

# Gelia Sheppard

## Becomer's Mystery Person of the week - May 10, 2009

I was born in Cedars of Lebanon Hospital and had a head full of black hair. Being one quarter Greek, people often mistook me for being Jewish or "European". Both my parents were from the South, so by the time I went to school, people guessed I was from a variety of southern states, since I apparently had developed a southern accent. I grew up in a home with two very loving parents and a younger, bratty sister who never outgrew it!

Only by the Grace of God am I here today. Being only a few months old, my parents decided to go "show me off" to my Dad's family in West Virginia. My parents were young and their car was old. Halfway into New Mexico, they encountered a blizzard one late afternoon and the car broke down on a deserted road. Before long, the snow was all over the car, it had turned pitch black outside, and our car could hardly be seen. A couple of cars passed by, but we seemed invisible. After many, long, cold hours, with no heat, no food and no bottles with which to feed me, my parents thought we were all doomed. More cold hours passed, when suddenly a truck drove by. As with the cars before it, Dad tried to wave him down, but he didn't see us—or did he? It appeared he was nearly out of sight, and suddenly he was backing up in that horrible storm. He jumped out, and he and Dad hitched the car to the truck. The driver took us dozens of miles, very slowly, into a small town where he set us up in a motel and got us some food. My parents tried to pay him, but he refused. They asked his name and who he was with, but he said it didn't matter, as he hopped into his truck and left. An angel in New Mexico? My parents always thought so!

At the age of 5, I made my Hollywood debut by appearing on the Bill Stella Show. I didn't really like that much, and found myself wanting to be a little more adventuresome. At the age of 8, I decided I was gonna be Wonder Woman and kill a pesky fly in the bathroom. First I locked us in and then stood on the bathtub to take an aim—well, after falling, being knocked out, getting a brain concussion and a broken collarbone, and having the door knocked in to be swept away to the hospital, I chose to settle down a little. But the risky side of me reared its ugly head many more times in life, like when I decided to fix the clock in my parents' oven and forgot to turn off the electricity. Sparks flew and it was a wonder I didn't get electrocuted. Seemed I was always doing things like this to keep people on their toes, and still like doing little things now and then that are "unconventional"!

I was not a child who liked to eat. My parents did everything they could to feed me. My mom would faithfully fix me a piece of buttered toast and orange juice for breakfast (the only things she could get me to consider) and leave me to eat while she went to take a shower. Poor Mom—if she only knew... the minute that bathroom door closed, I poured the juice down the sink and threw the toast behind the stove. Years later, when we moved from that house and dad pulled out the stove, hundreds of slices of toast were glued to the back of the stove and the wall. It got no better at lunch where I gave away most of my food at school. Then at dinner, I would beg to take my dinner out to the living room where there was a TV. Everyone thought I was eating... but the dog next door knew better. I would run off to my bedroom and throw my dinner out the window to the dog. My parents never understood WHY that damn collie next door howled so much outside my bedroom window so often. Needless to say, I was one skinny kid—unfortunately, now I like to eat most everything!

I attended public school for about 10 minutes, before my parents decided it was not where they wanted their child to be raised, and placed me in a Christian Day School, where I went to school through the 9th grade. Having no Christian High Schools in the area, at that time, I went on to public high school and had a blast! I guess the Christian training served me well as I ended up as Valedictorian of my senior class, as well as homecoming princess, a cheerleader, and a majorette who got to march in several parades. My first job, at about the age of 15, was giving young girls baton lessons. Actually, I guess baby-sitting was my first job, but giving baton lessons was more fun!

I was baptized, when I was a baby, at the First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood where my parents had been wed many years before. However a couple years after that, we moved and ended up in another church for the next thirty years. My mom and dad, and both grandmothers, as well as several aunts and uncles were all "churched", so we all led a very nice Christian life. I thought "booze" meant the glass of beer my dad had when he came home after a long day at the office, or when he and some of my relatives would have a glass of wine with dinner! I thought it all smelled bad, and still don't drink to this day.

My dad was a Marine who fought in World War II in the Pacific and was a recipient of the Purple Heart. My mom worked as a Safeway checker during the war. They met one night at a dance that she and a girlfriend had been invited to by my aunt and uncle to attend. I guess it was pretty much love at first sight for both my mom and dad, for they were married 6 weeks later and had a wonderful marriage of 59 years before Mom passed away. The following year, Dad joined her in Heaven.

After World War II, Dad went back to work for Pacific Bell, where he had worked prior to the war. Mom eventually quit working and became a stay-at-home mom when I was born 4 years later. Dad continued with Pacific Bell and worked his way up to District Manager until his retirement. He was so great—In Jr. High School, I didn't like Algebra all that much, so he would try to help me with my homework—but we'd mostly sit and listen to the baseball game on the radio, and he taught me how to keep score, what number the positions were, etc. I took up girl's softball and developed a mean wind-up and underhand pitch? To this day, I love baseball.

As for my Mom, she was really either a good sport or a wild teenager at heart—she took my sister and me to concerts of the Beatles, the Monkees, the Raiders, etc. I lived through the English Invasion in Music, the Flower-Power Era, and the Psychedelic Phenomenon. Music ran through my veins, I swear my mom had as much fun as we did. Until the day she died, she could fully sing all the words to "I Want to Hold Your Hand" or "Can't Buy Me Love" or any of the other hits of our fave groups! She was terrific.

At the church where I spent most of my younger years, I taught 4-5 year olds in Sunday School for five years. I was 17 when I began teaching. At the same time, I entered college and began my studies to become a schoolteacher. By the time I had completed five years of dealing with other people's kids once a week in Sunday School, and was about to get my teaching credentials in college, I shook my head and, said, "NO WAY"—I'd had enough of dealing with kids!

While in college, I worked in the English Dept for 33 professors, and would occasionally work in the Home Economics Dept. for a handful of professors—mostly reading or grading papers, tests or projects. I actually thought that working for \$2.50 an hr, was pretty good! Having a dual major in both English and Home Economics, I ended up, after college, designing and making bridal gowns, bridesmaids' gowns, and the likes for a few years.

One day, I had a friend call and say they needed an office manager for a dental practice. I really knew nothing about dentistry, but she said it meant running an office, not working in patients' mouths. I thought going to that interview was a joke, but I went anyway. Wouldn't you know... I got hired instantly and actually got thrown into a whole new and interesting world for the next 18 years. I loved working with the people... for the most part. Dental patients don't want to be at the dentist and are more than willing to comply with so many things. If you halfway suggest that the dentist might not be as gentle as he should be if they don't pay their bill, they give up their money every time! It was kinda fun when celebrities like Ernest Borgnine, Loretta "Hot Lips" Swit, and Cher (to name a few) came into the office. They were just as nervous as everyone else, if not more.

During those years, I loved to travel with friends and really enjoyed life... From skiing on the slopes at Heavenly and Mammoth, to flying in a hot air balloon, to performing and winning in national ballroom dancing competitions, to visiting the Hawaiian Islands once or twice every year.

While still working in dentistry, times changed as computers were introduced and dental computer programs helped ease some of the paper problems of the practices. I lived next door to a very creative friend who loved computers. He suggested that we use his skills in computers and my skills in dentistry to develop our own program that could be useful to dental practices. Why not have a program that could file dental insurance claims—one of the first paperless efforts in the field? All went well for a couple of years until BIG companies like GTE and Panasonic learned of the program. With their big money and technology, we got eaten alive... but it was quite an experience while it lasted.

During this time, I bought my first 5 homes and enjoyed having tenants—Yes, I was NUTS. With time, the love of having tenants grew cold, so I finally gave that up and got a real estate license so I could sell homes on the weekends to other people. Eventually, I quit dentistry and went into real estate full time. Talk about meeting interesting people! I guess one of the most interesting was Bonnie Pointer of the Pointer Sisters, her husband Jeffrey, her sister June, and eventually all the Pointer family. What adventures we had while looking for a house for them. They ended up taking me into the studio and had me singing back-up for some of Bonnie's songs. Hey Anne, remember the week you had us singing those 3 songs that were designed for altos? Bring them on for us altos! There were parties up at June Pointer's house—I think I was the only one not doing drugs—Help! The best time I had with them was the night they took me to the American Music Awards... I was picked up in a big, white, stretch limo. When we arrived, I was the only Caucasian in the car—the paparazzi shot one picture after another as I stepped out... to their chagrin, they learned I was just the Realtor. So, did I sell them a house? No—on Christmas Eve they all got into a big brawl (I'd been invited, but didn't go), a fight broke out, and Jeffrey ended up in jail for spousal abuse... oh well, that's the way the house crumbles.

While working in my real estate office, late on a Friday evening, a man came in, looking for his agent who had gone home many hours earlier. The man was irate because his agent had messed up his deal and he wanted help—NOW? The security guard came and got me—"There's a very mad man downstairs - come help!" Geez, what was I to do? So, I went downstairs to talk with him. He wasn't at all mad, from what I could tell—as a matter of fact, he was charming. I tried to reach his agent, the escrow officer and the broker, but no one was available. So, I gave him my business card and told him to call me if he didn't get things worked out the following week.

Instead, the next day, he called to thank me and ask me to lunch. There are so many frogs you've gotta kiss before your Prince Charming comes along... I'd kissed more than I care to admit. So, I eventually met him with a lot of other agents at "happy hour" one evening. Hey, he didn't drink either, OR smoke, OR do drugs, and he was very nice. Later he admitted that he was more than irate the night we met, but when he saw me, he forgot about everything else because it was love at first sight. Well, one thing led to another and he is, and always has been, and always will be my one and only love and husband. We both love to travel and LOVE the sunshine and beautiful beaches. In our spare time, we are active in our Republicans club, and we enjoy volunteering at Operation Gratitude where we, along with hundreds of other volunteers, pack boxes of goodies and necessities for our troops. He says he likes my cooking—which is a unique style. We have 3 microwaves, and if I can't microwave dinner, it usually doesn't happen.

As I said, music runs through my veins. Up until late 2002, I managed a rock band, and actually sang in it for the last 5 out of the 10 years we performed. We did private parties, sang in restaurants, and did company events. The only instrument I ever attempted to play was the piano, and I gave that up after only a few lessons. But I had an ear for teaching harmonies and it was a lot of fun. I used to throw parties at my home for hundreds of Realtors, for several years, and we had a great time with our band performing.

When the great music of the 60s turned into the heavy metal music of the 70s, I turned to Country Music, and like it still. There was a great country station that used to have terrific contests that I won many times. From winning 2 motorcycles, to a kayak, to \$1000.00, to luggage, to records, to tickets, to you-name-it, I won so much from that station, I became known as "fast-fingers" because of how fast I

could dial a phone—nowadays, redial and speed dial do what I used to do in the early 70s.

When it comes to encountering the men in blue, I'd have to say my most memorable adventure happened when I was working in dentistry. Our office moved into a new 3-story building that had just been completed, and primarily had dentists and specialists as tenants. One of the offices threw a huge "house warming" party where about 150 of us attended. It was a great party with lots of food, drink and music—suddenly the party pretty much came to a stand still when 3 cops came in, silencing the crowd, telling people it was too rowdy, people were illegally parked, etc. Then, just as suddenly as they had walked in, two of them turned on their own loud music as one of the cops started to strip! Well, stripping was one thing, but then he decided to arbitrarily choose one of the partygoers—namely ME—to pick up, and start twirling me over his head, as he danced, without much on except the music" Needless to say, I never lived down being part of the strip act as long as I worked in that building.

With whom would I most like to have dinner? Probably my parents so I could share with them all that has happened since they passed away.

A well-known person?? Probably Ronald Reagan