

I REMEMBER ELMARIE

by Joanie Hyler as told to Dixie Layne

I don't believe there is a more idyllic place to grow-up than Pacific Grove – this heavenly place with its rocky coastline and abundance of flora and fauna. And tucked within this remarkable place that I considered just one big playground was my family, five generations of Hurlberts-Hylers and Ernst-Deans. It never occurred to me as a child how lucky I was to be surrounded by a family who are and were so much a part of the fabric that makes Pacific Grove our hometown.

My parents Bill and Olive Dean Hyler, raised their three daughters, Deanna, Gail, and me in the same house on 19th Street where my great grandparents Hurlbert lived and raised their children, Elmarie and Elgin. My grandmother Elmarie also lived in this house with her two boys, Bill and Bob, after their father, Nelson Hyler's death. My earliest memory of my paternal Grandmother Elmarie was of her and Grandpa Clyde Dyke living in their home on Lighthouse Avenue. This house has since been move to Surf Avenue – they used to do that back in the day, move houses when they wanted to use the lot for something else. My maternal grandparents, Ted and Gladys Ernst Dean (Gladys was Nana to me) lived in a large house on Forest Avenue, just a few houses up from Lovers Point. I was a lucky girl to be surrounded by so many generations of family: grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and siblings in this most remarkable small town.

My sisters were four and seven years older than me, which made them teenagers when I was a child and left me to have my own childhood experiences and memories. I remember spending the night at Nana's house and her tucking me into bed, our baking cookies, and her hugs. Then there was Ahree; I don't know why my sisters and I called our paternal grandmother Ahree – other than she didn't want to be called grandma. Maybe as toddlers Ahree was our best pronunciation of Elmarie.

Anyway, as a child I remember Ahree was the grandmother who took me to concerts and the theater where we would go back stage and everyone knew her. We also visited museums and galleries, and then there was that most memorable trip to Yellowstone – just the two of us. She was always interested in what I was learning at school, she gave me a Samsonite train case and suitcase for high school graduation. I don't remember that there were ever any family functions at her house, never a meal served – well, maybe she made us soup, simple things sometimes. She wasn't much of a cook. No, she was the world-wind grandmother, she was always about something. Elmarie was a force of nature.

I was eight years old when my grandmother began working on the one thing she would be most remembered by generations of Pacific Grove residents who knew her then and know of her now. My grandmother Ahree was Mrs. Elmarie Leslie Hurlbert Hyler Dyke – matriarch of the Feast of Lanterns.

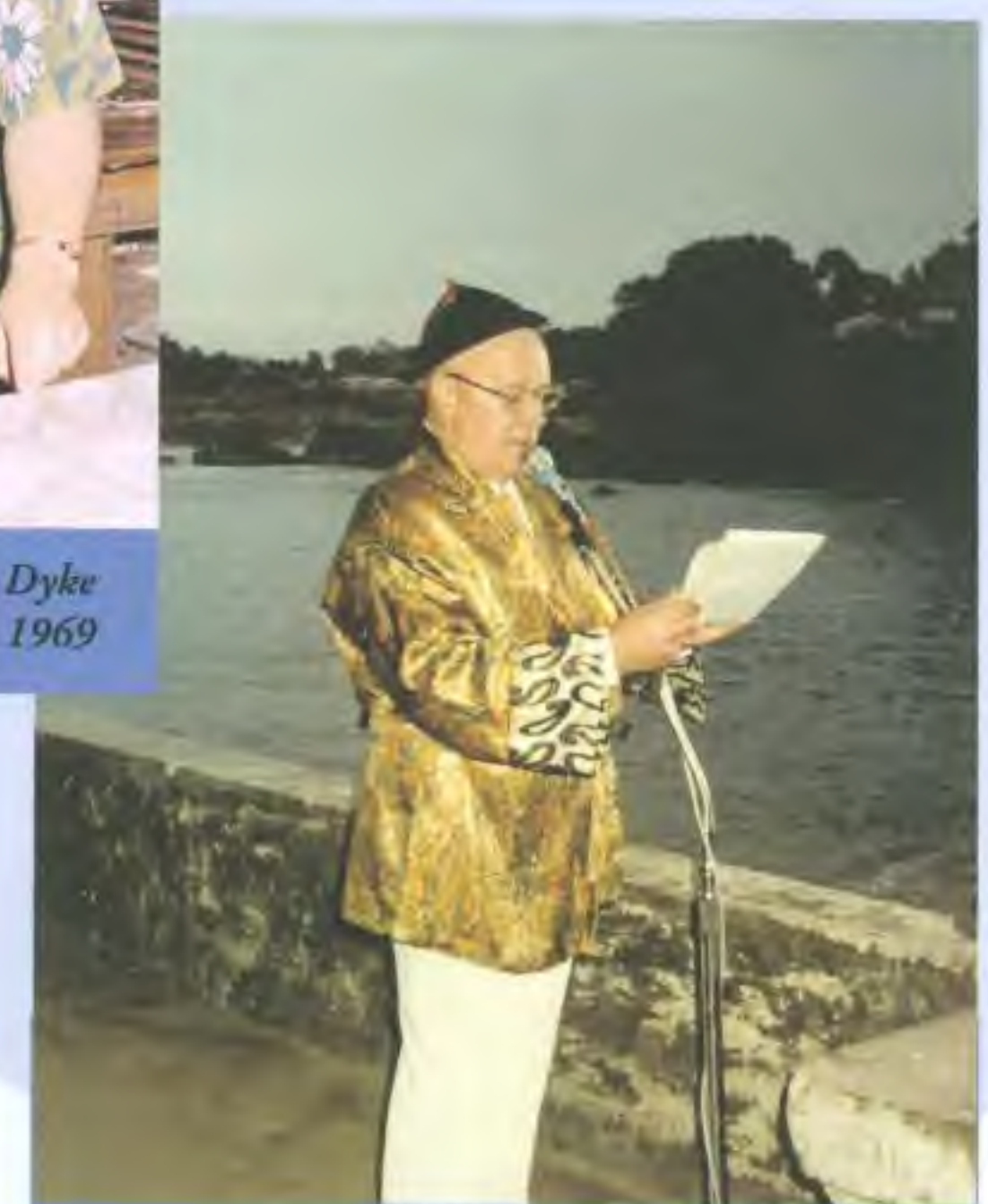
You'd think there would have been quite a hullabaloo around the house when Mayor Frank Shropshire asked my grandfather, Councilman Clyde Dyke to chair the City's revival of the Feast of Lanterns, but I don't remember anyone being all that excited about it. Grandpa Clyde was a smart man, and as Committee Chair he immediately asked his wife, Elmarie to join the committee, and she agreed – for just this first year. Then the Mayor suggested his wife, Helen could also assist the committee as she just happened to be the director of the Miss Monterey County Pageant, which was part of the Miss America pageant. The original Feast of Lanterns committee was comprised of primarily City department heads, my grandmother, and the mayor's wife. I think we all know who ended-up getting the job done.



Elmarie Hurlbert Hyler Dyke



Elmarie Hurlbert Hyler Dyke with Joanie Hyler, 1969



Bill Hyler Narrates the Feast, 1981

As you'd suspect, my early memories of the Feast of Lanterns are limited, but there were some standout moments for this eight year old that are probably not much different from those of many young girls who attend their first Feast of Lanterns and meet their first Royal Court – I just happened to have a front row seat. I remember Grandpa Dyke asked me to hold the Queen's crown, thus the tradition began – I was the first crown bearer. I remember I was up on a balcony with the Queen and there were lots of people below us. I was scared, too shy to say or do anything – just hold the crown. I was in awe of the Queen; she was very nice and smelled good. I remember Herb Miller and his orchestra played music on Lovers Point beach with the great stone wall as their backdrop. Later that evening I went to Nana's house on Forest Avenue with my family. We went upstairs and from there we had a perfect view of Lovers Point. Until I graduated high school, this is where I joined my family to watch the Pageant on the pier every year. Elmarie was always on the pier with the Royal Court. Then there were fireworks. I learned sometime later that my father had made the first mortar boxes for the fireworks. The PG fire department's Don Gasperson built the Torri gate and Roger Brown of the PG fire department shot the fireworks off for many years. It was a hometown thing.

The older I got the more I remember about the Feast of Lanterns, like the go cart races down Alder Street and the synchronized swimming in the Plunge at Lovers Point. By the time I was 11, I was fully immersed in PG's summer festival. My oldest sister Deanna married in 1960, so she wasn't all that involved in it. I was in 7th grade