



Reflections - Growing up in Mulford Gardens In the early Fourties

By **Kathe King McColl**
West Ave. 135th

Kathe McColl is a true native of Mulford Gardens, born here and has lived here all her life. Kathy wrote this story back in 1990 for MGIA's 50th anniversary. She still lives here and still loves Mulford Gardens.



Kathe - 1951

What a great place Mulford Gardens was for a kid to grow up. No smog, no traffic, no crime worries as we see them today. Plenty of open fields filled with poppies and other wild flowers, and of course the wonderful open waterfront of the Bay, totally wild and undeveloped at that time. We never got tired of exploring that waterfront. No bored kids here on summer vacation. Right after breakfast, make a bag lunch, hop on your bike and down to the bay we'd go. Explore the beach for treasures, build sand castles, jump from rock to rock, find sand crabs, splash around in the water, build a raft out of scrap wood that had washed ashore. There were endless things to do.

Once my friend Annabelle McDonald (McGeorge, now) we were paddling our raft in the large canal that emptied into the bay. We had taken off our good "school shoes" and put them on a rock so as not to get wet

and muddy. We knew we shouldn't have worn them in the first place. Mom would not be happy. In those hard times school shoes were an expensive item and a pair

had to last the entire school year. A couple of teenage boys came up riding their bikes. They spotted our shoes, picked them up and waved them at us as they rode off laughing. We knew



Annabelle & Kathe

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we were going to be in big trouble when we got home. Luckily later we found them about a half mile down the trail. What a relief. Boys weren't too bad after all.

Sometimes I ponder how I came to be born in this particular spot of the world. My dad, Bill King, traveled a lot in his younger years. He was born in England, near London. At fifteen years of age, he ran away from home, stowing aboard a ship. He didn't know where he was going, said he didn't care. He just wanted to get away from England. He ended up in South Africa, living there for eight years in a small village and working in a diamond mine. He loved the people there. His next move was Canada, where he lived another eight years and homesteaded a large piece of land, later working with the Royal Mounted Police. Finally he migrated down the west coast of good old U.S.A. When he got to Mulford Gardens he stopped. He said, "This is the best. This is where I'll spend the rest of my life, between the sparkling bay and the green rolling hills. This was in 1927.

I think my father was rather a typical of the kind of person who settled here - adventurous, independent, appreciative of the freedom that allowed his style - Where you made it on your own.

My parents and grandparents settled on West Avenue 135th. My mother's parents (William and Anna Meinoke) had immigrated from Hamburg Germany. At first they lived in San Leandro, in a duplex on Williams St. (near Washington Avenue). My mother and her first husband occupied the other half of the duplex, along with my brother Gert. After the death of Gert's father, my mother married Bill King and I was born after they moved to Mulford Gardens, where together my dad and grandparents owned seven lots on the north side of the street, between Menlo and Shoreline (now Doolittle Drive). At first our home

was just a garage. My grandparents lived next door, in a garage too. We slowly added rooms on until we ended up with a very comfortable, modern home, one to be proud of. We had a lovely garden, almost like a park, with shrubs, trees and flowers. Often on Sunday afternoons we had friends and family over for a "garden party", munching on fresh cracked crab, french bread, salad and of course sipping a little wine. It was a great time!

The lot next to us, where Doug and I live now, was all planted in vegetables for my grandparents and my family. We had about ten different kinds. It was a living grocery store. My mom and grandmother would can during the summer, so we had plenty of food to last through the winter. If not for that, there would have been some pretty lean times during the second World War. Remember when meat was rationed? and gas? I remember thinking how much work that canning seemed to be. I tried it once, and I was right. People did not complain about all the work. They just did what had to be done, focusing on the good in our lives.

During the depression my grandparents struggled to make a living. At one time their entire back yard was planted in gladiolas. When they bloomed, Grandfather would cut them, as many as he could carry, and travel by train to San Francisco, where he would sell them on the street corner. Sometimes others in our family would also go, carrying all the gladiolas they could. On the way home from these trips, Grandfather would stop at the Housewives Market in Oakland to buy a roast for dinner. He also started his own business on the back of his property, the "Horse Tail Business." It was a lucrative one, and in only ten years he had made enough money to retire.

My dad and mother had a chicken ranch in our back yard, with as many as a thousand chickens at a time. Dad worked as

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manager and bookkeeper for the San Leandro Lumber Company on San Leandro Blvd., but he quit and took over the Horse Tail Business when Grandfather retired.

What in the world is the "Horse Tail Business" you ask? Okay, one more time. It was actually the horse hair that was needed. Most all of Europe used it to stuff arm chairs, couches and mattresses. It is very resilient, natural fiber that will last a lifetime. Dad would drive down the California coast, stopping at slaughter houses to pick up the tails, which were considered waste. The horse meat was used to make canned pet food in those days. (My nieces, who have their own horse, cringe at the thought. I don't think this is done any more.) Dad would haul the tails home, shave the hair off the tail, wash it in big 6' x 8' x 4' cement basins in our back yard. The hair was then dried and put up in 200 pound bales. Finally a shipment of about 2,000 pounds was shipped out of the Port of Oakland to Belgium, where they distributed it throughout Europe. He worked long, hard hours for about a month or two to get a shipment ready, then would take a couple months off. Then repeat the whole thing. It was a smelly job, but a lucrative one, and he also retired after ten years. Can you imagine, when I was in the first grade at school and the kids would ask me, "What does your Dad do?" By the time I got to high School, I learned to say he was in the "export business."

Each and every one of the first people who settled in this unique spot was a real pioneer in his own right.

I can remember the large open area across the street from us. A large flock of sheep was kept there - close to 200 of them. An electric barbed-wire fence enclosed the area to keep them in. The shepherd would allow Judy Watters and me in, so we could play with the

lambs. When no one was around, Judy and I would try to get each other to touch the fence to see what it would feel like. Fortunately neither of us ever did.

I attended a variety of schools, and we were picked up by a school bus which, on rainy days, would deposit us at our homes on the return trip. I attended kindergarten and the first grade at Washington; then grades two and three at Lincoln; fourth and fifth at Woodrow Wilson, and finally sixth at Garfield. Our class was the second to graduate, in 1950, from Garfield, and I remember Jeannie Kellogg and I played a violin and piano duet at the ceremony.

It's good thinking back to those "good old days." I didn't wander very far, Doug and I and our son Mike live right next door to my old childhood home. We still enjoy the country feel of the neighborhood- large lots, the trees and greenery all around, and the privacy. We now enjoy the Marina in a different way, as we ride our bikes on the trails and keep our sailboat there. People travel from Santa Cruz, Livermore and Tracy, to keep their boats in such a beautiful Marina. We enjoy our neighbors - not only the ones we have known through decades, but also our new ones. It seems a certain kind of person is drawn to this area. They have a certain spirit and a zest for life.

Mulford Gardens, a great place to enjoy the good life."

- Kathy King McColl