More than a Decade in Ukiah

With the beautiful music of Tchaikovsky still ringing in my ears, I looked around me and was overwhelmed with a warm glow of good fortune for the present time in my life. This was during the intermission of a Ukiah Symphony concert at the Mendocino College Theater. As I looked at the other people around me I felt gratitude to be living in this wonderful community of Northern California. In a rural setting of natural beauty, I have enjoyed a closeness with my loving family. For ten years I continued my professional psychology practice here. I've also participated in innumerable cultural, social, political, educational, and spiritual events out of which have grown many satisfying friendships. All of this together has contributed to making me feel happy and abundantly enriched in this, the tenth decade of my life.

How did I get here?

The year following Mort's death was difficult and ungratifying for me. I lived alone in the big house in the San Fernando Valley. Since I'd gone from my mother's home to my marriage, never in my life had I been alone so much as in that year. My son Norm lived nearby but I saw him infrequently. I also had many friends living in Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley and maintained contact with them, but this was only occasional. Most of the time I was alone, with increasing feelings of loneliness. I actually underwent a period of therapy that was somewhat helpful.

My younger son, Barry, had been living for many years in Ukiah, a small town in Mendocino County in Northern California. He visited me several times during the year following
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Mort’s death. He was very caring and lamented that, living 400 miles away, he could not be of any immediate aid should I need it. He suggested that I move to be nearer to him and his family: “Come while you are alert, getting around, able to meet people and can utilize your skills.” He said he could make connections for me within the community. Additionally, he emphasized that his two young daughters wanted to have a grandma nearby. It was 1996, and, at the age of 86, longevity was upon me.

Over and over I mentally evaluated my situation and my future. I was quite reluctant to make such a major change. To act on Barry’s proposal and leave the area where I had lived for more than six decades of my adult life was very difficult to contemplate. It was an excruciating process. Then one night I awoke feeling good—suddenly the decision was made! Yes, I would sell my beautiful home, leave my life in the San Fernando Valley, and move to Ukiah. Finally I had a sense of peace, along with excitement at my new prospects.

I made several exploratory trips north to purchase a house. The last house we walked into I knew immediately: this would be my new home. A large living room with space for my piano! This was more important to me than the number of bedrooms or bathrooms.

I sold my home in Sherman Oaks albeit at a low price, and hired a moving company. Norm offered to drive me in my car from Southern California to Northern California, along with my kitty, Rosie. In a cat carrier I arranged food, water, a little box of cat litter, and a blanket. Rosie had to be pushed into the carrier. Immediately she began howling and continued without interruption—for nine hours, the entire length of the trip. By the time we got to Ukiah her whole body was covered in a mix of water, food, and bodily waste. She was quiet now, completely exhausted, and I worried that she might not have survived.

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However, she was still alive and my little granddaughters were delighted to help me clean her up under the faucet. But Rosie was so traumatized that she spent the next several days under a bed. After we moved into the new house I promised her that I’d never make her move again. So far I’ve stuck to my promise!

Though Barry and his family welcomed me warmly, I was still full of apprehension about my new adjustments. I was determined not to become socially dependent upon them. So what was I to do? I began thinking of a variety of activities that I could pursue.

After settling into my new home, I arranged to continue my career as a psychologist and opened an office in Barry’s downtown Ukiah office building. I also became a therapist with the Mendocino Community Health Clinic. Other referrals came through insurance companies.

Many of my clients were on MediCal and gradually I became aware of the high percentage of low-income people with multiple problems living in this community. Then one of the county supervisors recommended that I become a member of the Mental Health Advisory Board and so I did. I also became a member of the Mendocino Child Care Planning Council that assisted women developing day care centers for working families. In addition, I joined the Youth Project, which supports many kinds of youth activities in the county.

Eventually, as I became known as someone who wanted to contribute to the community in the area of families and children, I was invited to join “McPhab” (Mendocino County Public Health Advisory Board.) I enjoyed my involvement with this group most of all because they made great efforts to educate the members as well as the public on many social and health problems within the county. Moreover, all these groups contributed to my growing interest in the political scene, both
locally and nationally; I joined the National Women's Political Caucus as well as the Democratic Club.

For more social reasons I joined the American Association of University Women and have made some very fine friends within this group. Through AAUW I became a member of two book clubs. Many other friendships also ensued as I participated in a group supporting the Ukiah Junior Symphony. During my earlier years in Ukiah I took piano lessons, but pressures of increasing activities prevented me from much practice. However, in 2003 I invited several pianists who were members of a music history group to my home to start a piano group modeled after one I had been part of in Southern California. After five years we are still meeting once a month and we give a piano recital for each other.

Moreover, all these groups contributed to my growing interest in the political scene, both locally and nationally; I joined the National Women's Political Caucus as well as the Democratic Club.

At the age of 90 I participated in the ten-month Leadership Mendocino training program, a group which stimulates ongoing and existing leadership in the community.

At 94, I performed on stage in "The Vagina Monologues". Ukiah's presentation of this sensational and controversial play was one of the first performances in the United States.

Another enrichment in my life during this past decade has been my travels. I've gone to Hawaii, the Mexican Riviera, and Australia. Several of these trips were made with my cousin, Florence. A few years ago she and I took a train trip across Canada. I also went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, for a medical conference; to Ashland, Oregon, to see plays at the Shakespeare Festival there, and to Portland, Oregon to visit my granddaughter Hanna when she was a student at Reed College. I've also returned to Los Angeles about every other year to visit my

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brother Saul and many old friends in the San Fernando Valley.

Several times I went to Florida to visit Bib, to the East Coast to visit family, and once to Gunnison, Utah with Barry and his family. In 2007, as a graduation gift to my granddaughter Molly, we joined an academic group traveling to China. My other granddaughter, Hanna, and I went to South Africa in 2008 (photo 31).

Recently I wrote out a list of all the organizations of which I have become a member since moving to Ukiah twelve years ago. I'm lovingly calling it my "Obituary List." Being self-evaluative, I'm not sure how much I contributed to these groups. And yet, after mentioning this recently to another member of one group, she said to me, "But you give so much support to what we do." This was positive and bolstered my self-esteem. Even though it may sound as though I was constantly attending meetings, actually these groups met only once a month, and I was involved in perhaps only two or three groups at any given time.

In 2005, I decided to research an answer to the question I'd always been asked, "What's your secret?" I created a questionnaire, interviewed twenty nonagenarians and compiled the results of the research (see discussion in the Addendum).

In the beginning of 2006, I decided I should slow down. After a decade of continuing my professional psychology practice in Ukiah, I took "early retirement" at the age of 96 (Figures 28 and 29). Suddenly I found that I had considerable free time. So I began learning how to play bridge and started taking yoga classes again. Also I began what would become a three-year process of pouring my heart and soul into the writing of this book.

Nonetheless, in spite of so many activities, since moving to Ukiah I have spent more time alone and have revisited my feelings of loneliness. I have become increasingly aware that I
I am flooded with remembrances of our childhood and of how, with all of the many changes in our lives, both of us were really resilient. My sadness has not been persistent because I am so full of memories of his life well-lived. Bib had three marriages; each of his wives died of cancer. Late in life a fourth woman told him she did not want to follow the pattern and would not marry him. He once said to me, “With each succeeding relationship I believe I have become a better partner.” I accept his death as part of my own process of living, and I feel blessed that he was such a very positive influence in my life. So I can say, “Goodbye, my dear brother. One day I will join you.”

Goodbye to Bib

At the end of 2007 an important event occurred in my life. My dear brother Bib left us! During that year, his 99th, he gradually faded away. I did not see him after the fading began. My many memories are of his vital, active, and contributory life.
Photographs and Letters Depicting Various Periods of My Life
What's My Secret?


2. My father, Benjamin Liphschitz Brown in 1910, in Clarion, Utah, before the colonists arrived.

3. Me and my brother Bib, in 1911.


5. Me and my aunt Helen, Detroit, 1915.


7. Me and my friend Mabel Botvaneck, Detroit, 1925.
My dear daddy,

We were waiting to hear from you so that's why we didn't write sooner. How are you and how is Eugene? We haven't heard from him either, for so long.

How did you come out with the turkeys? I suppose you were quite busy, weren't you?

The day you left Solly felt so sad. He cried for about an hour and when I came home from school he said, half crying, "Daddy didn't come back." When Isadore came home he rang the bell and Sol started to laugh and said, "Here comes daddy." When Isadore came in he started to cry. Even now he says that Daddy will come home soon. I hope you can stay longer next time. He certainly misses you.

Daddy dear, can you send me some money for some shoes? With the ten dollars I buy things for sewing, for school, and small articles such as stockings, etc. So I have no money left to buy larger things. Please send it if you can ($6.50).

Give my love to Eugene. Lots of hugs & love and kisses, your daughter.
My Dearest Daughter,

Your letters reflect your beautiful soul. The words are great like the honeycomb of the beehive. But the spaces between are imbued with the sweetness of your spirit.

There is nothing greater, my dear girl, in a person than purity and goodness of heart. Through it you reach to the plane of Godhood. Even the echo of infinity responds from a pure and good heart. So God bless you, my dear. Let the spirit of goodness abide in your beautiful soul. Thus will the beacon light of wisdom forever reflect from your image.

I had big business problems lately; therefore was neglectful in writing. Please dear daughter forgive me for it. With an abundance of love I am as ever your loving

Dad[d]y

Nov. 30th 1924
Utah Poultry Producers Cooperative Association

5/16/17

Dear all daughers,

My Lily!

Don't say, kindle means. I do not know you - why I need you even before you were born.

You are different, of course, than most other girls. You possess a rare individuality, and you have the quality of rare observation.

You are just in your blooming prime now. Here a vigorous plant in springtime blossoming out with apex of flowers full of magnificent perfume of color and fragrance - which is trueful and pure, and going to in transformed into fruitful understanding which will grow.

To your expression, just as unappeal as ripened fruit is coming to a time -

I was in Philadelphia last week, and advised your dream to be sent to you by letters, you will now get it in due time.

I am preparing to leave in my big trip the first part of June, and shall return at the exact date.

I am sure you will be happy and will be happy with your request to keep a rest of being.

If we will see - may be it will be with some ocean full of love and a galaxy of known places.

And with writing songs that in some shape...