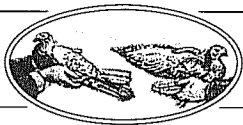


A FEATHER IN HER CAP

Anne Towbes has been a secretary, a waitress, a teacher, and a media mogul (KEYT, *Santa Barbara Magazine*, C); she's now a philanthropist and is this year's Red Feather Ball honoree (story begins on p.26)





The Red Feather Ball Honoree

by James Buckley



Anne and Michael Towbes were married under an oak tree at Lotusland a little over eight years ago (September 3, 2005); this photo of the couple was taken recently by Andrew F. Mester, MD

Anne Towbes is at the very top of a prestigious but short list of local philanthropists (alongside, we hasten to add, our Auburn Eminence **Leslie Ridley-Tree**) who not only donate substantial funds to causes they care about but who also regularly roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty, wash pots and pans and/or do whatever is required or helpful and gleefully supplement their cash contributions with some serious volunteer work. Mrs. Towbes and Hutton Parker Foundation head **Tom Parker** will be honored at this year's upcoming United Way Red Feather Ball on November 2 at Fess Parker's Doubletree Inn.

In acknowledgement of her generosity and outsized presence in Montecito and in Santa Barbara, we decided to spend some time with Anne to try and uncover not only what motivates her, but why United Way chose to honor her. We did just that recently during a lunchtime conversation at her and husband **Mike Towbes'** Montecito aerie. We plan to conduct an extensive sit-down with Mr. Parker after the November event.

Joining us for lunch were **Suzanne Danielson**, Development Executive with United Way of Santa Barbara County and a longtime friend of ours, **Joyce Ginsberg**.

The following is the gist of our conversation.

Q. You were born Anne Fuchs at Harper Hospital, Detroit, Michigan; is that correct?

A. Correct. I grew up in Royal Oak, which is right by the zoo. In fact, I lived right near the Camel House and could hear the camels every night. I went to elementary school in Royal Oak, and I was there when the wrecking ball took down the school in order

to build a part of the community college. I have good memories of those days. After Royal Oak elementary, I went to a private school from sixth to twelfth grade: the Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills. And then to the University of Michigan – Go Blue! – I got my B.A. as well as M.A. in English and Education and then I went right into teaching...

You went directly into teaching from college?

I did. I did...

Really? You didn't take a year off or something before that?

Oh, I did take a year off. I took a wonderful year off.

Now, that's what we're looking for. Where did you go and what was that year like?

I worked as a temporary secretary for the BICC – British Insulated Callender's Cables Company – in London. They laid the first transatlantic cable... I also worked as a waitress, but don't tell anybody. I worked at Cranks at night, the first health food restaurant in England.

When it was nearly time for me to go back home, I saw 'Penn Tours.' It was right across from Harrods; I just kind of wandered in and they had this overland trip and I said, 'Well, this is a good way to go home. I'll just keep going east rather than west.' So, I did. I met some wonderful Australian folks who were going home the long way too. I was actually the only American. There were a few Canadians.

Rather than catching a flight west across the Atlantic, you thought you could save money by traveling "overland" in the other direction?

Well, yes, I saved a lot of money. I

signed up (this was 1969) for an overland bus trip with ninety Australians from London to Nepal. You had to be under thirty-five, and it was just fabulous. They called it the Adventure Of A Lifetime and it really was; it's lasted all my life.

Why the age restriction?

You had to be under thirty-five because we camped along the way.

Every night?

Yes.

Every night?

Well, let's see. After we left Europe, we went through Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. I remember camping in Afghanistan under dining room tables in these Russian hotels, which ran generators and at seven o'clock at night, that was it. Lights out. There were no lights, so we went to sleep early those nights. But, otherwise, we camped outside. We traveled in two big buses and I still keep up with my seatmate, who was a former nun with a lot of wild oats to sow (laughs). And, we were wild.

And the rest of your route?

After Afghanistan we went to India and Nepal...

Over the mountains, in a bus?

Well, you're exactly right. That's when we switched out of our nice big buses into the little buses. We went up to Nepal and then we flew from Katmandu to Bangkok and then they all went south. I didn't go with them. I had applied to teach in Australia but my visa got screwed up, so I just came home. I flew from Bangkok to Hawaii and then to L.A. and back to Michigan.

You finally get home. Then what did you do?

I went to the University of Michigan and got my Masters and I started teaching (high school English and Drama) the following year in Ellicott, Maryland, outside Columbia, Maryland.

You taught high school? You must have caused some hearts a-fluttering, as you weren't much older than your pupils, were you?

*It's true. We were pretty close in age. I still keep up with a lot of those kids. I still see some of them on occasion. We did some wonderful musicals together. We did *My Fair Lady*, *Man Of La Mancha* was my favorite, *Fiddler On The Roof*. We did straight plays too, but my love was always musicals.*

I taught in Maryland for nine years and got married to Bob Smith during that period. Then, we moved back to Michigan – where we were both from – and had our two children, Jennifer

Smith Hale and **Michael Smith**. Michael is now a deejay and runs a background-music company (headquartered in downtown L.A.), called the Playlist Generation. It's like an updated Muzak and he does business with hotels, stores, and restaurants around the world. He's in nineteen countries so far. Jennifer is publisher of *Santa Barbara Magazine* and C.

Both kids are married and Jennifer has two daughters: **Leighton** (4) and **Carrington** (nearly 1). Bob passed away ten years ago this year, in 2003, but he's still very much a part of all of our lives.

When you got back to Michigan, Bob, as I understand it, went into the broadcast business and you started teaching school again.

*Yes, I started teaching fourth and fifth grade at the Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills, where I went. I did plays with the kids there too. And that's where I had Joyce Ginsberg's son, **Michael**, in the fourth and fifth grade. He's now a doctor. I loved teaching and those were wonderful years.*

When did you arrive on the West Coast?

We moved to California – full time – in 1991. We had a great old Mission style house downtown. I got very involved in the community through KEYT (owned by Smith Broadcasting since 1987 and sold only last year). At that point, I didn't have the proper credentials to teach out here, even though I'd been teaching for eighteen years, so I figured, that's it. I got involved in community work through the Lobero. I was president of the board there. So, I was still involved in drama, and education, and kids.

Before we focus on the Fun In The Sun program, let's just recount how you met your husband, Michael Towbes.

Before Bob passed away, he said to me: "I'm so excited for you for the next part of your life. You're going to meet someone who has more in common with you than we did, and it's my best legacy to see you go on and be in a happy marriage." So, in a way, Bob kind of sent [Michael] to me.

How exactly did it happen? Did he just ask you out or what?

We knew each other socially, but we weren't really connected. I made the first move. And, I had no control over the words. I do believe Bob directed me.

And that first move was?

I asked him out.

By telephone or in person?

In person. I can't believe the words came out of me, even today, but they

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did. And he said, "Yes!"

What was the occasion?

It was a Christmas party.

So, you were talking to this guy – Michael Towbes – who you kind of knew but not well... He must have been flirting with you.

No! No! No! He claims he might have gotten around to asking me out, but he's so focused.

So, we're getting close. What did you say to him?

I said, "If you're not busy on Christmas Eve, I have this lovely cottage at the San Ysidro Ranch if you'd like to come for dinner." I had been given the cottage by the guy who was re-doing the Ranch for Ty Warner at the time; I was just going to go there by myself, read...

By yourself? On Christmas Eve?

And, these words just came right out and he said, "Well, I'd love to." My sister said, "You did what? You asked him to come to your hotel room?" But he was a perfect gentleman.

Thank you! You have probably told us way more than you had planned. How did you get involved in United Way and why?

I was in Hawaii working with my friend Sandi Nicholson and she was working hard getting auction items to this event, so we were jabbering about it the whole time we were in Hawaii and she said, "Oh, you should come." I knew Michael, who was being honored that year, from afar and admired him, always did. So, that was the first one I remember coming to. In 2005, KEYT was honored as an organization; we always honor a person and an organization. So since KEYT was being honored, I came again to the Red Feather Ball. In 2006, I sang with a group because they were doing a retrospective of the years that had gone before. I sang with Fred Benko, Erin Graffy, Steven Crandell, and Susan Keller (Gil Rosas played piano). I've attended almost every year since. They've honored Bob Bryant, Leslie Ridley-Tree... Peter MacDougall, Rob Eammons, the Granatellis (Dolly and Andy) the DeVorzons (Jelinda and Barry) and I loved the Abercrombies (Katherine and Stewart). It has a special place in my heart.

And United Way's principal interest these days?

I am amazed at the broad reach of United Way. I had known them as a funding organization; they would raise money for the community and distribute it, but now I'm becoming more aware of the programs they are actually running. And, the one that I like the best is called Fun In The Sun.

Their focus is on education, financial stability, and health. The Fun In The Sun, of course, speaks to the education aspect, and two hundred fifty disadvantaged students spend seven weeks, seven hours a day, five days a week every summer for three years. The kids are ages seven to eighteen.

It speaks to the fact that these kids would be losing ground during the summer but because they are in these programs, I think that eighty-seven percent of them go up two grade levels at the end of the summer. So, instead of backsliding, they go forward. The Fun In The Sun program won the National Excellence In Summer Learning Award. Paul Didier went to receive the award, given by the National Summer Learning Association, which is affiliated with Johns Hopkins University.

Does United Way have other successful programs such as this?

United Way is involved in a variety of literacy programs throughout the year. It's impressive. Parents are involved. They have workshops for the parents, materials to work at home with the students. It's a real win-win and makes me feel really good about November 2. I think one of the reasons they asked me to be involved is that I had a birthday party last year [at our home]; the theme was summer camp and we had it in our little amphitheater. Camp was so important to me. It's a part of who I am and the character that I am. So, instead of gifts, I asked people to give money for scholarships to Fun In The Sun. We raised enough for six students to go last year. I think that's why they chose me.

Montecito Journal has covered every Red Feather Ball and the event is always among the year's most elegant and popular fundraisers. What is this year's theme?

The theme is a Russian motif. The ballroom will be decorated in silver and gold and very icy. There'll be vodka, an ice sculpture, caviar, possibly samovars, centerpieces will be roses. The chairs and tablecloths will reflect that theme.

Why is it called the Red Feather Ball?

I think it was Katherine Abercrombie's idea that everyone should dress in red and/or black and white. The red feather symbolizes charitable giving.

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The Red Feather Ball takes place Saturday, November 2 from 6 pm through 11 pm at the Doubletree ballroom. Tickets are \$300 per person and include dinner and dancing to a live band. Proceeds from the event will benefit United for Literacy's Reading Plus and Fun In The Sun Programs. Along with over 100 silent auction

items, there will be a raffle featuring a seven-day Wine Country Ranch Getaway Package in Santa Ynez. Raffle tickets are \$25 each and no more than 1,500 will be sold. For more information, you can call Suzanne Danielson at 805-965-8591, e-mail her at sdanielson@unitedwaysb.org or visit the website: www.unitedwaysb.org.

Dressed & Ready

Susan Pitcher owns and operates two Coast Village shops: one is called Dressed and the other is Ready. Dressed now has ten full years in business under its rather fashionable belt and Susan plans to celebrate the occasion in a big way.

"We opened Dressed ten years ago," Susan, who'd grown up in the fashion business in New York, says as we sit outside a very noisy Jeannine's; construction of the multi-use building just east of the bakery/café continues apace.

It was the end of March, 2003, and her thirteen-year-old son Lincoln (in the eighth grade at that time) had been invited by Bikes Across America with his history teacher from Santa Barbara Middle School and six other kids to bicycle across the United States. They left in the summer and returned in October. It was a four-month-long trip and during that time Susan could only speak with her son on Sundays.

"As a parent of a thirteen-year-old son," she says, "it was a big change in our lives, and through his journey I realized he was not going to come home needing me the same way anymore. It's going to be different. I had been working with clients in styling and I thought, 'You know? It's time for me to open my store.'"

She had told friends she was looking for a place on Coast Village Road and when Susan heard that Baskin Robbins had closed, she quickly contacted the landlord.

"When Hank [her husband, Hank Pitcher, is a noted artist and apparently handy with a hammer] was in the shop and doing the work on it, everyone would come by; they were excited for us and sad about Baskin Robbins."

When French Lessons [where Memaw's had been for many years] became available, Susan negotiated for the space and is about to combine Dressed with Ready. "What has always been an issue for us, as retailers, is that we have Ready, we have Dressed and we have this fabulous Cos Bar in the middle. So, you have a customer in the dressing room trying on something from Dressed but they really want a pair of jeans, so you have to go: 'Wait! I'll be right back!' and you run over and get a pair of jeans. Modern women – fashion women – buy a combination of high-



Susan Pitcher opened Dressed ten years ago and plans to celebrate the occasion on Thursday, September 26; the public is invited

low. They buy designer but they buy their t-shirts and their jeans too."

Dressed and Ready will now share the former French Lessons space and Susan will use the shop where Dressed had been to carry her accessories: jewelry, handbags, shoes, scarves, belts and the like. The shop's fashion lines include Givenchy, Stella McCartney, Kenzo, shoes from Valentino, purses from Valentino and Givenchy, J Brand, R13... "We have a lot of younger designers like Veronica Beard – two women named Veronica who married into the Beard family (for those who remember photographer Peter Beard and the tumultuous two years he was married to model Cheryl Tiegs)." Veronica will be making a personal appearance in October.

Heading West

Susan "discovered" California in the early 'eighties. She packed everything she owned and headed west. "I got to Santa Barbara and said, 'Huh?' I'd never seen fuchsia. I'd never been here. I'd never been to a place where the mountains were on one side and the ocean was on the other."

After living and working here for awhile, she went to the Santa Barbara Art Institute to listen to a lecture to be given by a famous weaver from San Francisco. "I went to the lecture and learned that the weaver was sick and in her place was going to be an artist, Hank Pitcher. I didn't know Hank but I had a friend who is an artist and she always raved about Hank's work."

A couple weeks later, she was moving out of a house she had been living in on Figueroa Street to a little Spanish cottage on Sola Street, "and right across the street from the house I was moving into," she relates, "was... Hank, outside, making a painting of a garden. I crossed the street to say hello and Hank looks up and stops painting... he says he knew he was going to marry me on that day."

"We started talking and I told him I was going back to New York for

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