

Resident to Resident

A Dating Act by a Friend Brings Virginia Melitz a Wonderful New Life

By Carol Keochekian

“Don’t give up” has been the personal life slogan for Virginia Melitz. It’s particularly appropriate during this Woman’s Suffrage Month, which commemorates women’s right to vote.

A vibrant and most interesting person, Virginia has lived in various states in the United States – Kentucky, Florida, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Hawaii and of course California.

While residing in Hawaii between 1958 and ’61, she and her first husband had their second child, a baby daughter, to keep their son company. Her daughter’s birth certificate certifies that Hawaii was a territory. It had not yet become a state.

In 1961 her divorce was final and Virginia returned to the mainland with her children to settle down with her parents in Connecticut. A friend from church set up a blind date for her with Peter Melitz. He asked her to go out for drinks. Virginia was somewhat hesitant because she had just completed going through a difficult divorce. But, she said yes, nevertheless. It was a very good decision. It started her on a new, wonderful life.

Virginia will never forget that first date with Peter. He showed up dressed to a T wearing a ski sweater, grey slacks and loafers. He asked where they could go to get a drink and to go dancing. Virginia suggested a local hotel. To assure he was dressed appropriately, Peter unzipped his sweater, took a sports jacket from the back seat of the car as well as a gardenia corsage for Virginia. This was the beginning of a wonderful life together. “A marvelous man walked into my life,” Virginia says. “Not a day goes by that I haven’t thanked God for him.”

In 1962 Virginia moved to Northern California with her children and parents. Soon she found a job as Retail Credit Manager for Stacy’s Medical and Professional bookstore in San Francisco. The store specialized in publications for doctors and lawyers. One day Melvin Belli came into the store. He was well known in San Francisco because of the large legal awards he gained for clients in personal injury cases. He was known in the bookstore also because he had built up a large credit account. Virginia didn’t recognize him by name, but told him he had to pay his overdue bill in cash before he could do any more business in the store. The “King of Torts” laughed and paid off his bill.

Peter and Virginia, who had kept in touch through letters over the years, were married in 1965 in Encino. He was working for IBM as a Regional Manager of Manufacturing Marketing. Besides a new husband, Virginia also acquired Peter’s four children and thereby became the mother of six. Peter was the father of two sons, 12 and 11; and two daughters, eight and three.

Once the children grew up, Virginia attended CSUN and obtained her degree in 1977 in Speech Communication. Rather than working in speech, she served as an office nurse through 1980.

After living in the valley and Westlake Village for 55 years the Melitzes moved to University Village. Virginia now serves as chair of the Safety and Security Committee and works to get residents to slow down while driving on campus and to stop at the stop signs. Her work is dedicated to the safety of all.



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Celebrate Women’s Suffrage Centennial

By Barbara Warkentien



Elizabeth
Cady Stanton



Susan B. Anthony



Carrie Chapman
Catt



Alice Paul

Valor and Victory

“MR. PRESIDENT, HOW LONG MUST WE (WOMEN) WAIT FOR THE VOTE?”

For over 300 years, American women had been working and fighting right alongside men to create a civilization out of a wilderness and to establish and preserve a just nation. Still, women were denied the power of the vote to access the justice proclaimed in our country’s sacred founding documents. Now in early 1917, with World War I looming in the near future, women would again be asked to forget about Suffrage and give full support to the war. Who could blame Alice Paul for asking, “**MR. PRESIDENT, HOW LONG MUST WE (WOMEN) WAIT FOR THE VOTE?**”

The fault did not lie entirely with President Wilson, although he was not very supportive. Many factors kept American women from the polls including the law, religion, tradition, race, science, politics, economics and good old-fashioned power.

In establishing the new country, American men righted the wrongs applicable to them, but left intact laws pertaining to women and marriage. Essentially, married women had no legal status. They could not make contracts; their personal property, wages and even their children belonged to their husbands. Single women fared somewhat better. The clergy upheld the law by admonishing wives to “...submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” Traditions also kept women in their place—the home and children, while men dealt with the outside world of work and politics. Besides, women didn’t need the vote, for their husbands would always vote in their wives’ “best” interests. Furthermore, women had the treasured role of guiding young boys to become men of honor and young women to carry on the tradition of safe-guarding the home.

After the Civil War, women expected to be enfranchised along with the former slaves. Republican Northerners could accept black men voting, for the blacks would most likely vote with the north in gratitude for their freedom, but including women risked an uncertain outcome. As the country became industrialized, economics worked against women’s Suffrage. Women were already lobbying for safer working conditions and better pay for labor. Profits would not impact their vote. Science, too, chimed in to report that not only did women have smaller brains than men (what about short men?) but they didn’t have the energy to contemplate complicated ballot issues. (Hmmm, baking bread, washing clothes by hand, raising children didn’t require energy?) Even some women were against the vote: well-to-do ladies feared losing the courtesies and honors men gave them and working women feared retribution if they supported the vote. But the most vehement and powerful opposition was found in the Democratic and Republican parties. They feared women would vote their conscience and not the party line, thus weakening party power.

In spite of these constrictive forces, women acquired many rights. They even heard Horace Greeley’s advice as “Go West, Young Suffragists;” and by 1919, they had successfully gained the vote in all the Western states except New Mexico. The **EUREKA!** vote came in Nashville, Tennessee. When young Harry Burns voted “aye” on August 18, 1920, the 36th state had ratified the 19th Amendment. While men had to share power with voting women, they were right about a mother’s influence. Harry was only following his mother’s admonition “to be a good boy and vote yes” on the amendment.