

**Longtime community news headliner gets the job done ~ An interview-biography with Pacifican Shirlee Gibbs**

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**Written by Jean Bartlett**

**March 12, 2024**

(A Pacifica Historical Society Project)

Shirlee Gibbs has been featured in the *Pacifica Tribune*, since not long after she and her husband Chris moved to West Sharp Park in 1956. Here are a few "Shirlee" headlines, not in any particular order: "Shirlee Gibbs Is Rec Commission's Honored Volunteer," "Volunteer Rallies To Help Elderly," "Mother Of Three Named Sharp Park Life Member," "Gibbs Honored At Pacifica AAUW Yearly Meeting," "Shirlee Gibbs Installed As Pacifica Lions President," "Lion Shirlee Gibbs Is Pacifica's Sight Night Chairman," "Shirlee Gibbs Chairs Pacifica's Silver Anniversary Celebration," "Shirlee Gibbs Heads Historical Society's Restoration Team" and "Longtime Pacifican Shirlee Gibbs Decides To Run For City Council."

What? Shirlee ran for Pacifica City Council? This is a tremendously time-consuming process for any candidate. It hardly seems possible that Shirlee, who is a whirlwind of activity today, would have ever found the time needed to get the "running" done. Grant it, this was back in August of 1982 and she was 42 years younger. Still, she was even more impossibly busier back then with must-do projects, assignments, community events, various service organization needs and always anything family. But of course, she did run.



**In a debate with Barack Obama and John McCain, Shirlee takes the lead. Or, maybe she's just posing with a couple of cardboard cutouts on a 2008 cruise.**

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To make sense of this "timing thing," lining up this biography-interview required serious scheduling maneuvers – and not on my part. Here are just a few of the Shirlee' calendar activities, over one 7-day period: completely load up the back of her vehicle, more than once, with items for the Pacifica Historical Society's monthly rummage sale; price those particular items and all other items for the sale; work the sale; make sure that rummage not sold is either packed up again for the next sale or donated to the Salvation Army; attend a Beta Sigma Phi Chapter meeting, attend a special Lions Club meeting/fundraiser for diabetes; attend The Camino Real California Council of Beta Sigma Phi sorority brunch at Nick's Restaurant here in town; celebrate her daughter's birthday at Westlake Joe's; discuss renovation work on the last passenger car of the Ocean Shore Railroad, Car 1409; discuss grant money search for Car 1409... By the way, Shirlee is 93.

\* \* \*



Shirlee, age 4.5 months, with her parents, 1930, Oil City, PA.

Shirlee Lorraine (Perry) Gibbs was born on May 25, 1930, in Oil City, Pennsylvania, the largest city in Venango County, to Frederick Allen and Mildred (Silvis) Perry. Located on the site of a Seneca Indian village, Oil City would become known as "the valley that changed the world." In late August of 1859, Edwin L. Drake, as an agent of the Seneca Oil Company of Connecticut, drilled the first commercially successful oil well in Titusville, just 15 miles north of Oil City, when he struck oil at 69.5 feet. This first oil well was adjacent to Oil Creek and oil was subsequently transported by water from Titusville to Oil City, where the oil was then exported to many other locations. When oil was first struck in Titusville, about six families lived in Oil City. By 1866, Oil City's population was more than 4,500 people. By 1870 it had grown to 7,300. When Shirlee was born, the population was a little over 22,000. Oil City thrived until the 1990s, when Quaker State, Wolf's Head Oil and Pennzoil moved their headquarters elsewhere.

"When I was born my dad worked in the oil fields," Shirlee said. "I believe he was an oil driller.

On November 24, 1931, Shirlee's little brother Allen was born in Oil City. On August 4, 1934, the unthinkable happened; Shirlee's mom died at Oil City Hospital giving birth. Her baby died as well. Mildred Perry—born in Greenwood, PA, raised in Pleasantville, PA, the daughter of David and Nettie (Moore) Silvis —was all of 26. Mildred is buried with her infant son at Brandon Cemetery, Seneca, PA.

"I do remember my mom. She had bright carrot-red hair and she had brothers and sisters that were also redheads. I always thought I'd have a child with red hair but I never did."

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**Shirlee, Allen and their pregnant mom, early in 1934.**



**Shirlee and Allen, early summer, 1934.**

Shirlee was 4 when her mom died and her brother was almost 3.

"After my mother died, my dad sent my brother and me to live with his grandmother, our great grandmother. I'll never forget her. Her name was Matilda Simon. I don't know the details as to why we didn't live with my father's mother, Alice Perry. I do remember her. She was very prim, very proper and always very well-dressed. She wore her hair in this thing called a finger wave, which was always funny to my brother and me. It looked like it was glued to her head!

"We lived with my Great Grandmother Matilda and what happened was really tragic. She backed up to an open-flame heater in the winter time and her nightgown caught on fire. She died in the hospital of burns. I was 6 or maybe 7. We weren't with her for that long. She also lived in Oil City.

"Then my dad sent me to live with my mother's sister Cora and her husband, Uncle Ted. They lived in Oil City. Their last name was Shepherd. They had an older son in the service and two teenage boys. I had my own bedroom there. My dad took my brother to live with him. When I lived with my Aunt Cora and Uncle Ted, I saw my dad very infrequently. I felt like I was just there. The older kids had their own activities and their own circle of friends. I really had a lonely childhood, but I never wanted for anything. I was never poor and these were Depression years. My father always provided money for books or magazines, or a new dress, whatever I needed. But I never got a hug, never any affection of any kind. I never felt really wanted, though I was always taken care of.

"When I was 10 years old I said, 'When I grow up, I am going to have a family of my own.' I did grow up and do that! I thank God every day for my family, for the life I had with my late husband Chris and that I had and still have with my children, my grandchildren and my great grandchildren. I am so fortunate!"



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Shirlee went to the elementary school that was three or four blocks from her aunt and uncle's home.

"It was a great neighborhood where my aunt and uncle lived. All the neighbors knew one another and my aunt and uncle had a set of flats. They lived in the upper flat. We lived in an area of Oil City called Cornplanter Run. (The area is located alongside the 2.76-mile-long tributary Cornplanter Run, which feeds into Oil Creek.)

Shirlee did have fun vacations with her aunt and uncle. They went to Lake Erie, to Niagara Falls, and to Conneaut Lake in Conneaut, Ohio, where her uncle liked to fish and there was an amusement park. But mostly she remembers those years as lonesome.



When Shirlee was 10, her dad telephoned her aunt. He was coming to pick up Shirlee and bring her home. Home now was not only her dad and brother, but also her new stepmom Joan – Joan (Thomas) Perry.

"We lived in the house that my dad's mother had left to him in Cranberry Township, which is about 10 miles from Oil City. Since my mother's death, this was my first touch of family-togetherness living."

←Shirlee in Cranberry Township, 1941.

"My stepmother was great. She had been a school teacher. She made sure we went to church. She was a homebody and she taught me to bake and to cook, and to garden. She had a small garden and I'll never forget it was the first time I ever saw rhubarb grow. In the backyard there was a well with a pump and a cistern which we used to water the garden. I remember the seasons, there was a lot of snow in the winter and we had to shovel to get the car out.

"My dad was then working in Franklin, PA. He had taken the tests and had become a licensed master plumber. We still went to Oil City. I remember the Allegheny River ran through the city and along the river were railroad tracks and these big storage containers for oil. They looked like drums to me when I was a child and they were all over the place.

"I had not seen my brother until I moved back in with my family. But we picked up where we left off. We got along just fine. Poor guy was always sickly. He had asthma really bad and had to sit up in bed at night. My stepmother had this apparatus which they used back then to treat asthma. It was a glass thing with a tube on it. You put the medicine in it and held it to his throat."

"I learned a lot from my stepmother Joan and while she wasn't affectionate, she was such a good influence and she really encouraged me to make a lot of friends. There was a roller rink about a mile away and that's where I spent most of my free time. My dad got me new skates when I needed them. He gave me money to go skating. He'd say, 'Here, have a cheese burger before you skate or at the snack bar, and treat the kids.' He was very generous with money. I didn't feel the Depression. Roller-skating was my big deal and I learned how to dance on roller skates. We probably roller-skated every weekend and sometimes on a night during the week.

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"We also ice-skated. There was a pond that froze over in the winter and we'd skate on that and there was a little hill where we skied."

Family life for Shirlee was good and she learned that her dad was quite a hunter as venison, during the season, was on the menu. She went to Cranberry High School and she excelled in school. She was a cheerleader for the basketball team and frequently rode the school bus to cheer on her school at the interleague games. She had the lead in the junior class play and her biggest event of all happened in her junior year when one of the senior boys asked her to the prom.

"He wasn't my boyfriend. He was just a friend. His name was Chuck Turner and he had a convertible and off we went to the prom in that. That was something, to be invited to the senior prom as a junior.



Shirlee, and a friend, cheer for her high school, 1947.



Shirlee graduates from Oil City High School, June 2, 1948.

At the end of her junior year, Shirlee was uprooted again. Her dad and stepmom were getting divorced.

"We had a good family life for a while. When they got divorced I thought, now what is going to happen? My dad said, 'You are going to have to go back to Oil City and live with Aunt Cora and Uncle Ted.'

"This was just awful. I really enjoyed Cranberry High School and was so looking forward to my senior year there, but now I was going to Oil City High School.

"Now the additional really tough thing was my dad and my brother disappeared in my senior year and my father was not sending my aunt and uncle any support money for me. Aunt Cora and Uncle Ted were supporting me.

"My Aunt Cora had a friend that owned a 24-hour diner. It was several blocks down from where they lived, within walking distance, and my aunt found me a job. I was 17. I went to high school and as soon

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as school got out, I went to the diner and worked, 4 p.m. to usually 10 or 11 p.m. When I got home, I did my school work and went to sleep. On Saturday, my aunt also got me a job at F.W. Woolworth in the linen department. I made \$15 a week at the diner. There were very few tips. This was when coffee was a nickel a cup.

"My last year of high school, all I did was school and work. I did manage to read. I've always been an avid reader and still am. The only time I really heard music in my senior year was at the diner. There was a small jukebox at every table. One of the popular songs, at least among our customers was, 'Near You.' I loved that song! I bought that record and played it over and over again in my bedroom, until my aunt and uncle's son Carl yelled at me to 'shut that off,' and then he broke it!"

On June 2, 1948, Shirlee Lorraine Perry graduated from Oil City High School. "It was a very lonesome last year of high school."

"When I graduated, my Uncle Ted and Aunt Cora's eldest son had returned from the service. He thought I should try to get into Clarion State Teachers College in Clarion, PA (about 27 miles southeast of Oil City). I said, 'How is that going to work?' Well, he had a job in Clarion and he said he would be happy to take me there and home. However, he told me, we had to find my dad so my dad could pay for my tuition.

"While all this is going on, here comes an airmail letter addressed to my aunt from my dad. He wrote, 'I am in El Cerrito, California, and I have opened a plumbing shop and I would like Shirlee to come here and be with us and be my one-girl office worker.' He knew I had taken a business course in my last year of high school: typing, shorthand and bookkeeping. My dad wrote, 'Shirlee can manage my office and I'll send her the money to come. I'll pay her \$35 a week.' I was only making that \$15 a week working at the diner, in addition to the little money I made from the Woolworth's job. My aunt and uncle thought that would be the best thing for me.

"This is all happened only several months after I graduated. My dad sent the money and my aunt and uncle took me to Pittsburgh, PA, to catch the train. Here I was, barely out of high school, and I had never been out of this small-town area. Every place I had lived so far was in Venango County. Now I am heading across the country to California, with a layover in the big city of Chicago.

"My Aunt Cora said, 'What you do when you get to Chicago is, you hail a cab and you ask them to take you to a medium-priced hotel. You stay the night, and then you get the hotel to give you a wake-up call and you take another cab back to the train.' I was scared to death. But I did it. When I got to Chicago, the cab driver took me to The LaSalle Hotel, I'll never forget it. I went in to register, and the desk clerk looked at me funny because I listed my address as 123 Main Street, which really was my aunt and uncle's street address in Oil City.

"The next day I got my wake-up call and got myself back to the train station and headed out to California. When we got to Richmond, I knew they lived in Richmond, so I got off the train there. But the train's destination was Oakland. So here I was in Richmond, but they were waiting for me in Oakland. Fortunately, they figured it out. My dad called the train station in Richmond and they came and picked me up. It was my dad, my brother and my new stepmother, Phyllis.

"I went to work for my dad in his plumbing office in El Cerrito. He had five or six plumbers working for him. I did the bookkeeping, the accounts payable, the accounts receivable, the payroll and even sold water heaters in the front showroom. What amazed me the most about California was back then you could drive all the way on San Pablo Avenue, from San Pablo to Richmond to El Cerrito to Albany to Emeryville to Oakland, and never know you were entering another city.

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Not long after she started living in Richmond, Shirlee met her first close friend.

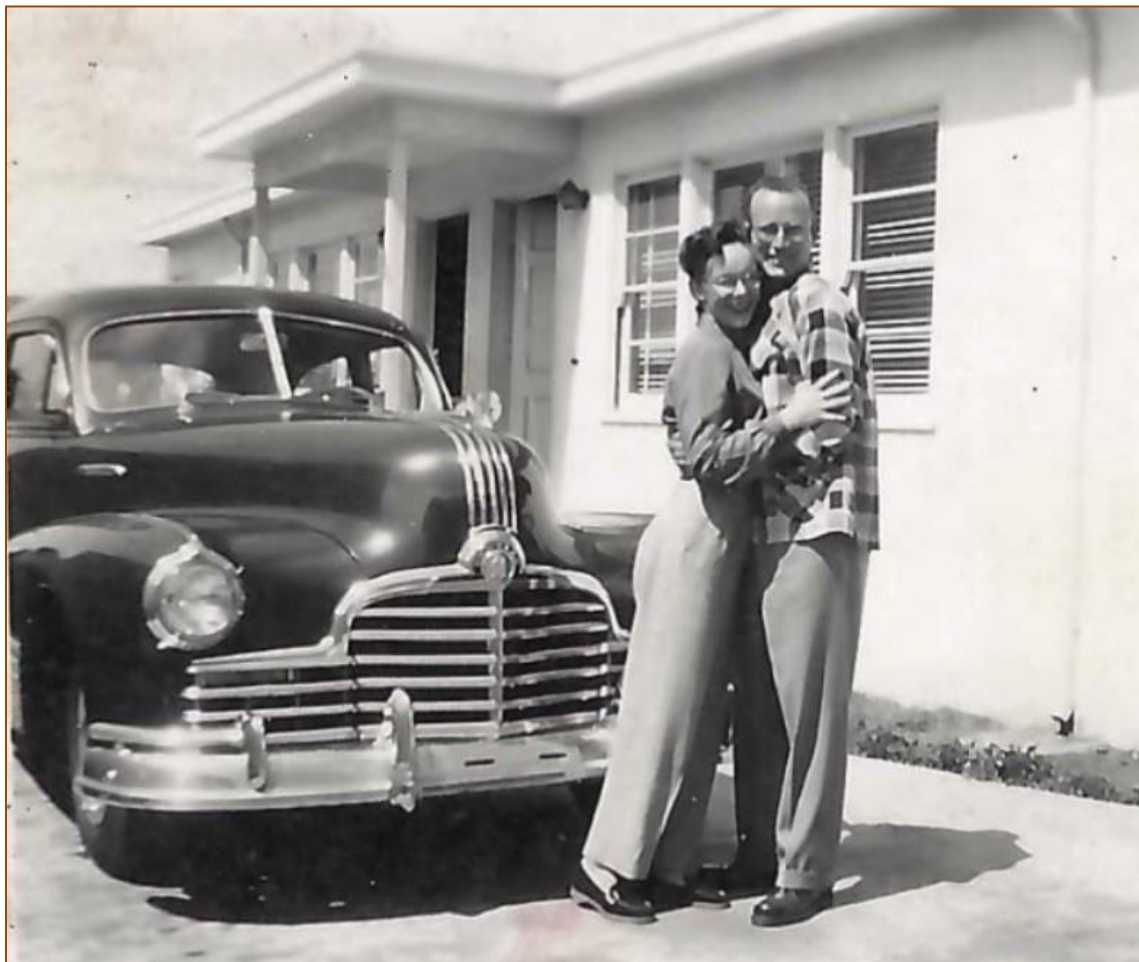
"Dolores was a neighbor. She was 21 and I was 18. She worked at a purse factory in San Francisco and she and I became really good friends. She used to love to go to restaurants and bars and listen to the music and dance, and she would drink beer. She often drank a little too much beer. She was part Native American and she would say, 'the firewater gets to me!' What with me being underage and Dolores enjoying her beer, my dad always picked us up whenever we went out."

In May of 1949, Dolores was heading to a birthday party at a restaurant/bar in El Cerrito and invited Shirlee to join her. That night, Shirlee met a fellow named Chris.

"Chris and I didn't dance, we just talked and then my dad picked Dolores and me up."

June, July and August went by and in September, Shirlee got a phone call from the young man she met in May.

"He got my phone number from Dolores and he asked me out on a date. Chris had a car that was the love of his life and he was making payments on it. It was a 1946 Pontiac and it was beautiful. We had our first date, and then immediately we went to three dates a week."



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Christopher Columbus Gibbs, "Chris," was born on May 10, 1928, in Malden, Missouri, to Wesley and Sarah Gibbs. In the 1930 U.S. Census, Chris's family can be found living in Como Township, New Madrid County, MO, and they are listed as follows: Missouri-born dad Wesley, 51, farmer; Missouri-born mom Sarah, 39; daughter Audrey, 14; son Richard, 12; daughter Lorene, 8; and son Chris, 1. A few years later, Chris's younger brother Jay was born. In addition, there were several older siblings no longer living at home in 1930, including the eldest, Chris's big brother Orda.

"Chris grew up dirt poor. His dad was a sharecropper and they moved from place to place. The family started out in Arkansas and Missouri. They lived in little huts with a sod floor. Chris was one of nine children. The family was so poor that when they went to church on Sunday, some of them went in a horse-pulled wagon and the rest followed barefoot. They were saving their shoes. When they got to church they put their shoes on. The family picked cotton and they often had very little to eat.

"When Chris was young, 8 or 9 years old, the family moved to St. Louis and Chris sold newspapers for a nickel and gave his mother just about everything he made. She was a widow at that point. Chris and his younger brother Jay and their sister Lorene, would take the wagon down to the railroad yards where bananas came in. Many of the grocers would give them overripe bananas and they would bring them home and their mom would make banana pudding and this was a real treat. Chris grew up on banana pudding. What money he didn't give his mother, he set aside to go to the movies on the weekend. That was a big deal.

"Eventually his older brother, Richard, entered the service and he was based at Camp Roberts in San Miguel, California. While he was still in the service, Richard and his wife got a place in San Francisco, and Richard drove out to St. Louis to visit with his family. He was driving a really old, junky car. Chris had just graduated from high school in St. Louis. He had graduated early, at the age of 17, and Richard said, 'Chris, you are going to come to California with me and start a life. There is nothing for you here.'

"On the drive out here, the old car kept blowing the tires and neither Chris nor his brother had any money. When they got to Arizona, Chris hocked the watch he had received for graduation, the only present he had ever received. They got into Los Angeles and Chris took a job as a dishwasher to make some money and Richard headed back to San Francisco and the service. Chris made enough money in Los Angeles to come to San Francisco. He lied about his age and got a job driving a truck for Dreamland Bedding. He didn't work there for very long before he got a better job as a truck driver with Marin-Dell Milk Company. He delivered milk to stores all over San Francisco. This was all when he was 17. Then four years later, in May of 1949, we met, not quite a year after I graduated from Oil City High School. What a long of changes in a short period of time!

"Chris was living in San Francisco with his brother Richard and Richard's wife when we met, so he had to travel across the Bay Bridge to see me and that was a quarter, back and forth. On the weekends, we saw the City, we went everywhere in San Francisco. On New Year's Eve, 1949, Chris said, 'I think we should get married.'

"My friend Dolores said, 'Oh my God, Shirlee, you've only known this man for three months.' And my dad and stepmom said, 'No way!' Well I was 19, and I could make my own decisions, and I said, 'Okay!'

"On January 12, 1950, we went to Reno. There was snow on the road and we had to put chains on the car. We got married in the Lutheran Church in Reno. The two strangers who stood up for us worked in the church. Then Chris and I went to the Overland Hotel in Reno and stayed there for a couple of days, before heading back to the Bay Area. Our first home together was an upper flat on 18th Street in Richmond.



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"Marrying Chris was the best decision I ever made in my whole life, despite everyone saying, 'You haven't known him long enough!' I married the best man in the world."



"When we lived in Richmond, this man owned an awning company up the street in El Cerrito and he offered me double the money from what I was making if I would come and do the same work for him. So I quit the job with my dad and went to work for Ace Awning. I didn't stay with Ace Awning for too long. I got pregnant right away and our daughter Christine was born two days after our first anniversary, January 14, 1951. By then, we were living in San Francisco. Chris's job was in San Francisco and we thought it would be a better fit.

"In San Francisco, we lived in an upper flat at 16th and Mission. The Mission District was beautiful. We used to take walks at night to the movie theater up the street. We made friends with Pete and Marge Aiello, and we were friends with them all their lives. Our neighborhood was very friendly, very welcoming. Chris was working the day I went into labor, and our friend Pete Aiello took me to the old Mary's Help Hospital on Guerrero Street.

"I was a stay-at-home mom and Chris was with Marin-Dell. In fact, he was there for 38 years until he took an early retirement at age 55. Marin-Dell was bought by Foremost Milk Company and that's when Chris retired. But I'm getting ahead of myself, though I will say that it was through Marin-Dell that Chris met Don Stanaway. Don was big in the Lions Club, and the Lions Club would eventually become a very big part of our lives."

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Not long after Christine was born, the Gibbs family found a house to rent on Oxford Street in San Francisco's Excelsior District. The couple's friends, Pete and Marge, had moved there and really encouraged Shirlee and Chris to do so as well. When Christine started school it was in the Excelsior District, at Hillcrest School. By that time, Chris had made friends with another milk truck driver, Earl Walley.

"Earl and his wife Audrey, and their little girl Jill, lived in the coastal town of Vallemar. We became great friends and we would visit with them it seems just about every weekend. We would travel to Half Moon Bay, or we would barbecue or play cards. In those days, to drive to today's Pacifica, we took Alemany Blvd. to where the old horse stables are and then come along the cliff. Back then, on Earl's days off, he and Audrey bought properties, fixed them up and sold them. Now you call that, 'flipping houses.'

"On some of our weekend visits, we would help them. We did small jobs, like clean the yard. Earl said to Chris, 'I think you two should consider getting out of the City and move here.' Earl told us there was a contractor building new homes on Pacific Avenue in Sharp Park and he and Audrey were going to buy one, 436 Pacific Avenue. He also told us they were building three or four homes on Brighton Road, the next block over.

"We had a car payment at that time and we didn't think we could possibly afford a house, but we were anxious to get out of the city and move to the country. So we came down to West Sharp Park and looked at 441 Brighton Road. It was \$13,500 and it came with turquoise kitchen appliances, including a dishwasher and an oven. We thought about it and decided – we can do this and we made our down payment. The year was 1956. We couldn't move in immediately because it wasn't quite finished. So we stayed, just for a short time, with our friends Earl and Audrey on Pacific Avenue until our new home was ready. I was pregnant when we moved in, with our second daughter Sharon."



**The Gibbs new family home at 441 Brighton Rd. in Sharp Park, 1956.**

"There were just a few houses on Brighton back then and Brighton was a dirt road: no street lights, no sidewalks, no nothing. Because Brighton got so muddy in the winter months, and Moana Way was partially paved, we would park on Moana and walk from there. We went out and bought a second-hand refrigerator and a little kitchen set. We went to Plaza Furniture, which was up in Manor, and we bought a

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twin bedroom set for the girls and a bedroom set for us. When we moved in, there were no drapes at the windows, no rugs on the floor. It was exciting, but we just didn't know how we were going to swing this. It was either in November or December of 1956, when this woman who lived next to Earl and Audrey on Pacific, asked Audrey and me if we would be interested in working. The woman worked for Railway Express and said they were in desperate need of help during the holidays and she could get us jobs. I thought, 'Man, I can buy drapes for the windows! We need it.'

Earl had bought his mom a home in Sharp Park on Carmel Avenue, and she offered to babysit her granddaughter, as well as Chris and Shirlee's two little girls.

"Mrs. Walley was a great woman and she loved the kids, so Audrey and I were able to take these seasonal jobs at Railway Express. Audrey had been a school teacher and she was a smart woman. She did not, however, have a lot of business skills. But the two of us worked through the end of the year.

"In January, Audrey was laid off. But they kept me on and sent me to one of their other offices. Someone had a two-week vacation and I was brought in to fill in for them. I did typing and bookkeeping. Then I would get laid off. Then I would get called back and this went on for about a year and a half. But I had income and we had new drapes and carpets!"

Railway Express was the UPS of its day, originally using stagecoaches, soon followed by the railway system, for rapid express delivery service. Eventually they expanded to delivery trucks and baggage carts, and in 1927, they started their first Air Express division. They had offices all over the country.

In November of 1957, Sharp Park became one of the nine small coastal communities that voted to incorporate and become the City of Pacifica. Those communities, now Pacifica neighborhoods, are: Fairmont, Westview, Pacific Manor, Sharp Park, Fairway Park, Vallemar, Rockaway Beach, Linda Mar and Pedro Point. (Linda Mar was previously Pedro Valley.) Shirlee noted that she and Chris were too new to Sharp Park when the contentious discussions for and against incorporation began and the vote took place. They were still registered to vote in San Francisco.

"But I remember every aspect of that, the fights about incorporating and not incorporating," Shirlee recalled. "Before incorporation, we had a Sheriff who went around and rattled the doors at night. He was a grumpy guy. 'Keep your kids off the street at night!' That was his mantra. If we had an accident, the police came from Redwood City and in those days, there was no GPS. I remember some poor kid got hit by a car while he was riding his bike and it seemed like it took forever to get help."

In 1957, before the City incorporated, there was a knock at Shirlee's door. It was Grace McCarthy.

"Grace was the welcome wagon hostess. She had a basket of little goodies with some gift certificates in it, which included certificates to Landy's Supermarket, Bublak Meat Market on Francisco and the pharmacy that was up on the little strip mall along the highway.

"We talked a little and Grace said, 'You have a daughter in first grade at Sharp Park Elementary School. I think you should be a room mother.' I wanted to know what that entailed. 'Well, you work with the other mothers and celebrate the various birthdays, and what not, and make cupcakes when needed.' I thought, well I can do that, and I was happy to do it.

"When Christine was in second grade, Grace knocked again and said, 'I'm a Girl Scout Leader and you have two girls. Maybe you should start a Brownie/Scout Group.' So I ended up as a Girl Scout Leader for seven years, from Brownies through Girl Scouts and on to Senior Scouts."

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Who was this Sharp Park neighbor, Grace McCarthy? The beyond-abridged answer to that question is: married to Carl, mom to John and Patty (Pat "McCarthy" Kremer), Grace McCarthy would serve 10 years on the Executive Staff of the San Francisco Girl Scout Council, 12 years as a teacher, was a recipient of the California Park and Recreational Society Award for her service in parks and recreation, and served 11 years as a Pacifica City Councilmember, including four terms as vice mayor and three terms as mayor. You can learn more about Grace McCarthy [here](#), or go online to Bartlett's Biographies, "Pacifans that have gone before us."

"How would I describe Grace? She wasn't demanding but she was insistent. She was assertive. If she had her mind made up to something, she was going to pursue it. She was a wonderful woman and an extraordinary mentor to me. She was so involved in our community affairs and she really cared about people. Our city lost a great Pacifican when she passed."

All three of Chris and Shirlee's children – their son Chris was born in 1961 – went to Sharp Park School and Oceana High School. Shirlee was very involved in the PTAs of both schools. In 1965, her work with Sharp Park Elementary School was recognized, and it was one of the many times Shirlee would be celebrated in a *Pacifica Tribune* headline.

### **Mother of Three Named Sharp Park Life Member**

*Mrs. Shirlee Gibbs, twice a first vice president of Sharp Park School PTA, was the recipient of the year's Sharp Park Life Member Award.*

*The presentation was made by last year's winner, Mrs. Minnie Mirabelli, before a large audience.*

*"I tried for two days to find out who was getting the award," said Mrs. Gibbs, who admitted that the honor came as a complete surprise.*

*The mother of three children, Mrs. Gibbs lives with her husband Christopher at 441 Brighton Road, Sharp Park.*

*"And I owe some of this to my husband," she said explaining that he helped her with many of her projects.*

*During her service with the Sharp Park PTA, Mrs. Gibbs has officiated as Homemaking and Hospitality Chairman and is the present corresponding secretary of Oceana High School PTA.*

*For seven years she has conducted a troop of young girls through Brownies to Cadette Girl Scouts. She has also officiated twice as the chairman of the City's March of Dimes.*

*With her husband, Mrs. Gibbs was on the original "Hundred Committee" soliciting funds for Mary's Help Hospital. She is also a member of Alpha Alpha Omicron Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi.*

*Among the guests at the Founders Day meeting was the School's third PTA president, Mrs. Dorothy McIntosh and honorary life members, Mrs. Marge McCoy, Fred Lucas and Mrs. Grace McCarthy.*

On February 4, 1965, Shirlee received her "Honorary Life Membership Certificate" from the California Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. Branch of the National Congress.



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Not including her full-time school volunteerism, some of Shirlee's volunteer work waited until after she retired from Railway Express. Yes, that's right, that "part-time" job became full-time and she worked at the company for 17 years.

"I went to work in every one of their San Francisco offices. I worked downtown, at Third and Folsom. Then they bought a new building in the Bayview District, a commercial district at that time, and that was their big headquarters at that point. I worked steady there, every day. It was a 24-hour operation. I started out as a file clerk. My job was to sit in this small space surrounded by cubbyholes, one for each state. Then you got this big pile of waybills and you sorted them into the point of origin. I got fast! Then I was promoted to tracing clerk where we traced lost shipments. Then I was promoted to shipping and receiving. Then they made me a supervisor, but it was a 24-hour operation and I would get a call at home at midnight that the guy who worked from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., didn't show up to operate the computer. This is around 1969/1970. So if necessary, I was driving from Pacifica to the Bayview District, in the middle of the night. The computer was in one room and it was a whole wall and we had keypunch operators. I hired a couple of girls out of Oceana High School and they were the best employees. But that job nearly took my life!" (Shirlee paused to laugh.) "It was wildly busy. I hired my own daughter, Christine, to be a keypunch operator and she was terrific, and she made a terrific income – as did I. Railway Express was a great company to work for."



When Shirlee retired from Railway Express, they gave Shirlee her desk and a Wells Fargo safe. The latter required Chris, and three of his friends, to carry it into the house. The Railway Express truck and plaque, pictured above, are additional mementos from Shirlee's 17 years with the company.

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Crazy times at work or not, here Shirlee is, photo on the left, in a September 30, 1970, *Pacifica Tribune* write-up doing her part to raise needed money for high school scholarships, at both of Pacifica's high schools, Oceana and Terra Nova.

### **New Style Pantsuit?**

*Shirlee Gibbs and Ann Torrigino try on a pair of size 46 men's pants they received in a donation for their sorority's Next to New Sale, coming this weekend, Oct. 2 and 3, at Eureka Square. Proceeds from the sale will go to provide scholarships to both high schools in the fine arts field. XI Lambda Phi is still in need of donations, call Shirlee at ...*

We're still in 1970, and Shirlee is working at Sharp Park School, working at Oceana, working at her full-time job, being a wife and a mom, but there's something else that hasn't been mentioned yet that started back in those early days of living in the new city of Pacifica. Shirlee and Chris took a lesson from their friends, Earl and Audrey, and started flipping houses.

"It was such a lucky break for us that Earl and Audrey got us interested in 'flipping houses,' though we didn't really think about doing it on our own until Chris's younger brother Jay, who had been in the Marines, came out to stay with us after he was discharged. He met Earl and Audrey, and saw what they were doing and how successful they were, and by then, Chris was really involved in helping with the renovation work. Jay said to Chris, 'Why don't we become partners and do this on our own?' And that's exactly what happened, and I worked right alongside Chris and Jay.

"Our first venture was an apartment building, 73 Santa Maria. It was a five-unit apartment building. We started one apartment at a time, so we had rental money. We refurnished it, put new things in the bathroom, painted it and fixed it up. I'll never forget this man who had lived in the upper floor kept calling us – his front door wouldn't close. Well, Chris went to take a look and this guy had this huge, king-size waterbed in the bedroom right next to where the front door came in, and all that weight was causing the front door to sink down. So we moved him downstairs. When we got it all taken care of, we sold that building. Our next piece of property was 160 San Jose. We fixed that up and sold it. We bought 1070 Palmetto and the deed said, 'from Old County Road to high tide.' We had beachfront property! But the backyard was 25 feet up, sort of like a cliff. We were on a septic tank – all kinds of problems. But we did a beautiful job on that house and I learned to hang sheetrock. Chris would say, 'Shirlee, measure twice and only cut once.'

"How did Chris learn? How did I learn how to do all this work? We just did it. We had building inspectors and they were happy with our work. Eventually, Jay met and married a girl from Daly City and he and she went out on their own. But it was really a successful venture for Chris and me, and through all the years and continuing it really helped us, to help our wonderful family, which also includes, as the years have gone by, our grandchildren and great grandchildren."

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Chris's job, Shirlee's job and their successful side business of flipping houses enabled them to move to a little larger home.

"We lived at 441 Brighton until we had all three children. We did have three-bedrooms and one bath at our first house, but it was a small house. We saw the contractor digging on this new home just down the street from us and we met with him. We really liked the house and we thought, well, do we think we can afford it? That was in 1965, and we decided, yes, we can do this and I've been here since. Fifty-nine years!



**The Gibbs family, circa 1968, clockwise from bottom left: Shirlee, Sharon, Christine, Chris and Christopher.**

In 1964, Chris joined the Pacifica Lions.

When Lions Club International formed in 1917, its membership was exclusively male. It wasn't until 1987 that women were allowed to be Lions. In 1956, the North Coastside Lioness Club formed as an auxiliary unit. Later it was called "partners in service." In 1960, the North Coastside Lions Club became the Pacifica Lions.

"I became a Lioness the same year Chris became a Lion. We supported the men in their endeavors. We were their partners in service. There were 10 of us Lionesses in the beginning and we grew as the men had a new member. And we had all the fun, the Lionesses. The men had all the serious meetings. We planned the Mystery Trips. The Lions were our guests on the Mystery Trips."

Those Pacifica Lioness-arranged Mystery Trips, which began in the 1960s and continued all the way into the 1990s, became the stuff of legend and the Lionesses did the fundraising to make them happen. Shirlee became famous throughout the Pacifica Lions Land for taking charge of the rummage sale fundraisers that paid the Mystery Trips' tab.

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For the Mystery Trips—destinations known only by the Lionesses—the Pacifica Lions and Lionesses would get on a rented bus and the driver would spend some time driving off the beaten path so no Lion could easily guess where they were going. The group always brought lunch and liquids, ready for wherever their three-day adventure might take them. One involved bringing the thrilled but stumped-as-to-where-they-were-going Lions men, aboard an airplane which took them to Laughlin, Nevada. There, among other outings, the group attended a "fabulous" tribute show featuring a Bette Midler impersonator with her backup singers.

As Lions and Lionesses, the group mostly spent their time doing fundraising and outreach for "Knights of the Blind," one of the service organization's flagship programs. They also spent their time and energy, and often serious elbow grease, fundraising and being involved with the needs of their community. As soon as Lions membership opened to women, Shirlee signed on. Shirlee is a three-time Pacifica Lions Club President and still serves on the board. She is the two-time recipient, in 2006 and 2014, of the Pacifica Lion of the Year award. She has been a volunteer with the Lions for 50 years.

In 1981-1982, Chris served as Pacifica's Lions Club President. He was president when the historic storm of January 4, 1982, devastated the City. The Northern California "killer storm" closed the Golden Gate Bridge, and created mudslides in the counties of Marin, Santa Cruz and San Mateo.

"Three small children in Pacifica lost their lives when a mudslide roared down a hillside taking the home above them from its foundation," Lions President Chris Gibbs reported in a letter dated January 25, 1982. "It took firemen, volunteers and machinery, 31 hours to recover the bodies. Our main shopping center (Linda Mar) and surrounding homes in a 10-block radius were flooded, some homes with five feet of water and mud. Governor Brown and President Reagan declared San Mateo and six adjacent counties a major disaster area. ...A city-wide volunteer clean-up has been underway, scraping mud and pumping water from underneath foundations. ...Relief agencies have been taxed to the utmost."

The Lions Club President, who noted that the Pacifica Lions were proud "that they have never had the need to solicit additional assistance outside our own club," expressed his gratitude that other Bay Area Lions Clubs made donations to help Pacifica in its hour of need. In the meantime, Pacifica Lions did what they do, helped however they could. But Chris Gibbs conceded it was a difficult task to select those families/individuals who would find "some small help" through the Pacifica Lions Flood Fund. He said the money was essentially "a drop in the bucket" to people who had lost everything, and even then, the Pacifica Lions did not have "a drop in the bucket" for all.

"I remember going to Linda Mar with members of the Lions Club," Shirlee said, "and we had purchased wet-dry vacuum cleaners for the people who lived on Anza and Balboa. That was a big service project for the Lions. It was an awful time for so many of our community members."

The late Jim Gilchrist, a longtime Pacifica Lions Club member and the local club's 1995-1996 President, wrote a Lions Report about Shirlee and her husband Chris in 2000. Part of it is included here.

### **This is the Spirit of Lionism!**

By Jim Gilchrist

*This story is long overdue. There are several examples of the hard work and generosity of members of our Lions Family. However, I think that most will agree that this couple excels in giving of themselves to help those less fortunate.*

*Christmastime comes but once each year according to the calendar. However, to this couple the season of giving is every day of the year. Their actions say that. Lion Christopher "Chris" and*



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*Lioness Shirlee Gibbs have that spirt of giving embedded in their souls. They are extremely active in several local organizations where they have given freely of their time and energy to help their community.*

*...In 1964, with the urging and insistence of Lion Mario Torrigino, Chris became a Lion. Shortly thereafter, Shirlee became a Lioness. They both have been deeply involved with many of the Lions' and Lionesses' projects ever since. They have served in many capacities including President and project chairperson. As the saying goes, "If you appoint one Gibbs to a project, you will get two." They always worked as a team and worked hard at that.*

*Included among the deeds they have done, is drive Pacificans to doctor appointments and to the Lions Eye Foundation Hospital in San Francisco. Chris assists with the twice weekly pick up of day-old bread from the markets and delivers it to the Pacifica Resource Center for distribution to the needy. Both have participated in arranging for Lions and Lionesses to work at the Pacifica Resource Center annual toy distribution at Christmas, which includes picking up toys and helping set up the event. They have also adopted a Resource Center "family," for which they make sure their needs are provided for – in this they encourage one or more of the organizations in which they are members to help fund those needs.*

*They are members of the Moose Lodge and are always available to help out during fundraisers. In fact, for several years, Chris worked two nights a week cooking in the Lodge kitchen for diners in attendance.*

*When it looked like the Pacifica Fog Fest was not going to be sponsored by the City anymore, several local organizations spearheaded by the Lions, formed Pacifica Festivals Incorporated. Shirlee and Chris worked extremely hard in PFI. All of the work was done by unpaid volunteers and they worked tirelessly for many weeks each year to ensure that all local nonprofit organizations would have a place to raise funds for their nonprofit's projects. During the last very successful years of the PFI's Fog Fest, Shirlee was the President, with Chris working right alongside her. She put in long hours in the weeks before the Fog Fest with some nights getting only three or four hours of sleep. PFI was often under fire with some unfounded and misplaced criticism, and with the load becoming too much for the remaining volunteers to carry, it was recommended by the PFI Board of Directors that PFI be dismantled.*

*Another case in point of the Gibbs' concern for others. Chris heard of a family with four children living in a one-bedroom apartment. After seeing their living conditions and the lack of beds for the kids, he asked the Lions to purchase bunk beds with mattresses which the Lions gladly did. In another case, Chris heard of a woman who couldn't enter her house without assistance because she was in a wheelchair and there were several steps up into the house. Chris called on a couple of Lions and together, with wood donated by Lion Fred Schoenduby, they built a ramp into the house.*

*When Shirlee heard that the Safeway stores were tossing out day-old bakery goods, she asked the store manager if the Lions could pick them up and deliver them to the senior complexes. Shirlee and Chris then set up a schedule in which several Lions and Lionesses, including themselves, would pick up these goods several nights a week and deliver them to the seniors.*

*...There are so many more instances that demonstrate their thoughtfulness and giving of themselves for the community. ... They truly are the spirit of Lionism!*

\* \* \*

"I am and have been a Lion all these years because Lions serve their community," Shirlee affirmed. 'We serve' is the Lions' motto and it is a motto that I wholeheartedly believe in."



Jean Bartlett photo

In 2014, Pacifica Lions Shirlee Gibbs, Steve Dennison, Nancy Pope and Arnie Benjamin collect White Cane Day donations in front of Safeway in the Linda Mar Shopping Center.

In 1978-1979, Shirlee was nominated and subsequently chosen to serve as a juror with the San Mateo County Grand Jury.

On July 11, 1979, the *Pacifica Tribune* celebrated Shirlee's volunteer work with seniors.

### **Volunteer Rallies To Help Elderly**

*I'm just an active cheerleader for the center," said Shirlee Gibbs, chosen July's volunteer of the month by Pacifica's Seniors-In-Action.*

*Gibbs, a Pacifica resident at 404 Brighton Road "since before incorporation," said she has very strong sentiments about her involvement with the Oddstad center group; "I feel that the institutions that help the elderly have become increasingly complex and inaccessible, and the Oddstad center is serving a real need for the large and growing senior section of Pacifica's population."*

*Gibbs said she is "impressed with the whole organization; people always have time for one another."*

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*Gibbs became involved with Seniors-In-Action three years ago through her involvement with service organizations raising funds for the center. She is president of the Pacifica Lionesses and past president of City Council of Beta Sigma Phi sorority.*

*Gibbs recently organized a weekend rummage sale conducted at Casa Pacifica that raised \$400 "to keep the van Happy Wheels in operation next year." Representatives from various senior groups who use the Oddstad center participated, she said, staffing the sale, setting it up, and cleaning after it was finished.*

*Gibbs was asked to become a member of the Seniors-In-Action advisory committee six months ago and has been regularly attending monthly planning meetings since. Just freed from a one-year service span on the grand jury, Gibbs said she now plans to become more personally involved with Seniors-in-Action, rather than participating just through outside service or fundraising.*

*"A remarkable group of seniors participate in activities at Oddstad," she said. "I love to go there."*

In September of 1979, Shirlee's volunteer work with the Seniors-in-Action program was additionally honored by Pacifica's Parks, Beaches and Recreation Commission. Again, the roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-it-done volunteer made the headlines in her hometown newspaper.

\* \* \*

"Grace McCarthy really got me going on my volunteer career," Shirlee noted, "and I really enjoyed being a very active volunteer with the Seniors-in-Action program when they were at Oddstad Park. It was an old church building converted into a Senior Community Center. When they moved into the Community Center on Crespi Drive, I just kind of faded away. But while they were in that park, we did Christmas parties and events. We did fundraisers, including raising money for a dishwasher for the kitchen."

In 1982, there was a knock on Shirlee's door. It was Grace McCarthy. She used her power of persuasion to talk Shirlee into running for City Council. Immediately, Shirlee had a long list of endorsements, including from: Grace and Carl McCarthy, Nick and Lorraine Gust, the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, California State Assemblyman Lou Pappan and the *Pacifica Tribune*. Her campaign slogan was: "Decide Early For Shirlee."



**Longtime Pacifican Shirlee Gibbs Decides to Run For City Council**

By R.A. Verdeckberg

Pacifica Tribune

August 11, 1982

*Shirlee Gibbs, a Pacifican since before it was called Pacifica and out from the same mold as the women who spearheaded incorporation, has decided it is her time to run for City Council.*

*Gibbs, a 52-year-old grandmother, like her predecessors Jean Fassler, Grace McCarthy, Connie Mason*

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*and others, has been involved in the growth of the community as an active volunteer in PTA, the schools, women's sororities, and numerous other volunteer efforts.*

*Like most of the town's 'old-timers,' she and her husband moved to the Coastside to get out of San Francisco. They bought a house on east Brighton Road and then bought one still under construction across the street. The Gibbs have lived on the same street nearly 26 years.*

*"I had seriously thought about running for the council several times before I ended up working on others' campaigns instead," Gibbs said.*

*Her decision to run in 1982 was prompted by several friends urging her to be a candidate, with Mayor Pete Murray and Councilwoman Grace McCarthy among them.*

*"We had a family discussion Wednesday at dinner. They all, including my sons-in-laws, voted that I should run. In fact, they already have me elected," she said.*

*Gibbs balked at being pinned down on her position on the various issues that will probably fuel the fires of the campaign, saying she is studying the issues and will have plenty to say as the campaign progresses. ...*

There were 12 City Council candidates vying for three open seats the year Shirlee ran. They were, in alphabetical order: Nick Carpenter, Stewart Cross, Kent Crovisier, Charles Curry, Darrol Davis, Shirlee Gibbs, Vi Gotelli, Fred Howard, Peter Loeb, Spencer Rice, Donald Stout and Jeanette Warden. Out of the 12 candidates, Shirlee came in fifth, close behind incumbent councilman Fred Howard. The three "Friends of Pacifica" candidates, Peter Loeb, Jeanette Warden and Charles Curry, took all three seats. The Friends of Pacifica was an environmental political action group.

"That did it for my political career," Shirlee grinned. "But it was fun!"

While she was on the campaign trail, Shirlee was also the overall chair of the City's Silver Anniversary event, a formal event held at the North County Performing Arts Center, the former Serramonte High School building, to accommodate the crowd of attendees. The event included Big Band music, a champagne reception, a buffet dinner, and an impressive list of additional volunteer chairs, including: Dick Smith, chairman of the reception committee; Chuck Gust, chairman of the buffet dinner; and Connie Mason Brown, finance chair. The sold-out event was "fantastic." It certainly can be said that Shirlee had serious credentials running such a grand event. She had worked closely with Chair Ruth Mills to help with the City's 10th Anniversary celebration.

"That was held at Ed Cordero Chevrolet in Pacific Manor, where 24 Hour Fitness is now. It was a lovely event with a smaller attendance than our 25th anniversary. (Shirlee chaired the City's 40th anniversary and worked on the City's 50th anniversary gala with former Pacifica fire chief, mayor and councilmember Cal Hinton.)

In 1983, Chris retired at the age of 55. Shirlee had already retired from Railway Express – though frankly they needed to retire to keep up with their full-time volunteer work.



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"Because we were buying and selling houses and saving our money, and also because I had such a good salary with Railway Express, we were able to do that. My daughter Sharon was working for United Airlines, so Chris and I traveled all over the world. We had 17 years of all of Europe, Alaska and Hawaii. We went to South America. On our 50th wedding anniversary, we flew to San Paulo, Brazil, stayed there, went up to Rio, boarded a ship, and went around South America to the port side of Peru. Chris loved traveling and we loved traveling together. But we didn't do every trip together. Chris was big into fishing, and golf, and I didn't do either. Every year he went to Canada with members of the Lions Club to fish and golf.

"What kinds of vacations did we take when the kids were growing up? We always went to Missouri to see Chris's family. We drove night and day to get there and then we visited with everyone. His sister Lorene used to come out here for visits. We loved all those visits and Sharon gave one of her kids the middle name of Lorene. But all of Chris's family is gone now. My family is gone as well. My brother Allen lived east of us, in San Joaquin County. He was a smoker and died much too young at the age of 65 in 1996.

"We did not do camping with the kids. I did do camping with the Girl Scouts, and that was more than enough for me!

"Chris and I had a lot of fun with our kids but we never did big extravagant vacations. We did what we could afford and that always worked out fine. And our kids were just really great, they still are. But they never gave us any trouble. I suppose among my son's favorite 'growing up' stories, would be one that stars a dirt bike and his parents, particularly his mother.

"Chris bought him a dirt bike. Chris also had a dirt bike and the two of them would go dirt bike riding in the south end of Pacifica. They came home one afternoon and they were in the garage getting mud off the bikes. I don't know if it was Chris, my husband, or Chris, my son, who said to me, 'Why don't you try getting on that bike and take it for a ride?' Well, I got on that bike, first time I had ever been on a motorcycle, and I started that dirt bike and I took off. I flew up the street, Chris jumped in the truck to follow me. I went up to Scenic Way and I turned. I thought if I go there, I can run into the grass. I didn't know that the harder you push, the faster you go. I was hanging on for dear life! When I started up that hill on Scenic Way, the bike zonked out and I fell off. That was my last motorcycle ride!

"My son Chris rode that dirt bike all over when Ted Merritt was the Police Chief. My daughter Christine worked for Chief Merritt. She had joined the Police Department as a volunteer, an Explorer Scout, and as a volunteer, Christine became the Pacifica Police Department's first female Reserve officer. She did that for 17 years. But her boss would chase my son Chris all over the neighborhood because, 'You are not supposed to ride that bike on the streets!'"

In 1998, Shirlee was nominated for the Peninsula Community Foundation "Robert J. Koshland Prize" for her community service: The award is presented to an individual who has shown outstanding involvement

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in humanitarian causes. The Peninsula Community Foundation serves communities from Daly City to Mountain View and from the Pacific Ocean to the San Francisco Bay. To be the nominee for your city or town is an extraordinary recognition and the Selection Committee has the daunting task of choosing one recipient from a prestigious group of community volunteers. Once chosen, the Foundation designates a \$10,000 grant to the local charitable organization of the recipient's choice. In the end, Shirlee remained a nominee. The following highlights some of the information submitted to the Peninsula Community Foundation on Shirlee – of course she has done more since this 1998 sourcing.

### **DESCRIBE THE HUMANITARIAN INVOLVEMENTS PERFORMED AS A VOLUNTEER**

- Girl Scout troop leader, seven years, Brownies to Senior Scouts
- Member original "Hundred Committee," Mary's Help Hospital
- Honorary Life Member, Sharp Park Parent Teacher Association
- Member, San Mateo County Grand Jury 1978-1979
- California Parks and Recreation citation for outstanding community service
- Financial Planning Board, Pacifica Seniors-in-Action
- Pacifica Lions Club appreciation award
- Ecology/Recycling Center, every Monday morning for over two years as a volunteer worker
- Precinct Election Board for over 30 years
- In the last 40 years, Shirlee has organized and participated in countless fundraisers for charitable groups, including: Seniors, Pacifica Resource Center and various service organizations. Each December, Shirlee works the toy program for disadvantaged families through our Resource Center. She has packed up unsold donuts and pastries weekly for the past two years and distributed them to the senior citizen complexes in town.

### **DESCRIBE THE LEADERSHIP ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE NOMINEE**

- President, Pacifica Festivals, Inc. (Runs Pacifica Fog Fest, provides funds to cover 30 local nonprofit organizations)
- Chairman, City of Pacifica March of Dimes
- President, Oceana Parent Teacher Association
- President, Pacifica Lioness Club
- President, Pacifica City Council of Beta Sigma Phi
- President pro Tem, Pacifica Historical Society
- Chairman, City of Pacifica's 25th anniversary celebration
- Chairman, City of Pacifica's 40th anniversary celebration
- Candidate for City Council in 1982
- Wife of 48 years, mother of three, grandmother of six

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On February 8, 2001, Shirlee lost the love of her life, Christopher C. Gibbs. He was 72. A service was held at Chapel By The Sea in Pacifica. It was standing room only.

"Chris and I had a wonderful life together. He was it for me."

←Team Gibbs, 1950-2001.

Shirlee did not give up volunteering after Chris's death. In fact, she gave even more of her time to help deal with her loss and also to continue doing the community work that both she and Chris believed so strongly in. "Family and volunteering. These are my life's priorities."

A few more things she has done since, or were missed on, that 1998 list, include: continuing her work with the Pacifica Council of Beta Sigma Phi—a nonacademic sorority that concentrates on civic responsibilities and cultural programs; working on the Miss Pacifica pageants; serving as president of the Pacifica Historical Society and she has served on the PHS Board since at least 1995; she has served as president of the Pacifica Lions Club, three times, and is a longtime board member; she served for three years on the West Sharp Park Citizen's Committee for the revitalization of Palmetto Avenue. Her volunteer service with Beta Sigma Phi and the Lions Club is in its 50th year. Along with her 50-year memberships and her longtime PHS membership, she also holds memberships in: San Mateo Grand Juror's Association and Women of the Moose.

In March of 2015, Shirlee was again a headliner in her *Pacifica Tribune*.

### Gibbs honored at Pacifica AAUW yearly meeting

*In recognition of Women's History Month, Pacifica Branch AAUW honored Shirlee Gibbs for her outstanding decade long role in the restoration of the Little Brown Church building to be Pacifica's museum. At the yearly meeting of the Pacifica AAUW Branch, Shirlee spoke of the efforts made by the Pacifica Historical Society to reclaim, and restore the more than 100 year old building. Saving the building from decay and destruction, with a vote of the community, and then 10 years of fundraising, and tireless work leading the restoration committee, Gibbs outlined the steps taken in the restoration, from the "tenting" to get rid of bugs, the laminated beams to stabilize the building, the new roof, new utilities, an elevator, and finally the finishing of the original wood floors, Gibbs led her restoration team, and the Pacifica Historical Society to successful conclusion...with the grand opening occurring in late July of this year.*

Besides the years of fundraising Shirlee has done for the nonprofits she gives so much of her time to, she has often picked up her handyman tools to help where needed. As the Restoration Chair of the Little Brown Church building, you could often find her measuring, taping, and lending her own "flipping house" knowledge to oversee the accuracy of the work. Currently, she is donating massive amounts of time and energy to see that the last passenger car of the Ocean Shore Railroad, Car 1409, is restored to its glory.

"This is such a good project for Pacifica and its residents," Shirlee said. "People often don't realize how important their history is until it's too late to save it. But we won't do that here! However, we need help. We need another \$150,000 to complete Car 1409's full restoration and we need people to donate. Your donation is

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tax deductible. How many of us would have known to live here if the Ocean Shore Railroad hadn't first let its San Francisco passengers know, more than 100 years ago, that living in this area that we now call Pacifica, really makes for a wonderful life?"

Currently Car 1409 is sitting under a protective cover in the parking lot adjacent to the Pacifica Coastside Museum. Read about the history of Car 1409, [here](#), and consider making a donation.

The mother of three, grandmother of six and great grandmother of nine—called "Mimi" by her grandchildren because "Mimi is way too cool to be called grandmother"—says she has no intention of slowing down at 93.

"On top of volunteering, I still travel. My 42nd cruise is coming up! After Chris passed away, I went to Australia with a fellow Lion member. I've been to China. Japan is on my bucket list. I've been to the South Seas, New Zealand. I've seen the world.

"When I was growing up, I wasn't part of anything. That changed the day I met Chris.

"I had the best husband in the world for 51 years; I have three wonderful children, six incredible grandchildren, all college graduates, and nine beautiful great grandchildren. If I die tomorrow, I die happy."



Jean Bartlett photo

**The Restoration Chair of the Little Brown Church takes a work break to be photographed in 2010.**



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.

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