

Friendship Memories by Elaine Dockens,
Garden Poem by Alaina Dockens.

CIRCLE OF LIFE

My Friend Susan,

I'd like to share three amazing things about my friend, Susan Singh, a wonderful, understanding and loving person.

First, her childhood family, mother and father, husband and children.

Second, her strong faith and caring for people and our planet.

Third, her friendship and neighborly caring for all of us who live with her at Heritage Park at Hilltop. Fourth a poem dedicated to Susan Singh.

1. Susan's Mom Marion

In November 2023, the film Oppenheimer came to our local theatre, Hilltop Regency. Susan saw the film with a group of neighbors. She thoroughly enjoyed the film and wanted to see it again. In December I mentioned that I would like to see the film and Susan agreed to go with me. It was a few days later that she shared with me the reason why the film held a special interest and meaning for her.

When she was a little girl, Susan's mother had a good paying job working for Lockheed Martin, a defense contractor for the federal government. One day some men from the Navy came to her mother's job and marched her out for an interview with the FBI. It was during the time of McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Lockheed had originally hired her and she worked without incident for a couple of years, enjoying the adequate income for her family. Then the Navy offered her a higher paying job making parts for them. Marion applied and she was hired. Unfortunately,

she had a somewhat flamboyant, artistic handwriting and Lockheed had misread her birthdate as 1916, so nothing showed up when the FBI did its first search of her.

However, they correctly read 1918 the second time around, so the corrupt, unlawful and despicable FBI under, J. Edgar Hoover, found three things they used against her:

1. She attended one Young Communist meeting when she was 18 years old. (It was certainly an American's right to attend any political party meeting they wanted.)
2. She read either the People's Daily Worker or The Guardian, both of which every American has the right to read. (Americans have the right to read any publication they wish.)
3. She associated with known or suspected communists. (Americans certainly had the right to associate with other Americans no matter what their political status.) She had one neighbor who was intelligent, educated and had small children the same age. They had a natural affinity and became friends. Her friend Jane was a communist, but at that time was busy dealing with all the issues of having a young family, the same as Marion.

Anyhow, the Navy marched Marion out of Lockheed and into the FBI office where they told her she could name names of her friends for the House Un-American Committee and keep her job. Marion adamantly refused to name any of her friends. She never turned in any of her friends.

Susan's mother was steadfast in her commitment to not name names of her friends so she was fired. Worst, she was unable to ever again find a job that paid well. She, Susan and her family entered abject poverty where Susan spent the remainder of her childhood.

The high light of her mother's loss of employment was the boundless love and pride Susan has for her mother for sticking to her principles and not selling out her friends. Even though it cost her dearly, economically, her stature in her daughter's eyes was boundless. Like her mother, Susan is a woman of principle and strong character, a loyal and steadfast friend.

Susan's Father – George Earl Sargent, Jr.

Susan's Mom is an amazing person in another respect. She and Susan's father, George Earl Sargent, Jr., raised Susan without a speck of racial bias. Because it's rare to find any American free of racial prejudice, I asked her how her parents accomplished this. She replied that she simply absorbed their ideas and actions. Her mom didn't believe that race should make a difference in how you treat people. Her father didn't believe in or act with any racial bias. He believed all people are equal, with one glaring and amazing exception: He could never accept nor understand the equality of men and women as many other men do. When he divorced her mother, the children just became the responsibility of the mother and no longer his responsibility. His new wife, step-children, made his new family of 4 people, increased on many weekends, school vacations and summer vacations to 6 people to feed. He didn't give his wife any additional money to cover this. We were supposed to be fed imaginary female food, I guess!

Susan's husband and children. Susan married a handsome man, her third husband. They had a wonderful rendezvous recently. He is not doing well, health wise, and wanted very much to see Susan, so his son drove him from Bakersfield to see her. When they arrived, he was unable to get out of the car. So, Susan went out to the back parking lot where they were parked and sat down on her walker next to the passenger side door. He opened the door and they had a wonderful conversation. They looked at each other and

I'm sure he noticed that the white hair surrounding her face, changes to a lovely pale red as it surrounds her neck and shoulders. They looked into each other's eyes, remembering when love was young and realized there still is love. He held Susan's hand while they talked. She didn't share what they said to one another, but after a while, her husband and his son drove off and Susan came inside. For some time afterwards, she was enveloped in loving memories. Very romantic. Susan always wanted to be a great Mom.

2. Susan is a Unitarian and an Atheist, in the best traditions of these words, and a dedicated gardener

Susan's faith is based on a belief in mankind as a self-improving species. We improve in our actions toward each other, although it is the very familiar two steps forward, 1.5 steps backward. Susan understands the essence of human nature – we progress and mature by fault, by error. Susan often joined picket lines and protest meetings and she joined ACCE (**A**lliance of **C**alifornians for **C**ommunity **E**mpowerment) and with others she has tried to correct some of the faults around her.

Susan was an active member of the Unitarian community in Los Angeles. She participated in several committees. She most enjoyed the mission of the Minister Search Committees. When she decided to move to the Bay Area to be near one of her grandchildren, she quickly joined the local Unitarian community and UUCB.

She joined the Humanist group for the interesting topics they discussed. She was a loyal member of the Literature group. She is a faithful member of the Aging with Grace group. Susan invited me to join her in a wonderful group, The Health Challenges Group lead by Sandy Nixon. That was a wonderful experience. Sandy always started the group with a relaxing word

picture of a special place, like the mountains or the beach. Each meeting Susan had a special reading to delight and inspire us, both at the beginning and closing of the group meeting. We always left Sandy's meetings with a feeling of relaxation and renewal.

A major enjoyment for Susan is attending the UUCB Sunday services. On Sunday mornings, it was her custom to go to church in person but that was changed by COVID in 2020. Susan now watches Sunday Services on YouTube, but she truly misses attending in person and seeing her UUCB friends.

She really enjoys good sermons, by ministers she respects. She is very particular about the various Ministers of UUCB and she doesn't hesitate to let them know her opinion of what they bring to the UUCB community. She accepts their assignment here, but let's them know what she expects of them. She also enjoys the beautiful music during Sunday Services chosen by Bryan Baker and the organ solos of Katyana – they are the best.

Because Susan shared with me her love of Unitarianism and the ambience of UUCB, I became a member. We were in the Humanist group together and we both attended events of the Literature group. When I was encouraged to join one of two groups that restricted their membership based on race (People of Color Caucus and WOWS), I chose to join WOWS, the white group because they best reflected the world I live in. Susan was never a member of WOWS, but she was very proud of her fellow church members who, by virtue of their vote, echoed Susan's belief that the fiction of skin color should be set aside for the fact of our shared humanity. For both Susan and me, the WOWS vote demonstrated that UUCB is indeed a Beloved Community.

3.Susan as a Neighbor and Friend at Heritage Park at Hilltop

We live in the same senior apartment complex, Heritage Park at Hilltop, and she is a wonderful neighbor. When I moved there in 2016, I met her in the Community Room chatting with neighbors. Susan has an inviting, friendly and welcoming smile for everyone who lives at Heritage Park. She generously shares her wisdom and life experiences. Her knowledge and guidance helped me finally find a solution to a family adoption problem – *thank you Susan*. She's feisty and at times may have a few words to say about the behavior of one of our neighbors, but that passes quickly and no one doubts that she cares for us – all of us.

She liked to knit and was often surround by various colors and grades of yarn. Watching her knit was another way to stop for conversation and share good times and smiles. Susan enjoyed attending Heritage Park special activities and programs. One of the special activities a few years back was "Listening to Jazz." We would meet in the Community Room and share the sounds of different jazz singers and groups. We don't listen to jazz anymore and I know Susan misses it. She enjoys a spirited sing-a-long with songs like *O! Susana*, and *Camp town Races* and she loves Reader's Digest jokes like, *What does a buffalo call his son who is leaving? Bye Bison!*

On several occasions Susan conceived of and then gathered her energy for special programs for Black History month. One year she invited Cordell Sloan, a member of UUCB, to speak. The residents fell in love with him. Last year she shared info about Heritage Park with a fellow member and now we have three UUCB members living here.

Susan also dedicated her energy to the social causes that concern the residents of Heritage Park. She was a strong and faithful member of ACCE, an activist social organization that carries pickets for social justice or take trips to stand in solidarity for important causes, especially the lack of affordable housing. In the last 6 months, Susan joined David Sharples, a local ACCE official, and they drove to a demonstration. She was doing her part for a good cause, because by showing up and just being there, she let people know here was an issue that needed attention and strong push back.

Of her work life, Susan especially enjoyed being a tutor to disabled adults. She also worked for a wonderful organization named HATCH: Help Another Toward Creative Happiness.

Susan is a dedicated gardener. By dedicated, I mean she tends her garden, waters when appropriate and pulls weeds when appropriate. She cares about the earth. I have a garden plot next to hers and she reminds me to tend my garden and lets me know when the Spring flowers I planted years ago return again to share their beauty. Because she cares about the quality of the soil, she once ordered a box of live worms to enrich our soil. One year, to my amazement, Susan decided to "make dirt," healthy dirt, in a large Walmart container to spread in her garden and nourish the plants. I can't attest to how much dirt she made, but I will never forget the lesson she was teaching – the quality of the soil matters.

Well, those are the things I wanted to share with you about my friend Susan Singh: A wonderful, multifaceted human being with a heart and mind as beautiful as the garden flowers she admires so much. My granddaughter, Alaina Dockens, wrote the following poem for Susan Singh:

By: Alaina Dockens

4/28/24

The Garden

Aren't we all flowers in a garden?

Under the warmth and kindness of others,
we learn to thrive and grow.

Crimson camelias and dahlias of the sun.

Elegant bloody roses, lilies the color of ash and snow

Flowers in all their glory, come in a prism of colors,
sizes and classifications of lethality

But when night falls and the ebony color of obscurity
Softly blankets the Garden

We are all flowers the same

Different, alike, all in between, but flowers none the less
Capable of wilting and thriving and growing and learning
We are all the lovely and ugly flowers in the Garden

When night falls, you, one of the rare exceptions

Shine brighter than a star in this forest of flora and fauna

*Sincerely, to Miss Susan, a lovely flower whose roots have touched many,
many hearts*

[Reviewed/corrected/approved by Susan Singh]