

Valda Tormey

I was born Valda Olesen on a farm in Half Moon Bay almost 99 years ago in 1925. My dad was Portuguese from Brazil, the youngest of twelve. My mom was Swedish from South Dakota. I was the youngest of five, with two brothers and two sisters. At age four, I was called “baby” and I detested that.

My dad was a farmer, then a car salesman and eventually a banker. My mother was a housewife, though she did help out at the Farallon Hotel, now the Half Moon Bay Inn. We had a car. We lived in the last house in town.

I grew up in the Methodist church, which was really a non-Catholic Protestant church. Almost all the locals were Catholic. My dad, a Roman Catholic, didn't attend church because of marrying a non-Catholic. But he was very strong on his children attending church.

In high school, I was a soda jerk, and made great sundaes and banana splits. I loved school. My favorite subject was Home Economics. I graduated from high school in 1942, in a class of only two! The whole high school had only twelve students. I met my husband in high school. He went off to WWII.

I wanted to be a teacher. I first went to the College of San Mateo, then was a San Jose State Graduate.

Los Altos United Methodist Church

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My first trip was to Alaska, alone, on a cruise ship.

On my first day of teaching sixth grade, I called all my students to meet me in the back of the hall. My voice must have carried well and sounded like authority, because all the boys and girls obeyed without delay. After teaching four years, I went back and finished at San Jose State.

I have been married twice. My first husband Marv and I had two daughters, Betsy and Vallen. After Marv died, I married again, and we became a blended family with two more younger daughters. These days Betsy and Vallen take good care of me.

My father-in-law was the president of the University of Pacific. My dad and my second husband and his brothers eventually were bankers at the Bank of America.

I joined LAUMC thirty-three years ago. I taught Sunday School in the original Kitchen/activity room. My girls loved Starfire.

LAUMC is so much bigger now than the church I joined. I taught Sunday School, worked on Harvest faire and Rummage Sale, directed the food part of School of Christian Living, and participated in United Methodist Women.



Wisdom Generation *Our Stories*

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Barbara Paterson

“I’M 102 YEARS OLD!”

I was born in Cleveland, Ohio on April 1, 1921, the sixth child in a family of seven. My dad was Czech; my mom was Austrian. We were living with my maternal grandparents then. On the day I was born, my dad found a job and called me his “lucky charm.” I was named for my grandma.

I never had or read a Bible growing up, but my parents believed in God.

My parents bought a house in a suburb of Cleveland, and we lived there for ten years. The Great Depression came, and my parents bought a 15 acre farm. We grew vegetables, raised pigs and had a cow for milk.

I really wanted to take typing in high school, but every year I was told “the class is full.” So I quit school at age 16 and my mother suggested that I become a nanny. One baby I cared for had cerebral palsy.

After the nanny jobs, I went to work in an envelope factory. It took a while to learn the various speeds of the conveyer belt. If you’ve ever seen the “I Love Lucy” episode where she and Ethel are on an assembly line and can’t keep up, that’s what it was like.

I worked in defense plants during WWII. I met my husband, Willard “Pat” Paterson there. He also grew up in Ohio. When we married in 1944 we moved to Mountain View. My husband and two of his brothers worked in the Oakland shipyards. We had three kids.

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Harvey Dixon

I was born in 1927 on a farm in Deerfield, TN. My parents already had 3 girls and 2 boys. My father had sold his blacksmith shop and wagon-building business in West Point, TN the previous year. West Point was a small town of 312 with a pool hall and a beer joint. My father raised us on a farm to keep us busy and out of temptation. He mortgaged the farm to build a new barn and buy a tractor. The stock market crash in 1929 led to the Great Depression, and the bank foreclosed on the loan.

Dad returned to West Point and opened a blacksmith and carpenter shop. My parents belonged to the Methodist Church there and I attended Sunday School. I answered an altar call at a week-long revival meeting when I was 12 and was baptized in the local creek.

World War II was still on when I graduated from high school in 1945. To avoid military draft of all 18 year olds, I attended an electronics trade school in Chicago and then volunteered for a Navy electronics training program. That was before the Atomic Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When I finished the training, all my active duty was at Moffett Field.

The G.I. Bill allowed me to go to college. I applied and was accepted at both the University of Tennessee and Stanford University. My decision was not based on the academic excellence in engineering, but between my high school sweetheart, with whom I’d corresponded while I was in the Navy, and a local San Jose girl. I knew that if I went to

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Barbara Paterson, continued

My first church try was at Palo Alto Methodist. One of the deacons told me that if you didn't contribute financially, you weren't welcome to join. Next, I went to Mountain View Methodist Church where I worked in the nursery. Later I came to LAUMC when Marvin Harrell was the minister. My daughter Robin sang in the choir. I joined in 1975.



I now have ten grandchildren, twenty great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren. I took care of my granddaughter Brittany and grandson Bo while their mother went to school to become a hairdresser and makeup artist. Bo is a fine tuba player. He married a violinist.

My husband died in 1980. I've lived in this house for 33 years. I was robbed once by a bunch of high school kids and nothing was ever recovered.

When Dave and Sonia Samelson came to visit, my granddaughter asked Sonia if she would like to color, so the two of them colored while we visited.

Covid was very hard for me. I was alone for three months. I never caught the disease, thankfully. I had a bad fall in the shower, but now I have a walk-in tub and shower. Much better! I stopped driving at 97.

I am a big reader and am now working on giving away my book collection.

Words of Wisdom: Know your own body. Don't take meds unless it is absolutely necessary. Eat carefully. Don't let your family split over politics, or personalities. Like all your pastors.

I've lived a good long life, and still live on my own. Come see me. I love to chat.

Harvey Dixon, continued

Tennessee, I might never see Bev again. But if I chose Stanford, I would probably break up with the other girl.

I met Bev at the First Methodist Church in San Jose while at Moffett Field. I also went to the USO in San Jose which Bev's mother managed. Bev was a Junior Hostesses at dances and on outings to the beach or a picnic at a park.

Bev and I married in 1950 when I finished my sophomore year. Bev was a teacher and continued teaching while I finished both a Bachelor and a Masters Degree in Industrial Engineering. Our first child was born three months after I graduated. Bev then became a "stay-at-home-mom" to our one son and three daughters.

After graduating from Stanford, I was hired by Stanford Research Institute in Menlo Park. I had three different "careers" there. Later, SRI became an independent not-for-profit organization.

As our four children were growing up and attending Sunday School, both Bev and I taught Sunday School classes. When they were in the youth programs, we joined the Chancel Choir. Bev continued until her health declined. I continued until I was 91.

I have been blessed to serve in a variety of leadership roles at LAUMC in the 65 years since I became a member. Some of them have been Administrative Board, Trustees, Education, Endowment, and Staff Parish. I have also been blessed to serve as Chair of the Architect and Building Committees for Creekside and Office buildings in the late 1980's and the Children's Center, Narthex expansion, and Choir buildings in the late 1990's. Five of my 10 grandchildren have been a part of Starfire and youth programs at LAUMC. I am grateful that LAUMC has been exceedingly important to my whole family.



Chuck Dunker

I was born in Pittsburg, PA. I remember being five years old at my older brother's Halloween party. He was giving me the answers to a quiz and I won a candy prize.

My mother's family was Lutheran. She was from a 190-acre Iowa farm. My father grew up in Iowa also. We moved to Pennsylvania when Dad went to work for JH Heinz Company. He was Chief Engineer and later became President of a subdivision of Heinz.

I was in the church choir and was an acolyte in my youth. Through middle school I stuttered badly. My family thought it could be corrected and it was, finally, in high school. I didn't like school. I wanted to be an athlete, but I was a late developer. I didn't make the Little League baseball team. I didn't make the wrestling team or the track team. I was on the cross-country team in high school. We had a dual meet with a very large Catholic school. The varsity team started first, followed by the junior varsity squad, including me. At the end I came in second to last; I beat the last person from our opponent's team, though.

Education was very important to our family. My parents were both college graduates. Even during the Depression, seven siblings in my mother's family were all college women who would marry ministers.

I had an engineering aptitude and settled on Electrical Engineering at Cornell in New York. We were an insular family, and it was tough to be away from home. A year later I was going through the cafeteria and a female voice said, "We need a fourth for bridge." Even though I didn't know how to play bridge, she got my attention. It took me three years to reel Myrl in. We married between our junior and senior years. I finished a four-year program in five years.

I took lots of German in college, but one professor gave me a very low grade after being near the top until then. To get my grades up, I sat for a qualifying exam. Twenty years later, a hearing test found that I couldn't distinguish the German guttural sounds.

I applied to eight graduate business schools and was accepted into all of them. At Stanford I was wait-listed, so I went to Harvard.

Myrl and I spent eighteen years in "A Course in Miracles." It helped us in our marriage and with the kids as they were growing up. There are close parallels between Christian Science and the teachings of the Course. Later we joined Creative Initiative, an organization that was spiritual, but not church. It encourages being in community with others in the Initiative.

We owned two Computer Land Stores in Santa Clara and Capitola. After eight years, we sold and eventually, a hardware manufacturer took over the buildings.

When we came to LAUMC, we met the Boxills. My most fulfilling opportunity was her library project at the bilingual Escuela Populare, for children and adults.

Church is different with kids in it. Families coming into LAUMC have relatively lower incomes than the families leaving LAUMC.

I have been inspired to read to Elzene Yancey, to advise and fund a marketing project for Senior New Ways. I love to study the Word.

