

All About Oakridge



The Oakridge Estate is a Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument
Former Residence of Barbara Stanwyck and
Jack Oakie and Victoria Horne Oakie



Stanwyck Family Announces Gift

On May 22nd, attendees of Friends' *"Marwyck Ranch as Seen in Print and Film"* virtual presentation were treated to the news that sisters Christine Presley and Kathleen Carr, great-nieces of Barbara Stanwyck, have arranged to donate Miss Stanwyck's future residuals to Friends of Oakridge. The announcement was made by Friends Board member Greig Smith, the former CD 12 Councilmember responsible for rescuing the historic Oakridge Estate from developers in 2009. Friends of Oakridge wishes to express our deepest appreciation to Christine and Kathleen for their generous gift. Their ongoing support will ensure that the home that Barbara built will continue to welcome visitors for generations to come.

Memories of "Missy"

Barbara Stanwyck may have said goodbye to her Marwyck ranch and residence eighty years ago, but the high standards she brought to that project continued to influence and inspire her colleagues, friends, and family throughout the remaining decades of her life. Here, in their own words, Barbara's great-nieces, Kathleen Carr and Christine Presley, reminisce about growing up with one of Hollywood's most beloved and legendary stars.



Christmas at Missy's circa 1962

Standing: Barbara with brother Byron Stevens

Seated next to Byron: Byron's wife, Carol, their son Michael, his wife and son

Seated below Byron and Barbara: Gene and Barbara Vaslett with their children Christine, Kathleen, Timothy, and Victoria (in the very front)

How are you related to Barbara?

Kathleen and Christine -- Barbara Stanwyck was our great-aunt on our father's side. He was the son of Barbara's sister, Mabel. We called her Missy as did everyone that was a close friend or family.

Were you aware of your great-aunt's celebrity growing up? What stage of her career was she in?

Kathleen -- I was aware of Missy's celebrity growing up. She was making films for TV at that time and there was the Barbara Stanwyck special that she was doing. Then she did the TV series, *Big Valley*.

Christine -- Missy was 41 when I was born. Yes, we were aware of her celebrity, but did not discuss it. In 1963, Frank Sinatra Jr. was kidnapped, and Missy was terrified that it could happen to her nieces and nephew. We were told it would be best not to discuss our aunt with anyone. I remember early on she was called Queen.

What type of relationship did you have with her? Did you see her often?

Kathleen -- My family was very close to Missy. We spent holidays with her, especially Christmas at her house, coming over early on Christmas day to unwrap gifts and then she would have a big party where quite a few people who were in films with her would come. Our

car was loaded with gifts and goodies at the end of the evening. I always remember the cozy pajamas with beautiful robes she would give us – we couldn't wait to get home and sleep in them!

Christine -- We were her family and close. Saturdays would be spent at her pool. Sometimes at the pool we would not see her as she was busy studying a script. We spent Christmas and 4th of July on an annual basis at her home. I remember when we lived in Santa Monica, she showed up for my 8th Birthday in a black limo. She got out of the car and I thought she was holding a baby wrapped in a blanket. I said, "Missy, did you have a baby?" She said, "No, you did" and handed me a puppy – a Basset Hound I named Happy. He was my buddy for 13 years.

Describe her personality. What life lessons did she teach you or did you learn from observing her?

Kathleen -- She was a wonderful person to be around but tough -- we were always on our best behavior. She always wanted to know about our interests and encouraged us with anything we were pursuing. I was interested in art and she always showed me the art in her house and gave me beautiful art books. One Christmas I received all sorts of art supplies -- brushes, paints, and canvases. She was an avid reader and constantly supplied us with books and always stressed that reading was so important in our lives.

Christine -- Missy was a very disciplined woman. She had very high morals and ethics. She did not put up with attitudes or bad manners. Thank you notes were expected. She always had advice, depending on the subject. She had a large shoulder I leaned on at times. I remember during one conversation, she was shocked I was not street wise, so irritated with me!

Do you have any fond memories or stories you would like to share with our readers?

Kathleen -- Missy put me in the right place to pursue a career in the art field. After college, I taught high school art in Arizona. After a year of that, she persuaded me to move back to California. She rented an apartment for me in North Hollywood and furnished and decorated it -- it was beautifully done. She encouraged me to take my portfolio to Hanna-Barbara and I did. I was accepted into a class that they were giving for new artists to learn animation and eventually was employed as an inbetween artist which set my career in motion. I remember she told me not to tell my parents about the new job because she wanted to tell them. That Easter, my parents and I were at her house for a brunch and that's when she told them about my employment. I just remember how proud she was for my success! She was a strength in my life and a mentor pushing me to do things I never thought I could do. She was magic!

Christine -- Of course there are a multitude of memories, hard to pick a few. Her generosity throughout our lives. Christmas was her favorite holiday and she always made it such a beautiful and special occasion.

I'm grateful my children were able to experience it as well. I remember I finally had to be careful on what I might compliment, a beautiful vase, a piece of jewelry, because she would just hand it over. Most importantly, Missy gave me the love of reading. Books were sent each month to me, even into adulthood, no matter where I lived.

Do you have a favorite Stanwyck film/television series?

Kathleen -- My favorite film is *Great Man's Lady*. I know she loved holding the babies that were in the film. *Titanic* was traumatic for us to watch -- we were afraid she was going to drown and my Uncle By was in it and we feared for his life!

Christine -- *Great Man's Lady, Stella Dallas.*

When did you first learn about Marwyck Ranch and Friends of Oakridge?

Kathleen -- Missy did mention the Marwyck Ranch now and then -- and always said it was a lot of money in maintaining it. It was always a mystery to me, and I really wanted to see it so, when Vicky Wilson came to the ranch promoting her book about Missy, I was excited to get an invitation to attend the event! That's when Dana Amann took me on a tour, and I met Debra Farra and all the wonderful, dedicated people involved in Friends of Oakridge.

Christine -- My sister Kathleen.

What prompted you and your sister to donate your great-aunt's residuals to Friends of Oakridge?

Kathleen -- Christine and I wanted to donate our great-aunt's residuals to Friends of Oakridge because it just seems so important to help with the restoration of such a beautiful house that she had built and bring the community together over the history and films that have to do with Oakridge. For me, I just like to visit there because it reminds me of her and what she meant to my family.

Christine -- When I learned the story of Marwyck, I envisioned a young Missy building a dream. The house, stables -- what a huge commitment and accomplishment. I'm sure it was bittersweet to sell. I know she contributed to various charities and we could have gone that route, but what a concept, her residuals supporting an adventure she enjoyed so long ago. I'm sure she is happy with this decision.

What Are Residuals? -- A Brief History

Simply stated, residuals are union-negotiated payments that writers, actors, directors, and others, receive from a studio, producer, or distributor, when a movie, television show, or internet production is rerun or reused in a different medium.

It is now an accepted fact that union film actors receive residuals but that was not always the case. For decades, residual payments for motion picture talent did not exist; actors like Barbara Stanwyck were

paid only once, generally under the terms of their studio contracts. The studio owned the film and could re-release it whenever and wherever it chose, with no obligation to further compensate actors.

During his first tenure as Screen Actors Guild President (1947-1952), Ronald Reagan, then a liberal Democrat, was instrumental in securing residuals for television actors when their episodes were re-run. Motion picture actors, on the other hand, were still denied residuals and did not receive any compensation when their studio films aired on television.

Domestic movie attendance plummeted over 65 per cent from 1946 to 1959 as more Americans chose to stay home and watch television. Telecasts of theatrical films increased, and film actors argued they were being deprived of a significant source of income. By the fall of 1959, the actors were fed up and voted to return Ronald Reagan to the SAG presidency to spearhead their 1960 contract negotiations. A work strike eventually ensued but, after several weeks, a settlement was reached granting actors residuals for all studio films made after 1960. ***There would be no residuals for any studio films produced before 1948.*** In lieu of residuals for films produced between 1948 and 1959, producers agreed to a one-time payout of \$2.25 million, a contribution SAG would use as seed money to establish new union health insurance and pension plans.

Many of Hollywood's Golden Age actors were furious with the settlement and derided the compromise as a "great giveaway". But Reagan, who it should be noted didn't directly benefit from the new residual agreement either, saw the bigger picture. By establishing the residual payment system that lives today, he instituted an expanding revenue stream amounting to billions of dollars that continues to benefit thousands of both A-list and bit-part film actors – as well as their heirs.

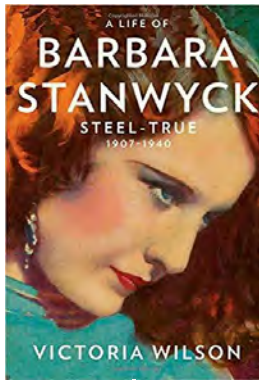
A Conversation with Friends of Oakridge Honorary Board Member Victoria Wilson

Author of A Life of Barbara Stanwyck: Steel True 1907 - 1940

Imagine researching and writing the definitive biography of one of Hollywood's most legendary actresses without benefit of the internet and digital archives that authors so easily access today. That's exactly the challenge this successful and much-heralded book editor (Vice President, Executive Editor, Alfred A. Knopf) took on in 1996 when she was given a contract to write "a life" of Barbara Stanwyck.



Victoria Wilson



One might easily assume that Ms. Wilson was selected because of her interest in the actress and her films but that affinity grew out of her publishing many biographies and working closely with her authors during this process “and being drawn to the form itself. A large story,” said Ms. Wilson, “about large people, a life of some kind of adventure and daring; of risks and strengths; of courage and hardships; pain and triumphs, with a beginning, a middle and an end. Who could ask for anything more,” said Wilson. The story of her writing the proposal itself, despite being a longtime, experienced editor, “is a story unto itself,” she said, “full of exactly the kinds of anxiety, fear and blind instinct that afflicts – and guides – every writer.” In fact, Ms. Wilson confessed to consulting a clairvoyant before signing on the dotted line to confirm that Barbara Stanwyck, “a shy and private person, was open to having her story told in detail.” Thankfully for us, the answer was yes, and so began a decade and a half of researching and writing the rich, riveting cultural history of Barbara Stanwyck in her time that was published in 2013 as Volume One. The positive energy generated by that metaphysical encounter ensured that one door after another opened and Ms. Wilson was able to conduct and record hundreds of conversations with her interviewees, including “developing a close decade-long friendship with Dion Anthony (“Tony”) Fay, Barbara’s adopted son.”

“Going up the curving driveway to Stanwyck’s ranch home was very emotional for me,” recalled Ms. Wilson of her 2014 book signing at the site now known as the Oakridge Estate. “I had been writing about Stanwyck and the buying of the Northridge land and developing Marwyck for so long and was only now seeing it for the first time. The pillars at the bottom of the driveway where Frank Fay had stood in a reckless publicity stunt; the building of the house; the pool; the barns . . . I had to take it all in.” According to Ms. Wilson, “Marwyck Ranch represented a major transitional time in Stanwyck’s life and career. “She was out from under the insidious control of first husband Frank Fay after many years of her willing her doomed marriage to work; her new business relationship and friendship with Zeppo and Marion Marx was taking her away from the conscribed life of Fay’s punitive and paranoid small world and finally, her freeing, transformative love affair with Robert Taylor was opening her up to feeling, joy and a whole new social life of Hollywood that she had always shunned.” Barbara was excited to take on a “great new adventure” with partners Marion and Zeppo. Previously, “in New York and on the road she and then with Fay, had led the happy life of a nomad in the theatre and in her unwavering support of Fay’s career onstage. Now, she was able to settle into a home all her own and have it be exactly the way she wanted it.”

“The Marxes were a big influence on Stanwyck,” added Ms. Wilson. The passion for horses which Barbara and Marion shared culminated in the development of a state-of-the-art Thoroughbred breeding and training operation at the ranch. Stanwyck’s career also evolved during this time when Zeppo, as her new agent, suggested and convinced the driven, dedicated actress to try her hand at comedy, thus paving the way for memorable roles in *Remember the Night* (1939), *The Lady Eve* and *Ball of Fire* (both released in 1941). And it was the Marxes who introduced Barbara to Robert Taylor, the love of her life. Their marriage ultimately closed the chapter on the Marwyck/Northridge years “and opened out an entirely new period in Stanwyck’s life and work,” as well as a whole new book to be released as Volume Two. We look forward to reading about the next adventurous years of Miss Stanwyck’s life and career.

Additional information about Barbara’s early life and career, including her years at Marwyck Ranch, can be found in **Victoria Wilson’s biography, *A Life of Barbara Stanwyck: Steel-True 1907-1940*, Simon & Schuster, 2013.**

A Special Day

Masks were dropped briefly for a commemorative photograph as Oakridge volunteers were recognized for a decade of service to Friends at an outdoor Board meeting on Saturday, September 11th. Personalized City of Los Angeles Certificates



of Appreciation were presented by Friends Board Member Debra Farra and CD 12 Field Deputy Myrka Martinez. Oakridge docents and volunteers bring a myriad of skills and talents to the organization for the benefit of our supporters, including research, public relations, photography, ASL capability, technical support, and private collections of historic memorabilia. Honorees included (left to right): Penny Brocato, Joyce Linden, Shel Mosk, Terry Porter, Art Jacobs, Shel Weisbach, Dana Amann (not pictured) in addition to presenter Myrka Martinez. If you are interested in volunteering at Oakridge, please contact us at info@theoakridgeestate.org.

Volunteer Spotlight

Friends of Oakridge is fortunate to have a group of dedicated volunteers who make our tours and events



possible. This Newsletter, we are pleased to introduce Terry Porter, a longtime docent.

How did you first learn about the Oakridge Estate?

I first learned about the Oakridge Estate in 2012 from a friend who had seen a notice about tours opening to the public. My husband and I were excited, because, like many people in the north San Fernando Valley, we had driven past "the house on the hill" for years and wondered who lived there. We signed up for the grounds tour because the house tour was already filled up, but were lucky enough to actually get to see inside the house as well.

What sparked your interest in volunteering and what do you enjoy most about it?

When I learned during that first tour that the house I had been living in since 1972 was built on land that had been the horse ranch portion of the original Estate (then named Marwyck), I felt I had a personal connection to Oakridge and decided I wanted to be part of its restoration and future. After attending several meetings of what was to become the Friends of Oakridge organization, my first experience as a docent was during a public tour of the property and house in 2014. In 2015, I was asked to become co-chair of the Group Tours by Reservation program, where individual organizations, many of them non-profit groups, were able to set up tours for their members. These tours were able to be a little smaller and more personal than the larger public tours we provided. I loved getting to schedule these tours, learning about the organizations and their attendees, and being able to share the history and stories of Oakridge with them.

What were you most surprised to learn about the Oakridge Estate?

So much about Oakridge was a surprise to me! The fascinating Hollywood history of its owners, the knowledge that it originally covered so much acreage including a racehorse training and breeding ranch, the modern features it contained way back at its construction in 1939 and the story of its being saved from demolition by its second owner and its subsequent purchase by the city of Los Angeles all were exciting revelations to me. Many of our docents and volunteers are wonderful history sleuths, and from their research I am constantly learning new things about the Estate.

Please tell us about your favorite room or place in the house and

why?

It's difficult to pick a favorite room at Oakridge because each one is special in some way. I love the simplicity and coziness of the kitchen with its private dining nook, the massive mural room with its hidden space for a turntable and records, the magnificent marble fireplace and incredible dressing area of the master bedroom, and the innovative glass panels and multiple shower heads in the bathrooms. It is clear that much thought, planning and, of course, money went into the building of this fabulous structure.

Do you have a favorite event at the house?

Any event that occurs in such a wonderful location is special, and I have really enjoyed the movies and discussions presented by those who have had a personal or unique connection to the house. For me, however, the best event is each and every tour in which I have been able, in some small part, to share with the public the fascinating stories of the architects and the inhabitants of Oakridge and the history of the north valley where I have happily lived for most of my life.

What other activities are you interested in outside of Oakridge?

Over the years, and especially since my retirement as a Parenting and Child Development Specialist, I have enjoyed various activities in the community and with my friends. For a while, I was part of a choral group that performed at senior citizen facilities around the San Fernando Valley and participated with the San Fernando Valley Volunteer League distributing clothing, personal care items and school supplies to needy students attending Los Angeles Unified District schools. I have been involved in movie groups and book clubs with friends and, of course, spend as much time as possible with my husband, children and grandchildren.

A Special Message to Our Subscribers

Friends of Oakridge appreciates your continuing interest and support of the historic Oakridge Estate. The residence and grounds are currently closed to the public. Everyone at Friends of Oakridge looks forward to resuming our tour and event schedule in the future. Please check for updates on our website:

www.theoakridgeestate.org

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Website



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