



# THE TIMES OF HALCOTT

## SUMMER 2005

## VOLUME 31

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### Vans' Boarding House By Martin Weissman

I remember "Vans'." For those of you not familiar with this name, nor the time when they were dairy farmers in Halcott, I refer to Robert and Addie VanValkenburgh. They once had a dairy farm located 2 miles from Halcott Center on West Settlement Road (Greene County Route 1). They had a son John, and a daughter Mae. John ran the dairy farm with his son Fuller, whom everyone called Fuller Van. Mae later married Myron Morse who also had a farm in Halcott. John's wife was Glennie; they also had a daughter, Vivien.

I remember these old-time Halcott residents because as a child I boarded at their farm with my mother Rose during the four summers of World War II (1942-1945). We boarded there for the entire months of July and August, as did the family of my mother's younger sister Lee. Her husband was Philip Davis, and they had two sons, Bradley and Bruce. When we first boarded there in 1942, I was 9 years old and my cousins were aged 5 years and 2 years, respectively. My mother and I shared the same room, as did my aunt's family. It was common for summer boarders to share their room with their young children. My mother and aunt were very close sisters who thoroughly enjoyed those summer seasons away together at the friendly, casual and affordable accommodations of the Vans.

I remember those summer fairly well even though they were more than sixty years ago. To me, they were wonderful summers of carefree, youthful fun in a peaceful, secluded country set-

ting during a time when the entire world was at war in faraway places.

Addie was a joy to all, and for me she was like a summertime grandmother. Both my real grandmothers had died when I was quite young. My mother and aunt were always very close with Addie and they shared cooking recipes with each other. I can safely say that nobody could bake an apple pie like Addie Van. My mother and aunt learned a great deal from her about the art of cooking. Of course, they did share some of their specialties with Addie, who enjoyed learning about Jewish recipes.

The farmhouse was always full up during the summers and of course, most of the boarders came from New York City.



There were many interesting people who came to Vans' from all walks of life. There were teachers, professionals, newspaper people, artists and business people. I remember one newspaper man, either a reporter or a photographer, who worked for the New York City newspaper PM. PM no longer exists, but it was then a very liberal paper in the finest tradition. Some of you may recall that Dr. Seuss was a PM political cartoonist during the war years. Also, there was a former fighter pilot with the "Flying Tigers" who came up to Vans' in 1943 with his wife. He drove up in his brand new Oldsmobile equipped with hydromatic shift, quite an automobile novelty then. Everyone was impressed with his flamboyant manner and his stories.

All the boarders got along quite well with



all the Van family and enjoyed the company of each other, both adults and children alike. Some boarders stayed only for a week or two, but my family, my aunt's family and a few others stayed the entire summer. This was the New York City summer school recess. With no air conditioning then, the Catskills was the place to cool off and avoid the sweltering heat of the city. Parents were happy too that their children were safely away and playing in the wonderful fresh air. I had no real idea what NYC

summers were like until I was 18 years old.

My mother had to work during the war years, but she was able to take the summers off for our mutual benefit. My older brother Gene had to work in the City during his summer recess while attending high school, up until the Army drafted him in 1945, at the time of our final summer at Vans'. My mother had a tearful summer that year until the war finally ended in August.

Mae and Vivien helped Addie manage the boarding home by waiting on guest tables and making up the guest beds. Addie was too busy in the kitchen preparing three meals each day, because they didn't know then about the Modified American Plan. I also remember a young teenage girl helped Mae and Vivien wait on tables. Naturally, she was so pretty and vivacious that I became infatuated with this "older" woman. Then one morning she didn't come to wait tables for breakfast, and we were told that she was seriously

injured in an automobile accident the night before. We were deeply saddened by the news and I never saw her again. Only recently, Pattie Kelder told me that the girl's name was Audrey Faulkner, and that she lost one leg from the accident, and later married Bob Johnson. Pattie told me that Audrey passed away in 1993. I was very sorry I could not reunite with her after all these years. I will always remember Audrey from before the accident, and how she helped teach me to square dance at the

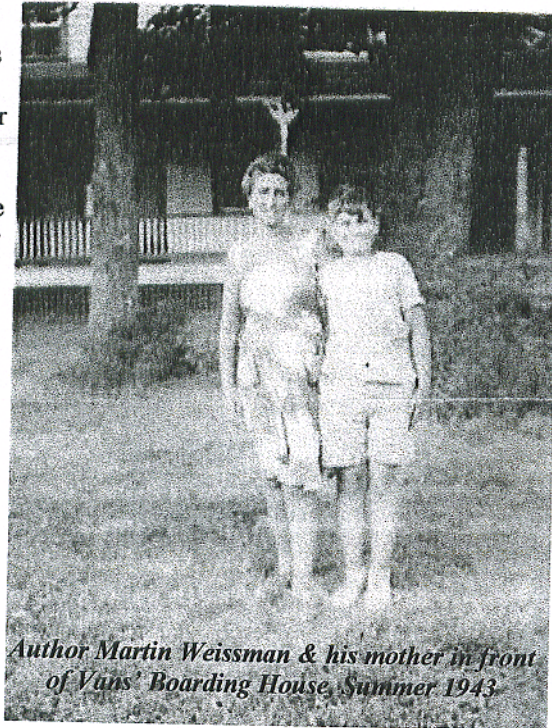
Halcott Grange.

To keep myself occupied, I would go to the cow barn to help John and Fuller in some small ways to be useful and have some fun. John let me call in the cows for milking from the pastures high above the barn provided the collie dog Toby accompanied me. I didn't realize then that it was Toby who brought the cows home and not me. Mother wasn't happy I did this because I always returned dirty, smelling of manure. Once I was stung by a bee in the barn, right on my ear and it hurt for days.

After breakfast it was customary to walk to the Halcott Center Post Office/General Store to fetch the mail and perhaps to buy a treat. On the way, I would pass the Gordon farm and other farms, eventually reaching Lorenzo VanValkenburgh's farm,

a short distance from the Post Office. Lorenzo was Robert Vans' cousin, who also took in summer boarders. Lorenzo's farm house is still there, although Robert's farm is completely gone. The last time I saw the farm was in 1975 when I returned to Halcott after a 30 year absence.

During our time at Vans', Fuller was already married with his first child, a baby girl named Emily. A few years ago I was pleased to meet Fuller's second child, Bob, at the Halcott Fair. He told me that he was named after his



*Author Martin Weissman & his mother in front of Vans' Boarding House, Summer 1943*



great-grandfather who died in 1947.

In late August, my mother, aunt and I would go to a large wild blackberry patch and pick berries all day. The women would cook the berries on Addie's stove and make blackberry jelly. Addie showed the women how to preserve the jelly in glass jars with wax seals so they could bring the jelly home for the winter. It was great fun for a 10-year old boy and left to myself, I could explore all the hills and pastures. I had plenty of independence.

The husbands drove up on Friday nights to enjoy a weekend with their families, car pooling, since gasoline was rationed during the war years. My uncle drove up every weekend, sometimes with my father and brother. They would return on Sunday just before dinner. There was no NY Thruway and Route 28 was narrow, meandering through many villages in Ulster County. He drove his 1939 Olds through Poughkeepsie, stopping for some dinner, and into the city on the Henry Hudson Parkway. Both our families lived in Queens County. It must have taken almost 6 hours each way.

We would have continued boarding at Vans' in the summers after the War, but Addie discontinued boarders after 1945. We were all disappointed. Fortunately, Myron Morse's cousin Henry Morse, had a boarding house in Denver, where our families began boarding in the summer of 1946. Henry's wife, Beulah did the cooking for the guests, but it never was the equal of Addie's cooking.

Eventually, I was too old to continue boarding; so, in 1948, I went to work at Camp Ta-Ri-Go in Fleischmanns, which I did for three summers until I was aged 17. After

1950, I did not return to the Catskills until a weekend in 1961 at the Kass Inn (now the Hanah Inn).

So, these are some of my special memories of a few wonderful summers at Vans' farm in Halcott during those terrible World War II years.

### Cow Down!

If there's one thing we have learned in 16 years of dairy farming it's to expect the unexpected. Cattle have an uncanny ability to start calving, get sick, get stuck or just plain get out of where they're supposed to be so that the farmer is late to where he is supposed to be. As trying as these times can be, the stories that come from these mishaps are often worthy of telling and retelling. Here's one such humorous event that occurred on our farm a couple of months ago.

The morning started out like any other winter Sunday morning. We awoke to cold, gray skies and got chores under way a bit earlier than on Monday through Saturday mornings so that we would be on time for church. That particular Sunday we were scheduled to serve on the usher team, so we really needed to be timely. OK, no big deal; we



can be done on time. Of course, that was assuming that all would go like clockwork. We milked along and fed calves without incident. Everything was going great. As we were milking the last group of cows, it dawned on us that Graffiti, one of the newer first-calf heifers (and a granddaughter of the Gina cow I wrote about a few years ago), hadn't been in to be milked yet. We checked the stall barn and Cover All areas--no sign of her. Given that this heifer is a "pet" as well as a skilled escape artist, we went looking for her up in the hay barn above the main barn. No sign of her there either. "Hmm... where did that silly heifer get to now?" we wondered.



We headed back down to the main barn thinking maybe she was visiting the younger heifers out front. As we passed by the driveway to the upper haymow, we were greeted with a most unusual yet comical sight. Graffiti had made her way up the entry to the mow, no doubt to help herself to some of the second cut hay up on the floor there. Unfortunately, in her exuberance to get to the hay, she ignored the holes in the floor and fell through. Graffiti's big, black and white, spotted body was suspended, floor-level, by a large wooden beam. Her legs dangled below her, unable to help her up because there wasn't anything solid below her hooves--just the now empty middle hay mow. It was quite a predicament!

Now, you would think the heifer might be at least a little bit perturbed about this turn of events. But no, not this particular gal. She just hung there, helplessly but happily stretching her head and neck to get at the hay she had come for in the first place! She wasn't the least bit worried about getting out as she hung there snacking on the hay. We, on the other hand, did have a few concerns. First, how were we going to get a 1300- pound heifer up and out of the hole? Also, was she injured in any way that we couldn't yet see? Finally, were we going to be able to fulfill our responsibilities as ushers at church on time this day?

Think, quickly, what to do, what to do?! Summon Tim Johnson, of course. Our faithful, jack-of-all- trades neighbor would know what to do. Chris called him and explained the situation. As always, Tim did know what to do and said he'd be right down. Meanwhile, Chris also called our church and spoke to Pastor Engelhardt." I think we're going to be late this morning. We have a little problem... (I doubt Pastor had ever heard a story quite like that one before!)

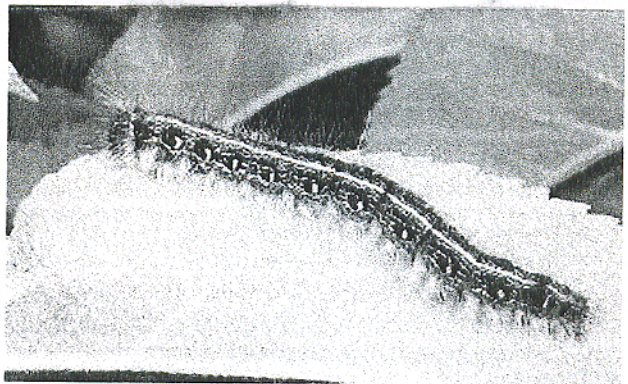
Soon after, Tim drove up pulling his trailer loaded with a skid steer. We went upstairs to formulate a plan to get Graffiti up and out. Believe it or not, he mentioned that this wasn't the first time he had done such a rescue. Within a few short minutes, Tim had skillfully harnessed a long rope around the still-relaxed heifer, attached the rope to the skid steer bucket, and lifted her out of the hole. Graffiti just went along with the whole thing, as if such an event happened every day. Tim removed the ropes and the

surprised, but unharmed heifer wobbled a bit then went on her way down to the milking parlor. We had her milked and back out with the other cows where she belonged in no time. Our dear neighbor had saved the day again. And yes, we even made it to church on time, carrying with us a delightful story of a neighbor's kindness and the sometimes-humorous side of our Lord's creation. *JD*

### CREEPIE CRAWLIES

Have you noticed that that the tent caterpillars are terrible this year? I was curious to know more about them and found on the web pages of the Universities of Ohio and Kentucky the following information:

The eastern tent caterpillar, (*Malacosoma americanum*) is native, as can be understood from its Latin name. Large numbers of this caterpillar usually occur in intervals of about ten years. Before the gypsy moth was accidentally introduced into the US, the eastern tent caterpillar was considered to be one of our most important pests of shade trees. And apparently the two bugs look alike. Home owners of-



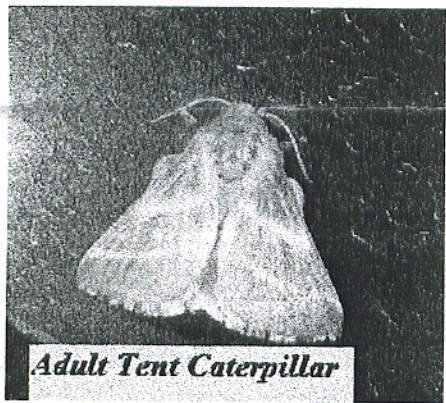
ten confuse the gypsy moth with the tent caterpillar.

Our tent caterpillar prefers wild cherry, apple and crabapple but can be found on almost any tree, as we can see this year particularly. They over winter in the egg stage. Egg masses are attached to small twigs and appear as varnished dark grey foam rapped around the twig. These masses are about one inch long and contain 150 to 350 eggs. The eggs hatch in early spring just as the leaf buds begin to show green. The tiny black caterpillars sun them-



selves on the egg mass but soon move to a nearby fork in the branches. These insects are social; caterpillars from one egg mass stay together and spin a silken tent in a crotch of a tree. Caterpillars from two or more egg masses may unite to form one large colony. Here they begin to spin silk and form a tent. The silk is produced by glands in the head and the tent provides protection from many natural enemies.

The larvae migrate to the new leaves to feed, usually in the morning or early afternoon. After feeding they return to the nest. They lay down silk trails wherever they go and these trails serve as roadways for other larvae. Feeding continues for four to six weeks until the larvae are about two inches long. Mature larvae usually leave the nest and tree to search for a suitable place to spin a cocoon. This is a messy time for everyone who is not a tent caterpillar as the long, skinny, million-legged worms swarm across roads, get caught on windshields, fall into swimming pools, etc. Once comfortable in a spot, they spin compact, spindle-shaped cocoons of white



to yellow silk. The adult moths emerge in two to four weeks. The adults are about one inch long, reddish brown in color and have two creamy-white stripes running obliquely across the front wings. Mating occurs soon after emergence and the females attach their new egg masses to tree branches. These masses stay on the tree until the following spring. There is only one generation per year.

Tent caterpillar control doesn't have to involve heavy applications of insecticides. In the autumn the egg masses are easy to spot after the leaves have dropped. Simply clip off and crush or dispose.

Or in the spring remove the tent by hand, using gloves as the caterpillar hairs are irritating to some people. Simply scrape the nest off onto the ground and crush the caterpillars or drop them into a pan of soapy water. Early morning or late afternoon is best because most of the caterpillars will be in the tent. Setting fire to the tent is not recommended as it may damage the tree.

Natural enemies play an important role in reducing tent caterpillar numbers in most years. Caterpillars are frequently parasitized by various tiny braconid, ichneumonid, and chalcid wasps. Several predators and a few diseases also help to regulate their populations. This, in part, accounts for the fluctuating population levels from year to year. Harsh weather conditions may also kill many caterpillars. And catbirds have been seen wearing the telltale webbing on their chests, beaks and heads indicating that they have tried to dip into the mess for a meal...

Tent caterpillar damage is not lethal. Although the defoliation and webbing is unsightly, these insects rarely kill a tree. However, heavy feeding during one year may reduce tree growth, especially if there are other stresses such as drought. It seems the most common bother of the tent caterpillar is his creepy-crawly yuckiness... He will occupy the hearts and minds of all Halcott gardeners until the arrival of our next perennial plague: the Japanese Beetle. *IK*

## Living Wills

By Dan Chesire

What if an illness or an accident leaves you in a coma? Would you want to have your life prolonged by any means necessary, or would you want to have some treatments withheld to allow a natural death? What if you are dying from a painful terminal illness? Would you want to receive medical procedures to prolong your life?

An advance directive allows you to give instructions to your health care providers and your family on these topics. You can give them instructions about the types of treatments you want or don't want to receive if you become incapacitated. Usually, directives will only go into effect in the event that you can't make and communicate your own health care decisions. Up until then, you can continue to give directions to your health care provider



even though you have an advance directive.

Hospitals and other health care providers are required under the federal Patient Self Determination Act to give patients information about their rights to make their own health care decisions. That includes the right to accept or refuse medical treatment.

We are fortunate to have Landa Palmer, the Admissions/Choices coordinator from Catskill Area Hospice and Palliative Care scheduled to visit us to discuss these issues. She will discuss Advanced Health Care Directives, Health Care Proxies, Living Wills and The Five Wishes in Planning to make life easier. She will address issues concerning what these all mean and how we can take control of our health care decisions. If you have concerns about these matters come and hear about the five wishes and have your questions answered.

**The presentation will take place at the Halcott Town Grange Hall , 264 Route 3, Halcott Center at 7:00 PM on Thursday June 30th.** For further information call Dan or Mary Chesire at 845-254-4310.

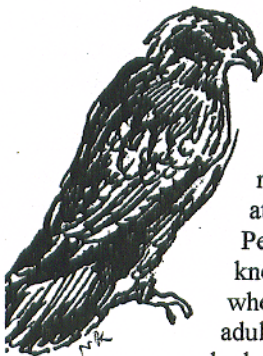
## **PET: THE MARVELOUS TOY**

*By Pattie Kelder*

Listening to Hilton Kelly sing "Zip when it moves and bop when it stops and whirrrr when it stands still..." has become somewhat of a Christmas tradition here in Halcott. What kid of any age isn't fascinated by the wonder of new gadgetry? Imagine a hand-operated riding machine that moves

smoothly, turns on a dime and handles uneven terrain. Intrigued? Well, you can see one up close at the Halcott Fair on July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

As it turns out, this marvelous toy isn't really a toy at all. But it IS pretty marvelous. Personal Energy Transportation, known as PET for short, is a three wheeled conveyance in two sizes – adult and child. It is for people who have lost the use of their legs due to land mine injury, polio, amputation and so



on. The worldwide waiting list for one of these specially designed wheelchairs is an astonishing 21 million people. The line is so long, in fact, that at this time, PETs are only being distributed to people whose annual income is less than \$100. These gifts of mobility restore dignity and rebuild lives by returning people to the work force in 29 different countries.

It just so happens that PET New York, the project center located in the northeastern US, operates out of a pastor's garage in nearby East Jewett. Component work such as painting, welding and sewing is often done by volunteers off-site, perhaps even at the Halcott Fair. Last year alone, under the direction of Don Muth, volunteers used donations of materials and money to construct over 1,000 PETs right here in Greene County.

PETs are shipped with plastic shopping bags and other materials which recipients use to augment their income. Times of Halcott readers can start saving bags now to present to Don as a way of saying thanks for explaining the project and demonstrating a PET at the Halcott Fair. Who knows – by working together, we might even come up with 1000 bags!



## **Halcott Born and Raised**

*By Suzanna DiBenedetto*

*[Editor's Note: In the very first issue of the Times of Halcott, 10 year-old Suzanna DiBenedetto published a poem. This month she will graduate from Margaretville Central School and has allowed us to publish the essay she wrote about Halcott for her college entrance.]*

I was born in a sacred valley in a round house, built by my parents and their friends on a mountain that was once part of my grandfather's farmland. The streams that I wade in and the earth that I walk on were once revered as holy hunting grounds by the Native Americans who inhabited the Catskill Mountains long ago. Although I wasn't aware of how cherished our valley was by Native Americans until recently, I always knew there was



something special about this place and the people living here. I've lived here all my life, except for the year we lived in South Korea, where my father taught school. People there would touch my little blonde head for luck, and to see what yellow hair felt like.

Whenever I meet people, one of the things I am asked most often is where I am from. My usual response is "someplace you've never heard of." Located at the end of a valley split by the Vly Creek, Halcott Center could be said to resemble "Little House on the Prairie." It consists primarily of a one-room church where I remember spending long mornings on hard pews at Sunday School, and a Grange Hall where practically all other community activities take place. These include summer's Halcott Fair and the annual Christmas program, where children learn the basics of public speaking as they recite memorized verses of poetry and music to a room full of loving faces. For all of my life I have participated in both; helping my cousin create a petting zoo of farm animals for the kids at the fair, decorating the tree for the Christmas party, and performing on stage. In both cases, it seems everyone in town shows up, creating a sense of community that is probably not found anymore in very many places across the country.

I have tried to do my part to contribute not only to my own community, but to those surrounding mine as well. I participate in the Community Christmas Project, delivering food and gifts to local families, and have been a reading tutor to younger students. I was also grateful to have the opportunity to take part in the tsunami disaster relief effort, helping to pack and crate over 62,000 pounds of medical supplies for Sri Lanka. However, nothing has been more enjoyable to me than coaching children in our community youth soccer program. Perhaps it is because of my love of the game and the memories it created during my varsity career, including carrying home our school's first ever State Championship Trophy down the steps of our yellow school bus in 2002. Or, maybe it is because of the memories I have of my own spring nights under the village park lights, learning the fundamentals of the sport as a child in

the program. Although the kids don't get every drill right on their first try, to be able to encourage them not to give up and to help them progress until they are successful gives me a wonderful feeling of pride and accomplishment. It's amazing how much weight the coaches hold in the lives of the young players. Just the other day, I was standing in the hall of our school when I felt a child's arms wrap around my waist. It didn't take long for me to recognize the face of a young girl I had coached last spring, and I realized that I had become

someone who these children look up to.

I spend a great deal of time out in the natural beauty and peace that grace this area. Much of this time is shared with my Arabian, Obby, as we ride bareback through



the mountains and along the dusty dirt roads that at times are so deserted they seem to serve no other purpose than our sojourns. With a population of fewer than 200, we don't get too many traffic jams. On the rare occasions that we do encounter cars, they are usually driven by locals who know us both by name, or curious weekend "city people" who are eager to gaze at and touch this animal they know so little about. Once, a big station wagon slowly pulled up beside us. When the doors opened, a tall Hasidic man stepped out, followed by a crowd of timid little children. I dismounted and attempted to show them that there was no reason to be afraid of my gentle pet. I was able to coax them closer and closer to Obby, until they were all awkwardly petting him with big, proud smiles from ear to ear, except for one little girl who ran back into the car crying. It was a feeling of accomplishment for the rest of us nonetheless.

Sometimes I wonder how a laidback country girl like myself will be received in the world outside of these mountains. Although I sometimes see strangers as a threat to the quaintness of my "sacred valley", and as a cause in the disappearance of "places to escape to," I am willing to welcome them with open arms. I can only hope that people will be as patient and helpful with me as I have tried to be with others. Wherever my journey leads me, I will always carry in my heart



the memories and lessons learned in my sacred valley of Halcott Center, a truly unique place on Earth that I will always know as Home.

## Fair Days Are Upon Us

*By Laura J. Vogel*

The Halcott Fair Planning Committee met up in the Grange on a fine Saturday morning in April to discuss this year's event—and, dear friends and neighbors, it's going to be a great one.

The seventh annual Halcott Fair will take place at the newly painted Grange on **Saturday, July 23, from noon to 6 p.m.**, and we need you. We hope you will definitely come and partake of Karl Von Hassel's famous pig roast, some great music, an exciting silent auction, and rousing games for the kids. If you would like to contribute, we'd be glad to have you. Below are the categories that volunteers are working on, and if you would like to lend a hand in any area, please contact one of the people listed below.

**PUBLICITY:** The decision has been made to widen the net this year, and we are going to advertise the event in many local papers, put up posters in local businesses, and list the event on Catskills Web sites. If you have ideas on how to spread the word to the local community, or want to help put up poster, please contact Innes Kasanof at 254-9920 or Kari Pagnano at 254-5744

**PREPARATION AND CLEANUP:** Nancy Reynolds and Lee Austin have been kind enough to offer their services again this year—if you would like to help out, please call them at 254-5924, or just show up at 11 a.m. on Sunday the 24th at the Grange.

**KIDS' ACTIVITIES:** Lauren Berley will be organizing a watermelon-seed-spitting contest, a science educator from the DEC will be conducting a stream-life presentation, Nichole Kelder and friends will be face painting and helping the young of all ages to create masterpieces in tempura, and Marc Neves and Laura Vogel are organizing a golden-coin scramble. They are seeking a bale of hay—call 254-4272 if you've got some to spare, or would like to help with any of the kids' activities or want to add another.

**MUSIC:** David Grossman is rustling up some fine local musicians (as well as a sound system) for the event. Please contact him at [david@grossman.org](mailto:david@grossman.org) or 917-273-7567 if you would like to play or would like

to help out.

**AUCTION:** We are always seeking donations from merchants in the areas (gift certificates, merchandise or services); if you have something of value that you would like to contribute, or if you would like to help solicit donations, please call Innes Kasanof 254-9920.

**50/50 RAFFLE:** Nancy Ballard is coordinating.

**PLANT SALE:** Steven Kozuch and Tim Mulvaney are in charge. They are looking for the donation of small pots, divided plants/seedlings, as well as volunteers to help them man the table on the day of the fair. You may call them at 254-4995 to assist.

**NOTE:** This year we will have an empty bin for returned pots since they are always needed to hold next year's plants. Bring back your pots, please!  
**ATTIC TREASURES:** Kari Pagnano will be running the sale again this year. She asks that donations be left at the Grange Hall no later than the afternoon before the fair (she will be glad to accept donations of small items at her home, and she will take them to the Grange, but she prefers goods be dropped off at the Grange). Call Kari at 254-5744 with any questions.

**BAKE SALE:** All proceeds will benefit the Methodist Church; contact organizer Ruth Kelder 254-5589 to donate.

## WELCOME!

To Todd Nation who has purchased Bill Nelkin's A-Frame on County Route 1. I caught up with Todd and his lovely lady, Melodie Provenzano one day in early April and had the grand tour of their house. They told me that when they first saw the property, it was immediate love, and that their decision was based on simply a look through the windows. By the time I got there, the house had been freshly painted, the kitchen was in the process of





being renovated, and several other changes were in the planning stage. Bill would definitely have approved.

Melodie is a graduate of the Parsons School of Design and a fine artist whose work I look forward to seeing more of. Todd is an entrepreneur of great skill who most recently owned a couple of the fast-food chain, Subway franchises in New York City. He attended Skidmore College and began with a lawn cutting business, a baseball card trading business, and worked up to an advertising agency in college. Quite an impressive string of accomplishments! Todd and Melodie love the privacy, the beauty and the nice people of Halcott.

And welcome also to Dick and Betty Webster, parents of Jacki VanValkenburgh. Dick and Betty have migrated from Portland, Maine, moving into a cozy apartment across the driveway from Bob and Jacki on Turkey Ridge Road. It is a pleasure seeing Betty zip around town in her gray Subaru. She says that she is excited to be here. It takes courage to pick up stakes and move to a new community. Our hats are off to the whole family! *IK*

## **PASSAGES**

### **Our Friend Up the Hill: Memories of Helen Parker**

*By Laura Vogel and Marc Neves*

We didn't meet Helen until the very end of her life, though we did not know it at the time. When we heard of her terrible accident, we felt cheated. With no warning, a beloved friend and kindred spirit was taken from us just as we were forming a strong bond. However, as time has passed, we have come to appreciate how fortunate we were just to have met Helen and enjoy the time we did have together.

Helen Parker was an inspiration of how to live life well. When she was 85, when we were lucky enough to become friends, she was full of wit, energy, curiosity, and fun. Helen always espoused the importance of travel and adventure: Indeed, she and Walt chucked it all—his Madison Avenue marketing job and her career working with Nobel-Prize winning physicist, James Watson to travel the country in a van. She said it was the best decision they ever

made.

In this woman, two generations our senior, we found a soulmate whose idealism and progressive views made many who were decades younger seem cynical and square. Where our passions converged most, however, was in our love of Halcott Center which we agreed was the best place on earth and well worth the many miles of driving that brought us to this perfect place.

Walt and Helen's amazing blended family was a virtual Brady Bunch that drove up to Halcott from Long Island every weekend in a Dodge Dart. They loved the valley dearly, and eventually bought a tract of land (above their home on Silas Lake) that is widely regarded as having the best view in the Catskills—we definitely consider it so. Helen was always generous with invitations to enjoy the trail for unforgettable hikes which gave us the perfect excuse to check in and see if she was home and available for a visit that turned from a chat in the driveway to an extended, animated conversation in her living room.

In a picture of her we have from last Fourth of July she is beaming and smiling mirthfully. We will always remember her this way as a wise, elegant and kind friend who, when she would talk, would often slap her knee and let out an uninhibited and mischievous laugh. We will treasure these memories.

On the day of her accident last summer, right before heading upstate and after a day of vigorous gardening, Helen told her son Paul "I am going to write a book about how to live life at 87!" Though she never got a chance to write the book, Helen Parker showed us, by her vibrant example, how to live life at any age.

### ***And from Alan Adelson...***

Helen Parker was an irrepressible life force. She committed herself to living and loving to the fullest, and left a circle of very devoted loved ones to accept her passing. We wrestled for many months with Helen's having slipped into a shadowlife after a head-on car crash on Rt. 28 last summer. Helen's was a life on the move, and that state was embodied in the moment when she was struck down. She was driving from Huntington, Long Island, to Halcott, where she planned to spend just one night before linking up with her niece in Albany and traveling west—to Colorado, I think, but I always had trou-



ble keeping track of where she was and where she was heading.

She was a gorgeous woman. She was a beauty queen, a poster girl, the life of the party, a most loving, effusive, observant, wise and deeply conscientious person. She cherished humanitarian ideals. She hated war, hated violence, hated cruelty, hated poverty, hated selfishness, and had the knack of bringing out the best in people.

Perhaps most amazing of all, that dynamic little beauty was also brilliant. James D. Watson, the co-discoverer of the double helix structure of DNA, brought her in to assist in a broad range of research and conference activities at his Cold Spring Laboratory on Long Island, where she spent a big slice of her life, and she ended up being a close personal assistant to him, coordinating events and seeing after a variety of responsibilities in one of America's most intense concentrations of scientific intelligence. Nobel literature laureate Seamus Heaney is one of the scores of people who delighted in Helen's company. He's a great chum of Helen's daughter, Jane, and her husband Bernard, from their years together teaching literature in Boston.

A few years ago, when Jane was visiting, we had the great pleasure of seeing some old reels of their family home movies. Helen was an eyeful, posing in the most fashionable clothes and shoes in cities around the world with her first husband, a Pan Am pilot.

In his short, glowing memoir, Walt Parker wrote the story of how he and his astonishingly energetic and bright-spirited wife Helen came to Halcott not long after they'd begun merging their two families. They each had children from a previous marriage, and were striving to combine kids and working lives while holding down important executive jobs. "We soon learned that weekend camping was a sport we all enjoyed," Walt wrote. "We rather quickly decided that a small cabin in the woods a couple of hours north of New York City would be just the thing to pull this crowd together."

"Once we found Thyme Hill things fell into place for us," Walt recalled. "What a team we were! We built roads and renovated the six-bedroom ramshackle farmhouse, all the while working hard and the kids going to school five days a week. We loved

it and it brought us all closer together. We became a family. That is surely one of Helen's and my proudest accomplishments."

Helen and Walt made a great life together. They spent a chunk of the year on a beautiful spit of land in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, and then went home to Halcott. They knew every house in our hollows, and stories about everyone who used to live in them. Walt always called Helen "My love," but if it softened her, she didn't show it much. She felt Walt needed managing, letting him have it for what he hadn't done, and lecturing him about what he should do. He'd listen with smiles and happily do her bidding, or forget it. They were a fabulous couple to sport around with and loved one another deeply.

Helen loved to reminisce as much as anyone, but she had the most intense hold on the present, wrung life lovingly from the time she had, worked feverishly, and never compromised herself with weakness. She was indefatigably determined and optimistic. She may have died the way she did because she wouldn't begin to concede that time had taken any of her capabilities.

It was terrible to see her how badly damaged she had been by the accident, and yet in a strange and wonderful way, Helen's brain responded to the injuries it had suffered by reducing her to simply feeling love. She would reach out to the doting faces that appeared above or beside her and touch them, then take her visitor's hand and stroke it. Her sons, Paul and Lannie, and Paul's wife, Tia, and their children, Harry and Mariah, cared for Helen after the accident with tremendous love and devotion (as they always had). They made her last months and moments as sweet as they could be. I don't dare mention Helen's age. A human meteor has passed, but we will never forget the sight.





# *The Times*

of the  
*Halcott Methodist Church*

*Pattie Kelder, Correspondent*



## **Invitation**

**What:** Vacation Bible School and Youth Event

**When:** 9:00AM to 1:00PM, Saturday, July 16

9:00AM to 1:30PM, Sunday, July 17

**Where:** Fleischmanns United Methodist Church

**Info:** Bridget Caputo, 254-5872

Pattie Kelder, 254-5589

---Nondenominational---

All are welcome. Lunch will be served.

## **GRADUATION AWARDS**

Congratulations to Halcott's High School graduates. Suzanna DiBenedetto, Ryon Bender, and Anthony Capriotti were all given Janet Kelder Riss Memorial Awards this year.

## **Announcements**

Summer and Fall Worship Hour is  
9:00AM.

Interfaith Bible Study on Genesis meets  
twice monthly.

Electronic Book Group is reading **A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23** by Phillip Keller

Bake Sale at the Halcott Fair, July 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Contributions and patronage appreciated.

Participation is open to all. For more information,  
please call Ruth Kelder at 254-5589.

## **UMCOR KITS**

This spring some of the children helped pack 66 kits for UMCOR. These health, school and sewing kits will make a world of difference to people suffering from disasters.

## **Memories from Shirley Bouton**

My first venture into the Halcott Church

was in the early nineteen thirties. Helen Gould Shepard from Roxbury, New York was to be guest speaker in the then Halcott Methodist Episcopal Church. The congregation of the Bedell Advent Christian Church also wanted to hear Ms. Shepard and the decision was made to come to Halcott.

The beautiful stained glass windows did not impress the then ten-year-old me at all. My reaction was that the Church interior was so dark! If electricity was available it was not evident. I was used to plain glass windows and sensitive to any and all outside activity. Here, no such distraction. Very recently, since we installed the handicapped-accessible door with the plain glass windows, I have found myself, once more, walking down memory lane!

I do remember the petite lady all dressed in black. Hat, coat, dress, shoes and stockings, standing on the steps near the piano. Of course I couldn't remember one thing she said. However, in mentioning it to Mae Morse, she said Helen was very concerned about the spread of communism and wanted to alert people to its dangers.

My next venture was in 1940 when I came to Halcott as the "hired girl" both on the farm and in the boarding houses. At that time the grounds around the Church were much the same as they are today. It is hard for me to envision the Church driveway going diagonally up across the front lawn and into the church sheds situated near the back of the Church. Old photos show that before the driveway was made around the Church that both the schoolhouse lawn next door and the Church lawn were the



same height. Donald was still going to grade school here when the Town Highway crew used the Lynn Tractor and a pull behind grader to grade the front of the Church lawn as it is today and to build the driveway all the way around the Church. When the sheds were no longer needed for horses and wagons, the Town used them to store some of their road equipment. Donald remembers the steam roller, water wagon and one of the bays being full of rolls of snow fence. It also made a great place for the school kids to play, especially on rainy days. The part that had been made lower to accommodate the high smoke stack on the steam roller would fill up with water, usually muddy! What a fun time to place a plank across the mud puddle and jump up and down on it and hope the teacher wasn't looking!

Repairs on the old shed were neglected and my sister-in-law Dorothy said that it finally collapsed during a party on Valentine's Day. I think 1936. Probably from the weight of the heavy snow. The mess was cleaned up with the exception of the stone foundation. Sometime during the mid-1950's Paul Finch came with his bulldozer and pushed the big rocks out into the swamp.

On each side of the front lawn was a

barberry hedge. This too had been neglected. It was very overgrown, full of dry leaves, and ideal spot for maple seedlings to grow and also caused, in season, the drifting of snow. It became very difficult to mow close to it; the result being a lot of handwork. Eventually it was taken out along with the young maple trees growing there. Had they been allowed to grow, by now they would have over shadowed the Church.

The overgrown white cedar trees on either side of the Church entrance were also removed and replaced with the "Burning Bush." Only one survived and that is very beautiful.

The area in the back of both the Church and the school was mowed once a year with horses and a mowing machine. Hay was then raked up and taken to the barn for feed. Marshall Bouton did the honors. As tractors replaced the horses, it became more difficult to mow with the modern farm machinery. By that time, Dennis was big enough to assist his dad and the two of them disked, harrowed and sowed grass seed and the following year the whole Church lawn, front and back, was mowed with the popular rotary hand mower. Of course, many, many, loads of the small stone from the old shed foundation had been hauled away first. Close inspection, yet today, gives evidence of where the once indispensable building stood.

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