

The Duchess of Beverly Glen

Betty Lou Marquardt

This book was written as part of *Lifescapes*, a senior citizen life writing program sponsored by ElderCollege and the English Department of the University of Nevada Reno, the Washoe County Library System, and the Nevada Humanities Committee.

Copyright © 2004
Betty Lou Marquardt

Frandsen Humanities Press
Department of English
University of Nevada
Reno.

The Little Gay Home in the West
By
Meg Gregory Irons



Friend and foe, rain or shine
This little old house is mine all mine.
I bargained and begged, borrowed and fetched
Until merchants and sellers thought I was tetched.
I built it of things out of this world
boards and boxes broken and curled.
I stomped and raved and tore my hair
To have it nailed HERE instead of there.
The carpenter swore he couldn't use THAT.
Finally walked out and left me flat.
I did a lot of nailin' myself
To have a roof for my family and self.
Although the roof's off kelter, sags and leaks
And the floor is slightly uneven and squeaks
I feel quite at home with my old antiques
Well, you know, I'm just an arty creature
And gay and high-spirited music
I like for you to listen to me play
Boogie or Bach—anything you say.
I love livin' up here among the trees
Sorta ruffin' it, you know, in dungarees
My fireplace is cheerful, tho it sometimes smokes
But it's heartwarming here with friendly folk.
Come sit with me on my deep, soft rug
In front of the blaze with a little brown jug.

This was written by Hildred' friend Meg Gregory Irons in 1946 and re-produced exactly as it was originally written.



The Duchess of Beverly Glen

In the early 1940's "The Duchess" arrived in California to establish her reign of 30 plus years, at 1214 North Beverly Glen, West Los Angeles, California. The shingle in front of her house read simply; Hildred Hodgson-Piano Teacher but, it really should have read like a reader board because she was also known as; Hilly, "Tilly- the Palm Reader", party giver par excellence, plus much more, but I will have to backtrack and explain how she arrived at that point in her life and how she acquired the different titles.

Hildred Hodgson was born in Island City, Gentry County, Missouri and raised in and around Stanberry. Her father, Franklin Pierce Mayhugh, was an educator, who died in 1900 leaving his wife Mary Jane to raise the remaining four, of their seven children. She believed in true family values of refinement, education, manners, responsibility and religion and raised her family accordingly. Part of Hildred's education was in the Normal School with music being her forte. Piano was her first love and would hold her in good stead her whole life. She said "Music is the breath of life." As a young adult she went off to the big city of Kansa City, Missouri, to establish herself and to meet the only true love of her life, Ross Hodgson. They were married on June 1, 1910 (see wedding photo, facing page) and while Ross climbed the ladder of success, with the Devoe Reynolds Paint and Varnish Company, Hildred kept a nice home, raised a family of four daughters, taught music, played at the Church, accompanied local artist and became a member of The Young Society Matrons of Kansas City. Life was good and happy for the family despite the death of a daughter just six weeks before the last baby girl arrived. I was that baby, Betty Lou, and being the youngest the girls became the benefactor of a lifetime of wisdom and excitement.

In 1927, the Company promoted Ross from sales to management and he was sent to Tulsa, Oklahoma. Life flourished and all went very well for the family until disaster struck on "Black Friday," October 28th. The Stock Market crashed with a loss of \$ 26 billion in securities, many thousands of people lost everything they had and suicides were common.

The country went into a long, deep depression; there were no jobs, no money and businesses failed. To help with the finances Hildred returned to teaching piano but that wasn't enough, so one afternoon and without telling Daddy she took the money from her own account and bought a dance studio. To help hide her secret she would stuff her earnings in a brown paper bag and take it to the bank without it being counted. This worked until one day the ballet master decided to quit and Mother had to give up her secret so Ross could persuade the teacher not to leave. The up shot of that happening was that Daddy closed her account and she never again had her own account until he died.

Each summer there were trips to California to buy new dance routines and instruction at Franchon and Marco's Dance Studio, and on one trip Hildred hired a teacher who was willing to go back and teach in Tulsa. When Hildred wasn't playing for the classes she was

overseeing her family's needs. The daughters were all performers: Alice Louise was a professional ball room dancer and performed with Ted Fiorito's "Big Band", Madeline excelled in and taught ballet and sang. I was the song and tap dance comedian.

1933 brought orders for Ross to go to Lincoln, Nebraska to try to save a paint store from "going under because of the depression." The Alice had married and had left home with their first grand child. Daddy went on ahead to start his new job while Madeline stayed in Tulsa to finish the school term. Mother packed up the house, got the entourage, including the maid and dog onto the train and headed North for a new adventure. She promptly got involved in her life style and continued to ply her talents by opening a studio in the basement of our house.

Disaster struck this close-knit family on September 7, 1937 when Ross died, leaving Hildred with all the responsibilities of raising two daughters- alone. To understand what a shock this was, the reader would need to know, that the depression created less income, there was no life insurance, no company pension, no retirement funds, no Social Security, no Medicare and no jobs for a woman who had no skills outside the home. She had always relied on her husband to provide for her emotionally and financially but now he was gone. But her great inner strength came to the front. She had her musical talents and teaching skills, so in the famous words of Horace Greeley "Go West," she did just that.

With that decision made all of the household goods were taken out on the front lawn and auctioned off to the highest bidder. The house was sold and the company took back its car. It was a devastating experience but the strength of family held us together. We bought an old used Pontiac packed it with everything we owned, and headed west singing all the way "California here we come."

The first stop was Lake County which mother didn't like at all. She wanted to be in Southern California. Her sister was there, there was lots of culture and most of all warm sunshine. I met the perfect man and rather than go south and continue my education I opted to stay marry my life partner while Mother and Madeline family headed south.

It was during this transition that proper society matron disappeared and a butterfly emerged from her cocoon to develop into a full- blooming character. She first tried living in a cute Spanish style apartment in Westwood Village, where she hung out her shingle and started to support herself with her music. Daughter Alice had come back to the nest with here baby Diane, Madeline, her baby Stephanie, husband Tom who had just gotten out of the service were all living together in the little, adult only apartment. All these people plus piano teaching created a noise level that didn't meet the landlady's approval they were evicted! Undaunted, Hildred went house hunting. With her limited finances, teaching capabilities and her gift of gab she found the perfect location and at a price she could afford, which was 1224 North Beverly Glen." The Duchess of North Beverly Glen" had arrived.

To get there you left Westwood Village and went north to Sunset Boulevard, turned off North Beverly Glen, which was a narrow, windy two-lane road, in a wooded canyon. Towering above was the prestigious community of Bel Aire, home of the rich and famous, and

University of California at Los Angeles was just down the road. Her discovery was an old streetcar barn and garage nestled against the canyon wall, with barely any front yard, no back yard and no parking. But this didn't deter her because she was positioned close to higher education, culture, wealth and families, who had children that needed to be trained in the finer things in life especially music. The parking problem was simply solved by digging out an area of the bushes in the front area just big enough for two cars.

The entry was by way of a charming little path of stone steps that meandering up from the street through what looked like a small urban jungle. Alongside the house were stone steps that went up to a little spot of dirt by the rooftop there she could look down through her skylight or while away her spare time reading, musing and starting a new career of painting. Her little house got a real make-over in her inimitable style; paint, hammer, nails and a lot of fortitude. She went to her death with a crooked finger that she hit with a hammer; we all swore that it was really from her dialing the telephone. Fortunately cell phones came to late for her or her fingers would have been stubbed from poking the buttons. The barn became a studio/ home with a front room and a very special fireplace that she had built. She had the girls, Alice and Madeline, go scrounge used bricks and then called a contractor to build a fireplace with special instructions that it was to be crooked. He responded saying, "Don't worry lady I haven't built one in twenty years".



The Fireplace.

Her bedroom was in a little alcove, with a closet under the eaves in a sidewall. The alcove wall separated her place from a small apartment she built next door. The kitchen was big enough to hold a refrigerator, two chairs, a tiny table, and a tiny stove. The bathroom was a shower, sink and potty. The garage was turned into a little, low-ceiling, rustic apartment, that was rented to the students from the University. One of her tenants was Francis Ford Coppola. She either did all this alone or with anyone who worked cheap or she could con into helping for free. There was one time when a building inspector came to check a change in some wiring that she had done. He said it was illegal and that she had to stop at once. Not to be thwarted, she told him she would just call the mayor and take care of the matter. Which she did! That took care of that and the re-modeling moved forward.

She loved her "Glen" with a passion and would not tolerate anyone spoiling the pristine atmosphere. Drivers were cautioned to obey the speed limits and not race up the street or make loud noises otherwise the wrath of the "Duchess" would come down on them by means of a garden hose turned on full bore as a warning.

The "Duchess" was now established with tenants, students and friends galore. A young man named John rented the small apartment that was attached to the house. He worked nights and slept days except for his days off when he slept nights. Well trouble started when mother would be teaching during the day and he was trying to sleep or she would be playing

her piano in the middle of the night when he was trying to sleep. He finally had enough and after taking twelve sleeping pills went up on the roof and set the house on fire. The fire stopped the music, the firemen stopped the fire and the police stopped John. When he was arrested he kept falling asleep, which necessitated a stop at the emergency hospital to have his stomach pumped. Then he was booked at the jail where at last he got some sleep in a nice, quiet jail cell.



Santa in skylight.

Christmas was a glorious time at the little house because it became a fairyland. Peeking into the skylight was a jolly looking fat Santa watching the “goings on”. Inside the place was decorated with greenery, red bows and candles galore. The little, oval, antique table was covered with a lace-trimmed cloth and all manner of goodies were there for sampling. In the tradition of the season, a crystal punch bowl was filled with Hildred’s famous and very potent punch (recipe unknown because she made it up each time). There were dips and chips, cookies, home made candies and indefinable creations that nobody could identify, but they tasted good. The guests were always talented and performed upon request. “Aunty T” would sing *Ave Maria*, in her lovely soprano voice, an original poem would be recited by a

friend or there was a lovely dance improvised by granddaughter Elizabeth and the evening ended with Mother playing the piano while daughter Madeline lead everyone in the traditional Christmas Carols and always ending with *Silent Night* and the traditional holiday wish of “ A Merry Christmas to all and to all a Good Night.”

Gifts were hard to give mother so I opted to send her money in some form or other rather than a check. One year I found a cute, little tabletop, rattan tree on a stand. I tied tiny red bows on the tree then added paper money shaped as leaves. The ornaments were coins of all denominations which had been covered with colored metallic papers of various colors and then tied all over the tree On the top was the *piece de résistance*, a shiny, silver, dollar, symbolic of the star. She was delighted with her gift and displayed it on top of the grand piano, for all to see. In late January, granddaughter Kathy arrived for a visit and saw the tree sitting on the piano with all the money still on it. “Nana,“ she said,“ you should take that money to the bank and deposit it in your account.” Into Westwood they went with the tree, minus the stand and when they got there she planted the tree on her head like a hat and walked into the bank where she plopped it onto the counter and told the teller she wanted to deposit the tree. The teller informed her politely but firmly they couldn’t do that so while mother stood protesting Kathy un-wrapped every coin and unfurled every piece of paper money then filled out the deposit slip and finally calmed her grandmother down. What a trooper that child was!

Yet another year I bought a big Styrofoam wreath and totally covered it with money. Again for the greenery I used paper money, wrapped coins in red and green cellophane and clustered them on, as ornaments and topped it with a big red bow. Friends would stop in during

the holidays and mother would invite them to have a piece of candy off of the wreath. Finally one friend said to her, “ Hildred that isn’t candy it’s money”. Mother squealed with laughter and said she had better not give away any more of her “candy.” It was always fun to give those gifts because they gave her so much pleasure.

Hildred had always been aware of how she looked and took great pains to be as stylish as the times and places allowed. Her mother, as she so often pointed out, was a woman of style and fashion and had made all of her girl’s clothes. Mother inherited her flare for sewing and created her own clothes, she was especially proud of her wedding dress. Having so many daughters it became a loves labor for her to make their clothes plus making all of the costumes when they were dancing.

Sometimes we were on our way out the door while she was still putting on the final touches. Whether it was an Easter suit or a prom dress we never looked like anybody else and were always properly done from top to bottom

As a child and young matron she was somewhat conservative in her demeanor, but when she got to California the Duchess emerged and so did her flamboyant way of dressing. She loved wearing hats and one of her close friends worked for a hat designer. He would keep her in the most current style but with a special flare. With age mother’s hair became finer and finer that relegated her to wearing wigs, which were always blond. When she wasn’t wearing a hat she carefully groomed her wig before placing it on her head. But there were other times when she just plopped it on and out the door she went, always smiling and charming anyone in her path. When she got into her 70’s she went to work for Robinson’s Department Store as a high fashion model, and by that time she had acquired an assortment of different styled wigs, her wardrobe.

Don and Giff were two young men who adored mother and liked to take her shopping. So, off the three of them would go, to one of the finer stores in Beverly Hills and proceed to deck her out. After the shopping spree they would have to go to some nice restaurant just to show her off. She was always dressed for the occasion and always made an entrance no matter where she was going. For one very special occasion they bought her a short, fitted, gold- sequined dress, gold heels, and gold hose with a black designs up the sides. They had her make up done and an especially lovely blond wig was the final touch. She wore this outfit to a gala party at their condo to celebrate her 80th birthday.. Their love and friendship for this lady was a rarity that few are given the opportunity to have.



80th birthday.

For years she had tried to learn to drive but she never got the hang of it besides, she really never had to because there was always a way to get where she wanted to go. Now as the methods that was another

matter. There were taxi cabs, friends and family, or hitch hiking, the latter was one of her favorite methods and it didn't really matter who gave her a lift to where she wanted to go. It was a Saturday afternoon in October and she needed to get into Westwood to do some shopping, so out the door she went, looking snazzy, put out her thumb and waited for a ride. After a couple of cars passed, a big, yellow bus came to a screaming halt and as the Los Angeles Times reported, a man got out asked, "Where are you going, my pretty maid?" "I'm going shopping, sir," said the pretty maid. He said, "You don't want to go shopping on such a pretty day, so get in and consider yourself kidnapped we are taking you to the Stanford football game at UCLA. Mother's total knowledge of football was that there were three bases and a pitcher, but she didn't care because she was surrounded with young people. She went to the game as a Stanford fan. They loved her spirit; she learned about football and was rewarded with a Stanford Pennant. The newspaper article read, "Glenite Captured by Indians."

The Glen was unique because of its location and the variety of people who lived there. Elke Summers, the movie actress and her mother lived down the street. Quite often mother would have them for tea. Across the road was a sculptress; there were writers, poets and other artisans, some living a rather bohemian life.

The Glenite, the local newsletter that was printed with the latest news in the Glen, especially if the "City was going to try to make any changes." There were bits of prose and poetry written by and about the locals. In the spring the date for the annual Craft Faire was announced for the following July and everybody started making their plans to participate according to their talents. Mother's forte was fortune telling. She would don a black dress with a high neck and a lace mantilla over her blond wig and bracelets, rings, necklaces and chains galore. Her little table was placed in a propitious spot under a shady oak tree, and on the table she would have candle glowing, incense burning to create an atmosphere and there was a little silver box into which a donation could be dropped. Mother knew nothing about reading palms, cards or any other mystics. But what she did understand human nature and when she would start her readings she would lean forward and in a soft voice and tiling her head forward and say; "palms or cards?"

She then gently lured her customers into conversation about themselves, which would give her the fodder she needed. From what she had learned she was able to tell them what pitfalls to beware of or how good life could be if only they would do this or the other thing to make changes. Her subjects swore nobody could have known about their lives. Oh she was good!

"The Four Oaks," was an Irish Pub two blocks up the glen. It was a harbinger of the "heath foods style of eating," greens sprouts and all. Sunday was when the "Glen People" would gather to gossip, listen to music and order from the special menu.

On lovely summer days, the tables were set outside under the trees, and nestled away was a small group of young musicians, from UCLA, playing chamber music for all to enjoy. Mother donned a red skirt with big, white polka dots, a white frilly blouse and always a huge picture hat covered with big multi colored flowers and more jewelry than two people needed. When she was ready to go to brunch down the path she went out to the street and

stuck out her thumb for a ride, hopefully to be picked up by a nice young man in a convertible, who would take her to the café. The Duchess would make her usual entrance, nodding and greeting or being greeted by her friends and neighbors and then stroll among the tables to stop and chat and then sit at a table holding court, enjoying the food and music.

University of California at Los Angeles played an important role in mother's life because education and learning was a lifelong search. Politics were important and she went to her death as a knowledgeable, staunch Democrat. Her granddaughter Kathy relates "Nana" always said, "there were three great men in her life; God, President Jack Kennedy, and her husband Ross," in that order. She was invited to the Kennedy Inaugural Ball but didn't get to go. The opportunity would have been so wonderful for her.

At a political rally in the summer of 1971 she met Lisa Feinstein, who was a student in the film making summer session at the college and her project was to make a 15-minute film of a local person. Lisa asked Mother if she would be willing to be the subject for the film. Never known for missing a chance to be in the limelight Mother said "YES." The film was made, and the family for generations to come will see mother telling of her childhood, her family life, love of my father and all the fun she participated in at 1224. There is a special moment, which was filmed at the Four Oaks Café, where she was peeking out from behind a big oak tree with her face framed in the big picture hat with the flowers. Her head is tilted to one side, wearing a big smile on her face while she waves the hand with crooked finger, as a sweet little laugh comes forth. That is an image I the author will always cherish.

Shopping with this lady was a real experience that can only be appreciated if you were there to hear and watch her. Since she didn't drive, at times grocery shopping became a difficult thing. Her first choice was to pick up the telephone call Jorgensen's, which was one of the more prestigious stores in Westwood Village. She would give them her order and they would deliver it to her. Even putting the cold things in the refrigerator, if she asked, but if there was transportation it was different matter: One time I had the pleasure of taking her shopping after parking the car I escorted her to the front door where a slight, graying man wearing a white shirt and tie covered by a striped apron, greeted us " Good morning Mrs. Hodgson what can we do for you today?" "Good Morning John" she replied giving him a big smile and with a wave of the hand she started down the aisles as he pushed her cart and took her choices from the shelves while re- assuring her that she had made the very best selections. When she had finished she would say " Please put this on my account, " and out the door we went with her chatting away followed by the little man carrying the groceries to the car. One thing I could never understand was how she always bought the richest of cream, butter, desserts and ate any thing she jolly well pleased and yet lived to be over ninety years old.

She loved pretty clothes and kept a lovely, svelte figure her whole life. In the mid 1970's she went to Robinson's, a big department store, and proceeded to get herself a job as a high fashion model. She wore glamorous clothes and delighted in being asked to model at the movies stars homes in Bel Air and Beverly Hills.

Time and tide moved on and the Duchess had to quit teaching when she was 89 years old.



Modeling in Robinsons.



She still held court, reclining in her little corner bed or seated in her rocking chair by her beloved grand piano. The last time I visited her in her home she had a new piece of furniture. Sitting under an ornate, gilded mirror was a Victorian styled sofa, which was upholstered with white satin brocade. I asked her why she had bought the couch. In a very serious voice said " Oh, honey, I wanted to know how I was going to look in my coffin." With that she dropped the arms of the sofa then laid down crossed her arms and closed her eyes and giggled. During all of this she lay there and planned her funeral. The instructions were very clear that there was to be a gala party with lots of pink flowers, candles, special hor'de ouvres and fine wine. Good friends and family should share their memories, but always there was to be lots of laughter and fun but especially music oh glorious music from her beloved grand piano. I can assure you that was exactly what happened when the time came on June 14, 1976 just 3 months short of her 91st birthday.

This I cannot tell for a fact but let me assure you it is what probably happened. As she took that walk to the Pearly Gates she was "dressed to the nines" in a flowing, chiffon white gown trimmed in marabou, ribbons and sequins. She was likely wearing multiple chains and rings that were big and glittery. On her head was her favorite blond wig, and atop that was a halo of diamonds strewing stardust as she waved and chatted with every-

one she passed. Upon arriving, Saint Peter would have greeted her with " Welcome to heaven, Hildred Hodgson." Her response to him, with a big smile would have been "Oh thank you, I am so happy to be here. Now would you please escort me in to join my family." With that she took his arm and walked into heaven accompanied by harps and trumpets blaring. The stars shined brightly that night as she entered and the gates slowly closed behind her. The Duchess had arrived. She was loved by so many and will never be forgotten or replaced on earth.

From *The Glenite*, the neighborhood paper, July 1974

A Glen Profile

The Grand Dame of the Glen: Hildred Hodgeson

Kit Salter

“Oh, we’re living in a wonderful time! People have to know that!!” With bracelets sliding down on thin wrists as she raises her hands in gestures of excitement and vitality, Hildred Hodgeson interrupts herself again to exclaim for life.

“Oh, Kit, we’ve got to let people know that this is a simply wonderful time to be alive...there is so much.” And then a pause: a smile comes over the face of this dance mistress, musician, and grand dame of the Glen, and she goes on. “But don’t you think there weren’t great times before... Oh, my...don’t you think we didn’t have some sweet things to do when we were your age and younger...a lot younger.”

And off she goes into another story that will lose itself in the introduction of still a newer story until there are beginnings ranging from Kansas City to Tulsa to Westwood to the Irish’s Bar in the Glen. This birdshot approach to narration comes from no lame mind that is weary of busy life across two centuries; it comes from a spirit spilling over with engaging things to share with anyone who comes within earshot. Recountings that begin with quiet voice and still fingers resting on a well used scrapbook grow and expand into all corners of a of the room and mind as Hildred goes from photos in mirrors to special rugs to an inclusive wave of an arm meaning all of the room... or the Glen, or the city, or her life.

Subtle journalistic phrases that are intended to return the speaker to the initial concern of any given comment do little when pitted against the variety of experiences, the rich detail-rich memory, and the driving delight in recollection that Hildred can muster when wandering through her past.

“Father was called away from our home in Kansas for a stay one time because of an accident. It was not his accident... no, he was a careful man, but he was called in to replace a director at a girls’ private school because of an accident the director had.” (Pause, and a new smile.) “You know what happened? Well...this director noticed a rope hanging out of the second story floor of the girls’ dormitory and he wondered what it was for. He hid in the trees one night near the wall by the rope and saw boys from a nearby boys’ school coming through the woods, standing beneath the rope and calling ‘Pull me up.’”

“Well, just as soon as one of them called up to the girls, up they pulled and up went the boy—right into the girls’ dorm. Now I think this director couldn’t believe his eyes, so he waited until it was good and dark and went over to the rope. ‘Pull me up,’ the director croaks in a baby voice and suddenly he found himself being pulled right up the wall. Oh, can’t you imagine the surprise on those girls’ faces when they saw the director starting to climb into the window?”

“What happened?” I asked, waiting expectantly for the rest of the story.

“What happened? Well, what do you think happened? The girls screamed and let go of the rope. The director fell two floors and my father had to replace him for two months... that’s what happened.”

Or.. the wonders of the Tulsa Academy of Dance Arts. Hildred felt so bad moving with her husband from Kansas City to Tulsa in the 1920’s that she decided to create some entertainment in the new oil-rich city. The school caper also enabled Hildred’s daughter with dancing lessons. She purchased a failing dance studio on the sly, while her husband, Ross, was getting accustomed to his high-management position with the Devoe - Reynolds Paint and Varnish Company. For three months Hildred managed to keep the operation a secret by taking the modest proceeds to the bank in a brown paper sack, depositing them without counting them herself, and returning to the school to attempt to placate a moody Ballet Master. Ross Hodgson was finally brought in when the man said he was going to leave. After a combined family effort, the dancer stayed and Hildred and her daughters continued to bring culture to Tulsa for six years through the Academy.

Hildred and her daughters moved to the Glen in 1946 when they were squeezed out of a small studio in Westwood. The only two demands that Hildred had for housing then were that she be able to have a room for some of her family to live with her and that the home have a fireplace. Toward the latter end, she asked a Glen contractor to build her a good solid brick fireplace in her small home in the 1200 block. He said he’d send down a man.

“And you should have seen that man ...oh, he was gorgeous...a tall redhead...but he was stinking drunk. When he asked about the fireplace, I told him that I just wanted it to be crooked. He laughed at me and said, ‘Hell, lady...that’s gonna be easy. I ain’t built a fireplace in twenty years.

Since 1947 Hildred has taught piano in her Piano Studio home amid the rich trappings of a full and cultured life. She teaches, entertains, corresponds with a whole world of people and shares her infectious love of life with all who come into her presence. Here is not only a very special person for the Glen to know and delight in, but is one of those rare spirits who loves to share time and ideas. She’d welcome a call (474-3283) the way we all welcome her being here in Beverly Glen.



Betty Lou Marquardt was born in Missouri and raised in the middle west. From there, she migrated to California, where she met her husband and raised their three children. Time and tide necessitated the next move to Reno, where she lives close to the family and the cultural advantages she so much enjoys.

Lifescapes