

## **Barbara Lowdon**

Barbara Romelfanger was born in 1926 in San Francisco, Ca. She is one of 8 children, 4 boys and 4 girls. Luckily they all got along as the 4 girls and 4 boys had to share double beds. All 10 in the household shared only one bathroom. As there were 10 people sharing a 20 gallon gas water heater, she said she never remembered having a hot bath! Dinner times were quite fun as Barbara had to peel potatoes every day for 10 people and the laundry, she said was a real chore! Before school Barbara's job was dusting and after school she was in charge of ironing, cleaning the bathroom and washing and drying the dishes.

The family only had a car for a few years. With 10 people to cram into it, all the kids had to sit on stools on the floor in the back seat. Barbara's dad smoked cigars, so, the kids usually got car sick. During the Depression, the children were given a certificate for a free pair of shoes. The girls and boys always wore hand me down clothes. Barbara said she had a very happy childhood even though they weren't wealthy. She said there was always enough to eat. A family friend who owned a bakery used to call on them to come and get day old items.

Barbara's school life was very structured as she attended Catholic schools all the way up to her graduation from St. Paul High School in 1944. Life was easy back then with no crime, no locked doors, no TV, phone or newspaper. Barbara's Grandmother taught her how to do hand stitching, crochet and to make doll clothes. Barbara's mother was a great baker, she taught her how to make many things, but, her favorite was making chocolate chip cookies. Her Aunt also taught her how to play the piano.

Her social life was spent playing outside all day. She enjoyed roller skating "we used to skate in the streets as there weren't many cars in those days, otherwise we would skate on the sidewalk and jump the curbs which was neat". She also enjoyed playing Tennis, Hiking, Softball, Basketball, (she was a guard in high school), playing kick the can, hide and seek, 10 cents movies, 5 cent ice creams, and playing with the family dog named Cinders. She also enjoyed reading and her favorite book was Jane Eyre.

Barbara's first job was babysitting, 25 cents a day, to watch neighbors kids. She later worked in a curtain manufacturing plant, cutting the threads holding them together and then folding them. In high school she worked Thursday nights and Saturdays at Sears in the infant dept. and yardage dept. She got paid on Saturday, \$5.00 for the week. That was just enough to pay for her bus and streetcar fares.

In the evenings the family would gather around the radio and listen to music, plays, and the daily news. Barbara's favorite radio program was "The Shadow"-mystery with scary music, Amos and Andy-comedy and One Mans Family. Her favorite musical band was Glen Miller. One day her father won a TV set in a drawing-he had a lucky ticket, so, the family began watching Milton Berle Comedy Hour, The Jack Benny Show, The Ed Sullivan Show and the Red Skelton Show.

In 1942, World War II presented an uncertain time for everyone. It was a scary time as the kids always thought the Japanese would bomb San Francisco. There were many air bases nearby, so, the kids were taught to look up to the sky to see if the planes flying over the city were Japanese.

Barbara's San Francisco neighbor was in Australia at the time, but, was sent back to San Francisco due to a no guarantee of a foreigners safety protocol. The woman met an Australian girl the same age as Barbara, who asked if when she got back to San Francisco she could find a pen-pal for her. Barbara (16), was asked and agreed. She started to write to her new pen-pal in Australia. Her name was Marie. During the War, their letters were always marked 'opened by the censor'. If the censor thought something in the letter could be dangerous if it fell into enemy hands it was cut out with scissors and destroyed.

In the beginning both of the girls shared their feelings about music, their families, movie stars and their heart throbs. Barbara's favorite was Frank Sinatra. Later on they shared their college years, dating and eventually their marriages, families and beyond. Now, 79 years later, they still communicate with each other. In 2015 Marie, her pen-pal from Australia finally came to San Diego to meet Barbara!! What a monumental visit it was.

The day World War II ended- Barbara was working and as soon as she heard about it-her boss let her leave. She and a co-worker friend went down to Market Street in San Francisco where thousands of people were in the street singing and dancing.

In 1946 Barbara started to work as a secretary to the Supervisor of the Service Dept. at the American Can Company in San Francisco. One day in 1948, she met Lew Lowdon, a clerk in the Engineers Dept. of the American Can Company. They both worked in the same building, but, on different floors. Lew would always find an excuse to visit Barbara by asking her to type a letter for him. Sometimes, he would find a reason to make a correction to the letter so he had an excuse to visit her again. Their peers finally caught on to their budding romance and decided to set them up. They devised a way to have them be in charge of finding a venue for the American Can Company's annual Christmas party. They had to go and try the food in many restaurants, so, their dating history began!

2 years later, Lew wanted to propose marriage to Barbara. But, he couldn't marry her unless he became a Catholic. One day, he was having lunch near a Catholic Church. He noticed that people were going in and coming out 15 minutes later. He thought this was strange. So, he went inside and asked the priest, 'don't people like church, they are coming in and leaving soon after'? The priest replied, 'yes, very much, they are just coming in and praying during their lunch hour'. So, Lew decided to give the religion a try. He secretly went to classes and finally became a Catholic. Soon after he proposed to Barbara on her parents front porch. Lew was Barbara's first steady boyfriend. He was very polite and treated her well. These were the first qualities that attracted her to him. So, in 1950, they married in San Francisco at the Church of the Epiphany next door to where Barbara attended Catholic High School.

In Lew's parents' 1942 Pontiac, they set out for their honeymoon. They drove to Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Palm Springs, Las Vegas, Yuma, Arizona, Calexico and Mexicali. One hotel they stayed in cost only \$6.50 a night, a lot in those days! After the honeymoon they found a small apartment in the Mission District of San Francisco and continued to work at the American Can

Company.

In 1951, just a few short months after getting married, Lew, who was a World War II veteran, had previously signed up for the Navy Reserves, was sent to Japan during the Korean War. Barbara was pregnant with their first child, so had to stay behind in San Francisco. Fortunately, Lew got to come home for the birth of their son, Fred. When Fred was 5 months old, Mom and baby traveled to Japan by boat to Yokohama, Japan where Lew was stationed.

After 1 more year in Japan, they all traveled back to San Francisco and Lew resumed his job at the American Can Company as an equipment service man for the Sacramento valley. In 1955, Lew and family moved to Yuba City and bought their first house. Alan was born there. 2 years later, they all moved to Auburn, Ca. where Jeanette, Theresa and Linda were born. In 1963, they moved to Tustin, Ca. as Lew was now the service man for the San Diego area. In 1964, the family packed up and moved across America to Norwalk, Connecticut because Lew was transferred to the American Can Company headquarters in New York City. John, their last child was born in Connecticut.

All the children enjoyed their childhood in Connecticut with year round interests of ice skating, sledding, swimming, biking and playing. The girls made lifelong friends, with Barbara and Kathy Braun, their playmates, who after more than 54 years still keep in touch.

Barbara was very crafty. She made many of her girls dresses and even sewed matching dresses for the girls Barbie dolls. She also taught the girls how to crochet. She was a fantastic baker, so all the girls learned how to bake. Lew, was a great cook, something he picked up in the Navy and from his mother, so, the girls learned how to prepare some real tasty recipes.

In 1969, the family moved back to California. In 1972, some of the family moved to Newport Pagnell, England, where Lew, now a machinist, was sent to train the sister company. While there, they made lifelong friends and saw many countries in Europe. After 2 years there, the family moved back to California. In 1977, Lew retired after 31 years at the American Can

Company. Barbara, who worked at AAA, finally retired in 1986. Then the 2 began to travel in their trailer all over America.

They eventually moved up to Nevada City, Ca., and then on to Central Point, Oregon. There they became members of the Road Runners trailer club and traveled as a group making lots of memories.

Each winter they would travel from Oregon as snowbirds to Yuma, Arizona, where they honeymooned. While there, they donated their time to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society from 1994-2004. They worked tirelessly putting in over 10,000 hours in the community and in the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society's thrift shop repairing, pricing and cleaning items for sale. The Society helps Sailors and Marines with all of their needs. Barbara also made and donated crocheted baby sweaters and bonnets for young families. Barbara even entered the Yuma County Fair and won ribbons for her crochet work.

While in Oregon they also donated their time to the Providence Medford Medical Center in the Emergency Department running errands for the team. They even received a certificate of merit for their efforts.

Barbara and Lew spent 62 glorious years together, traveling, raising a family and giving back to society in countless hours of volunteer time surely set a perfect example of how to love and give with faith in God. When the need arose, they were always there. Their children could all see the commitments they have given to everyone around them and especially their devotion to God in their daily lives. They also saw them lean on their Shepherd and believe he will pull them through life however hard it may be. It taught them that love and dependability on the Lord does have its rewards.

In 2013, Lew passed away and the family moved Barbara to San Diego to be near her family. Of course she lived in a Catholic Assisted Living home! She attended mass every day for 5 years and made many friends. The nuns were very strict, she always used to say! She became a mild celebrity last year as a documentary was made about a local San Diego Doctor that visits assisted living homes as a mobile doc. Barbara was chosen for the documentary as the

star patient who would then be on Sharp Healthcare TV commercials. One day, her daughter Jeanette was watching TV and saw her Mom!!

Now, she has moved to Stellar Care where new memories are being made. Her daughter, Jeanette, who lives nearby, attends Bible Study at Stellar Care with her Mom and takes her to church, shopping and outings. She also has regular visits from her Grandson Tony and his wife Catherine as well as their 2 children, Katie (4) and Alex (2). She also has another Grandson, John and his wife Jessica who visit and live nearby.