



Carmelita Marie Jarvis Conn

June 5, 1932 - December 25, 2023

"What a blessed, interesting life I've enjoyed! And it has flown by so quickly!"

The lively author of the above quote was born June 5th, 1932, in Detroit, Michigan to Anna Dillon McGee and Michael Thomas McGee, the 11th of 12 children.

Carmelita was a woman on the move even when she attended Treadwell School in Dearborn, Michigan, where she was president of the first and second grades. She completed elementary and high school at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral School in Detroit. In high school she was student body president for two years, vice president of the Senior Class, Captain of the Basketball team, and a class valedictorian. After graduation, Carmelita worked as a switchboard operator at Michigan Bell while she attended Marygrove College.

In 1951, Carmelita moved to California where she helped her brother Pat, an assemblyman, in his district office. She worked for Pacific Bell Advertising for a year before moving back to Detroit. During a three-year employment period with Geyer Advertising, she married her high school boyfriend John Jarvis. She did switchboard work at night while he got his BA and attended law school. The couple had four children by the time they moved to Los Angeles in 1958 to help brother Patrick McGee run for Mayor of Los Angeles. She

notes the job was hard

but "great fun," and, "we only lost to Yorty by a fairly small margin!"

In 1960, the Jarvis family moved to Visalia. John worked for the DA. Among other jobs, Carmelita worked as a "stringer" at the Visalia Times Delta, where she contributed local feature stories, movie reviews, and live theater activity. Carmelita and her children were often active in the Visalia Community Players, the local music scene, and school shows.

When her marriage ended in 1970, Carmelita went to work for "The Visalia Independent," a weekly newspaper produced by the owners of "The Clovis Independent." Her highlight of those days was an interview with Clint Eastwood! She penned a column called "Gadfly."

When the paper folded in 1972, her editor, Bill Schiffman, told Carmelita she had a "gift for writing" and advised her to go to journalism school. Mary, her youngest of seven children, was starting first grade, so Carmelita enrolled as a fulltime, daytime student at College of the Sequoias, motivated by Schiffman's encouragement.

During her tenure at COS, she helped produce the "Campus," the college newspaper, writing columns, editing, and interviewing important visitors such as John Voight, Attorney William Kuntsler, and Governor Jerry Brown. Carmelita earned her "precious" A.A. degree in January, 1974. "When I first looked at that degree, I thought it should have been streaked with blood, sweat, and tears. I know I could never have accomplished that without the deep love and cooperation of my children." All seven of her children are graduates of COS.

Next came the commute to Fresno State as a Journalism major. Carmelita worked on the production of the newspaper "Insight" and wrote feature stories, interviewing such visiting luminaries as Lou Grant, Ray Bradbury, and

President Gerald Ford. She was on the editorial board and had her own weekly column. Her mentor was the famous Roger Tatarian, teaching there after 20 years as Editor of United Press International. She won a national "Hearst Nomination" for writing about Vietnam, and won an international writing contest and internship at Playgirl Magazine, where she learned much about publishing.

In 1975, while attending Fresno State, she ran for the Visalia City Council. "I was the first woman to attempt that. I garnered a very respectable 1409 votes, and felt very patriotic and proud."

Carmelita earned her bachelor's degree in 1976. After graduation, she was hired by Kings County as the first female property tax appraiser in the Valley, licensed by the State of California. After three years on that job, she left in 1979 to pursue publication of a monthly newspaper. She invited Fresno State pal Craig Lindaman to head up the advertising, and later John Lindt came on as the printer. "I wanted it to be like the Village Voice in New York, full of politics and local people, so we called it 'The Valley Voice.' It was very well received in the community, much to our delight."

In the spring of 1982, Carmelita was planning her marriage to Judge Kenneth E. Conn and sold the Valley Voice to John Lindt. She created "Eagle Publishing," producing a monthly called "The San Joaquin Eagle" which ran for five years. During that time, she took graduate classes and earned her Lifetime Community College Teaching Credential in 1985.

In 1987, Carmelita "took a year off" to build her dream house with Ken at "The Lakes." In 1988 she decided to add a book-publishing division to Eagle Publishing and had national success with a book called "Real Grandmas Don't Bake Cookies Anymore" written by her sister, Therese McGee. In 1989 she

published "Settlement Conference: A Handbook for Judges and Lawyers" written by husband Kenneth E. Conn. This book has been included in curriculum at the National Judicial College, many law schools and as a reference book for judges and lawyers in the practice of dispute resolution. Judge Conn retired in 1999 after 22 years on the Superior Court Bench. He had a thriving mediation practice and Carmelita ran his office along with her own enterprise.

Carmelita earned a number of awards and distinctions, including a lifetime achievement award nomination from the Visalia Times Delta, and a plaque from Networking for Women as a founding member. She served for six years on the board of Tender Loving Care, a haven for abused children. Carmelita also served a nine-year stint on the board of the Visalia Community Players. She has been a balloon pilot and was the first woman invited to cross the Sierras in a helium balloon. The mission was scrapped due to bad weather, but she and Ken spent the day entertaining the late Flip Wilson. In 1992, Carmelita ran for the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, losing to Bill Maze, but "thrilled" with 4000 votes!

Carmelita's happiest life memory is eloping to Mariposa with Ken Conn! Her favorite pastime was traveling with Ken to exotic ports of call and snorkeling destinations. She was an avid fisherman and liked to play poker with her best friends George and Lana Webb, play the piano, and play with her grandchildren!

As the proud mother of Terese, Jack, Julie, Geoffrey, Patrick, Michael, and Mary, Carmelita said her greatest lifetime achievement was raising her seven children to love God, America, music, and life! She inherited four grown daughters when she married Ken 42 years ago. Carmelita was very fond of Melissa, Jennifer, Pam, and Marjie. She considered them friends. She was deeply proud of Jack's wife Dianne; Michael's wife Liz; Julie's late husband

Larry Polk; Mary's late husband John O'Leary; and precious adopted daughters C.D. Harbottle, Tracy Cristallo, Amanda Sanchez, and Jeannie Johnson. Ken and Carmelita were delighted with their grandchildren, Hallie, Evan, Claire, Emily, Jacqueline, Bethany, Katie, Michael, Clara, Jack, Kenneth, Brooke, Kevin, Tyler, Trevor, Adam, Sam, Anthony, Michael, Benjamin, Chase, Aubrey, Darcie, and Ashley. And Carmelita was blessed with great-grandchildren Savanah, Alexis, Marshall, Kace, and Parker. Of her descendants, Carmelita said, "Of course, they are all smart, beautiful, and above average!"

Carmelita had hoped to cruise the Greek islands and go snorkeling in Tahiti with her beloved Ken, but unfortunately he preceded her in death in 2016. She also had dreams of learning to fly a plane and writing a book about miracles that she had witnessed in her lifetime. She asked her grandson Jack to share this with her friends and her family when she passed: "I've always felt like I'm the most fortunate woman who ever lived. I've lived the lives of five women. I'm so lucky."

- Carmelita Conn wrote her own obituary. We love you, Mom. May the road rise up to meet you.

Services will be at St. Anthony's Retreat in Three Rivers, CA on Tuesday, April 30, 2024 at 1:00 PM. Reception will follow at The Lake's Club House at 3:00 PM.

Services have been entrusted to Salser & Dillard Funeral Chapel. Memorial Tributes and condolences may be offered by logging onto www.salseranddillard.com.

Previous Events

Service

APR **30**. 1:00 PM (PT)

St. Anthony's Retreat
43590 Alta Acres Dr.
Three Rivers, CA 93271

Reception

APR **30**. 3:00 PM.

Lake's Club House

Tribute Wall



“ *Carm was a blazing light when we shared an adventure. It was a high point of my life and over the years I would reflect upon it with pleasure and wonder that it even happened! She was one of God’s special ones. It was a joy to know her. Char Johnson (Noble)* ”

Charlene M Johnson - April 28, 2024 at 05:16 AM