

CAMPER PROFILE
DOTTIE MULLER, HAGAN 1940's
AND JANET BROOKS, HAGAN 1963–1970

BY JANET BROOKS

I am the daughter of a Hagan Hag and I am a Hagan Hag. Hagan permeated my life before I stepped out of our family car and made my way to Junior 2 in 1963. I was making hospital corners on beds for as long as I can remember. My mother, Dottie Muller, sang me to sleep every night as a child with “Run along home and jump into bed,” which caused me to fight homesickness every night the first two weeks at camp when I had to endure lots of campers and counselors, and not my mother, singing it. I was born to become a Hag. There was just the time waiting until I was old enough to start.



Dottie Muller – Sr. 5, 1944

My mother's years at Hagan took on mythic proportion. But as a child I didn't ask for specifics, such as "Mom, what years did you go to camp?" With her death in her early 60's in 1994, there are many pastel colors in my memories of her experience but few solid outlines. Dottie was



there for three years as a camper in the beginning years. (Who knows when or what cabins). She planted the trees for the council fire circle. (That's true.) She helped build the altar in the outdoor chapel. (Mary Goldsmith Westhuis' mother also told her the same story, but we're not sure it's true, or rather they may have been referring to a prior altar.) Dottie passed on stories of deep friendship from year to year with cabin-mates, which I would experience soon enough. I know she spent a lot of time at the waterfront. But I didn't hear of her keeping up contacts in her adult life. The Hagan trail in her life goes cold for me for a few decades, but the embers rekindle in 2017 and the fire goes on.

Photo left: 1944, Sr. 5

Top row, left to right: Jan, **Dottie Muller**, Sally, Evie Next row: Marge, Joan, Mary Third row: Birdie, Betty, Phyl Bottom center: Janie

But first, a little about her life: both of her parents were born in Southern Germany in the early 1900s and emigrated to the US in the 1920s, where they met, married and lived in Philadelphia. My mother spoke German at home. She married at 18, which seems young to me but was not uncommon among her friends. She stayed home raising my older sister and me until I was 1-1/2 when she unexpectedly found herself co-running a business with my father when his business partner got cold feet two weeks before opening date and disappeared leaving my father alone to open and run two retail paint stores, one in Philadelphia and the other in Hatboro. We lived midway between both stores. My mother, with my sister 3½ and me 1½ at her side, opened and ran the Hatboro paint store for a few years. This was decades before childcare existed. We ate at Horn & Hardart's every night on the way home. We kids loved it! It was exhausting for my mother. Eventually she confined herself to the bookkeeping end of the business which she preferred. She settled into working out of the paint store in the town in which we lived, where we kids went to school and her work-life and home-life, although still super-busy, stabilized, i.e., we ate dinner at home. I never knew a day when my mother didn't work, including weekends.

Somehow, in her "free time" she helped start the Montgomery County Association of Retarded Children in the mid-1950s. My older sister was diagnosed with mental retardation, now referred to as a developmental disability. Possessed with a strong inner compass and motivated by love for my sister, Dottie fought for years to have my sister provided with the same opportunities as other children. My sister and I went to the only day camp that would accept disabled children. Dottie thought it important that my sister learn to swim as a matter of safety. We traveled to the Norristown YMCA to find a pool that would give swimming instruction to my sister, albeit in private lessons not with other children (except me).

I grew up working with my mother, closing the (financial) books every month at the paint stores from sixth grade until I graduated high school. I learned to love numbers, working by her side. It was news to me that girls had math anxiety. Dottie was a voracious reader. Ditto for me. Especially, of mysteries. Ditto for me. Dottie had a determination for each of her children to live up to their potential, whatever that potential was. For me it was to attend college, an opportunity she didn't have.

But first, my Hagan years. I attended between 4 and 8 weeks every summer, from Junior 2 to Senior 7 and then my final year as a CIT in 1970, the last year of Hagan. Along the way I took part in plays, sang my first Bach cantata, learned to canoe through rapids and earned tie after tie. Except the white tie. So, I was particularly touched to be awarded an honorary white tie at the 2017 reunion. On my mother's death I found a box of my Hagan memorabilia which she had kept. She had carefully ironed all of my award ties and wrapped my two letters for citizenship from Jr. 3 and Sr. 7. Among my mementoes I also found her aquatic pin.

The summer of 1970 was my last year on the Delaware River. During the mid-1980s my mother and I sang ourselves hoarse singing camp songs while driving across Pennsylvania to a family reunion. Dottie knew all the words for *"From six months of fishing off the coast of Maine"*



better than me, and it was MY favorite camp song. I visited the Poconos in 1990 and found Camp Hagan with the use of USGS maps by orienting myself with the powerlines on the maps – the ones we swam to, to become a blue cap! I found the council fire circle and the altar. I wasn't alone. I asked the guy about my age (35) why he was there. He said his sister, Karen Snyder, had gone to Hagan. I knew Karen! She was always either in my cabin or in the cabin below me. Well, I got to share that story over dinner at the 2017 reunion with Karen Snyder and her mother, also a Hagan Hag!

Photo above: Karen MacAdam Snyder (Hagan 1961-1970) and her mom, Betty Stefany (Stef) MacAdam (Hagan 1938-1947) at the 2017 reunion

I was off to college to Wesleyan in Connecticut. I graduated a Classics (Latin) and music major. I went off to be an au pair/mother's helper in Munich, West Germany for 1½ years. Got the love



of travel in my blood and looking at life from a variety of perspectives, came back speaking German well and Italian so-so. I went to law school at Northeastern in Boston. My first job after law school was a singing wench at a restaurant that put on medieval banquets, at the same time I started working at an environmental organization in CT. After five years at a non-profit I went on to enforce the state environmental laws in the CT Attorney General's Office for 18 years. For the last 11 years I have been a solo practitioner, focusing on wetlands protection. I write a quarterly legal column for town wetlands commissioners. This spring I published an article called: " 'Throw, tow, row, go' or Everything I know about wetlands enforcement I learned from my senior aquatic lifesavings course in the 1960s."

From singing Hagan Hag to singing wench

One husband, two daughters, a sprint triathlon, a half dozen Olympic triathlons, 8 half marathons later, my husband and I found ourselves in August 2015 walking the European Peace Walk in Central Europe, from Austria to Croatia, through Hungary, when the largest migration of refugees since WWII was walking east to west through Central Europe. We watched TV news in Croatia as refugees detained in the Budapest train station broke out and walked west and were eventually bussed by the government, ending up in the same tiny village on the Hungarian-Austrian border we had walked through two weeks earlier. I was utterly humbled by their feat. It was a defining moment for me. At home I now coordinate the English language learning for the adult refugees resettled in our town. About five years ago I thought I heard a calling for me to help restore Latin in the public schools from the lack of certified teachers. While continuing my law practice, I completed the alternate route to certification, did my student teaching and am now one course shy of a Masters Degree in teaching. But now I know that was all to prepare me to tutor refugees in English.

My husband is responsible for flu and bioterrorism surveillance for the state. One daughter produces distilled flavored spirits from fruits and vegetables for Hartford Flavor Company and the other daughter and her husband raise a goat herd and make goat cheese in Maine on a celebrity's farm. And I bake pretty terrific sourdough bread that goes well with the flavored spirits and goat cheese. Both daughters grew up going to an overnight camp in Maine. In fact our younger daughter was married to a fellow camper at a wedding officiated by the camp director on the camp grounds over Labor Day weekend. Everyone at the wedding was in awe that I was about to attend the 80th anniversary of my overnight camp and my mother's as well.



The embers reignite. I was very excited to

attend the 2017 reunion after discovering that Sandy Dempsey had posted photos from camp days in the 1940's from camp elders – including some from my mother's friends! I pinpointed



from the photos that Dottie attended Hagan in 1943 and 1944 along with Phyl Kaspereit Davidson (Photo left 1940's) and Jan Mueller, and Jan would be attending the reunion. I was worried that I would be over-exuberant at meeting Jan, who may have taken photos of Dottie **73 years ago**, but might not remember her in 2017. On the first evening during dinner I went to the elders' table. I could have melted on the spot as she glowingly recalled Dottie Muller. We decided to find time the next day to

talk. She spoke of driving down to Philly from Long Island at Christmastime to meet Dottie and Margie Schick (Aunt Margie to me) at the eagle in Wanamaker's to spend the day. In the late 1960s I would be doing the same thing, meeting camp friends at Christmastime, my cousin Jeanne Holt Legacki (daughter of Margie Schick) and Sally Gerhardt – at the eagle in Wanamaker's.



**My mother Dottie and Phyl Kaspereit Davidson are 3rd & 4th from the left.
Margie Schick is 5th (Dottie's cousin) and Evie Freitag is 6th.
Her parents were friends of Janet's grandmother (six degrees....)**

Enter Phyl Kaspereit Davidson: Remember Jan didn't know of my existence until I approached her at the reunion. While Jan and I were chatting, she pulled out her phone and starting a conversation with: "Phyl, there's someone here you're going to want to talk to." She handed the phone to me. Without missing a beat, I start in: "Hi Phyl, I'm Janet, Dottie Muller's daughter." Her response: "Janet, I haven't seen you since you were one year old." And with those few words I was seamlessly back into their lives as though I had always been there for the last six decades. Jan and I sat together at the council fire, singing Hagan songs together, just as my mother and I had done in my childhood and young adulthood. And now I look at the elders' photos often on the camphagan.com website and know with certainty who Jan and Phyl are in each of their posted photos, as though I had looked at those pictures often with my mother. I've talked to both by phone since the reunion. Just today in talking to Phyl I learned that my

mother named me after Jan Mueller. *I have never known who I was named after.* We are sharing photos by email and the U.S. mail. And next summer we are planning to get together. The Hagan fire had never gone out and it never will. Hagan born, Hagan bred.



Photo above: 2017 Hagan Reunion - Janet and Hagan Elder, Jan Muller, for whom she was named