

## FACES OF BODEGA BAY

### Meet Mary Cook

Interview by John Hershey & Melinda Pahl



Mary Cook is a respected Bodega Bay original, especially when it comes to the history of our Fire District. Mary, her architect husband John and son Staven, moved to Bodega Bay in 1968. She worked at the *Bodega Bay's Post Office* for nearly 30 years. She is one of the original volunteers on the ambulance squad, founded in 1974. Called **BBAR** or *Bodega Bay Ambulance Rescue*, Mary and the other founders witnessed too many serious heart attacks and accidents to stand back when help took at least an hour to get to the Coast. They raised money, found and bought used ambulances from places like Truckee and trained in lifesaving EMT skills. Mary continued building the volunteer base by teaching others advanced classes in First Aid. They trained at the *Bodega Bay School*, ready

to "take care of each of our own" and others passing through Bodega Bay. They were dedicated, available 24 hours a day, keeping the ambulances at home, ready for immediate departure.

Mary is quick to give credit to others. At the Post Office, people like Shirley Ames, Glenice Carpenter and Mary worked together. In 1982, they remember when the bridge in Salmon Creek washed out, isolating Carmet and Sereno del Mar to the north. They managed to get the mail through with Highway workers help, using the construction crane to hoist US mail over the washed-out creek to the other side where it was picked up by postal workers that couldn't get to work. "It worked pretty well" Mary says.

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When asked about the start of the ambulance service, Mary invariably credits **Les Sansone** for raising the needed money to start BBAR and the **Bodega Marine Lab** as a first rate supplier of ambulance volunteers. She remembers being kept out of trouble when her authority went unrecognized by State Law Enforcement, until our **Resident Deputy Sheriff, Dennis McAllister** stood by her. She brought humor to the narrative by keeping the locals up-to-date on developments, writing now historical newspaper articles and naming the first ambulances (otherwise know as "crash wagons") with names like *The Great White Hope, Big Red and Goldilocks*. She saved lives as one of the original volunteers and trainers. She says she was never so happy to hear a tiny, crinkly kick in a space blanket and a baby cry ,when at first the infant was still and silent.

Mary and her family lived in an old beach house on Gleason Beach in the early days, with porches and stairs to the beach before erosion took down the houses on Highway One. She has a tale to tell about getting out in a hurry when the surf came perilously close. Then they actually moved the house itself to Calle del Sol, where she still lives today.

Her tender-hearted ways are unmistakable, teaching children with physical disabilities and with her love of wildlife. Her favorites are deer, hawks, and brown pelicans. She cared for and raised llamas, one named

Marigold. Marigold was 9 months old when she came under Mary's care and lived until age 25.

Mary helped find company for Burt Reynolds (another llama), a popular and regular guest at the old Fisherman's Festival who was extraordinarily lonely until they managed to add a few more llamas the following year. After the volunteers and attendees went home, someone needed to stay overnight at the festival to tend the llamas to prevent overnight mischief and mishaps.

Born and raised in Topeka Kansas, Mary earned her degree in Occupational Therapy and a Masters Degree from the University of Kansas in Psychology focusing on people with physical disabilities. Today, Mary Cook lives with her son, Staven, Bodega Bay treasured locksmith who took over the business from the same Deputy Sheriff, Dennis McAllister, that kept her out of trouble years earlier.

Those were the days in Bodega Bay, when fishing was the primary livelihood, Meredith Dock canners employed scores of local women, when people devoted lives to the community, raised their children here, volunteered and taught in the Bodega Bay School. Thank you to the Cook Family, John who drove the ambulance and more, Staven and Mary. Thank you. - *Author: Melinda Pahl, Rancho Bodega Historical Society, 6 Oct 2019*

*A regular appearance in our quarterly newsletter, The Faces of Bodega Bay is a photojournalistic record of people in our town: school kids, surfers, shop owners, fishermen, restaurant workers; a whole gamut of people who live and work in Bodega Bay and help make it the wonderful community that it is. These "environmental portraits" portray the subjects in their natural environment, capturing their character and telling their story through their surroundings.*

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