

UC San Diego

Biographies, Autobiographies, & Memoirs

Title

Growing Up At Scripps

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6h37w158>

Author

Barnhart, Helene S.

Publication Date

1998

GROWING UP AT SCRIPPS

By

Helene Schellenberg Barnhart



Stanley - Helene - Gillian Chambers

Page
6 - Sullivan
Inquirer

Send to
DEBRA

DAY

Longer report
than sent previously
to Scripps

VING UP AT SCRIPPS

By

Helene Schellenberg Barnhart

In 1924, my father, Stanley W. Chambers, moved his family family from Coronado, California to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography as it is known now. Then it was called, The Biological Station by adults, and, "The Bug House" by my friends at La Jolla Grammar School.

Our first home was cottage 13 located on what was known as, The Biological Grade, the highway to Los Angeles, a steep winding road with many sharp turns. When a car missed a turn in back of cottage 13, a car came tumbling down into our backyard, and neighbors gathered attired in nightclothes to give assistance to the injured. At age ten, these episodes were exciting events for me and my brother, Stan, then age four.

A year and a half later, we moved up in the world to cottage #28 which sat high on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. This was my home until I married and moved away to Anaheim in February, 1938.

Among my many memories of early Scripps days were the tennis games. Everyone played tennis; kids, parents and grandparents. Among the good players were members of the Clark family. Dr. Clark

was then President of the University of Nevada. There were four Clark offsprings, one of whom, Walter Clark, became a celebrated writer with the publication of his book, The Oxbow Incident. During the summers, the Clark family were our closest neighbors taking over what was known as, The Community House, a much larger cottage used during the winters for Campus social events. Miriam Clark was near my age and she and I became girlhood friends, walking the pier and the hills together. When the family moved back to Reno, Nevada for the school year, Miriam and I exchanged letters. When Miriam married, she and her husband operated a motel just outside of Reno. I believe the motel is still standing.

Another exciting event at Scripps that brings fond memories was the grunion run when hundreds of silver fish came ashore to spawn, laying their eggs in the sand and then scurrying back into the sea again. Old and young alike hurried to the beach to await the grunion, building bonfires to cook supper and eat while they waited the sight of the first grunion. Caught up in the excitement when the fish arrived, children and adults alike ignored the drenching of the incoming waves as they scooped up the tiny fish and deposited them into containers, skirts and pant pockets.

The most memorable social event of those early Scripps days was the Friday Tea given for staff and family by Dr. and Mrs. T. Wayland Vaughn. Dr. Vaughn was the Director of Scripps Institution during my childhood and adolescent years.

The Director's house rose two stories above the cottages and was then painted brown. As I walked to the front door with

my mother, dressed up, wearing a hat and gloves, I felt as though I were entering a palace. Dr. Vaughn reminded me of the Southern Colonels I had met in novels I was reading. With his fringe of white hair and moustache to match, and his formal bearing, he was a distinguished looking figure as he and his wife, Dorothy Vaughn took their nightly walk.

On several occasions when my parents were going out on the town, I was invited to stay overnight at the Director's House. At such times, I was impressed by the attentive Juan who served us at dinner, and by the silver finger bowls brought on at the conclusion of the meal.

Another Scripps family that lingers in my memory is the F.B. Sumner family. The Sumners lived at the "top of the hill" in a regular house, not a cottage, a house that commanded a breath-taking view of not only the ocean, but of the Village of La Jolla as well. An invitation to the Sumner House for a birthday party was an exciting event to us Scripps kids. Mrs. Sumner knew how to entertain the younger generation with home baked cookies and cakes, punch and lots of icecream. Then there were the games and the prizes awarded the winners. My family was not big on such parties, and so, an invitation to those given by Mrs. F.B. Sumner was a special occasion.

In the 1930s, my growing up years, there were not too many kids on the Campus of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Many members of the academic staff were still unmarried, or newly married. Among my girlhood friends were

the following:

Elgarda Zobel, Dr. Claude Zobel's sister, who visited during summer vacation from her home in Utah. Elgarda and I were bosom friends, walking the hills and the beach and talking endlessly about our future, a future which held marriage, a house and picket fence, and three beautiful children. In those days, girls were not career oriented as they are today. For most, the degree would be M.R.S., and that was it. I always loved to write, but I had no conception then of what was required to become a professional writer. Later, when I left my teens behind, I dreamed of writing the Great American Novel with a message that would change the world, but there again, the dream and the reality were far apart.

Only my mother had faith in my evidence of talent as shown in English Composition 1A, and told everyone, "Helene is going to be a writer." Such a goal was not in the plans I talked over with Elgarda Zobel.

When we lived in cottage 13, John and Margaret Fleming were my childhood friends. Later, the Fleming family moved away to Torrey Pines where Mr. Fleming became the Director of the Park.

Betty Henry was another girlhood friend. Betty was the niece of Mrs. Percy Barnhart. Percy Barnhart was the curator of the museum and aquarium. In those early days I never dreamed I would end up with Barnhart for a name also. No relation however to the Percy Barnhart family.

Betty, like Elgarda, was a summer visitor, along with another of her Aunts, Mrs. Henry. Mrs. Henry started a quilting group and the ladies of the Campus gathered twice a week to quilt, my mother one of the group. When I married, I took along a lovely quilt made at the quilting bee, something I treasured for many years before it wore out.

The only other boy on Campus in addition to John Fleming was Paul McEwen. Paul was a year older than I, and there were many stretches of time in which he and I were the only young people on Campus. When Paul was twenty or twenty one, his mother surprised, and shocked some, by giving birth to a second child, a girl she named Dora Ellen. Dora Ellen was a lovely child with expressive brown eyes, a winning smile, and happy disposition. I often baby sat her for Mrs. McEwen, and often Paul and I took her to the beach with us. Years later, Dora Ellen baby sat my two small sons, Carl and Gary.

When Paul went away to attend the University of Southern California, he met and later married Peggy Andrews. By that time, I was married to Carl E. Schellenberg. Peggy was my bridesmaid at my wedding. We corresponded for years. Even later, my second husband and I, Barney Barnhart, visited Paul and Peggy in their home in Exeter, California. Paul and I spent a lot of time in , "Remember Whens," and, "Whatever happened to...." You can take the kid out of Scripps, but you can't take Scripps out of the adult.

Life at Scripps continued in a quiet and tranquil manner

until World War 11 burst upon the scene. Then tranquility was gone. La Jolla changed from a quiet little village town to a bustling place with sidewalks crowded with soldiers on day leave from Camp Pendleton and other military bases, and new families moved from other locations to the seaside sites like La Jolla, San Diego and Oceanside.

Evidence of military operations were visible from our livingroom and diningroom windows when a machine gun and soldiers were placed on the bluff below our house. My mother joined the war effort by organizing and presiding over an active volunteer ladies' group, The British War Relief. She and numerous La Jolla women worked hard gathering needed clothes for bombed out England, bundling them into cartons and getting them labelled for shipping overseas.

During the War, Scripps Institution of Oceanography contributed valuable information on weather, ocean currents, etc., all of which helped in the selection of the time and the day for the Normandy Invasion.

Even with the War going on across the seas, life for the younger generation continued in its secure and comfortable style. Since the academic staff all received modest salaries from the University of California, and we all lived in look-alike cottages, we Scripps kids grew up without the stress of envy. Growing up at Scripps gave us sound values, and a sense of belonging, two ingredients that are so important to children.

The geographical beauty of the Scripps Campus, set as it was facing out on the Pacific Ocean with its back to the gentle rolling hills also contributed, I feel, to a lifelong appreciation of the wonders of Nature. Some fifty years after my departure from Scripps, I still hear the surf breaking along the shore below cottage 28. The memory often puts me to sleep after a busy day, a sure cure for insomnia.

So many of my Scripps friends are gone now, but they live on in memory. Florence Sumner Henderson was older than I and away at college and then into teaching during my growing up years. We were to meet again, however, in one of the strange twists of Fate. When my husband, Barney, took a position in Sacramento, Florence and I got together. She lived not too far from me in Sacramento. Florence was the first born of the Sumner three children. Her sister, Elizabeth lived in the East after her marriage, but she and I corresponded for many years. Herbert Sumner, the youngest of the three Sumner kids, was my brother Stanley's childhood and adolescent friend, and they too stayed in touch until Herbert's death several years ago. Stanley died May 1, 1997 in Tucson, Arizona at age 79.

Another Scripps friend I met and associated with years after leaving Scripps was Winnie Keyes, wife of the well known scientist, Ancel Keyes whose scientific research contributed to the successful development of the War rations for the troops. Ancel to us Scripps friends was a celebrity,

not for his scientific achievements, but for the fact that he was related to the famous Hollywood actor, Lon Cheney. Ancel could do a wonderful imitation of his Uncle in any one of his famous roles, such as Phantom of the Opera.

As I think back over the growing up years at Scripps, so many faces pass in review. There was Jim Ross, Superintendent of Grounds, a lovable Scotchman with dark hair, deep blue eyes, and always a friendly smile. Jim could do anything, from rescuing a cat, fixing plumbing problems, finding lost kids to making two daily trips to La Jolla for the mail which he brought back and put into the little white mail boxes placed in a rack just outside the museum area in Ritter Hall.

For many years, Jim lived with his Mother who kept house for him in cottage number one which was built at the lower end of the Campus facing out on the beach and ocean. As a child, I loved to visit Mrs. Ross because she treated me like a grown up, serving me her homemade cookies and a cup of tea. I loved to hear her talk about her home in Scotland. I was shattered when she finally left the Campus to live with her daughter in Australia. Mrs. Ross was then in her late eighties a memorable character; a beautiful lady.

More faces appear in the memory book. Mr. and Mrs. Bostwick came out to Scripps from Florida. La Place Bostwick was interested in cultivating pearls in abalones. His wife, Mae Bostwick, was a talented artist. When I married, she gave me three of her

H. Schellenberg Barnhart--Scripps

paintings, seascapes depicting the scene below our cottage where the white surf flings itself against the dark rocks and the blue-green ocean and white-clouded sky forms the background. It hangs on my wall in my office and I only have to look up from my work to be back at Scripps again.

Other pictures facing me are ones of the weathered gray pier, again with the white surf rolling into shore. A photograph of my mother and father sitting in their yard under an umbrella with the ocean in the background. Another Bostwick painting done later showing the small white cottage, number 28, sitting on the bluff against the backdrop of an unbroken vista of sea stretching to the horizon. There is also a black and white photograph of my father, Stanley W. Chambers, taken in his laboratory, a treasured picture.

Another friend I cannot forget in this account is Miriam Fox. I remember when Miriam came to the Campus as the bride of Dr. Denis L. Fox, physiologist, who gathered mussels from the pier area for studies of their feeding habits and the carotenoids that turned them orange, as a study of pigmentation in fish.

Too many faces appear in my memory book to give a complete accounting here. I must settle for only the few that for one reason and another were closely associated with my family and my childhood.

Dr. George F. McEwen, my friend Paul's father, must be mentioned, along with his wife Mae McEwen. My father's

position at Scripps was as assistant to Dr. McEwen. Dr. McEwen's research was concerned with ocean currents and temperatures which required the taking of daily samples from the ocean, as well as plankton from collections off the pier. Much of Dr. McEwen's work contributed to the development of long-range weather forecasting, information that also contributed to the success of the landings on the Normandy beaches during World War II.

Another face I could never forget is that of Professor Winfred E. Allen who for many years lived with his family in cottage 25. Professor Allen was an expert on diatoms and the productivity of plankton. There again, it was not this scientist's research that interested me. It was something much much more vital to the path my life took years later. It was Professor Allen who gave me my first armful of Writer's Digest, a trade journal for writers. I devoured those Writer's Digests, and so began my interest in writing professionally. Professor Allen in addition to his role as scientist was a writer, turning out a column for the San Diego Union. He probably never knew that his efforts led to my eventual career as a professional writer.

Cottage 28 is long gone, replaced by a laboratory building. I understand the canyons on either side have been filled in. Many of the other cottages are gone too. Only in memory does the Scripps of my growing up years still remain just as it was--small white cottages flung against the hills and facing out on the lovely expanse of ocean, two laboratory buildings with overhead walkway between, the old wooden aquarium building housing the strange looking fish which so fascinated me as a

child, the first tennis court made of clay later to be replaced by a cemented one. The sound of pinging tennis balls going back and forth over the net and outside the courts for us kids to retrieve. The walks in early morning with my Father and my then young brother along the pier to the instrument shack where the awesome tide gauge dropped down through a hole in the floor to the often turbulent waves breaking around the pilings. The Friday teas at Vaughns. The Fourth of July picnics on the beach below the Campus. The hikes up Soledad when the picnic was moved to higher ground. My little brother being carried on my father's shoulder on the homeward trek as his short legs grew tired.

Still other memories

The gathering of us Scripps kids for the ride into La Jolla Grammar School, and later La Jolla High. The rough-housing of the boys in the back of the bus, Paul, John, Stanley, and others. The endless teasing of us girls by the boys as we waited for the bus outside Ritter Hall.

Most important of all, the memory of the close friendships that evolved out of the isolated from the Village lifestyle of those early days on Campus. As I've mentioned earlier, we lived at what many in La Jolla referred to as, "The Bug House." That set us apart.


"Does your Dad believe we came from monkeys?" was a taunt I often heard from my La Jolla friends. A question hard to answer then.

In conclusion I must mention my son, Carl S. Schellenberg, Joyce,
his wife/and daughter Christine who made a vacation trip to

La Jolla and went out to Scripps to look the old home over. They met with the archivist, Debra Day,.....who was researching for the Scripps Institution Archives. She was interested in learning about the 1930s at Scripps, but there seemed to be a problem in finding anyone who remembered. My son, Carl, mentioned that I did remember. And so I felt compelled to write about how it was when I grew up at Scripps, compelled to share my memories with my family, son and grandchildren, as well as with my brother, Stanley L. Chambers and his children. The Stanley L. Chambers offspring are: Lynn Laryisson, Barbara Koeneke, and Diana Chambers. There are several grandchildren.

Stanley Chambers distinguished himself in the Army Airforce, first at Pearl Harbor where he was stationed at the time of Pearl Harbor attack, and later as a helicopter pilot in Europe. Stanley served in Germany during the occupation, as well as at military installations throughout the United States. He and I kept close contact throughout the many years since we both left Scripps. Stanley retired as Major. He died May 1, 1997.

I'm sure that my brother Stanley's memories of growing up at Scripps, while different, held the same nostalgia and appreciation as mine do. I'm also sure that there are others still living who remember Scripps Institution of Oceanography as it was in its early days--The Good Old Days.


Helene Schellenberg Barnhart

(1930s--Helene Chambers)