

Memories of Sheila Stone Dill



Shared at a memorial on June 3, 2023

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From Julia Harrison

One of my favorite memories of Sheila took place during Christmas of 2019. Sheila came to Paso Robles to visit for Christmas and she helped us make Christmas cookies and deliver them to our friend's houses. We then had a crafting party with family and made Owl ornaments out of felt and seed beads. It was a wonderful time!!! I miss her so much!!!!

Julia Harrison





A Sheila Story From Bret Harrison



My mom was known for her positive and encouraging disposition. She was a tremendous influence on me this way, and I would imagine her grandkids and most who knew her would have a difficult time picturing her angry to the point of administering a spanking.

I got several spankings as a child, and I'm certain I probably deserved more than I actually received. I'm not super proud of this fact, I'm just acknowledging that I could be a management problem.

Mom's spankings were pretty straightforward. They went something like this:

1. Bret makes a poor choice deserving of a spanking.
2. Mom informs me that I am going to get said spanking, and arranges a place and time for this. Typically, it went something like, "Let's meet in your bedroom in ten minutes (pause for effect, establish menacing eye contact) because you're going to get a spanking."

3. The ten minutes of anticipation leading up to getting the spanking were in fact way worse than the actual spanking, but that was part of her plot. Often many remorseful feelings were expressed during this time, usually by me.

4. The spanking usually was several swats on the butt, bare-handed, pants on, followed by lots of very dramatic sobbing, again usually by me.

One spanking sticks out. When I was about four or five (1967 or 1968), I did something deserving of a spanking, and mom and I arranged for the usual “see you in 10” thing, but this time I went into the little bathroom near the laundry room, and I stuffed a fluffy hand towel into my underwear, providing a measure of impact protection that of course, mom wouldn’t be the wiser to.

When I arrived for my scheduled thrashing, I wasn’t nearly as sobby as normal, and, according to mom, I kind of hopped right up across her knee like I was getting onto Santa’s lap or something. There was the customary delay, and then I felt the solid, but significantly muffled impact of her hand on my butt...then another, more hesitant spank.

Then she started laughing. I couldn’t hear her, but I could feel her shaking. She gave me one more half hearted whack, and couldn’t go on. She told me not to commit the offense again and she left, trying to keep it together.

In 1967, my four-year-old-brain believed I had gotten out of a spanking. In retrospect, I understand that didn’t exactly happen. I understand now that I had a tender-hearted and loving mom with a tremendous sense of humor.

Bret Harrison

From the friend to whom Sheila promised her ceramic dishes

I just wanted to tell you how much joy I am getting from Miss Sheila-la’s dishes.

I moved from G’Ville back to my home area...not in the burn scar but to Chico. I’ve scaled down a lot and in the process of even more so her dishes are the only ones I have now. Every day I use them and every day I think of her and thank her. Take heart and know that I too love your mama.

From Liza

From Heidi Harrison

I always felt loved and accepted by Sheila! She was like another mother to me. I could always talk to her about anything. I appreciated her love and support through all the years I was with Andy! She was classy, funny, smart and kind.

Sheila was an incredible inspiration to me. I believe there was nothing she could not do.

She was so talented. She played the piano beautifully and loved music. She learned how to play the harp! She made clothes, aprons, table runners & quilts that were colorful and unique! I will always treasure the items she made me.

She made homemade apple butter and jams! Her apple butter was my absolute favorite. I would stretch my jars as long as I could. At Christmas she made her famous fudge. You all remember the fudge!

She loved to cook. She could cook the most amazing food! On a visit to Oregon years ago she cooked the whole time we visited. I still have the recipes from the meals on that trip.

Sheila loved to bird watch & her love for birds rubbed off on me. When Andy and I would visit we would go look for the bald eagles nearby. Or we would jump in the car and look for great horned owls. That was a literal hoot. We found the owls every time and once it was a barn owl chased down the street and I got a photo of it before it disappeared. When she lived in Sparks we just walked out to her patio to watch the quail run along the fence or the finches at her feeder.

I always enjoyed playing board games or card games with Sheila. I enjoyed getting clobbered at Rummikub by Sheila. She was a champ at that game.

She was a wonderful mother to her boys. She loved them fiercely and was wonderful sharing them with her daughters-in-law. She loved Andy so much and was such a kind and loving person to him.

I miss our talks. I am glad she knew how much she was loved. She was so easy to love. I miss her so much. But every time I see a dragonfly I think of her. When I see quail or great horned owls I think of her. She is in my heart now and for always.



♥ -Heidi

From Andy Harrison

It's still difficult to express how special my Mom was to me, but I'll do my best. Here's a short list of things that remind me of her:

Homemade pizza reminds me of my Mom. When we were kids she once dropped an entire bubbling-hot pizza face down on the oven door as it slid off the pan. That was the first time I heard my Mom cuss. Oven-Door Pizza was born, a catastrophe on that day, but a source of belly laughs for years afterwards.

Sitting at the piano reminds me of my Mom. When I was a kid with better things to do she made me take lessons and practice. She wouldn't let me quit! But one day when I was older and dumber I quit anyway. In the years that followed, I'd watch her play and wish I could play like her. Now when I play I imagine her listening with approval, but at the same time gently telling me to keep practicing, and finish what you start.

Children's books remind me of my Mom. I don't remember her reading to me, but I know she did. She was good at it. In her later years I got to watch her read to grade-school kids, which she did with endless joy and patience. I've slowly reacquired my favorite books from childhood, knowing they're special because she selected them herself so many years ago.

Sunflowers remind me of my Mom. Sunflowers are the happiest flower so it makes sense she loved them so much. She grew towering specimens in her yard every summer. She also painted them on her fence so she could enjoy them in the winter too.

When I see a young mother at the discount grocery store, patiently asking her bored kids to behave and doing her best to fill the cart, I think of my Mom. She bravely raised her kids alone, making sacrifices for herself so we could have things like piano lessons and occasionally Farrell's ice cream. She worried about money but she made sure we didn't know it.

Birds remind me of my Mom. She loved them and appreciated them, and was thrilled when I

expressed that Heidi and I had fallen in love with them too, largely because of her. Once when I told her I saw something new, she reminded me that it wasn't new at all. She said it's been here all along, all your life. You just never noticed it until now.



May we all spend the rest of our lives life looking at the world like my Mom did—with an open heart and open eyes, with patience and compassion, and with a desire to guide others to see and appreciate things not yet noticed.

Grandma Sheila-la Dill From Melody Garrett

One year for Kith-n-Kin we were in Tahoe and we went out for lunch and Grandma and I shared a salad. I loved everything about it except that it had blue cheese.

Grandma and Grandpa came out to stay with Thomas and I, in Missouri, when we were young while Bryan, Mom, and Dad went to Costa Rica for 10 days and we ate a lot of ice cream and popcorn. Grandma and I also made a nice table runner that we surprised Mom with when they returned.

When Grandma and Grandpa lived in Gardnerville we would take a walk after dinner when we'd visit, and often walk as far as the park.

It was fun when Grandma would dress up as 'Madam Sheila-la' and tell us our fortunes.





Stories of Sheila From Jan Hall

When Dad first introduced Wayne and me to Sheila, I think they had already decided to get married and wanted us to know each other. So of course we went on a hike together. The hike started out well-enough. We hiked a few miles to Twin Lakes in the Sierra and then enjoyed lunch together.

The trip was fine and we liked Sheila well-enough. She wasn't bossy or weird, but Wayne "decided" to test her mettle (or scare her off?) by falling off a cliff, which required an extraction from a ledge over the lake and then a helicopter lift back to Fresno. Sheila was chosen to ride in the helicopter while Dad and I hiked out. I was a little jealous of both of them who got the helicopter ride.

Sheila told the story fairly recently and I learned that after she got to the hospital, she had to call her father to pick her up from this very interesting date. Since she was a very independent single woman, this was embarrassing for her. But she married Dad anyway.

I remember reading a scripture with Wayne at the wedding and that Sheila was a beautiful bride and that the wedding was at Woodward park and she made quiche and had strawberries for guests to eat.

Besides cooking for her wedding, I always remember that her cooking was an important part of visiting. She took pride in serving her guests great food. Often she would announce the special meal that she had planned.

Early on though, this did not go over as well as expected. We went to visit one time and she said, "I'm going to make rumaki." I learned that rumaki is a water chestnut surrounded by chicken liver, and wrapped in bacon. It was not my favorite food and I went home wondering what other "icky" food she was likely to subject us to. Rumaki was the last thing that she made that I did not think was fantastic. Everyone who visited (even picky children) looked forward to the food and the good company.

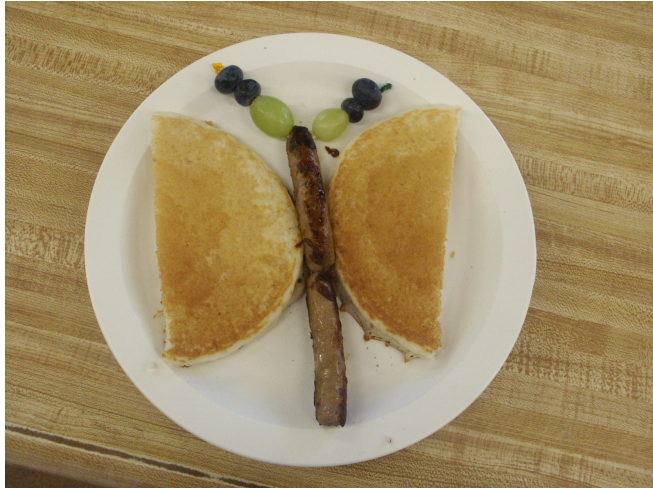
When Dad and Sheila moved from Eugene to Gardnerville, I remember that the house had no yard and I was a little sad for Sheila that she had left such a beautiful yard in Eugene and wondered how she would like living in Gardnerville. It wasn't long before I got my answer. She transformed the dirt into another beautiful retreat to enjoy. We could still watch birds, enjoy lush plants and beautiful flowers, as well as food from her bountiful garden.

I will always regret that circumstances forced a move for us after only a year of them living "close" in Gardnerville. So, we could no longer meet at Apple Hill or only be a short drive away. I always figured that we would be able to move closer at some point, and that I could learn to garden from Sheila or we could sew or quilt together.

Sheila became my second mom. I admired her creativity and many talents. She taught me so many things and was an example of resilience. When she was diagnosed with diabetes, she handled it as with so many other things. She educated herself and took care of the problem. Our visits, in addition to being filled with good food, pinochle, and laughter, started to include long walks to the park after dinner or in the morning.

I'm grateful for the chance to know Sheila and learn from her. I wish there had been more time.

Remember the breakfast at Kith and Kin? Pancakes, with Sheila's special creative touch.



What about the Kith and Kin cookbook, where she included ambitious recipes like “Stew-in-a-sleeping-bag-made-while-climbing-Half-Dome” or “rumaki-on-toast”?





Jan

From Melinda Nunez

My earliest memory of Aunt Sheila is when her and Uncle Doug came to Portland when grandpa Dill was sick. I knew Aunt Sheila and Uncle Doug were the family from Kentucky and they flew a long way to be with grandpa. In the short time that they were with us in Portland, grandpa passed away. I remember Aunt Sheila leaving an impression of her kindness and warmth.

My next memory was the excitement swirling around the house that Uncle Doug and Aunt Sheila were moving back to Oregon! They would be just two hours away in Eugene Oregon. Once they arrived, we visited occasionally. Every visit was so wonderful. So much to talk about. They were so interesting to me as they felt like world travelers. So smart and kind. Aunt Sheila always prepared an amazing meal. I saw her as such a strong comforting woman. I loved being around her. Eventually, my college path leads me straight to Eugene, University of Oregon. It was exciting to have family there that I could connect with, and I did. As often as I could, I would go to their house to visit. The visits would be long and impressionable. They helped me with so much, like advocating for myself, and how to be professional. They were always more than happy to share advice on things like my resume and job finding skills. More importantly we talked a lot about family. I felt such a strong bond with both of them. Aunt Sheila always made me feel so special. I felt her love for me and it was mutual. I knew that I had a place and I was always welcome. Never mind that Aunt Sheila's meals were always calling my name! She was the best cook, and even shared her recipes with me. I continue to make some of my favorites that I learned from her.

After some time, I graduated from college and Aunt Sheila and Uncle Doug moved to Nevada. Our visits were few and far between until recent years when we started our annual visit over Memorial weekend. We'd drive down, and spend the most wonderful few days together. I am forever thankful for that time. The bond I shared with Aunt Sheila, trickled down to my daughters. I am so thankful that they had those years to get to know both her and Uncle Doug. They absolutely adored Aunt Sheila. She made our visits so fun for them. She set them up as waitresses for all of our meals together. They'd take our orders and serve us. They loved every minute of it.

I will forever be grateful for my time with my amazing Aunt and Uncle. They taught me so much about life. I do and will continue to miss our visits together. I'm thankful for the memories, and will hold them dear to my heart.

~Melinda







From Thomas Hall

Viewing people from different angles can be a startling experience.

As children, it's easy to put the people around us into boxes according to their relationship with us. In adulthood, however, most of us come to realize that our kin, family, friends, teachers, mentors, and even passersby are more than the silhouettes they cast in our minds. It's one of those moments of realization that I'd like to share.

On both sides of my family I am among the youngest of my cousins, which means I have taken advantage of few opportunities to connect with my grandparents. When age had made them distinguished and wise, I was young and stupid. When I had reached (relative) maturity, they began to die.

Yet I do have a story. One ordinary school day in elementary school, as our English lesson began, I stumbled across a name casually attached to our afternoon reading assignment. That name was Sheila Stone Dill. I never took the opportunity, when we later moved to Nevada and began making the drive to Gardnerville regularly, to ask Grandma how she felt about her contribution to my second grade English class in Missouri. I'm not certain that I ever told her, though I hope that I did. It was only in writing this story and consulting with my Mom that I learned that Sheila had contributed many writings for the same purpose.

Speaking with people who took greater advantage of their interactions with Sheila than I, a picture emerges of someone I would have liked to know better, and the strong impact that she had stretches from my second-grade classroom to the lives of other people I love.

From Bryan Hall

Grandma Sheila-la was always excited and vivacious. I remember her love of birds and wildflowers and also her infectious sense of fun. She was never boring, even when she was tired or sick.

One memory I have that is especially sweet is an occasion where she and I sat down to review photos of her trip to Wales. She taught me how to read and pronounce the names of Welsh words. She took one photo next to the sign for the village of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogogoch which I remember struggling with for quite some time. But she could say it easily and clearly. Just spending that afternoon sitting in the sun looking out at her beautiful garden and talking about the things she had done and seen while in Wales as well as our plans and thoughts about the future remains a treasured moment for me, one which I will hold on to for the rest of my life.

Grandma was always hopeful and supportive, and she encouraged and inspired me to be the best version of myself. I love her and miss her.



❤️ Bryan

From Marc Hall

In December, 1991 -- when I first met Sheila -- I was 23. And a half. She and Doug had driven down to Sacramento to meet me a few days before my marriage to Jan. Sheila, Doug, Jan, and my parents sat around the dining room table in my parents' home and chatted. I remember very few of the specifics of that first real conversation with Sheila, but about 25 years later she recalled to me one detail that revealed a little too much of my maturity level at the time, and which would no doubt embarrass Jan too much to relate here. Not only did Sheila recall -- and **confoundingly express approval for** -- my comments at that first meeting, she had apparently interpreted them as a validation of the upcoming union. Which, in retrospect, may have been a tad unwise (the endorsement, not the union). Nevertheless, she and Doug never once expressed condemnation, or even concern, to me about Jan's choice in mate. Go figure.

After Jan and I wed, we would make periodic pilgrimages to Eugene to visit. On one such visit, we plowed through a deer, causing significant damage to our Ford Tempo. On another visit, we plowed through a snowstorm, causing less significant damage to our Saturn SL1. But these setbacks were worth it, as Sheila would prepare food I wrongly thought I would never like, and we would luxuriate on the deck, enjoying the birdsong and forested vista behind their home.

The inside of the house was just as beautiful; Sheila's sewing complemented Doug's woodworking, and made their home a showpiece.

When we visited, we would walk for hours through the forest behind the house, at least before the clearcutting and subdivision of those many acres. The walking path through the neighborhood was a poor substitute for logging roads into the depths of the woods. Sheila always knew where to go to see fawns, or what birds were nesting nearby.

I suspect Sheila and Doug not only wanted to be closer to their kids and grandkids but also wanted to live somewhere a little less nuts-and-granola and a little more Wilford-Brimley-oatmeal. The transformation of wildlands into subdivision near their home in Eugene probably made that decision a lot easier.

Jan and I weren't much use in helping Sheila and Doug move their household to Gardnerville, but a month or two after the house was mostly unpacked we drove over the mountains from Shingle Springs with the kids and a rototiller in the back of the van. Sheila kept the kids from underfoot while I manhandled the machine through the yard to prepare it for the amazing garden that Sheila eventually grew there.

At **every one** of our subsequent visits, Sheila made a point to say thank you and credit the rototilling for making the garden happen. This was sweet -- if grossly mis-stating the comparative levels of effort involved -- but always gave me a little lift.

...And made me feel that much more guilty when, just two years after the Dills' big move from Eugene to Gardnerville, the Hall clan pulled stakes and moved to Missouri.

Fortunately, Sheila and Doug must have forgiven us, and a few years later agreed to play parents for Melody and Thomas while Jan, Bryan, and I went to Costa Rica for more than a

week. This was the longest continuous exposure Melody and Thomas had to their grandparents, and it went well enough that nobody got murdered, maimed, or even maligned. Possibly because of the enormous volumes of ice cream involved.

Not much later, our family returned to the West, settling in Nevada. We would all drive up to Gardnerville two or three times a year (Jan and one or more of the kids much more often) to visit. The metamorphosis of Sheila's backyard from bare dirt, to lawn and pergola, to garden paradise, was ongoing. She would always welcome us and once again thank me for the rototilling. Her modesty at what she had accomplished was noteworthy.

During one of these visits, Doug, Jan, and I attended a performance by Sheila at the little community theater above Sharkey's Casino on Highway 395 in Gardnerville. Regretfully, I cannot recall the name of the play or the name of the character Sheila portrayed. But it was clever, and Sheila's delivery was solid and well-received. This was a new side of Sheila; after more than twenty years she could still surprise me.

Afterward, Sheila, Doug, Jan, and I went out to eat; I remember the restaurant staff recognized both Sheila and Doug right away and enthusiastically welcomed them back. I felt just a little like Norm entering [Cheers Beacon Hill](#).

This may have been one of Sheila's final roles on stage, as her memory was less and less reliable as the years wore on. She took her decline in stride, however, and seldom complained about it. I suspect that -- of all the things she gave up in her later years -- she missed her audience the most.

Whether that audience was a theater full of strangers, a gaggle of school kids wanting to hear another story, or a grandchild on her lap, Sheila always gave us her best self.

We miss you, Sheila.

Marc





Recollections of Sheila Dill From Wayne Dill

I think we need to stop assigning memorial events to the teachers in the family because they keep assigning essays to write. 😊 But then they are mostly all teachers, aren't they?

I met Sheila on a hike to Twin Lakes in the Kaiser Wilderness area, near Huntington Lake. Dad was anxious to have his new “girlfriend” meet his kids and wanted to have a fun family day in the mountains.

Unfortunately, I was a pigheaded teenager who thought he was a real mountain man and who thought he was a rock climber, simply because he had seen a film or something, and thought he knew exactly how a real climber did things.

So, while Dad, Sheila and Jan were enjoying fishing or something like that (I never could sit still for such a pursuit) I was out rock-hopping and exploring. Aaaand...falling off a rock precipice.

So that took the “fun family day in the mountains” to a whole different level. Sparing details, the rest of the day involved transporting me on a makeshift stretcher to a meadow, where a rescue helicopter could land to evacuate me. I was attended to by a troop of boy scouts camping at the lakes, and a group of men from the Coca-Cola bottling company in Fresno, as well as Jan and Sheila. Dad had run out to the main road to get help.

Sheila ended up flying with me in the helicopter to St. Agnes. When the day was done, she might have had reason to question her involvement with the Dill crazies. But somehow miraculously, she stuck around. I'm so glad she did.

Our family was broken—the divorce between Mom and Dad, and all the dysfunction that brought that on had left us in a mess. And I know that Sheila had gone through such difficult times too, that she must have been reeling from her own wounds, but somehow, she found the strength and empathy to treat me with love and compassion, to be patient with me, to still be an adult who could guide me into an acceptable path for my life. She knew when to love and accept the ridiculous mess that I was, and when to help me make better decisions, firmly but gently (that's a contradiction). She was loving, kind, wise, and giving, even when she must have had her hands full with her three boys, and the biggest boy of them all—my dad. She was a true angel in our lives.

I did not appreciate all this immediately. I was an adult when I began to realize what a special person she was. Intelligent, but humble, she lived in Dad's shadow, but over the years I began to see that she was the true hero of the family—the one with wisdom, the one I wanted to be like, the one who I needed to watch and follow, and emulate.

This was supposed to be a letter of memories of good times. I certainly remember best the many Kith and Kin reunions that we had. These were mainly inspired by Sheila, and they were great. They are a legacy to her love and compassion for both sets of children, spouses, and grandchildren. These came about from her desire to have a whole family, and it was Sheila that made that happen.

When Dad passed away, I sensed in Sheila a relief that she had some time on her own to live the last years of her life exactly how she wanted. I remember shortly after dad was gone, I was there in her home and I remember hearing music playing, and I realized that I hadn't heard her play music for many years. She said that she hadn't because Dad didn't like to hear the music. She was joyful and seemed light as air as she was able to brighten life once again with the sound of music.

I know she missed Dad, but I think she also felt free and released from the burden of his cantankerous pessimism. And that was Sheila—she was the opposite of Dad in many ways—bright, cheery, happy, and fun to be around. She was an optimist, loved life, loved adventure, and always was very giving. And she had faith in people—she had a vision of the potential of those she loved, and loved them whether they soared or stumbled, but always believed that they would recover from any stumble to be better. I think she instilled this in Dad too and made him a much better person than he ever was, or would have been without her.

She was a great cook (again I didn't appreciate this strength until I was an adult), always able to whip up a meal that was healthy, delicious, and novel. She was also a fantastic gardener, having created a jewel of a backyard that was lovely to sit in, and to meditate in.

When Sheila succumbed to a failing heart after battling COVID, I thought it was all too soon. I had thought she would be around for many years, and I looked forward to visiting her often. Of all the parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles I have lost, I miss her the most. But just remembering her makes me a better person and makes my life brighter; I am more optimistic remembering her. When I think of Sheila, I feel hope, love, beauty, and appreciation for simple things. That is perhaps what I liked most about visiting Sheila and Dad—was her appreciation for simple things, for her ability to see everyday beauty, and appreciate the small things that are really the big things in life.

I will miss Sheila. But I will also hold her memory very dear. I don't think that I ever let her know how much I learned to appreciate her in my adult life—I tried toward the end, but I just was not very good at expressing it that well. I really loved Sheila.

Love,
Wayne

From Katie Dill

When I think of Sheila, I will always remember...



This picture was taken June 24, 2022 after a wonderful evening & following morning of visiting, sharing and being in the moment.

Sheila was officially my "step mother in law", and in my heart will always be Sheila-la!

I remember the first time meeting her right before Wayne and I married. From that first moment - we could talk, connect and appreciate each other - just as we were. Over the years when we were together, we would share healthcare stories, what it meant to be creative, and enjoying sitting on a beautiful deck/pao taking in the beauty around – and she with a cup of tea or a piece of dark, not milk chocolate.

I will remember Sheila too, was there for me when there were difficult times, never judging or fixing and giving space just to be.

I will remember how Sheila loved family and made those special Dill/Harrison Kith 'n Kin reunions memorable. Part of our family #DillsDo, is because of what she and Doug established so many years ago bringing family together.

I will remember how Sheila was published, polished and poised. I will remember when I learned she had a quick wit, fought for the underdog and welcomed everyone with her smile and a hug. Oh, and her laugh was so contagious.

With all the accolades, her connections and accomplishments I will remember Sheila was a human being first.

I will remember how very unexpectedly having to say goodbye and how it hurt. I will treasure the gift that I was able to express what Sheila meant to me personally and share my love with her. I'll never forget our last gaze as I said "I'll see you again - I love you!" and gave her a kiss. She shook her head and softly said "Yes we will. Love you."

I will remember a week later, being in Utah at Scheel's when I received a text from Abbi that Sheila died peacefully, surrounded by family & lots of love. I will remember that moment of standing still with Wayne as we hugged and cried, knowing her beauty would no longer grace this earth and for the gift that Sheila was in our lives.

I know I am a better person today, because of Sheila's example of the life that can be lived - as a true authentic human being. I know when I say she is missed, I am not the only one. Until we meet again - I love you Sheila-la!

Love, Katie



From Abbi Harrison

For the last 2 years I have kept a note from my grandma Sheila taped to my wall. It is written in her beautiful script, but at this point, when written in 2021, the arthritis had done its work on her hands, so the careful letters are shaky. In the midst of her Alzheimers diagnosis I assume she was tasked with writing down memories. This note was short, written to me, a memory Sheila had of me as a child. "What fun it was to pick you up in your stroller to Roeding park on a summery day in Fresno. You were so happy to ride in your stroller because you could see so many animals at once. You especially loved the tall critters - the giraffes!"

The summer after she wrote me this note I found myself at the same zoo daily, probably 25 years after her memory was formed. I had the privilege of working there, and the same summer Sheila passed I got to show her all the pictures I was taking every day. Not just of giraffes but every animal imaginable. Once, long ago, Sheila Dill pushed me around the Fresno Chaffee Zoo, and 25 years later I got to lay with her on her hospital bed and share with her the same animals she shared with me. If Sheila is anything, she is certainly a powerful manifestor.

Sheila Dill loved the natural world deeply. She was a fierce nature explorer, avid birdwatcher, and pet owner. She instilled into all of her children and grandchildren the beauty of the world around us. She found joy in these things, pure unadulterated joy. And sharing them with family, even more. Her contagious spirit in exploring was built into all of us, in our bones and marrow.

My grandma Sheila is and was my hero my whole life. Strong women aren't built overnight. She worked hard and loved harder. I don't think anyone could hope for a better grandmother. She was the textbook definition of doting: She baked, and cooked, and her

garden was carefully tended to. Anyone in the family knows the healing power of smelling her fresh baked bread, or starting the morning with Sheila apple butter.



The traits I loved in my Grandma Sheila are the traits I look for in everyone. Tenderness, understanding, and an unrelenting curiosity. She defined so much of humanness for me. She led by example, but also led with love. I couldn't have hoped for a better guide in my 27 years of life. I couldn't hope for a better person to have as my hero.

from Corbett Harrison

Mom loved to perform, and she once gave me the moon—more about that moon momentarily.

She'd cackle like a witch when we begged her to as kids...and again as adults. At some point, she'd practiced to perfection this sinister laugh (Andy and Bret are likely hearing it right now), and she delighted both our school friends and us with over-the-top performances throughout our entire lives. I think Mom was just one of those people who—on occasion—delighted herself by captivating an audience with all the pure radiance she could muster. Ms. Sheila-la was the character she eventually created; she read both crystal balls and picture books to children as Ms. Sheila-la. She threw tea parties where her work friends talked silly and dressed for high society. The perfect purple hat came later to La-la's costume, but it was always there in some form, as witnessed in photo at right.

In Mom's junior yearbook, I found this fun picture of a seventeen-year-old Sheila Stone performing in a play. In the picture, she is wearing a silly hat, of course. But study her face; it shows off an expression that really captures my mom's radiance—her love of a performance. She passed that DNA on to all three of her sons, and each had their own moments on a variety of stages.

Mom also made sure she exposed us to professional live theater when we were still impressionable. Mom helped direct plays at our church; she seemed to know where theater was happening in 1970's Fresno. Back then as now, I imagine taking your children to a play couldn't have been cheap, but she always managed to afford us good memories by acquiring tickets. I remember seeing *Godspell* with her in what seemed an old repurposed building in Fresno, and I remember our front-row seats during CSUF's repertory musicals. In Reno, she gave us *The Odd Couple* and *The Music Man*, and from there I was personally hooked by the magic of seeing a good performance from time to time.



That said, here's the story I chose to share in this memory collection. My mother and I once had a huge fight over me going to a musical with her instead of hanging out with my friends at a Christmas tree lot.

Of course, this happened when I was a teen, and in general, I was an easy and innocuous adolescent for Mom to endure. Once I turned fifteen and found a job, I towed the line until I graduated high school because not doing so would have cost me said job, which I ended up keeping

until graduating college. I think years thirteen and fourteen were the only years Mom and I really had any fights worth remembering.

It was a Saturday morning in December. Let's say 1982. Before I dashed away on my bike halfway across town to work at our Scout tree lot that morning, she told me to be home by a certain time because we were going somewhere that night, and I would need to clean up. That day at the tree lot proved one of the best days ever. Hanging out with friends gave me teen amnesia, and when I called her in the afternoon, asking if I could stay and work until the lot closed that night at 8:00, she was flabbergasted. We argued over a payphone outside an Albertson's for some time. Eventually and angrily, she showed up in her Subaru where we dumped my bike in the back, and drove home in silence so that I could clean up. She had acquired tickets for an expensive play that night. There was no way I was going to change the plan and work late at the Christmas tree lot, because I was the teenager and she was the mother. She won. That was our fight. Now onto the performance...

I don't remember why Doug didn't come—he may have been working at the paper—but Mom and Andy and I attended South Pacific in the former Sahara Casino's showroom that night. On the car ride there, I expressed my displeasure of losing the fight in a variety of non-verbal ways from the backseat, but to no one else's interest. My angst was pretty unforgivable, and even though I was being the pilliest of pills, when we got to the theater I was given the best seat from the three Mom brought. Before the curtain rose, I folded my arms, huffed a lot, and embarrassed my brother, I am certain. As soon as the lights went down, however, a magical world provided by mother—the world she'd known about from days before I ever existed—well, it unfolded before Andy and me. Neither of us had ever seen a Rodgers and Hammerstein show, and it was an amazing spectacle in every way.

From the first note of the overture, I was just blown away. The show's more operatic songs drug on a bit for my teenage taste, but—all was forgiven—because the actors drove jeeps across the stage, they brought in working showers for a funny song about washing men out of your hair, and a beautiful full moon rose from an ocean backdrop as Bloody Mary sang about the magical island, Bali H'ai. Captivated by that moon, I couldn't look away from a stage covered in performers who were staring over the audience as though they could see the same moonrise we were seeing above them. It was a cool moment. She gave me the moon, my Mom did.

A few months after Mom passed, Dena and I attended the immersive Van Gogh exhibit, which toured through town. We had reserved tickets with Mom months before she had gotten sick. We'd even splurged and bought VIP passes to let us in half an hour before the regular crowds—a justified COVID precaution, we felt. With our extra ticket and a picture of Ms. Sheila-la, Dena and I arrived as early as they permitted, and we sat alone—except for the employees—in a room where heavenly images from Van Gogh's paintings were projected, choreographed to music. There were so many sunflowers, so many starry nights—and it felt as though they were performing privately for just us for a tiny amount of time. When a larger crowd started to appear, Dena and I snuck away before our tears might be noticed.

Sheila was my Mom. Miss Sheila-la was the performer. Both were radiant, and both gave me the moon.

On August 20, 2022, Sheila Dill passed away peacefully at home in Sparks at age 83, surrounded by her loving family. She was born in Bremerton, WA, on August 11, 1939 to Harold and Doris Stone. As a brave single mother in the early seventies, Sheila raised three sons while also earning her BA at Fresno State, and eventually her MA at the University of Nevada, Reno. She married Douglas Dill in 1977, whom she fondly called her “love of a lifetime”; they spent 42 years together until his death in



2019. There wasn't a soul who met Sheila who didn't love her. She was elegant and poised, but also quick with a joke and always inspired a jolly time. She had a deep connection to nature, and was an active hiker and camper. She attracted birds to the gardens she created wherever life moved her, from Kentucky to Oregon to Nevada. With each living thing she encountered, she greeted it with love, respect, and gentleness. She was a remarkable seamstress and quilter, creating handmade treasures for her extended family her whole life. Sheila adored children, and read books to hundreds of 1st and 2nd graders over the years. She advocated for abused and neglected children navigating the court system as a volunteer with CASA. She taught her grandchildren how to cook and create, sharing with them skills as well as an appreciation for the finer things in life. She loved a fancy tea party, dark chocolate, and a good view. She was a lifelong writer, explorer, and crafter. She brought genuine joy and curiosity into each element of her life, and she will always be remembered and emulated for that. Sheila was preceded in death by her parents, her husband Douglas Dill and her brother, Douglas Stone. She is survived by her children and step-children Bret Harrison, Andrew Harrison, Corbett Harrison, Wayne Dill and Jan Hall; her sister JuDee Dion, nine grandchildren, and six great grandchildren. In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made in Sheila's name to Kindred Hospice.