

Stinson Beach woman found herself in the sixties

by **Jacoba Charles**

Nancy Sullivan, an adventuress, gardener and world traveler who taught at the Bolinas-Stinson School for 13 years, died last Monday. She was 84.

"She loved learning new things, seeing new things and experiencing new things," said her daughter, Bonnie Sullivan of Stinson Beach. "She developed an independent spirit that she passed on to so many."

"When she was teaching she swam in the inner lagoon every day, even if it was raining," said her granddaughter Noele Kostelic of Inverness Park. "She had a little white 911 Porsche, and she kept a dishpan with her swim fins, her bathing suit and a towel in the backseat of her car."

Nancy Sullivan, née Hediger, was born on June 13, 1923. She was raised in San Anselmo and spent summers at her grandparents' house in Stinson Beach. Her great-grandparents bought the property just before the 1906 earthquake, and finished building a hunting and fishing cabin in 1912. Their permanent home in Oakland was a three-day trip away, said Bonnie.

One of story of Nancy's childhood involved her parents trying to get a case of champagne into Stinson during prohibition.

"At every little cliff, her father would have to pull over and her parents would enjoy a nice bottle of champagne," said Noele. "The case never made it but they had a great time anyway."

Adventure, Noele added, is in her family's blood.

Nancy graduated from Tamalpais High in 1941, and went on to join a sorority and

study psychology at UC Berkeley. She met John Jay Sullivan, an ironworker and airplane pilot, and the two married at her parents' house in 1945. She later said that being married to an adventurer helped her discover her own taste for exploration.

"I think it's the best way to learn, to travel, don't you think?" Nancy mused in a 1988 interview with the Light.

After graduating from college, the Sullivans ran an air taxi service and also considered starting a salmon fishing fleet, said Bonnie.

Nancy learned to fly a plane, and served as her husband's co-pilot although she never completed her pilot's license. She later ran crab pots in Crescent City, Noele said. After a few months there, they moved back to Palo Alto, and bought a house where they had Bill and Susan, the first of three children.

John returned to the military during the Korean War, where he was a jet pilot instructor. In 1951, he was stationed in Japan.

"My mother quickly took advantage of the opportunity to relocate," said Bonnie. "She packed up the family, and maybe the dog, and went to Japan - where I was born."

The family was assigned housing outside Tokyo, as well as live-in help. Nancy took advantage of the free time to teach English as a second language, and she and John traveled widely around Japan.

After returning to the United States in 1954, the family stopped off in Stinson Beach, and then moved to Oklahoma where John was stationed. "We every three to five years after that," Bonnie said, "but we always called Stinson Beach home; it was the only place we knew."

Despite her education and her travel, Bonnie described her mother as a traditional homemaker.

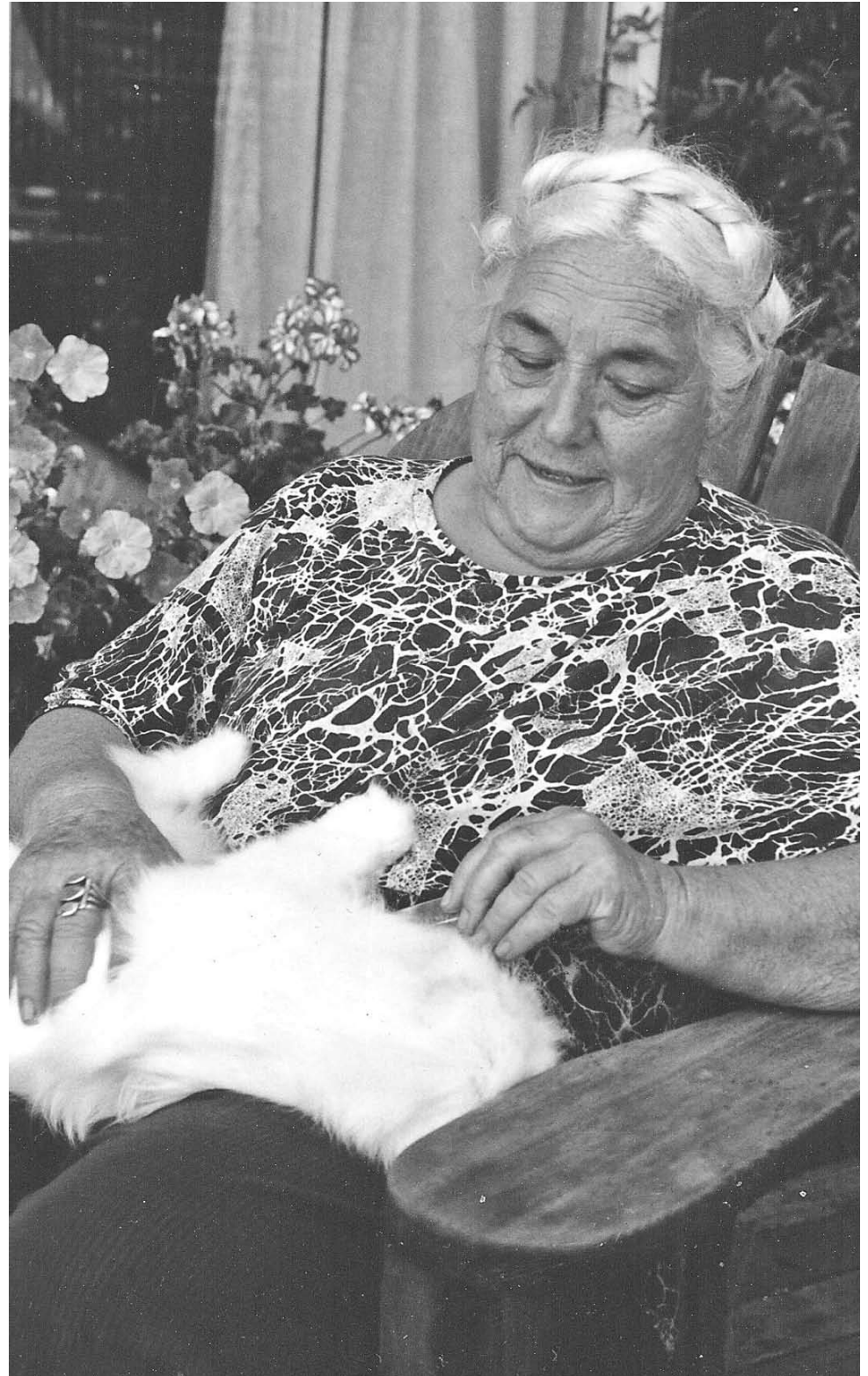
"My mom was the epitome of a good housekeeping mother to me," she said. "She was a Cub Scout leader, and there were always warm cookies waiting when I came home."

Even in her homemaker years, Nancy was far from conventional. She and John would regularly take troupes of girl scouts to wilderness survival camps. "You have to be hearty for that," Bonnie said. "Not everybody likes to learn how to dig latrines, drink purified water and eat K-rations."

In the 1960s, Nancy's life - and role in her family - began to shift. The older two children grew up, and her husband was gone flying supplies in, and bodies out, of Vietnam.

Nancy inherited her grandparents' house in Stinson Beach, and she and Bonnie moved there from Wheatland. Nancy started teaching at the Bolinas-Stinson School in 1969, and was principal there for one year.

"My mom took full advantage of the freedom of the 60s to really focus on herself," Bonnie said. "At that time, Marin County was the center of the movement



Nancy Sullivan of Stinson Beach with her cat Minerva. Nancy once landed an airplane at Chrissy Field in the late 1940s. Photo courtesy of Noele Kostelic.

of self-expression for women, and it let her develop her own spirit and person."

Nancy opened her doors to the artistic community that was starting to form in the area. She hosted weekly potlucks that were a hub for local artists, poets and musicians. She also began to focus on gardening, botany and cooking, and contributed to a cookbook published in 2001. In the late 60s, she and John separated and eventually divorced.

Even after Nancy retired in 1982, she continued to teach and learn. She used her green thumb to help neighbors and friends plan gardens and farms; championed the virtues of worm bins; and pointed out all the birds by name on slow drives around the lagoon with her granddaughter.

At the time of the 1988 interview,

Nancy was about to leave on a six-month trip to Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji to study tropical vegetation. She said she had been researching horticulture and was a docent at the Strybing Arboretum.

"I'm big on education," Nancy said. "Only in the U.S. do people say they've 'finished school.' Did you know that?"

Nancy Sullivan is survived by her three children, Bill Sullivan of Saratoga, Susan Sullivan-Maynard of Brisbane, and Bonnie Sullivan of Stinson Beach; her sister Margaret Aronoff of Whitesboro Texas; and her granddaughter Noele Kostelic and two great-grandchildren of Inverness Park. A celebration of her life will be held at the Stinson Beach Community Center at 1 p.m. on Sunday, May 4.

CARROT CASHEW CURRY

- 4 Tbs butter
- 3 to 4 cloves crushed garlic
- 1 tsp freshly minced ginger
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp dill weed
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 2 cups sliced red onion
- 1 tsp salt or cayenne pepper
- 2 sliced small potatoes
- 4 thinly sliced large carrots
- 2 cups orange juice
- 2 sliced red bell peppers
- 1 to 1 1/2 cup toasted cashews
- 1 cup yogurt

Sauté garlic, ginger and mustard seeds in butter in a deep skillet until seeds pop. Add the rest of the spices and the onions, potatoes and carrots; sauté 5 to 8 minutes. Add orange juice. Cover, simmer 10 to 15 minutes. Add cayenne, peppers, cashews. Simmer 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in yogurt just before serving. Serve over rice.