

# Humboldt State College

## Memories of the World War II Years

HUMBOLDT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*Don and Gayle Karshner's new life together is just beginning, when the war changes everything.*

*By Gayle Karshner*

The year 1941 seems like yesterday because the events and times are so vividly etched in my memory. My husband, Don Karshner, and I had driven our two-door '36 Chevrolet from Stanford to Arcata where he was to be head of the Speech and Drama Department at Humboldt State College for a yearly salary of \$2400. President Arthur S. Gist had interviewed us earlier that summer in San Francisco under a palm tree in the Stewart Hotel lobby, and had made the decision to hire Don—even though I did not play bridge. He assured me that all the faculty wives played bridge.

Don was indebted to George Murphy, a talented, ebullient English teacher who had just finished his first year teaching at HSC. He and Don were old friends; they had taught together in Aberdeen and Seattle, Washington, and had attended

graduate school together at Stanford. George had promoted our coming. As we drove around Humboldt Bay on arrival, I recall being struck by the beauty of the fields with cows and egrets juxtaposed. Arcata, known as "The White City" because all houses were white, had a population of 2,550 and Humboldt State had 368 students.

### Arcata in the '40s

Our home was a one-bedroom cottage on the northwest corner of 16<sup>th</sup> and I Streets owned by Evelyn Fielding and distinguished by a glorious bay tree. When I ordered groceries by telephone from Brizard's, I'd give my address as Miss Fielding's house under the big bay tree. The groceries were left on the kitchen table; we never locked our doors. On our porch each morning was a glass bottle filled with unhomogenized



*September 1941. Gayle and Don at their first Arcata house, with the big bay tree, at 16th and I.*

milk topped with three inches of whippable cream. There was no mail delivery; everyone walked to the tiny post office with well-worn wooden floors in the 800 block on H Street. Serving as postmistresses were the two dour Durdan sisters.

The "gulch" that coursed through town, where the freeway is now, collected the drainage from the septic tanks from the east side, including

PHOTO COURTESY OF GAYLE KARSHNER.



*View from the steps of Founders Hall, taken by Charles Fulkerson during WWII. At left is the College Elementary School, now Gist Hall; the house at center belonged to Myrtle McKittrick. In the foreground are the college tennis courts.*

the campus; the west side of town had sewers. The William Lanpheres lived in a house backed by the ditch and objected strongly to the open sewage. Wild sweet peas covered the banks of the gulch.

Little building had taken place since the 1920s, and there were still many beautiful old houses when Don and I arrived in Arcata. The Paul Brizard home and gardens, including a giant cypress tree, covered the block south of the Presbyterian Church on G Street. This house would soon be razed to build the Arcata Theater. Henry Brizard's home was a 1920s mansion on a few landscaped and wooded acres at 14<sup>th</sup> and F Streets. The property extended east with a field that was a mass of white "snowdrops" in the spring. This home was one of many that would be sacrificed in the 1974 construction of the freeway. The Noah Falk mansion with carriage house and gardens covered the block between G and H Streets at the top of the hill. A wooden sidewalk surrounded it, one of many in the downtown area. The former railway station, Brizard's farm warehouse, filled with hay, seed, etc. oc-

cupied the site of the present post office and had a high wooden sidewalk where it was not uncommon for us to see rats scurrying.

Older persons spoke of going to San Francisco by ship, but in 1941 the Northwestern Pacific railroad as well as Highway 101 connected

us to the Bay Area, and highways went east and north, but they were two-lane and partly unpaved. Winter storms frequently wiped out the railroad tracks at the Scotia bluffs, and slides closed the highways. Even in good weather, Humboldt was difficult to reach. Isolated from the rest of the state, the area was very pro-

*The Paul Brizard house stood at 11th and G Streets, across 11th Street from the Presbyterian Church, which can be seen in the back lower left.*





*Emmalina Thompson, Assistant to Financial Secretary; Myrtle McKittrick, Registrar; Frances Balabanis, Assistant to Registrar; Jessie T. Woodcock, Financial Secretary; Margaret Brookins, Student Controller; and Clair Gustafson, Secretary to the President.*

vincial. Wisely, Ruth Gist, the president's wife, cautioned me to speak only the true and the beautiful about others because everyone in Humboldt County was related.

### The College

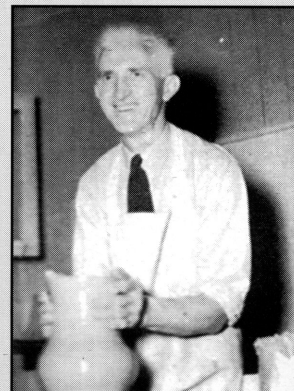
Founded in 1913, the college had started as a Normal School to train teachers. Eureka and Arcata vied for the institution, but Arcata won by a single vote, largely because William Preston and members of the Union Water Company—N. H. Falk, Len Yocum, Arthur Way, and Kate Harpst—donated land for the site. The donated property ran to the top of the ridge where there is a wide flat area above the forest with a magnificent view of the ocean; this was the spot Preston had envisioned for the campus. The argument for its actual location was: "The proposed streetcar will stop at Union and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets. How will the students climb to the top?" Of course, no streetcars ever appeared in Arcata.

Tucked against the hill, the campus has always seemed congested. It was particularly difficult for handicapped students and staff. Another frequent complaint about Founders Hall has been its stucco and tile construction, inappropriate for rainy Humboldt County. Historically state architects have disregarded the wetness of

our region. When originally built, the arches surrounding the courtyard were not glassed in, leaving the rain and wind to drench the hallways. Such were the tales we heard from the old-timers—the Hicklins, Telonichers, Balabanises, Hadleys, MacGinities, Arnolds, and others.

In 1941, the "permanent" campus consisted of what is now Founders Hall, a new dormitory named Nelson Hall, the College Elementary School, the president's home, the tiny gymnasium, and a stadium forever under construction by the WPA. Home football games were played in Eureka High School's Albee Stadium. "Temporary" (World War I-surplus) wooden structures extended south from the main building. Formerly used for the College Elementary School, in 1941 they housed the bookstore, coffee shop, a dance hall, and "Pop" Jenkins' woodwork and pottery classrooms. Pop—tall, white-haired, with blue eyes—was a beloved faculty member. During the Depression years he had kept a giant cast iron pot filled with beans, soup, or stew for needy, hungry students, and during the World War II years he used it to fry doughnuts for all.

Coeducational Nelson Hall housed boys in the East wing and girls in the North, and the dining room and social hall were between the



*Pop Jenkins, Industrial Arts teacher, with one of his pots.*

wings. Single Mady Platt, a business teacher, served as housemother, and single John Van Duzer, a stagecraft teacher, supervised the boys. After a night of Halloween pranks, the marquee of the new Arcata Theater on G Street, then Highway 101, read for all the world to see: JOHN VAN DUZER AND MADY PLATT IN TWIN BEDS. Fortunately, both took the joke in stride.

*Jean and Charles Fulkerson in about 1940*



Houses crowded close to the campus buildings, many of them faculty homes. The public street ran through the campus to the steps of Founders Hall and on around the tennis courts on the flat below. The library occupied a large room with a balcony on the south end of Founders Hall. C. E. Graves was librarian and Helen Everett his assistant. Helen and I were friends from Eugene, Oregon. She claimed an earlier librarian had arranged the books according to size and color! It was during her reign as head librarian that the Dewey decimal system was adopted.

Charles and Jean Fulkerson were the only other new faculty in 1941. Jean and I were both pregnant, our babies scheduled for the spring. Charles, born in Crannell, was well known throughout Humboldt for his brilliant piano playing, both classical and jazz. He had married Jean, a fine cellist, at San Jose State before returning to teach at HSC. At San Jose, Charles had run for student body president with the slogan "Scholarships, not battleships!" Threat of war plagued our generation.

### The Warm Welcome

Entertaining the new faculty was an annual ritual. Arthur and Ruth Gist held a formal reception at their campus home that brought guests from far and wide. A dynamic woman with a great sense of humor, Ruth Gist was the public relations expert for HSC. Well known as a speaker, she worked full time in her role as the president's wife. Everyone was hospitable; we were dinner guests in every faculty home that first year, and parents of students—the Elmores, the Roscoes, and the Winzlers—entertained us. It was heartwarming.

Martha and English professor Maurice Hicklin, whom we had met earlier at Stanford, were particularly kind to us. Martha, a southern lady, told interesting stories about the college. One former professor and his wife, a trapeze artist, lived in the bungalow just north of the

Presbyterian Church on G Street. Regularly the wife, in brief costume, worked out on the trapeze they had erected on the minuscule front lawn. She stopped traffic. I never pass that house without thinking of Martha's story.

We were impressed with the wide front entrance-way to Founders Hall where the Winged Victory statue stood on the tile floor. The door to President Gist's outer office, where his secretary Sarah Davies presided, was always open, and he was always accessible. Across the entrance hall were two barred windows where Jessie and Myrtle "lived." These strong women had great power: Myrtle McKittrick was the registrar and Jessie Woodcock was the financial secretary. The two were a fountain of information both factual and humorous. Myrtle's assistant was Clair Gustafson and Jessie's was Emmalina Thompson.

Throughout 1941-1945 HSC's registration fee remained \$6.50.

### Don's New World

The college was the cultural hub of the region, and the music and drama departments drew large audiences from throughout the county. The theater, at the north end of Founders Hall, held 250 and was delightful. It was decorated with classical friezes across the north and south walls, had attached molded plywood seats, and a balcony at the west end. The stage was well-equipped thanks to John Van Duzer, a remarkably gifted stage designer and musician. John taught speech courses as well as scene design and construction. He was a treasured friend whose mischief and wicked wit kept us laughing through some difficult years.

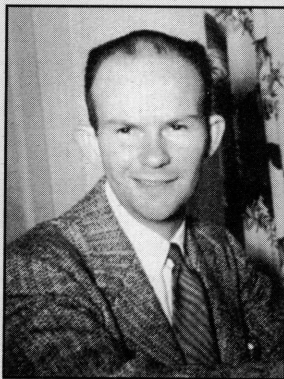
Don was thirty-one and energetic. To his dismay, on registration day a freshman thought he was another



*Sarah Davies, shorthand secretary to President Gist*



*The youthful Don Karshner*



*Ever Puckish John Van Duzer*



*George Murphy, Dean of Men*

PHOTOS FROM SEMPERVIRENS YEARBOOK, 1942



Arthur Gist, President of HSC, with his daughter Ruthie, and wife Ruth.

student, for he was always boyish looking. In addition to directing plays and teaching classes, Don expanded the Speech and Drama Department offerings to include speech therapy and radio. He ordered an amazing new device: a wire recorder that made it possible for students to hear their own voices. He also inaugurated an annual variety show, *The Humboldt Hilarities*, a combined effort of the Drama, Art, and Physical Education Departments that engaged over 150 students.

Don took pride in knowing every student's name. He and George Murphy were called "Don" and "Murf" by the students, a practice frowned upon by some of the older faculty. Ruth Gist called the pair the "Stanford wave of the future."

Don's office was Room 104 in Founders Hall, with an adjacent classroom. Just down the hall was the office of Margaret Brookins, a pleasant, efficient staff and student body executive who handled the advertising, programs, and ticket sales for the plays, concerts and athletic events, as well as managing the college bookstore and coffee shop.

### Taking the Show on the Road

The first three-act play Don produced at HSC was *Bachelor Born*. Roderick Belcher played the leading role as Head Master of an English boys' school. Others in the large cast were: Stribley Schussman,

Zane Nichols, Clarke Nellist, Ellen Purse, Gladys Smith, Phyllis Peugh, Rachel Bengston, Marella White, Marjorie Cloney, Jack Sutherland, Stanley Roscoe, Thurston Womack, Jerry Falor, Bob Oliveira, and Donald Christiansen. Schussman, Peugh, and Christiansen were students from the College Elementary School. Don, John Van Duzer, and I worked together; Don directed, John was the technical director, and I helped with makeup and costumes.

It had long been the custom for Chico and San Francisco State Colleges to exchange plays with Humboldt. The year 1941-42 was our year to take a play to San Francisco State,

which at that point was still located in the heart of the city, so we took our cast, crew, and equipment to San Francisco for a performance of *Bachelor Born*. We traveled in a Humboldt Motor Stages bus on springless seats for twelve hours along the tortuous, two-lane Redwood Highway. A college truck followed, loaded with costumes, properties, and sound equipment.

We stayed at the New Fielding Hotel on Geary Street. Some of the students had never been to San Francisco (or "down below" as it was known), so we took them to China Town and the "Top of the Mark," a bar with a panoramic view where we ordered Coca-Colas for all. Ellen Purse rode up and down the escalators in Macy's, enthralled, and we all rode the cable cars. The adventurous trip was fun and valuable for Don and me, for those early students remained friends for the rest of our lives.

In addition to *Bachelor Born*, in 1941 Don produced a series of one-acts with student directors that were performed at HSC and in local high schools. Then there was *The Humboldt Hilarities*, written, directed, staged, and acted by the students. Les Brazelton narrated the show, which had a patriotic theme that

*The finale of the Humboldt Hilarities, planned and put on by students. "This superb show was closed with Don Wilson's dramatic 'The Yanks are coming' and 'The Star Spangled Banner' sung by the audience," notes the 1943 Sempervirens yearbook. During the war years, military life and patriotism were the themes of student shows.*



first year. In the spring, Don directed *Stage Door*, presently enjoying a revival.

## Enter Pearl Harbor

On the morning of December 7, 1941, I was standing at the kitchen sink when the radio blared news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Never will I forget the hot rage that surged through me. Foremost in our minds were my sister Lova and her husband who had just moved to Honolulu. Lova was expecting her first born at any time. The full meaning—that we were now at war—engulfed me. Suddenly Don's and my life together, off to a wonderful beginning, was shattered.

Although the Japanese attack came suddenly, the threat of war had not; war had shadowed our lives for several years, factoring into all our plans and decisions. An entry in my diary on March 13, 1938, when Hitler annexed Austria, expressed my fears. I was a senior at the University of Oregon. My peers and I discussed the threat of the next war, wondering what it would be like. World War I, "the war to end all wars," had slaughtered one generation before ours, and we feared the same fate. Poison gas had been the horror of the past, but what unknown atrocities lay ahead—nerve gas, germ warfare?

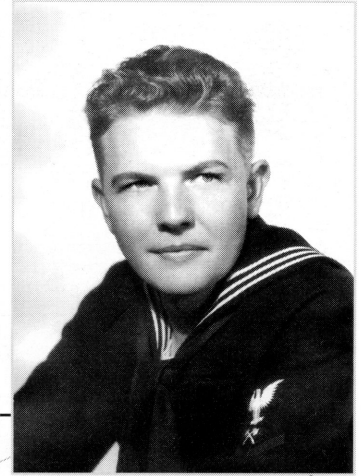
Times of crisis bring people together, bonded by a mutual fear and foe. A hatred for the Japanese formed instantly. War wasn't something far away; it was here, and our worst fears seemed to be coming true. Don had signed up for the draft while we were at Stanford. Immediately the draft called up thousands of young men for the Army, Navy, and Marines. For the first time in American history, women could enlist in special branches of the military such as the WACS, WAVES, WAFS, WASPS, and SPARS. Nurses enlisted in large numbers.

## On the Home Front

Our families had visited at Thanksgiving and on a walk

*Left: Don in Seabees uniform*

*Below: Gayle and Don's new house at 653 15th Street in Arcata, 1943. John Van Duzer gave them the red-flowering Rhodendron (still growing) in the front corner. Gayle and Don planted potatoes in the front yard to condition the soil for grass. Don's mother sent them \$200 so they could have the brick fireplace built. The Ward Falors later bought the house.*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAYLE KARSHNER

discovered a two-bedroom home under construction at 653 15<sup>th</sup> Street. Together, our parents shared the \$200 down payment, and Don and I assumed the \$4,500 Federal Housing Administration loan at 3.05%. When we moved in at Christmas, the weather reflected the mood of the times; it rained steadily for over a month. All of our shoes, stowed in drawers, turned green with mold. When I cried, Don would say, "But it makes the redwood trees grow!"

Arcata's hospital, operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, was the old McKinnon home on the southeast corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and G Streets, where ten faculty children were born that year. Jean Fulkerson and I were there together in the spring of 1942. Julie Fulkerson arrived just fine. However, my infant needed turning at a critical moment, but the doctor was "unavailable." We lost our baby girl and were heartbroken. Everyone was wonderfully kind. Fortunately, one year later—exactly to the day—we had our first son, Gary, born at the Palo Alto Hospital.

The enrollment at the college was dwindling, for boys were leaving daily for the service. Many students qualified for officers' training at various universities. One group, known as "The Humboldt Block," went to the University of Oklahoma where they received their engineering training; all had been students of professor Homer Arnold, who had taught them philosophy, mathematics, and for several, surveying. The group included Merritt Neal, Charles "Jim" Roscoe, Raymond Sweet, Elvin "Finn" Jackson, Guy Keith, George Wilson, Wallace Johnston, Cletus Davenport, Homer Arnold Jr., and G. Swanson. During the entrance physical, the doctors discovered George Wilson had a serious health problem that caused his death soon after. Many joined the Seabees, the engineering corps of the Navy. Close college pals now went in different directions.

The draft took John Van Duzer, but Charles Fulkerson was spared from service because of chronic asthma. Don, being childless, was now eli-



*The Arnold family was a typical wartime family, with each member contributing to the war effort. Back, left to right: Helen Arnold Stover, whose husband, Marlan Stover, was in the Pacific serving in the Navy; Homer Arnold, Jr. was attending the University of Chicago Medical School in the Navy's training program and became a captain; Charles was a captain in the Army field artillery; Elma May was a student at Arcata High School and served on the Listening Post. Front: Professor Homer Arnold taught extra HSC classes in mathematics and engineering to better prepare young men for the service; and Elma worked during the war as a butcher at Papini's Grocery.*

gible for the draft and sought to become an officer, but having failed the vision test, he enlisted in the Seabees, with the rank of carpenter's mate, second class. He was due to leave in September of 1943; our son Gary would be four months old.

To make extra money and to strengthen himself for the rigors of training, Don worked at the California Barrel Company in Arcata that summer, loading gun cases into railroad boxcars. He enjoyed the fellow workers at the factory where everyone was called "John"; he was "Teacher John." The FHA that carried our home loan placed a moratorium on the principal, leaving me to pay only the interest.

Two professors were called to serve in Washington, DC: Dr. Homer Balabanis, an economist, worked for the Office of Price Administration, and Dr. Raymond Fisher, an expert on Russian and Eastern European history was attached to the Department of State.

By law no man in the service could lose his job; to fill those jobs, women stepped into the workforce everywhere. Locally many women worked at the Arcata barrel factory, and large numbers riveted and "burned" the steel plates that formed the floating dry docks being constructed at the Chicago Bridge and Iron Company in Eureka. The factories ran twenty-four hours a day.

At the college Elma Arnold, wife of Professor Homer Arnold, worked as a butcher at Papini's grocery on H. Street. Hazel Jeffers, a pianist and wife of music professor Edmund Jeffers, stepped into his position. Jean Fulkerson taught extra music classes to help fill the gap left by Jeffers. Nell Murphy taught English in George's place. President Gist asked me to replace Don, and I agreed to work half time because of my three-month-old son, a mistake because I actually ended up working full time, teaching Don's classes and directing plays in his absence. I made only \$90 a month, and Don's family allotment

was \$85. To help further, I invited a high-school teacher, Dorothy Ames, to rent our bedroom that fall. She stayed one year before joining the WAVES as a Lieutenant.

## Civil Defense

Life had already changed drastically. Being on the coast, our community was vulnerable to attack from submarines. The week following the Japanese attack authorities had established a blackout. The bright stucco college, considered a likely target, was camouflaged with a patterned olive green, brown, and tan paint. Cars could not exceed 35 miles per hour at any time, anywhere, and at night only parking lights could be used. The streetlights were hooded; coupons were needed for gasoline, shoes, meat, and butter. Whale and horse meat sold because they were not rationed. We saved all kitchen fats and donated metals to be scrapped for armaments. In patriotic frenzy some even wanted the statue of President McKinley on the plaza melted into scrap; fortunately he prevailed.

Charlotte Marks (Womack) recalls disaster drills where she and her sister, teenagers, were given notes describing their "injuries." Later they were taken to the hospital to be "treated." Every household had a disaster survival box of necessities. Arcatans were scheduled to flee to Orleans in the eastern hills on the Klamath River if an attack occurred. To enforce the blackout, each block had a captain who, when the eerie, chilling siren blew, checked every house for any rays of light escaping. The few Japanese living here were sent to camps over the mountains, and Italians, including our friendly neighbors, the Meuccis, were under observation and confined to limited areas.

Everyone was on the alert. Following army orders, volunteers built the listening post at HSC, a tiny privy-like shelter placed atop the roof of Pop Jenkin's workshop, reached by a ladder, and manned twenty-

four hours a day by pairs of volunteers. It had two chairs, a shelf with old magazines, a tin can ashtray, a wastebasket, an electric heater, and a telephone with a direct connection to defense headquarters in San Francisco. The volunteers' task was to listen for airplanes and report any flying over. We had no commercial airlines at this time, but we did have a new airport on Dows Prairie.

It was easy to spot an airplane on a clear day, but during the night, or with rain, fog, or wind, it was almost impossible to distinguish the sound of an airplane from the sound of the many logging trucks as they went into low gear, grinding up the hill on G Street, which was the highway at that time. The result was that an inordinate number of airplanes were reported in the skies above Arcata. Volunteers from both "town and gown" liked to share stories of their experiences at the listening post. Proper matrons like Mary Sample, Berneice Titlow and Marian Marks climbed the steep ladder to the little



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLES GEORGE TAYLOR JR.

*Mounted Coast Guard patrollers in front of Herrin's Museum at Clam Beach. These special recruits from the Southwest were proficient horsemen who patrolled the beach at night. The horses were U.S. Army stock.*

post. Faculty, their wives, and students served. Don and Charles Fulkerson, manning the post one wild, stormy night, feared the worst when the winds rocked the little shelter. Later it was moved to the corner of Spring and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets.

The Coast Guard recruited men familiar with horses to patrol the beaches on horseback at night while others guarded the airport. HSC was very aware of a blimp base located at Samoa. The fat, noisy blimps drifted continually over the town raising a cacophony of barking among the dog population. Our dog was terrified. Blimps often interrupted classes at HSC when a pilot, seeking to impress a student girlfriend, would hover his noisy craft and dip the gondola dangerously low into the inner court, shaking windows and disrupting classes.

With servicemen stationed at the

*Left: A wartime blimp hovers over HSC, the soldiers inside hoping to impress the college girls.*

*Below: The Karshners' dog Bonnie was afraid of the blimps.*

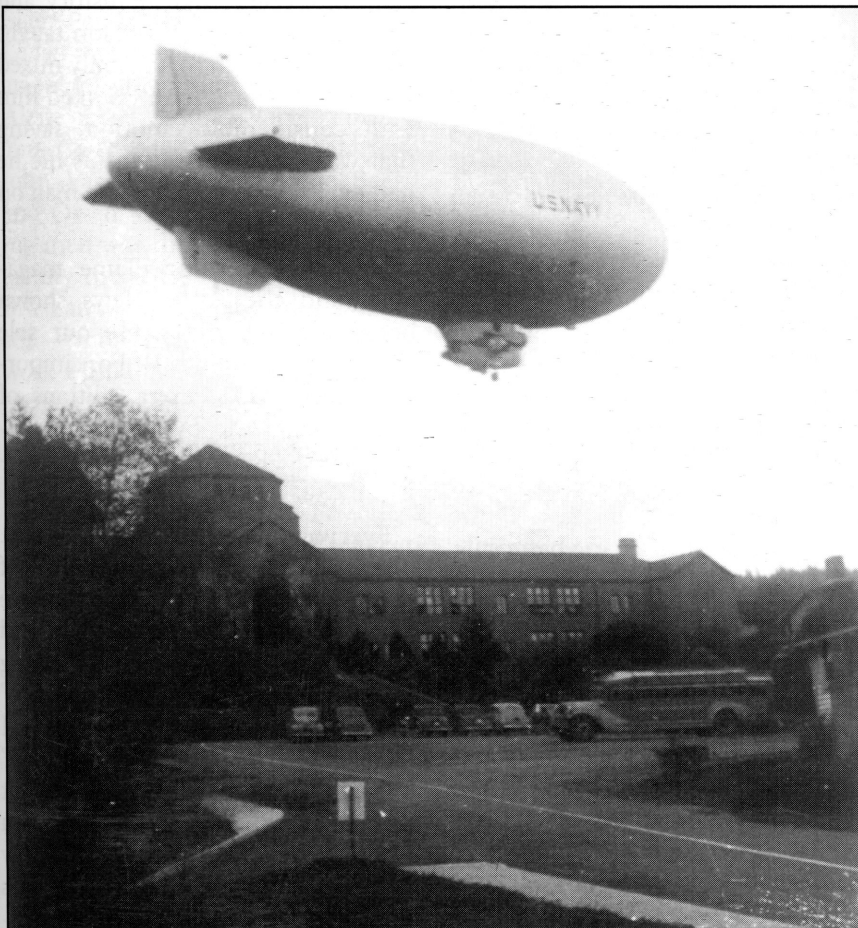


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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GAYLE KARSHNER.



new Dows Prairie airport, Samoa, and Salyer, local citizens did their best to make them feel welcome. I recall attending dances with Monica Hadley, college girls, and other women at the airport, and Charles Fulkerson and I entertained with piano and song at Samoa and Salyer.

### Personal Adjustment

It was a precious, poignant summer as Don and I enjoyed Gary's infancy and prepared for an unknown future. We worked out a code for Don to let me know where he was located because we knew our mail would be censored, and we chose a certain star to observe at special times. These romantic strategies were common among couples. We wrote each other every day.

Fortunately John Van Duzer was released from the service and returned to teaching at about the time Don left. John was a great help to me in my new job. To care for Gary I arranged for Mary Warren, a delightful Croatian woman and wife of Nick Warren who was on the maintenance

Gayle, little Gary, and Don. Photo taken by Ruth Gist at the Gist home.

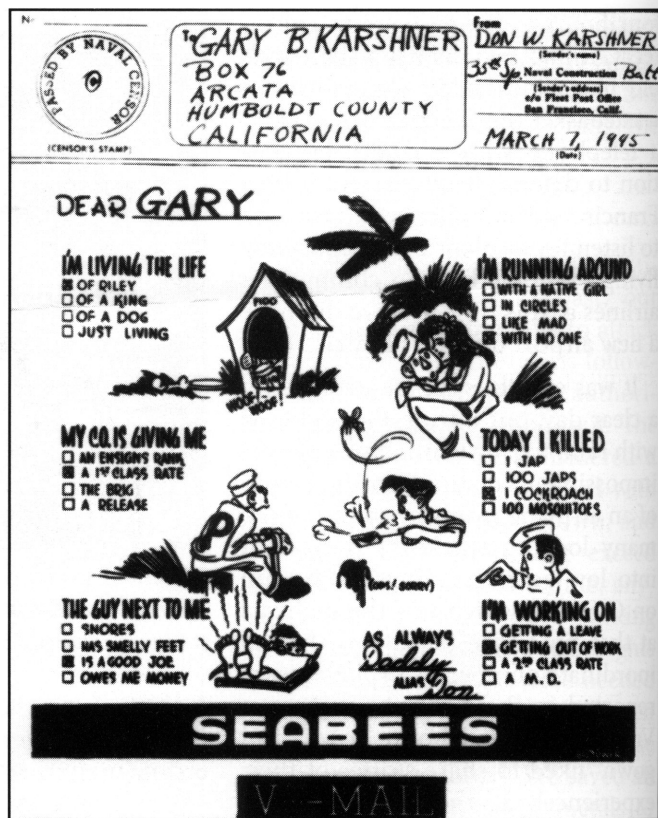


PHOTO COURTESY GAYLE KARSHNER.

staff at the college, to come each day and leave a dinner. She was a fabulous cook and taught me to make gnocchi and other of her ethnic dishes. As the war continued, Gary stayed with Mary at her spotless home, playing with her grandson John Warren. I could not have survived without Mary and John Van Duzer. Appropriately, today Mary's house on 14<sup>th</sup> Street is The Mary Warren HSU Child Care Center.

Don left on a Greyhound bus in early September to join the Seabees. For some reason he had taken our marriage license and insurance papers along with him, perhaps for security, and they were lost. He was fortunate to be assigned as a teacher on American soil. He was first sent to teach illiterate soldiers at a camp in North Carolina where they lived in tents that were cold, damp, and miserable during the winter months. Although his students could not read, write, or tell you where Japan was, a few were wealthy businessmen. Then he was sent to Mosquito Control School and eventually taught that subject. Later, his battalion went to Hawaii, the staging area for the Pacific battles.

Don enjoyed Hawaii, where he received visits from many former students, including Charles "Jim" and Stanley "Neb" Roscoe, Bob Oliviera, Jack Pearsall, and Merritt Neal from HSC. His assignment was to organize a school for the men to keep them occupied and give them the chance to gain credit for high school and college while serving. He recruited teachers from within



the battalion and offered a variety of courses: machinery, music appreciation, speech, English, history, and government, as I recall. Don taught courses in speech to a racially mixed group. One black man thanked him with considerable emotion, saying that was the first time in his life he had ever talked with a white man on a personal level.

Newspapers, radio, Time magazine, and the Pathe News shown before every movie were our sole sources of war news. For important happenings, extra editions of papers were sold by newsboys calling "EEEXTRA—read all about it—EEEEExtra."

Everyone had a radio, maybe two. They played the popular songs of the day: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer," "Til Then," "I'll Be Seeing You," "I'll Be Home for Christmas," "Give Me Ten Minutes More," "I Don't Want to Walk Without You." The bands of Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Artie Shaw, Harry James, Glen Miller, Woody Herman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and the voices of Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Bil-

lie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and the Mills Brothers—the list goes on and on. From the little Bakelite boxes in homes and Armed Forces Radio overseas, their horns and their voices tugged at our hearts. They also became heroes for entertaining troops overseas along with actors, actresses, and comedians like Bob Hope with Les Brown and His Band of Renown. Betty Grable was probably the most famous pin-up girl.

### College Adjustment

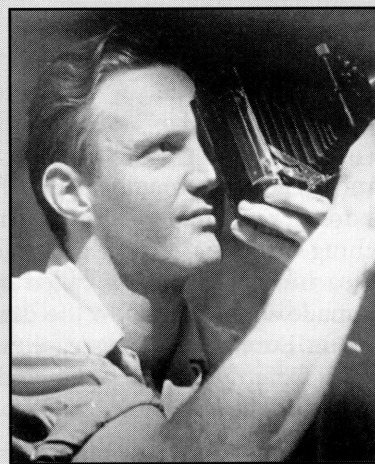
The enrollment at HSC had dropped to 267 in '42-43, and by '43-44 there were only 159 students—mostly girls. There was some talk of closing the school. My job of selecting and casting plays was difficult. I finally found a play with a wartime theme and a cast requiring only one boy, *Letters to Lucerne*. Rosanne Hill (Frank) played the leading role. Opal Schull, Valjean Frazier, Sissy Thompson, Mary Borel and Gene Orlandi were the cast. Other plays I directed were: *Junior Miss*, with Ellen Peterson and Jean Hardwick; *Ladies in Retirement*, with Hilda Bianchi, Patricia Dumm, Eva Clayton, Alene Beers, and LaVerne Elmore; *You Can't Take it With You* with John Van Duzer and Alene Beers, and Owen Wister's *Icebound*. Finding men was difficult, so I recruited faculty members—John Van Duzer, Bill Lanphere, and Charles Fulker-son—who were excellent and fun to work with. Once I cast a high school boy for a romantic role.

One blustery night, with no outdoor lighting allowed of course, I climbed the long stairs to Founders Hall for a rehearsal. Just as I reached the top, the cast jumped from the shrubbery to “surprise” me. In the dark we unlocked the door and groped our way back to the theater. With brothers and boyfriends overseas, the concerned girls at home benefited from the camaraderie of theater. All the women missed the company of males.

Whenever there was a wartime casualty of one of our own, we grieved



*Left: Helen Hartsook, editor of the Lumberjack. She married Bud Villa, above, while he was home on leave. He died in the war.*



*Above: Chan Jenkins, photographer for the Lumberjack, was killed on D-Day. His parents, Horace “Pop” and Anna Jenkins, left, at their Arcata home.*

together. Beverly Winzler, active in drama, lost her eldest brother “Bub” when the plane bringing him home for Christmas crashed. Helen Hartsook, editor of *The Lumberjack*, was engaged to Milton Villa. When he returned home before going overseas, he and Helen married. Tragically, very soon after, his plane went down in islands off Alaska and he was never found. Later Helen bore their baby daughter, Lynn. “Pop” Jenkins’ son Channing, an excellent photographer, was shot down on an early reconnaissance flight over Normandy beach on D-Day. Eugene Hammond, a student with a fine singing voice,

was a B-29 pilot who achieved fame by having his crew bail out and landing the crippled plane alone. Later he was killed in action. Each loss had its own special story.

Janice Telonicher Stokes recalls a wartime Thanksgiving when Ruth Gist invited the entire faculty and their families for a seated dinner at the president’s home on campus, after which we watched 8-mm home movies.

President Arthur Gist wrote personal letters to every student in the service during the war, and in return the grateful young people wrote to him about their experiences. These



Cast of "Letters to Lucerne," the first play directed by Gayle Karshner after she took over Don's classes when he entered the Seabees. Front, left to right: Valjean Frazier, Sissy Thompson, Opal Shull. Back: Mary Borel, Rosanne Hill, Gene Orlandi.

letters are archived in the Humboldt Room of the HSU Library. Gist went out of his way to help the students. Grant Ferguson remembers that he had done everything to complete his teaching credential except the practice teaching when he was called up. Gist made a special trip to the draft board in Eureka about his case, arranging for a delay so that he could finish before he left.

Gist was also responsible for the publication of the Humboldt News Letter, featuring news from the home front and news from those on active duty, which was sent to all students in the service, keeping the Humboldt community alive. His role during the war was truly remarkable. Mail during the war years was crucial for morale at home and with the troops. V-mail was created for the servicemen, an easy way to send a greeting card or note. The sale of war bonds continued throughout the war.

Dances were popular in the '40s. The Senior Ball, the Barn Dance, and most of the others were held in the gym, but the Sophomore Shuffle took place on Humboldt Bay in the stern-paddle-wheel ferry, the *Antelope*. However, these events were modified after most of the boys left, and the college yearbook, *Sempervirens*, ceased to exist during the war years. It was replaced with a small

booklet that listed seniors with their portraits.

The Barn Dance of 1941 had a Sadie Hawkins theme, a girls' choice. The usual decorations—a wagon, pitchforks, harnesses, cornstalks, and bales of hay—were augmented with a "Chic Sale" that had been "borrowed" from a farm in McKinleyville. It had been a working outhouse, and on Monday morning the irate farmer stormed into President Gist's office, demanding that the stolen property be returned and reinstalled and that the thieves be suitably punished. The first demand was satisfied, but there was little effort to identify the rascals.

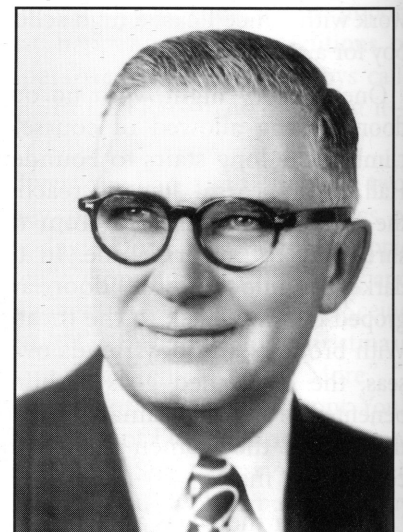
Despite the war, the year 1941-42 was outstanding in men's athletics. Coach Harry Griffith led the basketball team to Humboldt's first major athletic championship. The starting five were Howard Goodwin, Billy Lee, Len Longholm, Rod Belcher, and Del Goodyear. Goodwin became ill in January and was replaced by a lanky first-semester freshman named Darrell Brown, who became an instant starter and an eventual Humboldt State basketball legend. Reserves included Fred Iten, Grant Ferguson, Serge Stashuk, Maury Ayala, and Harvey del Fatti. Richard Tinkey was manager. Lee and Belcher were selected on the All-Far



Monica Hadley, Dean of Women



Stanley "Neb" Roscoe in fatigues with the "follow me" jeep at the Nadzab Airport in New Guinea during World War II, 1943.



President Arthur Gist

Western Conference first team.

To replace men's sports following 1942, Marty Mathieson directed a Commando Physical Fitness Program to prepare men for military service. All men were required to take one period per day in this commando work that included combative games and an obstacle track. The track had foxholes, tunnels, overhead ladders, high walls to scale, banks to hurdle, a pyramid ladder, and other demanding impediments. The mathematics and engineering departments offered special courses also to train students for the service.

The annual Student Work Day culminating in The Faculty Show was also a winner in 1942. Students, led by chairman Arlo Murray, worked hard cleaning windows, removing clutter, weeding, repairing roads, and cleaning classrooms. There was a free bean feed. The faculty rewarded them with their original, always hilarious show in the theater. Shedding their dignity, the entire faculty in outrageous costumes, often scanty, performed original skits, spoofs of individuals, both student and faculty, topical subjects, dancing and singing. Everyone had a roaring good time.

Traditional Work Day and the Faculty Show were then abandoned for the duration of the war.

### Mixed Emotions

Wartime summers Gary and I traveled by Greyhound or by car with Helen Everett and her daughter Betty, sharing gas coupons and cost, to visit my family in Eugene and Don's in Aberdeen. The summer of 1944, I took Gary by train to Rhode Island, on Narragansett Bay where Don was stationed, arriving on June 6, the day the allied forces landed on the beach at Normandy. It was my first taste of New England—but that is another story.

Monica Hadley, Dean of Women, took a pregnancy leave to have her son, Craig, in 1944, and President Gist assigned me to take her place as dean. I was happy to do the job and

felt qualified, but I was now growing very tired from the heavy load I'd taken on during the war.

I was walking down the corridor between the theater and the inner court on April 12, 1945, when I learned the news of President Franklin Roosevelt's death from a cerebral hemorrhage, just a few months following his taking the presidency for the fourth time. The shock, grief, and mixed reactions were tremendous. Many others and I were in tears while others said, "Good riddance." Harry S. Truman was our first new president in more than twelve years. In a matter of days, April 29, the Germans surrendered in Italy, and on May 2 Berlin surrendered.

At my family home in Eugene on the 6th of August we learned of the first atomic bombing of Hiroshima, then of Nagasaki, and Japan's surrender on September 2. The shock of this heretofore unknown, hideous weapon left us with guilt blended with the joy of having the war over. We had opened Pandora's box. The reality of nuclear power forced me to view the world differently and to feel less secure even as I grieved for the loss of so many close personal friends from high school and the university in Eugene and many students from HSC.

My sister Kate Buchanan had been Dean of Women at Lewis and Clark College in Portland and for her war effort had taken a job as director of housing for the 30,000 women employed by the DuPont Company at their Manhattan Project operation in Hanford, Washington, on the Columbia River. She was directed to report anyone who even discussed what they were making there—no one knew. Having unknowingly been a part of the atomic bomb project, she had particularly ambivalent and strongly emotional reactions to the news of the bombings. I men-



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAYLE KARSHNER.

Gayle, Gary, and Don

tion my sister because following the war, in 1946, she joined the English faculty at HSC and went on to become Dean of Women and Dean of Activities.

The fall quarter of 1945 I returned to Arcata and HSC to direct *Ice-bound*, to continue being Dean of Women, and to teach classes, but this period is hazy in my memory, for I was overly tired.

### The Aftermath

The year 1945 marked one of the most exciting periods in HSC's history, the return of the veterans under the GI Bill. This inspired legislation was one of the finest Government Issues ever created; boys who had been indifferent students came back mature adults, appreciative, with a burning drive to study and succeed. Faculty agreed these young men were the best students the college had ever enjoyed, and that was true all over America.

In November Don returned in good shape physically, but like most returnees, it took several months for

him to adjust to civilian and home life again. We had all changed. Don was insecure socially and impatient with two-and-a-half-year-old Gary, who was bewildered by this “Daddy,” his competitor for my attentions. Don had never sworn, but now he “cussed like a sailor.” Winter quarter when he returned to the work he loved, he soon gained back his confidence and his old self.

The war became the defining experience of those who served. Some brought home foreign wives. Many marriages did not survive the war, others were strengthened, and all were changed—particularly for servicemen who suffered permanent disabilities.

In a way, I, too, was a war casualty. Being gravely fatigued, I fell victim to tuberculosis following the birth of our second son, Warner, in August of 1946—but that, too, is another story.

(For the incredible story of Gayle Karshner’s treatment for and recovery from tuberculosis, see the *Humboldt Historian* of Mar/Apr 1992.—Ed.)

HH

**A**n Oregon native, Gayle Buchanan Karshner-Roscoe was educated at the University of Oregon, Stanford University, Claremont Colleges, and Humboldt State University. She has an M.A. degree in English. During WWII, when her husband Don Karshner joined the Seabees, she was “drafted” to take his job teaching speech and drama at HSU.

Throughout her years in Humboldt County she has actively participated in theatrical, educational, writing, and social service projects and has served on the boards of the Humboldt Arts Council, Young Women’s Christian Association, Humboldt County Historical Society, and Chamber Readers. When her two sons left for college, she returned to teaching English in the Arcata and McKinleyville high schools.

She is the author of many articles for the *Humboldt Historian* and of two books, *A Bell Rang in Uniontown*

## The Semper Virenette

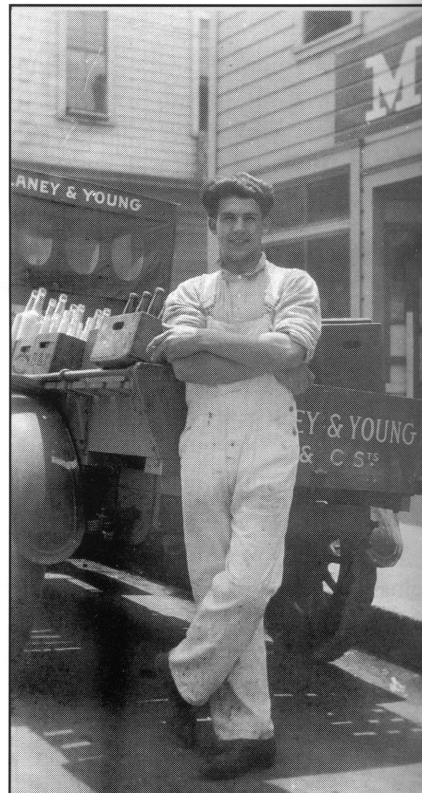
THE YEAR BOOK FOR 1945-46

DEDICATED . . . . .  
TO THOSE WHO NEVER KNEW COLLEGE  
LIFE UNDER PEACETIME CONDITIONS.

MAY THIS BOOKLET SERVE AS THE LAST  
REMAINS OF HUMBOLDT STATE  
COLLEGE AT WAR.

and *A Story of the Buchanan Family*. She edited *A Taste of Humboldt*, an historical and ethnic cookbook published by HSU, and *Bearkiller*, *The Life of a Boy on the American Frontier, 1878-1900*, by her uncle-in-law, Dr. Warner Karshner.

In 1990 Gayle married her long-time friend Dr. Stanley “Neb” Roscoe (pictured on page 20), an aviation psychologist and a native of Humboldt County. They both enjoy writing.



“He just received a gift subscription to the *Humboldt Historian*.”

## MYSTERY PHOTOS

Does this doting mother look familiar? Could that little baby be you? Perhaps you recognize this father and son? If you can identify anyone in these photos, please let us know. Send your identifications by email to [editor@humboldthistory.org](mailto:editor@humboldthistory.org), or by mail to *Historian* Editor, P. O. Box 8000, Eureka, CA 95502.



The photos are from the Margaret Delaney collection, donated by Marsha Daly. Delaney was the society editor for the *Times-Standard* in the 1950s and 60s.

