

# Living

## A friendship renewed six decades later

‘Are you the Murray Bass from Burbank and Glendale?’ the voice asked.

“I sure am,” was my answer.



**Murray Bass**  
Plan to live

“My name is Merhoff,” he said.

“Oh, yes,” I said. “I remember you. Hugh Merhoff, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” he replied, “that’s right.”

And so a friendship that ended 60 years ago when each of us went our separate ways began again.

I’ll have to admit I was (and am) amazed at how you can find someone after 60 years of no contact at all. I’ll let you know when I find out.

Sixty years is a lot of time and events to catch up on. We’ve just begun.

Aside from the two years we spent at Glendale City College together in parts of 1947-49, we discovered that we had both been at Ft. Lewis, Wash., in 1947. He was the intelligence NCO for the 23rd Infantry Regiment of the 2nd Army Division (the Indian Head Division) and I was an Army recruit being shipped to Japan for the occupation.

We both owed our ability to get an education to the GI Bill.

Hugh ultimately became a doctor and had a private practice in Red Bluff for 28 years. He retired about 20 years ago and still lives in Red Bluff. He likes the heat, he tells me.

He tells me about the “rednecks” up in Red Bluff. I tell him that I, too, am a “redneck.” He forwards liberal material to me and I send him conservative stuff.

I suggested to him that maybe it’s a good idea not to talk politics until we get a little better reacquainted.

I’ll have to admit I am curious about how a guy can live in “redneck” country for almost 50 years and only have a pink neck.

We’ll find out, I guess. Old friends Bob and Donna Harr live in Red Bluff. When they sold their ranch in Lagoon Valley they moved to an 87-acre walnut orchard in Red Bluff.

I don’t think I will introduce them until I find out how tolerant Hugh is of genuine rural conservatives.

Well, that isn’t quite the case. Bob and Donna are really just constitutional Americans who subscribe to the belief in the laws of nature and nature’s God.

Americans in the tradition of our Founding Fathers.

Maybe I’ll find that Hugh is also that kind of an American.

In any event, I’m sure Hugh is the genuine article. He is true to his beliefs. And that’s OK.

If everyone believed as I do, it wouldn’t be nearly as much fun being right. (Bad joke).

I hate labels and I think he does, too. I am neither liberal or conservative. I am an American who believes in the Constitution, equal opportunity and individual freedom based on the fundamental concepts outlined in the Declaration of Independence.

Accepting labels means accepting only limited views of right and wrong.

In any event, Hugh and I are still in the process of defining ourselves to each other. I like what I see and hear so far whether I happen to agree with them or not.

I’ll keep you posted on the “Saga of Red Bluff” as things unfold.

Murray Bass can be reached at 427-0744 or mbass25@sbcglobal.net.

10 MINUTES WITH . . .



Ballroom dance instructor Natasha Clarke, on right, watches as her student Stephanie Moore dances with her husband, John, at the Dance Unlimited dance studio in downtown Vallejo Thursday afternoon.

Mike Greener/Daily Republic

# Dancer dedicated to her instructor

*Editor’s note: “Ten Minutes with . . .” is a feature that puts a spotlight on people who might never otherwise have their story told in the paper.*

BY AMY MAGINNIS-HONEY  
DAILY REPUBLIC

DIXON — Ten years ago, Dixon resident Stephanie Moore met Ukrainian-born Natasha Clarke, who came to the U.S. when she was 42 in search of a better life.

In the past decade, Moore, 51, has traveled around the area taking lessons from Clarke, who teaches with her son Gregory Chapkis at their Dance Unlimited studio in Vallejo.

Moore doesn’t recall dancing as a child, but opted for modern jazz during her high school physical education classes.

She danced on stage in high school and college.

Then, she left college to marry. Moore went on to raise four children. The youngest is 24.

Her daughter enrolled her in Clarke’s ballroom dance class at Solano Community College.

Clarke then picked her to be in a

troupe that danced at community events.

Then, when Clarke went on to teach at Diablo Valley College, then Contra Costa College, Moore followed her to both schools.

Dancing runs in the family as two of Moore’s three grandchildren have already taken a journey in the dance world. One of them performed in the “Nutcracker” with the Sacramento Ballet.

Moore is recovering from neck surgery and gradually working her way back into the dancing classes.

This is what Moore shared over the phone:

**Q: What got you involved in dance?**

A: I’ve always danced. I would dance around as a child and make up my own little plays. With dance, I can escape briefly. Dance brings

pure joy out of my heart. It makes me very happy. Besides God, this (dance) is my sanctuary. God and dance got me through these years.

**Q: What is it about Natasha you like so much?**

A: She is such a wonderful person. She wants to inspire people to dance. She says “If you can walk, you can dance.”

She gives a history of the dance and tells you what country it comes from. She teaches you the dance and gives you an idea what it’s all about.

(Clarke, she added, is “extremely patient and very positive.”)

She takes time to show each person. Sometimes there are 70 (people) in her class. She takes time for everybody.

And, when we’re all on the same page, she wants to put everyone on

the same stage. She gets excited when everyone gets it.

**Q: Do you have any upcoming performances?**

A: At this point I don’t know what she has planned.

I am not doing any stunts. I used to be her flyer and do acrobatics. The other dancers would throw me up in the air and catch me. My wings are clipped right now. By May I should be ready to rock.

**Q: What is it about ballroom dance?**

A: You know how you feel like a princess when you are a little girl and twirl around? How you felt like you were flying like a fairy?

That’s what ballroom dance is. It feels so fiery, fun and wonderful.

**Q: How many hours a week do you spend in dance class?**

A: When I’m going full force about 15 to 20 hours.

**Q: How many hours a week do you practice at home?**

A: About four. When I’m going to perform I do more. I have my own ballet room inspired by Natasha.

Reach Amy Maginnis-Honey at 427-6957 or amaginnis@dailyrepublic.net.

## ‘Wounded duck’ management style of state government

The executive director of Napa State Hospital was recently arrested and charged with multiple counts of child molestation over a period of decades.

In the interest of disclosure, I still work as a Department of Mental Health (DMH) physician/surgeon, and once worked under the administrator in question. I have 12 years of service in DMH and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Having disclosed that, I wish to address the obvious question: How could someone with such a troubled personal history, if it proves to be accurate, secure a position of power within the State of California?

The answer lies in the culture of correctional medicine. Management in correctional facilities within California often conflates treat-



**Scott Anderson**  
Ask Dr. Scott

ment of personnel, including doctors, with treatment of inmates (euphemistically called “individuals” in the DMH). Though staff at Napa State Hospital takes umbrage at any effort to liken their facility to a prison, forensic patients confined to the Secure Treatment Area at Napa, behind a guarded fence, are for practical purposes incarcerated. It is no wonder that a prison-like mentality permeates management’s thinking in both corrections and mental health services in California.

For example, I once heard a speaker in our prison system discuss “progressive discipline” of employees, with frequent unintended reference to “inmates” emerging as a revelatory insight into how employees are really viewed. Similarly, doctors are forced to sign in four times when going on duty at a lo-

cal correctional mental health facility, and “continuity rounds,” designed to sign-out patient care issues, are effectively “doctor counts.”

To the extent that employees, even highly trained physicians, are objectified and viewed as property of the state, they are devalued, intimidated and more easily controlled. In order to perpetrate this organizational goal, supervisors are needed who will “kick butt and clean house,” to paraphrase the words of one medical administrator. But how does an organization find such supervisors? After all, the broader culture of medicine prizes collegiality, not intimidation.

That’s where hiring the right person is critical, someone known as a wounded duck.

I learned this term from deceased physician Kevin Geraghty, and we further developed the concept in conversations with Dr. Nicholas Capozzoli as we all

served in medical staff posts in a California state hospital. What follows is my summary of the concept.

Wounded ducks, a term which also describes an errant football pass, here describes employees with professional, legal or behavioral issues. Examples include drug addiction histories, malpractice verdicts, medical board sanctions or even criminal convictions. These flawed souls often reach high levels within governmental agencies, for a number of reasons. Wounded ducks are sought out by managers who wish to exert strict control over the work force. Once hired, those with checkered pasts may also find themselves promoted precisely because they will perpetuate a worker culture of submission.

In this patronage system, wounded ducks are beholden to supervisors, and supervisors rely on wounded ducks. One outcome of this ongoing symbiosis is demoralization of remaining staff, who generally feel

cowed by the feudal nature of what they observe. For that reason, and for the purposes of maximizing the quality of patient care, I favor a strict meritocracy in state hiring and promotions. I don’t see us getting there soon, however. We need to return to the historical roots of civil service, which sought to replace favoritism and corruption with unbiased selection of the best candidates for any post.

These opinions are my views alone as a private citizen. Moreover, I do not know what was known about Napa State Hospital’s former executive director before his arrest. And he deserves his day in court, to be sure.

Scott Anderson, M.D., Ph.D., is a clinical professor at UC Davis School of Medicine (scott.anderson@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu). This article is meant for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice.