

## Tribute to my Father (with Photos)

George Rex Gardiner

By Vicki Gardiner Taylor

Dad was surprised. Shocked even. "I've come to apologize to you," I told him, "for having been such a rebellious daughter." Dad was a bit puzzled, but still graciously accepted my apology, adding that there was no need to ask for his forgiveness. It was 1974 – Dad was 52 and I was 26. As a teenager I had run away from home a number of times, always to San Francisco or Berkeley, where I eventually lived as a flower child and an angry, protesting hippie. For several years I had been searching for truth and love in all the wrong places, including cults and communes, but instead I had ended up as an exhausted parent raising twins alone. A few months before my talk with Dad, I had begun attending a little church in Marin County where the Christian people told me, "Go back to your family. Live independently, but move back to where you grew up. Begin to rebuild the bridges you've blown up, and honor your father and mother for a change." So I did, reluctantly at first, and imperfectly, I'm sure. Now, decades later, I'm so glad I went back, because since that 1974 talk with my Dad, he and I have been able to share some good times and loving memories that otherwise we would have missed out on entirely.

Just a few years ago, for example, when Dad and I began working together on a photo history of Los Altos Hills, it became clear that he was the last surviving co-founder of the town during its incorporation in 1956. But by 2012, virtually no one in Los Altos Hills remembered the role that Rex Gardiner had played in the creation of their city. Dad did not push for recognition for himself, but I did – at least a little. So after a few calls and letters to the Los Altos Town Crier and the Mayor of Los Altos Hills (Gary Waldeck) and after meeting with the Town Historian (Jitze Couperus), in 2013 Rex Gardiner was officially recognized as a Co-Founder of Los Altos Hills. Dad was pretty thrilled, and so was I! Gary was here earlier today. I'm grateful to Gary and Jitze for their part in recognizing Rex.

Back in 1950, in the Post-WWII boom years and several years before our new town was born, Dad moved our family from the little house on Raymond Street in San Jose to our brand new Eichler home, located in what is now called Los Altos Hills. I remember that as a very small child, I would hold my Dad's hand as we walked sunny paths through grasses that grew higher than my head, surrounded by poppies, purple lupine and fragrant wild sweet peas. Even though I was only three or four years old, I loved "hiking" through the beautiful hills and meadows that made up our neighborhood with my tall, strong father. Since there was no town yet, neighbors had to take care of a lot of things by themselves – for example, there was no city water supply, so in those early years - believe it or not - we all drank water pumped directly and unprocessed from Adobe Creek! (And we survived!) Dad would walk with me through the field across from our house, up to the magnificent Tudor Mansion that we all called "The Castle." There Dad would meet with John Ford, our next door neighbor and the principal/owner of the Ford Country Day School (currently called The Morgan Manor). Rex and John were responsible for keeping clean water running to our homes, so sometimes we would all walk together down the hill to the little pump house on what is now Foothill College property, where I got to "help" Dad and John Ford fix the water pump. And sometimes we had to pull leaves and even frogs from the water tank on the hill. Believe me, it was a big day in our neighborhood when Hetch Hetchy water was finally brought in.

*Tribute to my Father, Continued:*

In those days, the rolling hills in Santa Clara Valley on the west side of San Francisco Bay, in and around Los Altos Hills, were still sprinkled with oak trees and wild flowers, and carpeted with orchards. My father and mother (Phyllis) loved the area so much that in 1947, they chose to be married at the magnificent Adobe Creek Lodge located near today's Hidden Villa, where the Duvenecks lived. Adobe Creek Lodge was an incredible local resort with sprawling lawns, swimming pools and charming Tudor style buildings, where families could picnic, listen to live music, rest in the shadows of the towering oak trees, swim, sunbathe, or simply relax and enjoy their "vacation for a day" with friends and family. It was Dad's kind of place! Since I was born in 1948, I was able to appreciate Adobe Creek Lodge in its heyday. Some years later, when I was a teenager needing to recover from a serious illness, Dad and I actually stayed in one of the Tudor cottages at Adobe Creek Lodge. It was a memorable time and place.

More recently – in fact, only a few months ago – my husband & I and two of my cousins spent the afternoon and had dinner with my Dad (their Uncle Rex). He was 93 when he moved to the local retirement home where we met and enjoyed a wonderful day listening to Rex's stories, swapping humorous anecdotes and sharing in lively conversation. At one point my cousin Debbie asked Rex two deeply thoughtful questions, "What was the happiest day of your life? And what was the saddest day of your life?" My Dad thought for a while before answering, "The saddest day of my life was when Craig (his son) died." He thought a while longer and added, "The happiest day of my life was when I met your mother."

But nothing on earth lasts forever. Sadly, beautiful Adobe Creek Lodge was bulldozed and Dad's first marriage ended years ago. However, Dad did not give up and he went on to establish his second family with Rita, and Rex is beloved by all his living sons and daughters who are here today to honor him. Altogether Dad raised seven children: four sons by birth, two daughters by marriage, and *one* daughter by birth (that would be me!). Dad and I have so much in common - and it's not just because I *look* so much like my father. We also shared a sense of humor, an analytical mind, a love of the great outdoors (especially Yosemite) and an appreciation for personal freedom and liberty. With regard to my faith in God, Dad and I agreed to disagree. Dad was proud to have helped start three things that are still thriving: a family, a business and a town. Today our Dad leaves behind a legacy to be respected by all his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, from California to Australia, and beyond.

A few days after my Dad passed on (in August of 2015), I wrote:

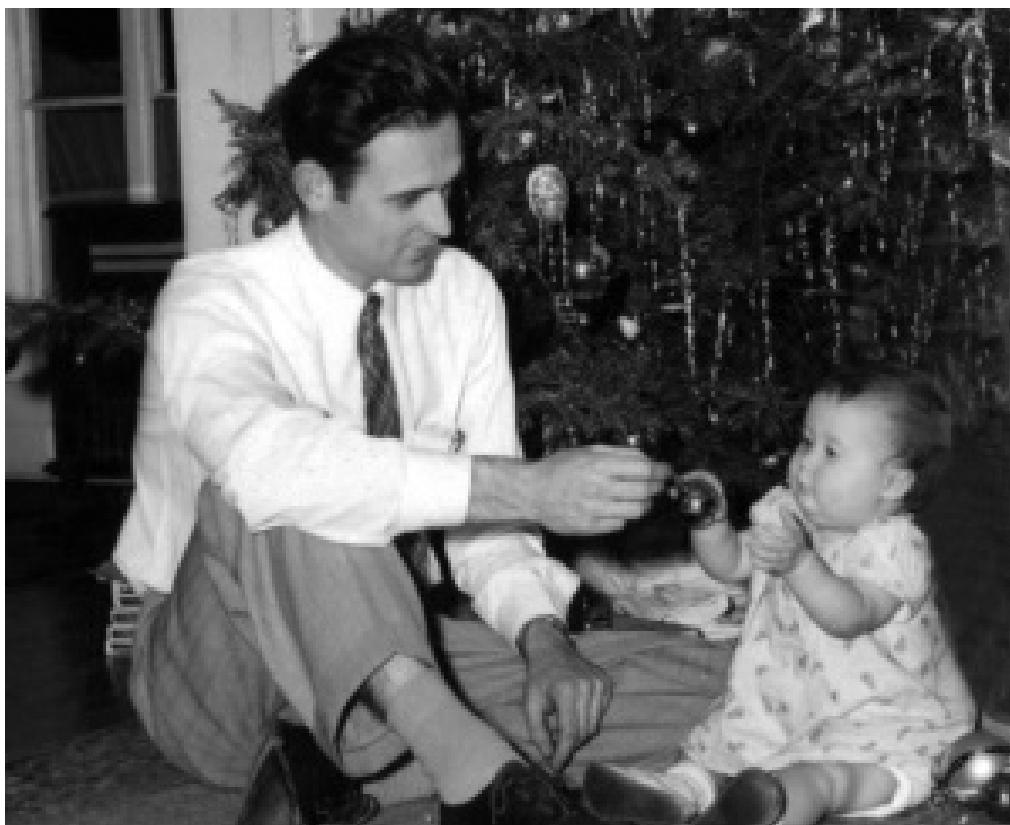
... "My Dad passed away last Sunday. I'm thankful he was able to recognize us and appreciated people's company, even in his last days. His last words were 'thank you.' In some ways losing my father has been like losing a magnificent Sequoia tree, knowing the tall tree has at last fallen to the forest floor to rest."

R.I.P. George Rex Gardiner, 1922-2015.

Goodbye, Dad.



1947, Rex Gardiner on his Honeymoon, Big Sur, California



1948, First Christmas with daughter Vicki who was born in January that year



*1953, Rex and Phyllis Gardiner, Yosemite, California*



1953 photo of Rex Gardiner in unfenced Los Altos Hills fields near his new 1950 Eichler home. Rex helped incorporate LAH in 1956. Printed in Los Altos town Crier with January 2, 2013 article; Photo courtesy Rex's daughter Vicki Taylor.



2014, Rex waving Goodbye from his home in Mountain View, where he lived until he was 93.

My Dad passed on in 2015 at Kaiser Hospital Santa Clara, after being hospitalized for heart and lung problems, having spent only a few months in nearby retirement homes. He thanked the hospital staff and assured his children (all his living children were there) that he loved them, and then passed on quietly in his sleep.





Vicki & her husband Morgan at Rex's Celebration of Life.