

John Fineren

I was born in 1944 and raised in San Francisco. I lived out in the Sunset district by the ocean. I have an older brother and 2 younger sisters. My youngest sister is 20 years younger than me. This could get uncomfortable in that people often thought that we were father and daughter. I lived next to the Zoo and an old, abandoned Army fort, Fort Funston. My friends and I spent many hours playing in these 2 wonderlands. The Army fort still had all the building and gun emplacement so we'd play war all day. We would also break into the zoo at night and have the place to ourselves.

I went to 3 schools: Ulloa grammar school, AP Giannini Middle and Lincoln High. You may not believe this, but I was not a good student. I talked too much and cut up in class. I had very poor grades and was put back one year. My parents were not happy with me. In high school I was a car guy. To this day, just by looking at the front, I can tell the engine size and whether it's a 55, 56 or 57 Chevrolet. At the week-end we would hang out at a drive in and drag raced and out-run the cops. My brother and 2 of my friends built a dragster and raced it all over Northern California. We did pretty well at it until big money came into drag racing. Then in 1992 two friends and I started road racing, and we did quite well winning the SCCA E production class. I was the mechanic on the car.

Right after high school I joined the Army and was sent to Fort Ord for basic training. The day I joined the army the Cuban missile crisis started and the Army called up the reserves. The fort was so full of men and the Army didn't know what to do with them. I tell people I was a war hero... it was because I was there guarding the coast of California, that the Viet Cong never invaded. The Army changed my life and I realized if I did not get an education and change my behavior things were not going to end well. When I came home from the Army I started working for Southern Pacific Railroad as a carpenter then as a sheet metal worker. Since I could not read or spell, other workers would make fun of me, so I quit working and started City College in San Francisco. I came home and told my mother and father I was going to college. My father said, "you won't last 6 weeks" To show him, I lasted 6 years. From City College I went to Sonoma State for a BA then Sacramento State for an MA. I can now read but still can't spell.

I worked for Sonoma County Mental Health for 35 years. I started working in the outpatient clinics in Petaluma and Sonoma. Next, I ran the Adult Day Treatment Center for clients returning from long term hospitalization. This was my favorite job and I loved running the program for each of the 20 years. I worked with small groups of patients. I helped them get settled back in the community and restore their lives. I will still run into an old clients they tell me how much I helped them. This makes me very happy and gives meaning to my life. After that, the county talked me into running all of Adult Out-patient Services, which included mental health at the jail. This was an administrative and political job and way over my head. As a result, in 2004, I decided to retire.

I got married in 1968 and moved to Sonoma County. I first lived in Santa Rosa for 3 years, and a short time in Sonoma and Petaluma. Then we lived 25 years in Healdsburg and now just west Windsor for 30 years. We are on 1/3 of an acre on Mark West Station Road. I have two children: a daughter living in Rohnert Park with two Grandchildren and a son living in Santa Rosa with one child. I have been married for 55 years. This is both my wife's and my first and only marriage. We farmed a small plot of land in Healdsburg and sold veggie at the farmer market. She managed the market for years. We both volunteered at Healdsburg high school and the Boys and Girls Club. My wife is a fund raiser for the American Cancer Society.

My neighbor has a small vineyard and as a hobby we grow grapes and make wine. My job is to keep the equipment running. My neighbor, the winemaker, takes care of the vines and makes the wine. It is pretty good wine and even my SIR friends, who have tasted it, agree.