

POINT REYES LIGHT

Volume LX No. 55/ Point Reyes Station, California

March 20, 2008



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Henry Wells delivered mail and shucked oysters in upstate New York in the 1850s. The bank he later founded reported half a trillion dollars in assets last year. Photo by Justin Nobel.

Big banking descends on Main Street

by Justin Nobel

A trademark Wells Fargo stagecoach will roll into Point Reyes Station on a flat-bed truck to celebrate the opening of their new branch this Saturday. There will be refreshments, face painting and balloon twisting.

Wells Fargo replaced the Bank of Petaluma on the corner of Main Street earlier this week. Although the five-person staff led by Point Reyes resident Patti Collins remains, as do customer accounts and loans, a change has undoubtedly taken place. For many residents the change is insignificant, but there are some who oppose the arrival of the banking megachain.

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Carolyn Keyes Johnson

by Justin Nobel

Carolyn Keyes Johnson, a longtime Point Reyes resident who had a way with words, a knack with kids and a green thumb, passed away earlier this month. She was 91.

"Just take a second, write a note," Carolyn often told her daughter Annie. "If you have an opportunity to give, don't walk by—give, and if you have an opportunity to love, let it happen."

Carolyn was born July 19, 1916 in her parents Berkeley home, the third of four children. She attended high school in Berkeley and graduated from UC Berkeley in 1938 with a degree in psychology and a minor in English.

Even back then Berkeley was "a little bit left of center," said daughter Annie.

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Iraq hero remembered

by Justin Nobel

Lucius Anderson of San Geronimo turned ten last Friday. It was a birthday that meant much more than double digits; exactly one year ago Lucius' uncle, Steve Kowalczyk, was killed by a sniper while surveying a rooftop in Muqadiyah, Iraq. Next week his family will scatter his ashes at sea outside Bolinas.

Steve grew up in Oregon and New Mexico, traveled widely, and spent much of his twenties in West Marin, where his brother Mike lives with his wife Sarah, and Lucius. Steve's liberal upbringing made him somewhat of an aberration in

the army, as did his age—he was 31 when he first deployed to Iraq.

"He was the quintessential West Marin guy," said sister-in-law Sarah. "He'd get up at the crack of dawn and go up the hill to watch the sun rise. He's the last guy you'd think would be into going to Iraq."

In his short time he made a lasting impression. The base he died trying to build is now named after him.

Steve's father taught math at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and later worked to develop a nuclear reactor that would sit on a satellite in space while at Kirtland Air Force Base in New

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>> Hero

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Mexico. After Steve graduated from Highland High School in Albuquerque he road tripped to Alaska with friends to work in a cannery. After the job his friends returned home but Steve hitchhiked to Prudhoe Bay and leapt from an iceberg into the Arctic, fulfilling a life-long dream.

"He was just kind of a rambling man," said Mike. "He sought experiences."

At Macalester College, a small liberal arts school in Minnesota, Steve set three all-time swimming and diving records. He studied biology and chemistry but left school after two years.

He became a traveling salesman for Sky Chairs, a company begun by Sarah's family. While on the road Steve slept on top of his van and when at the company's San Francisco store he crashed on the roof, becoming known as "the guy who sleeps outside."

During this time, Mike's Woodacre home was a base for Steve. He rose early to watch the sunrise, hitchhiked over the hill to pick up the New York Times and surfed off Duxbury Reef in Bolinas.

After 9/11 he caught the first New York flight and visited a friend who lived near Ground Zero. "He always wanted the primary experience," said Mike. "He didn't just pick up opinions or ideas out of the blue."

In 2003 Steve went to Israel during the height of the second Intifada and worked as a dishwasher. He considered joining the Israeli Army, but returned to the States, and in 2003, he enlisted.

"He was very well informed," said Mike. "He read about the war every day. I remember him saying he wanted to marry Amy Goodman."

Sometimes Steve showed up in West Marin unannounced, like on July 4 of 2006. It was the last time his family saw him. Over tea at Cafe Marmalade in Ross he told Mike to scatter his ashes to the sea in Bolinas should he die.

Steve trained in Fort Hood, Texas, where he spent several years, and grew impatient waiting. He earned latrine duty for going on a ten-mile run after "light's out."

"He was such a principled person," said Sarah. "He wanted to be there and to get held up was humiliating for him."

Back in West Marin, the Kowalczyk's continued to oppose the war. Sarah took Lucius to an anti-war rally in San Francisco. But with Steve on the verge of going to Iraq, Mike stopped seeing the war in political terms.

"I respected what he was doing because I felt his reasons," said Mike. "We got into Iraq and Afghanistan and we needed to do the right thing and try to help them try to become stable countries."

Once in Iraq Steve's platoon gained an exceptional reputation. Buried in a river bank, they uncovered the largest cache

of weapons discovered at that time. They were stationed in Diyala Province, an area of great bloodshed. Steve's platoon was one of the first units on the ground on a daily basis outside the Green Zone in an effort to build a presence in hostile neighborhoods. They were stationed in the town of Muqdadyiha.

Saddam Hussein's rule.

"Steve was a good litmus test," said Mike. "He wasn't a cheerleader."

Mike asked his brother whether he was wary that his leaders deceived him. "He very consistently said, 'No, I respect these guys,'" said Mike.

An email sent to his brother two days



"Steve Kowalczyk is the last guy you'd think would be into going to Iraq," sister-in-law Sarah Kowalczyk said. He served in 2006 and 2007.

Sarah was surprised that amongst their friends in West Marin, none knew other soldiers in Iraq.

"I mean this is Marin County," she said. "I've seen in my interactions with my friends in West Marin that this wall comes up. It doesn't make me angry, it's just more like, 'Oh, Huh...'"

"I think we get so busy thinking about our principles that we forget the people," she added. "People forget, because they don't have a family member there and so they don't realize that there are real people over there suffering....It's tragic."

Send pencils, Steve told Mike in letters—Iraqi children had none. He also requested history books for their translators, young men risking their lives every day for the U.S. Army who were thirsty for knowledge about a world they were prevented from learning about under

after Thanksgiving reveals the tension of the situation: "Wake up 4 5 6 am depending on mission. prep vehicle gather gear recheck equipment batteries flashlights fluids brass etc. get briefed and roll out. yesterday...made our patrols through an insurgent filled town. Another unit on another route got hit, an ied. We heard it rock the quiet and watched the smoke listening for the report on the radios. No serious injuries...Back at FOB normandy shower in the dungeon, clean weapon, enjoy the peace of a crescent moonrise listen to the wind through the euks(eucalyptus) watch the cats and the guys hunting the cats then pull an array of guardshift, tower guard, trashcan op, QRF quick force, detainee guard, with the remainig night sleep on grn army cot. Tobacco is good. tobacco is really good. big thanks out of time. also iraqi kids love

pencils just another idea. more later."

An email Steve sent to Mike several months before he died reveals a different tone, and shows the Steve that never stopped dreaming: "We grabbed the Baath Colonel and I fell asleep—I actually fell asleep in a beautiful nap and awoke, as the Colonel was zip tied walking across the street. I then observed a hawk. It flew across the street the other direction into a fruiting full orange tree that was cascading over an old mud wall. It was in close pursuit of some pigeons. My jaw dropped at all that I was observing. This sandy pepper-crested hawk, the Colonel, and the timing of the moment."

While searching for a spot suitable for the Muqdadyiha headquarters, Steve stepped onto a rooftop with a fellow soldier. He was shot in the neck by a sniper and died instantly.

Steve's body was flown to the Jefferson County Airport in Boulder, Colorado and taken to the Trinity Lutheran Church in a military motorcade. He was awarded the bronze star, a purple heart and a marksman's medal.

Steve's platoon finished the base in Muqdadiyah and named it K-Wal, after him. In a piece put together by a San Antonio reporter shortly afterwards 1st Lieutenant Patrick Stallings talks about his comrade: "K-Wal was a real quiet guy and real introspective...He was the kind of guy you'd find sitting on the roof watching the sunset and thinking about what that meant."

Boxes of Steve's things line a room in the basement of the Kowalczyk's San Geronimo home. One contains a flag flown over the White House sent from Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, a tattered Hebrew phrasebook from his Israel trip and a book about war sent by his eldest sister weeks before he shipped out with a note attached: "Steve, it's not too late to change your mind. In any case, all the best. You'll have an army praying for you."

In an adjacent closet are Steve's ashes. Beside this are more papers, one with words of remembrance from fellow soldiers. Specialist Josiah Hollopeter was killed several weeks after he wrote these words about his friend:

"He has seen more parts of the world and experienced more culture than most of us will ever see. He was the kind of guy that would hop a plane to Japan or Mexico or some other interesting place just because he had the time and could do it. The man never had an ounce of hate in him. Just watching the sunset, or the stars or the smell of the ocean and hearing the wave's crash was enough to fulfill him...To the men who knew him, like myself, he was one of the most interesting and unique people I have ever known. If he was here, I know he would say he lived a full life and left this world a "happy man."