

Angagh Kalpakian MacKellar

She was born in Adana, Turkey to Armenian parents in 1918 immediately after the end of World War I and by whose treaties an independent Armenia (a small area between the Black and Caspian Seas) was created. To commemorate this occasion, her father named her "Independence." Although her mother was a Protestant and was educated at the Congregational School for Girls, she was baptized in the Armenian Orthodox Church of her father.

In 1922 British and French mandates ceased and their troops left. Many, many Armenians left, too, fearing persecution. The family had already received papers of sponsorship by Mother's sister and brother-in-law in Venice, California to enter the U.S.; but Mother was 9 months pregnant. So they took a ship to Istambul, which was a cosmopolitan city and things were safer there. They landed on Thursday and Peggy was born on Sunday. Fortunately, relatives there helped them to find a place to live and a place to work.

The following year the family came to the U.S. They arrived in Venice in October and Betty was born in January. (And Mother was seasick during the whole trip!)

They lived in a tiny house behind the relatives' and they decided to speak English at home so that they would learn English faster. (Mother was the only one who knew English.) At age 5 Angagh went to school, knowing only 2 words in English: Yes and No. She flunked kindergarten and had to take it over again. (Her grades improved each year and by the end of the 6th grade, all grades were A's.)

Father decided to go into the grocery business because everyone has to eat. So they moved to Los Angeles: a small store on 19th and San Pedro Streets with living quarters in the rear.

When Angagh was 12 her parents became U.S. citizens; it was the ideal time to legally change their first names to the American ones they had already adopted--except Angagh. Mother wanted "Agnes" and Angagh wanted "Adele." Since they could not agree, the Armenian name remained. By the way, George claimed that Angagh was well named! Seriously, her strange name has been very advantageous in making new friends.

Eventually, after several moves, Angagh attended George Washington High School. (When she was 16, sister Harriett was born.) She had already decided to become a French teacher. After 5 years at UCLA she obtained a B.A and a General Secondary Teaching Credential. Two years later, she was offered a job at Washington High School where her former teachers were now her colleagues!

In 1946 she was asked to answer a letter written by a former classmate, George MacKellar, then in the Navy, but stationed in Boston. A correspondence developed; and 18 months later his ship docked in San Francisco at the time Angagh and her girlfriend were vacationing there. Result: marriage on October 27, 1946, one week after George's separation from the Navy. He went to work at the Eastman Kodak Processing Lab in Hollywood and Angagh stayed home to raise their 3 children: Jim, Patty, and Nancy. Seventeen years later, she heard of a school, Los Angeles Baptist High School, that needed a French teacher one hour a day. Soon she was teaching 4 hours: 3 French classes and 1 Spanish. She told her principal that is all she wanted to work, leaving the afternoons free to take care of her family. (She taught there 15 years.)

As soon as the baby was 4 years old, the family began taking camping trips all over California and neighboring states. Angagh and George dreamed of one day visiting Europe, especially Paris, and told the children that they would have to wait their turn for foreign travel. Then,

when Patty was 16 she heard of the Youth for Understanding Student-Exchange Program and she wanted to go to France. We saved the money, and Patty spent the summer with a family in Brittany in Western France. The next year Nancy spent the summer with a family in Southern Germany. Then, when Jim was drafted, the girls asked if we could host a girl for a year, now that we had an extra bedroom. YES.* The Army sent Jim to Bamberg, Germany. All 3 children went to Europe before we did! (Our first trip was in 1972.)

Patty loved French and decided to spend her third year of college in France--at the University of Aix-Marseille. There she made a lot of friends and invited them all to visit us when they came to California. (George's buddies at Kodak claimed that he was running an international hotel. His answer: Yes, and I love it.)

Angagh and George took a few trips alone during their working years; but the biggest one took place just after they both retired in July of 1978. On August 1 they were on a plane to Germany, picked up a VW at the factory (which they had paid for in advance) and drove all over Western Europe for six months! (George did all the driving even though he had just recovered from a brain-tumor operation.) They also visited the foreign friends they had acquired through their children's visits to Europe and friends who had stayed with them in Northridge.

Now they wanted to move out of Los Angeles and decided to live in Paso Robles, and found a church home at Plymouth Congregational Church. For the next 10 years they traveled a lot: Australia, New Zealand, South America, the Near East, China--all these by air; but took 5 trips by car all over the United States.

* We were sent a girl from Northern Germany; and I call her "my German daughter."

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In 1990 when George had a stroke and went to the hospital, it was discovered that his whole body was riddled with cancer. He died in July.

Since then, Angagh has continued working with Plymouth Circle (president 11 years) and began taking 2 trips each year, besides going on 11 Elderhostels. She keeps in touch with her family by telephone and goes to see them from time to time. (They all live in Southern California.)

She is looking forward to going to Russia in July (with Vivian Foulds) and to Turkey in September. (The latter trip will visit all the churches that St. Paul founded there.)