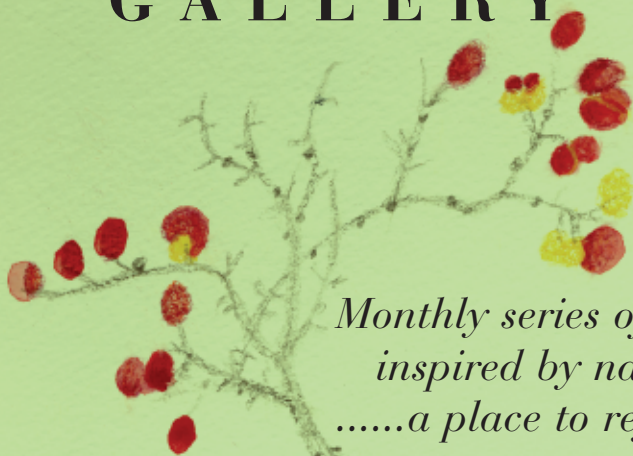


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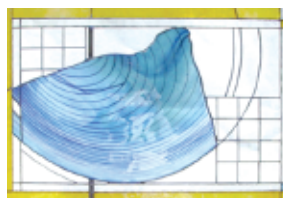
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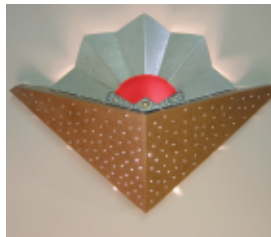
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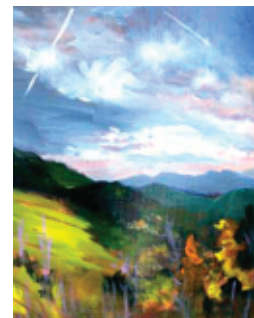


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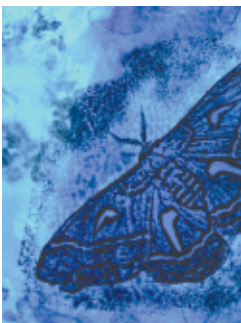


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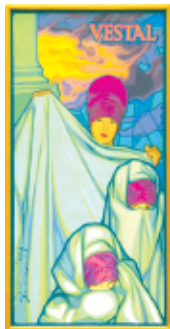
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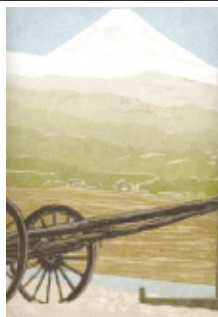
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Cat Woman

By Eleanor Cooney

She came to town around 1983 in a big sagging old American sedan. It was the Last Ride for that car, which she parked behind the Art Center. It never rolled under its own power again. She lived in it for a while. You could walk by and look through the windows at the tangle of clothes, rags and newspapers where she burrowed in to sleep, then it got towed away.

So she lived in public on the streets of Mendocino after that, for years and years. Like the rest of us who came here from somewhere else and stayed, she'd found refuge from the hostile outside world. Sometimes I thought she'd driven that old Dodge in from another century; she had a look about her like a figure you might see moving in the background in a woodcut from the Middle Ages, some sort of mad holy fool penitent. She was formidable—formidably filthy, formidably strange, formidably independent and often formidably drunk. She drew whiskers on her face and blackened her mouth with a Magic Marker and had a big orange tom cat named Truly she dragged around on a rope. She came to be known as Nelly the Cat Woman.

There was a freebox in town in those days, and it was Nelly's inexhaustible costume chest. Her flair for dressing rivaled Edie Beales' of "Gray Gardens"—no standard down-and-out street-dweller sweaters, jeans or parkas for her. She preferred extravagantly dramatic outfits that made a statement, and like Edie, was a fashion visionary—a discarded window drape worn as a long skirt with a ruffled train, a shower curtain and dangling wind chimes for hat decorations. Everything filthy, of course, her train dragging in the mud, her feet, hands and face gray with dirt, but always original and rococo couture, not so different from what you might see on the runway in some extreme designer's spring collection. A substantial layer of fat kept her warm.

She aroused an interesting variety of

responses in people, illustrative in their range and mutability. There was, for example, a lot of guilt and pity that metamorphosed into bewilderment and outrage. A succession of well-intentioned do-gooders tried to "help" her. A woman I know offered her a shed to sleep in (not even the most saintly ever considered letting her into their actual houses), but threw her out after she (the woman) found a litter of dead kittens in the squalor of Nelly's den.

Also, Nelly was not—how shall we put it?—housebroken, as all her would-be helpers discovered sooner or later, and this was where they also discovered their personal limit: this was the line in the sand even the bleedingest of bleeding-hearts could not cross. Nelly's ferocious atavism stopped them in their compassionate tracks.

Others reacted to her in a more primal way. Cops roughed her up more than once, and adolescent boys reviled and taunted her and sometimes let their cruelty rip. After she'd been in town for a couple of years, she'd got hold of a big wooden crate and had set up housekeeping in it on the north side of the Heider lot in Mendocino right along Little Lake St. I happened to be living across the way and had a good view of the proceedings. Late one night I noticed a car circling around and around, gunning its engine in an assertive-primate kind of way when it passed

Nelly's crate. Was she in the crate that night? I didn't know, but I knew she sometimes was, and I was pretty damned sure that the circling-around was building up to something, so after one of the passes I went out, got into my own car, which was facing west, sat there with the engine running but the headlights off, and waited. Sure enough, the other car came round again, turning onto Little Lake and traveling east, fast, this time heading right for Nelly's crate. I counted to two and flipped my lights on, full high-beams. The oncoming car screeched, swerved, revved and sped on down Little Lake and didn't come back. It was one of the supreme moments of glee of my entire life.

No one was around to intervene



Photo by Linn Bottorf

when some kid clobbered Truly with a stick, putting out an eye. I had a conversation about it with another very young guy who was working behind the butcher counter at Mendosa's. This kid knew who the perp was, and warmed my heart and restored my faith in young males when he said with disgust, "It made him feel like a big man."

Nelly collected stray cats and presented the females to Truly for breeding. I and a few other chronic

cat-rescuer types had been for years collecting stray females and getting them fixed; I discreetly spirited three or four of them out of Nelly's harem. Nelly was the bane of us actual "cat people," the ones who go around obsessively trapping and spaying, doing our pitiful best to reduce starving-wild-kitten misery. At the same time, we kind of felt for Nelly. True, you didn't want to get too close or be downwind of her, and any cat that got into her clutches was pretty much her prisoner and faced a grim future, and back when there was a laundromat in town she'd put her rain-soaked, moldy, pee-smelling sleeping bags and blankets in the dryers without washing them first, but whatever she was and wherever she came from, and nobody really knew, hers had likely been a hard life. There were rumors: she'd been a cowgirl in Nevada, she'd been a hooker, she'd had a couple of kids taken away from her, she'd been a Reagan-era loony bin ejectee, and so forth.

There might have been something to the cowgirl rumor. After her wooden crate had been hauled away, the Heider lot was still her headquarters for a while. There used to be a pit near the center. Nelly filled the pit with old furniture and busted televisions and sometimes slept in there. Somebody gave her an elderly horse, and she kept him in the field with her. Then she got busy. She got hold of a pair of riding breeches and scavenged some old mattresses and box springs and set them up as jumps. I was still living across the street and watched the equestrian event closely. The horse tolerated Nelly on his back, and would even canter in a grudging sort of way in the direction of the jumps, but he always refused at the last moment. Nelly was patient. She'd turn him around, go back and try again. And again. The riding breeches were a couple of sizes too small, and so about a half-acre of Nelly's substantial backside was on view all the while. People stopped and gazed. No one interfered. There was something about Nelly that mostly discouraged interference; she was too strange, too feral, too raggedy, too forbiddingly out there. After a while she'd quit. The horse would resume grazing, which was all he really wanted to do anyway, and Nelly would flop down on one of the mattresses for a snooze. Eventually someone came with a grader and covered over Nelly's pit full of chairs and televisions. They're still there, buried, awaiting archeologists of the future.

We locals were used to Nelly. She was part of the land-



Photo by Linn Bottorf

scape. People from out of town saw her with different eyes, though, and many was the time I watched them see her. An RV at a stop sign, for example, a vacationing family inside, and Nelly crossing the street in front of it, trailing her gray rags, face blackened with Magic Marker, raising a quart-sized bottle of Mickey's Big Mouth to her lips at 11:00 in the morning. The people behind the windshield silent and staring, seeming to have no frame of reference for

what they were witnessing in beautiful idyllic Mendocino.

We got so used to her, in fact, that it was almost the death of her. She deteriorated as the years went by, so gradually that no one took particular notice. We were accustomed to seeing her moving about in the pouring rain, and eventually we started to see her just sitting out in the rain, head bowed and hooded, a grim memento mori-esque figure like something out of Medieval Europe and the Plague years. Then we began to see her sprawled, asleep (or unconscious) on the ground in the rain, pale chubby flesh exposed. Someone gave her an old camper around then, and it was set up next to the field west of Crown Hall. Did she sleep in it, get out of the rain and wind? No, she packed it with junk and cats and locked it up. If you walked by, you saw desperate cat faces at the windows, and if you got close, you caught a whiff of eye-watering stench.

Finally, finally, a stout-hearted coalition of animal lovers and Adult Protective Services did an "intervention." The camper, the cats and Nelly were gone. By then Truly had been absent for a while. There were rumors of a top-secret intricately planned rescue action, and that he spent his retirement years free of the rope. Some people in town regarded Nelly's removal from the streets as interfering with her constitutional rights; others maintained that leaving her to her "rights" would have meant finding her dead in the mud one day soon.

A few years after Nelly disappeared, I was startled to see her in town. There was no mistaking her knock-kneed gait. But this was Nelly after a total makeover, Nelly scrubbed, combed and detoxed, with an expression like Audrey Hepburn on the Champs Elysées on a spring day. A different fashion designer dressed her now, no less boldly but worlds apart from her former look. She wore a red little-girl pinafore with a full skirt that barely reached her plump knees and a big bow in her hair. She recognized me. We talked. She was living in Ukiah in a group home. She was here for the day on a visit. She couldn't have cats of her own, but she volunteered at an animal shelter. I listened, and looked into her face, free now of obscuring layers of grime, Magic Marker and the old boozy haze, and for the first time was able to see clearly what she was: innocent, slightly retarded, someone the big world out there would have ground into dust long ago if she hadn't been lucky enough, like all of us whose lives have been saved here, to find this place.

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Jack and Melinda Leung

Story and Photo by Antonia Lamb

Jack and Melinda Leung met with me over a glass of wine as the sunset light streamed through the music room of their hillside home.

Music has been a major part of their marriage since they fell in love while rehearsing 22 years ago, somewhere between *Fiddler on the Roof* and *West Side Story*. Since then they've worked almost every Gloriana Opera Company musical, more than two dozen, with Jack as musical director/pianist and Melinda playing mandolin in the orchestra. Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* is next, in late summer '07.

There's more. As part of the "Gang of Five," Melinda and Jack (and three other talented people) helped co-write several popular children's musicals for Gloriana between 1988-92. They played at Winesong for at least ten years. They give concerts. Jack is legendary for his skill as accompanist and rehearsal pianist for various groups and events.

Who are these people?

Jack and his family came to the U.S.A. from China in 1955. His mother, a pianist, found him a piano teacher when he was eight. His checkered academic career took him from St. John's College (Maryland) to the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, to UC Riverside and UCLA and to the Music Academy in Vienna, Austria, for composition and piano study.

Ultimately he finished his bachelor's and went to UC San Diego for graduate work. He began playing percussion as well as piano, learned to accompany dancers and did his first musical as an accompanist.

Jack: "I didn't finish my Master's. I was making bamboo flutes, had a little marimba/xylophone thing, played shakuhachi flutes. I was kind of being alternative, I guess.

"We came to Mendocino in 1978. I started working with Sunday Afternoon Concerts, helping out, organizing, playing. I accompanied the College of the Redwoods Chorus. In 1982 I did my first Gloriana show, helping Barbara Faulkner rehearse and perform the music for *Oklahoma!* Then I played drums in *Music Man*. Barbara had done Gloriana for five or six years, and the next year she handed it over to me.

"I became musical director for Gloriana with *Guys & Dolls*. Next was *Fiddler*. I needed a balalaika sound. I asked Melinda if she'd play mandolin and handed her a guitar part. Wrong!



"I started writing mandolin parts for Melinda so she could play in the orchestra. One thing led to another—and here we are!"

Melinda: "I come from a family of actors and musicians. One uncle was a great harpist, my other uncle was a brilliant piano player. My father, Groucho Marx, was a comedian and actor, who sang and played the guitar. My mother had been a child star on the Orpheum circuit when she was seven.

"Our house was full of great musicians playing (points) that piano. We went to original Broadway musicals. I knew the songs from *Guys & Dolls* when I was four. I started out playing guitar but my hands were too small. I embarked on an acting career, did a couple of movies ("Bye-Bye Birdie!" interjects Jack) but I wanted to be a musician more than anything.

"While I was pregnant with my son in L. A. I learned to fiddle—swing and old-timey stuff—and played with several bands. I'd go to the Ash Grove and hear bands. But I was looking at the mandolin, not the fiddle.

"The kids and I moved to Mendocino. I fell in with musicians, played with a bunch of bands, got into Irish. I was injured in a car accident, and my neck just wouldn't let me fiddle anymore. I had a dark night of the soul but I knew I had to play. I began playing different kinds of music—klezmer, century-old Italian—on the mandolin.

"Guitarist Sergei Bassehes and I began doing gigs. Jack had hired us for a Sunday Afternoon concert. Then Jack asked me to play in *Fiddler*, and the adventure began. We've always kept different musics going—classical, or klezmer, now tangos—and we're really looking forward to making a CD."

(Melinda's recorded as a backup musician, and Jack made a 2002 CD of 24 short pieces, *Varianzas*; this will be their first recording together).

Jack: "We've done every Crown Hall Chinese New Year benefit for the Mendocino Joss House. We don't play Chinese music. Last time we played some Piazzola, and *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*—but tangos mostly."

Melinda: "We became aware of the music of Astor Piazzola when we went to "Tango Argentino"—we were mesmerized. Eventually we decided this was what we wanted to record. So after *Anything Goes* we'll make our tango CD. Meanwhile it's Cole Porter time."

Antonia Lamb is a local writer, astrologer, musician.

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If you drive to the east end of Fort Bragg's Laurel Street and turn left, you will arrive at 450 Alger Street, the home of Pacific Textile Arts. A small two story Victorian house on a half acre acts as headquarters for this non-profit organization which is dedicated to the support, preservation and teaching of all the arts and crafts falling under the umbrella of "Textile Arts."

Several months ago Pacific Textile Arts (PTA) celebrated its tenth year of owning this beautifully situated piece of property. It was bought through the bidding process from the College of The Redwoods, which had originally purchased it to develop student housing for the college. Thanks to loans from textile "friends" as well as generous donation pledges, PTA became the proud owner of a house without a foundation, paint or any interior amenities. For the last ten years we have paid off all our loans with interest, put a concrete foundation under the house, painted inside and out, built a storage shed, removed a sixteen foot deep hedge and replaced it with a driveway.

The inside of the house has been turned into demonstration weaving studios on the second floor and a bright and cheerful kitchen, meeting room, library, office and front room gallery which also houses a beautiful low warp tapestry loom (once used at the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco to weave "California Poppies," a tapestry designed by the renowned artist, Mark Adams. The loom's designer and builder, Jean Pierre Larochette, recently donated it to PTA for use and preservation).

What Are Textiles? — We can trace the history of man through the study of textiles. From the time of wearing skins to the earliest spinning of fiber, to the rich and diverse development of garments, bedding, home adornments for furniture and walls, we see the progression of our ways of maintaining body warmth, comfort and decor. The study of past household textiles and creation of contemporary wall coverings, rugs and tapestries are both educational and valuable as a creative outlet, in addition to providing employment. Spinning, weaving, surface design on

cloth, knitting, crochet, ornamental braiding, embroidery and lace and paper making are just a few of the textile activities which come to us from the past and which deserve to be studied and preserved. There is a vast cottage industry available for people who must, or who prefer to work at home.

Filling a need — It is our intention to construct three studios, built to the standards required by community college teaching sites, that can be used by college textile arts classes and other programs sponsored or co-sponsored by PTA.

Educating and Communicating — A modest membership fee (\$15 per year) allows access to our fine textile library, which now boasts more than 1500 volumes. Library hours are from 1:30 to 3:30 pm.

every Thursday afternoon and by appointment. Membership also brings four quarterly newsletters, informing members about our many activities, classes sponsored by us, and textile classes sponsored by the Mendocino Art Center, as well as museums and guilds on the central and north coast of California. It also keeps members informed about Vicki Fraser's California Rug Project, which is promoted and sponsored by PTA.

PTA is grateful to the many community members who have helped us turn an old "fixer upper" into an appealing place where a variety of community groups are able to meet, plan activities, hold exhibitions and conduct outreach activities. Our

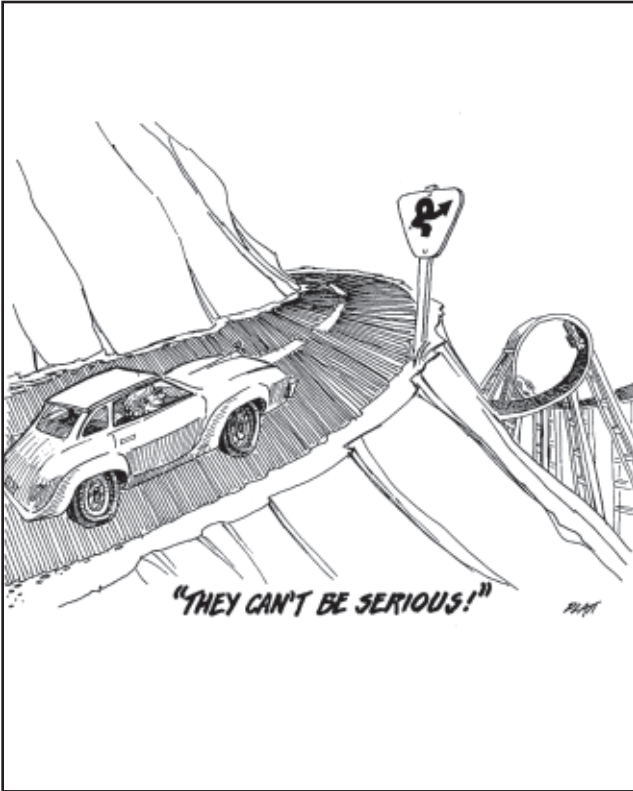
membership covers the gamut from a six year old spinner and weaver to very elderly enthusiasts. The local photography group holds meetings here as do various organizational boards. People like David Gealey, who completely rewired our building as a donation; Stefan Furrer who has done all sorts of woodwork; Rella, who donated a complete succulent garden for our front yard; and Richard Sutherland, who set up and continues to index our library; have made this a warm and inviting venue for study, exhibition, and organization of a wide variety of activities.

— Jackie Wollenberg

707 962-0441 or: www.pacifictextilearts.org



photo by Elaine Todd Stevens



Coastal Curios by Ben Platt



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If You Like To Hang Out With Artists . . .

by Jay Gordon

It is only natural that, in an area of such extravagant natural beauty, there would also be an abundance of artists and artisans of every conceivable style. The fine and performing arts—and everything in between—flourish in this region. It is where art and commerce merge that art normally falters. Historically, the relationship has been different in Mendocino County. We honor and celebrate our artists; they are essential to the heritage and culture of the region and, especially now, they are part of the thriving future.

The Arts Council of Mendocino County, in a model that should inspire other regions where art is a major attraction, works in partnership with business and other organizations to promote the vital art, music, and theatrical scene that thrives here. This ensures that the public is aware of the choices of activities that fit their interests.

The arts are an integral part of the community, beginning in early childhood. For example, the Arts Council works with GASP (Get Arts in the Schools Program) to introduce hands-on arts experience for children as part of their school experience. This is mostly funded by the Mendocino County Office of



Mendocino Ballet Director Trudy McCreanor escorts members of her Ukiah troupe to Blosser Lane Elementary School in Willits to introduce elements of ballet to kids who want to learn more about dance.

Education. There are three theaters in Mendocino County celebrating their 30th anniversary this year. The Mendocino Theatre Company, Ukiah Players Theatre, and Willits Community Theatre all provide live performances at remarkably low prices. They also feature workshops and other activities that encourage dance and theater experience for the youth of the community. Programming, of course, appeals to all age ranges and theatrical tastes—from traditional to the avant-garde.

There are dozens of distinctive galleries and museums in the county that display the works of local artists and artisans. As you explore these collections, you are likely to rub shoulders with people from the community who are also proud exhibitors of local artwork in their own homes. Your new favorite artist may be featured in the next gallery you visit or may be standing in line next to you at the ice cream parlor or coffee machine. If you like to hang out with artists, Mendocino County is the place to be.

To learn more about the arts in Mendocino County visit www.ArtsMendocino.org. You'll see how the Arts Council works with organizations like the Mendocino County Promotional Alliance and the Mendocino County Lodging Association, to ensure that art is in the foreground for both visitors and local residents.



Mosaic artist and teacher Elizabeth Raybee helps students from La Vida Charter School with their mosaic mural gift to the City of Willits for the new Willits Skate Park. Local artist Ann Maglinte oversees the glazing of the hand-made tiles to frame the mosaics.

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