

the first time my sister Gail was a princess. I was a freshman at Pacific Grove High when she was crowned Queen Topaz in 1965. I was so excited, and proud of her. I know now that from 1958 through 1964 the Queen and Princesses were selected from the Miss Monterey County contestants but after the Miss Monterey County Pageant was moved to Fresno, Elmarie began selecting the Royal Court from PG High School students and recent graduates. Her criteria, their family must be actively engaged in the community. No one questioned her judgment.

By the time I was in Junior High, I had become quite a help to Ahree and I really loved being part of everything. Whenever my grandmother needed help, I was there to help her. Whether it was loading or unloading things for any of the many events, stuffing envelopes, selling lanterns, helping at the Lovers Point barbecue, or selling souvenirs and fireworks buttons I was there to help. One year I even rode in the 4th of July parade as Princess Amethyst because my sister Gail couldn't make it. That was the year Vicki Samora was Queen Topaz.

As my high school graduation neared I began to wonder if I would get to be part of the Royal Court like my sister. I brought this up to Ahree one day, and was surprised by her response, "you're not princess material." Her reply bewildered me; I wondered what she had meant. At first I thought it was because as a young girl I was such a tomboy and by the time I graduated high school I was a hippie. Nevertheless, until I graduated high school I was by her side, helping and volunteering. Even after I married in 1969, I continued to help.

I was so proud of my grandmother for all she accomplished. I was and am particularly proud that she was in charge of the Feast of Lanterns, that she had created this wonderful festival and managed it for 23 years. The community looked up to her. That's not to say I didn't take advantage of her position in the community and mine as her granddaughter. I'd drop her name whenever it would take me where I wanted to go – like onto the pier during the Feast of Lanterns or backstage at a concert. "I'm Elmarie's granddaughter", was a fantastic VIP pass.

In 1981, just months before the Feast of Lanterns my beloved grandmother died. This caused lots of discussions to take place in City Hall and throughout Pacific Grove: What do we do, cancel it?

Who can possibly step-up to manage this tiger? And this is when I began to understand – I was executive director material like my Ahree. I was her mini-me. I had been training for this most of my life. I was not princess material. I don't think she thought the handoff would be quite so abrupt – but here was my destiny.

I called on my friend Becky DeSmet to ask her what she thought should be done because she became Elmarie's Feast of Lanterns assistant after her reign as Queen Topaz 1975. We talked and decided we needed to do this to honor Elmarie. As Elmarie would have said, "the show must go on." So we picked up the torch, or in this case a lighted lantern and began putting together the festival.

As has always been the Hurlbert Hyler tradition, the family and extended family pulled together. Becky and I were named co-executive directors, my daughter Trisha Muënych served as the crown bearer, my father Bill Hyler was the Pageant narrator, and my mother Olive was the treasurer. And for all we did in 1981, I have but only one regret – we did not name Becky's sister Jackie DeSmet Queen Topaz that year. We thought it best if we waited until next year, but next year never came.

I know Elmarie was with us every step of the way because there was definitely an angel riding with us that year. She was riding shot gun in my 1972 Chevy Blazer as I set out to deliver all the tabloids across the Peninsula. My poor truck almost collapsed under the weight; new shocks were required after all the deliveries were made. And then there was the near sinking of the swan boat. The swan boat was escorted to the pier by the Coast Guard from the Monterey Marina with our honorable boat rowers Franz Limper and Joe Krantz at the helm. The swan boat served as a not-so reliable mode of transportation for Queen Topaz and Chang's escape from the pier that evening – luckily they made it to dry land without incident. It was on the swan boat's return trip to the marina when the Coast Guard declared the swan boat "no longer sea worthy". I believe that was the last year the swan boat was used by the Feast of Lanterns.

Since 1981, I have continued to volunteer to help with any number of Feast of Lanterns activities, from selling lanterns and serving salads to acting as a Royal Court judge and serving on the Board of Directors in 2009, 2017, and 2018. I was Queen Mother in 1991 when my daughter Trisha Muënych Randall was Queen Topaz. The Feast of Lanterns is in my blood.



*The 1967 Royal Court with Elmarie*



*Co-executive Directors Joanie and Becky with Trisha as Crown Bearer and the 1981 Royal Court*



*Elmarie with Vice-President Gerald Ford*