attended a nearby local school, which was taught in Spanish. On weekends, we toured much of the country, including visits to Puebla, Taxco, Cuernavaca and Acapulco. The Mexicans loved that we had the children with us, and we were met with friendliness everywhere. Larry drove us back home via Monterrey and Laredo, Texas.

While we were gone, we had rented our house to a Ross family, who were remodeling their home, which made us think it was time to remodel our house. We hired Melvyn H. Klyce, the well-known Mill Valley builder, to design the plans to remodel and enlarge El Nido. After the remodeling commenced in 1957, whenever Mr. Klyce came to inspect the work progress, he would always bring Mrs. Klyce, and I would run down to the driveway to visit with her.

While our entire house was being renovated, our family stayed at the Garden of Allah. As it happened, Aunt Ruth was on a trip to Africa with her second husband, Dr. Robert Bowie (they had married shortly after she met him in 1955 in Argentina at a homeopathic conference). So we were glad to be able to live temporarily in her much more spacious accommodations. I remember, however, that it wasn't so convenient when the children were sick in bed upstairs, and it took me five minutes each way to get to them meals

from the kitchen via the staircase. When Aunt Ruth returned, she arranged to donate the Garden of Allah to the Northern California Conference of Congregational Churches; it was then renamed the Ralston L. White Memorial Retreat. As part of the agreement, she retained a small apartment at the back of the house as her and Dr. Bowie's residence for the remainder of her lifetime. There is also a small grove of redwood trees named for Ralston L. White in downtown Mill Valley (near the Depot Plaza), although I don't remember when that was established.

In 1956, while our house was being remodeled, a friend invited me to become a member of the San Francisco Junior League. Five other Marin County women had also been invited to become members. The six of us drove into San Francisco together to take the introductory course, which was exceedingly interesting as it taught us all about San Francisco and all of its services from every angle. One of my travelling companions was Lyn Jessup, and we soon became very good friends — as did our families. Her husband Dick Jessup, an architect, served on Mill Valley's Planning Commission and City Council in the 1970s; he was appointed Mayor in 1980, and later designed the Depot Plaza, which is enjoyed today by the community as the vital heart of downtown Mill Valley. For decades, I greatly enjoyed being an active member of Junior League, a worthy organization that promoted volunteerism to benefit Bay Area communities. One of my volunteer stints was at the International Visitors Center on Union Square in San Francisco.

By late 1957, we were able to move back into our much larger and more comfortable Tamalpais Avenue home — which now had a spacious living room (still featuring the half-a-century-old fireplace from the original El Nido house) and a large master bedroom (both rooms had incorporated the former front porch from the old house). In addition, there was an updated kitchen, a dining room, a den/extra bedroom, a family room, two bedrooms and two updated bathrooms. We also enlarged the western-exposure porch so that we could maximize our view of Mount Tamalpais and access to the garden. But Larry and I had to finish all the interiors. We painted each room, and while Larry installed the tiles in the bathrooms, I sanded the entire living room. I took a special sewing course so I could make the drapes for each room — the living room, dining room and family room drapes being the most challenging, but most successful as they lasted for decades. And we started to plan and develop the garden; Larry was in charge of the orange, apple, pear and plum trees, while I designed flower beds, a vegetable garden, and a large strawberry patch, which eventually produced the most delicious berries!

Our family was also growing. In October 1958, our son William was born, followed by Jonathan in May 1960. Marilyn and Anthony were attending Old Mill School, walking up and down the hill with other neighborhood children. And Larry and I were getting to know more of our neighbors the full length of Tamalpais Avenue. Symmes family activities included hikes up Mount Tamalpais — walking up the old railroad trail from Fern Canyon (past the Lando's impressive house) being a particular favorite, or frequent walks to the rock at the end of Tamalpais Avenue for the magnificent view of the mountain and opposite ridge. In the summers, we would pick blackberries on Tamalpais and Ralston Avenues, which I would then make into delicious jam and blackberry-apple pies.

After Bob Huber (a Mill Valley Councilman and Mayor in the 1950s and early 1960s) and his wife Jean moved into 245 Tamalpais, they kindly invited the Symmes children to play with their children in their pool. As the children grew up, they loved playing on our woody hillside. In our garden, we often saw families of quail (sometimes two families of 11 and 12 babies each); deer and foxes bred on our lower lot. For a while, skunks bred by the Redwood tree at the end of our driveway, and when neighbors walked their dogs in the evening, they would see skunk babies running on the road.

We were also very close to Nora Evans, a longtime friend of the Boericke family who had bought her 400 Ralston Avenue property from Ralston White in the early 1920s. Nora was very generous to our family, particularly in hosting special birthday dinners for the children. A highlight of those birthday festivities was feeding the raccoons, which Nora had trained to ring the backdoor bell when they wanted their supper; the adult raccoons taught this bell ringing skill to their young, so this behavior was passed on from one generation of raccoons to the next! As soon as the bell rang, birthday guests interrupted their own dinner in the dining room, and went off to feed the raccoons.

When we trimmed the large trees on the property, Larry and the boys would become lumbermen sawing the large tree trunks and branches into smaller logs for firewood with an old-fashioned two-man saw. We cleared part of the lower lot, and when we realized how much property we owned, we decided to sell a portion of it. We purchased road access to the lot from the Jakobs next door. In 1961, we sold our half-acre lot to the Stuart family, who built a house (301 Tamalpais), which they later sold to the Jenks family, who resold it in 1970 to Harriet and Tom Kostic, who remodeled the house, raised their two daughters, and continue to live there, now 45 years later.

Around 1967, there were some rumblings about educational changes in the Mill Valley School District. Jonathan was attending second grade at Old Mill School, and he brought home a schedule of what he did in class. Arithmetic was not on the schedule, but the word “play” appeared often. When I went to Old Mill School to inquire about this and to find out what he was being taught, his teacher said, “Oh! Jonathan elected not to take arithmetic.” I was surprised that a child was permitted to opt out of fundamental courses, without consulting the parents! A friend then told me about her experience visiting her daughter who was in first grade being taught in the school auditorium, then renamed the “Learnatorium,” which was furnished with sofas and old chairs, instead of desks or tables and chairs for the children. As soon as she arrived, the teacher instructed her to enter the room on her knees so as not to frighten the children, who might feel oppressed by her adult stature. When Bill was in fifth grade, he was given comic books to read in the mornings, and during the afternoons he watched movies. I learned that there was a group of alarmed parents, and I joined them to see what we could do to upgrade the educational standards for what our children were being taught. Although our group complained to the school, nothing changed. Indeed, one teacher told me that he did not have to teach his students anything, just “treat” the child! We were told that many parents loved the new system. Our group of parents who were critical of this new system tried to make reforms over the next two years, without success, although we did succeed in getting Tom Spencer elected twice to the School Board. It took a while, and eventually school matters improved; but the main benefit for us parents is that we became fast friends, who still keep in touch and gather sometimes for tea or lunch.

In early 1970, a sheriff came to my front door with a subpoena for me to serve on the Marin Grand Jury. I had no idea who could have possibly suggested me. I was to appear at the Civic Center in mid-April to begin my duties. When 12 of us met in mid-April to elect a leader and to learn our future duties, we were told that our tenure would be 15 months, instead of the usual Grand Jury service of one year; the next Grand Jury term would begin the following July, at the start of the next fiscal year. I was assigned to be chairman of the Welfare Committee, which was interesting. I sat in when candidates for welfare met with County social workers. The jury also met monthly to share developments with other committees. We also had many other duties, none of which are the types of duties performed by today’s Grand Juries. For example, we visited San Quentin State Prison and sat in on parole interviews, and we also heard cases involving crimes committed by San Quentin inmates, such as making escape tools and using drugs. That was the first time I smelled

marijuana, which was passed around for our inspection. Sometimes, the District Attorney had us decide on other cases. Attendance was a few days a week, or there might be three meetings in one day, plus a meeting at night. I remember that Larry often had to take me and the children out to dinner, as I had no time to prepare meals. I was paid \$5 per day, I think, plus mileage. On August 7, 1970, something terrible happened. There was a shootout at the Civic Center in which Superior Court Judge Haley was killed, a County attorney was maimed for life, and two prisoners were also killed. The Grand Jury was assigned to review that case.

In 1976, when Jonathan was 16, I decided I would enjoy working part-time, so I got a job as a coordinator of the new Food Service (Meals on Wheels) of the Marin Senior Coordinating Council in San Rafael. Later, I was offered another job to direct a Federal Outreach Program. After a year, we were all laid off by Proposition 13's financial cuts. Soon I began working for Attorney Joseph Sheeks (former Mayor of Mill Valley), who was the legal counsel for all the hospital districts in California. He was in need of a legislative analyst, and hired me. I had that job for several years until Larry retired. With our children now grown, and after the deaths of the older generations of our family, Larry and I decided we wanted to travel more. Thus began an exciting period of trips to New York, Europe (many to attend special music performances of Hector Berlioz, Larry's favorite composer), Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

After Ruth White died in 1977, Larry became President of the Tamalpais Land and Water Company, and I, Secretary. The company still owned lanes in Mill Valley and beyond. In 1988, a Board Member of the Homestead Valley Land Trust approached us about donating the Tamalpais Land and Water Company to it. After some consideration, Larry and I agreed, so we finalized the transfer in 1989.

The number of houses on Tamalpais Avenue has grown a lot from the 15 houses we knew in 1947; as of 2015, there are about 55 houses. In 1988, when Larry and I learned that many neighbors did not know each other, we gave a Tamalpais Avenue residents party at our house — which everyone enjoyed. Yet it was Elaine and Cary James (who live at 342 Tamalpais Avenue) who came up with the idea to have an annual Rock Party — at the boulder which marks the end of Tamalpais Avenue — every Labor Day, with each family bringing food or drinks alphabetically assigned to them on the invitation. It was a wonderful idea, which has continued for the past 27 years. Even those who no longer live in the neighborhood show up enthusiastically.

I began writing novels in the late 1990s, and two were published in early 2000 under my pen name Geraldine Boyce. The first — *Homefront* — followed the lives of six English families from the early 1930s through World War II. The sequel, *Here and There*, took place in England and the United States. When I did a book reading at Book Passage in Corte Madera, I mentioned that the main characters lived in a small town north of the Golden Gate called Cascade, and everyone laughed because they knew I was referring to Mill Valley! In 2004, Larry became ill, and I cared for him at home, which is what all our family wanted for him. I had an excellent Fijian caregiver to help me. Larry died on New Year's Eve, 2006. We had been happily married for 59 years.

I was not able to continue my writing while Larry was ill, nor for a year after he died. In 2008 I began writing what would become *A Daughter's Inheritance*, an epic novel about six generations of mothers and daughters whose lives unfold in England's changing society from 1815 to the 1950s. I just loved writing this book, which was published in 2012. I was pleased when the Bay Area Independent Publishers Association named it Best Novel of 2013 and it was also a Finalist in the National Indie Excellence Book Awards in 2014.

I continued to live alone in the house until 2010, when I decided it was time for me to move and sell El Nido. Our four children were already long since settled into their own homes elsewhere. So I began to sort through all our belongings to figure out what to give away. When I found the ancient two-man saw in the cellar, I offered it as a gift to the long-established Mill Valley Lumber Company, and a staff member immediately drove up to get it. Recently, I took a tour of the new Lumber Company — now much changed with shops selling boats, clothes and flowers, as well as other business offices. As I could not see our old two-man saw when I looked around, I asked the owner about it; he kindly showed me the outside wall where the saw was on display. I confess the two-man saw looked much bigger than I remembered it!

I quickly sold our house at 309 Tamalpais Avenue, and moved into an Independent Living apartment at The Redwoods in May 2011, where I settled in well. So I am back at the corner of Miller Avenue and Camino Alto — where I began my life here when I first arrived as a young bride in December 1947. Every day for more than 60 years I have enjoyed a wonderful view of Mount Tamalpais, and I continue to enjoy looking at the mountain from my apartment deck, where I also have a lovely view of the marsh of San Francisco Bay.