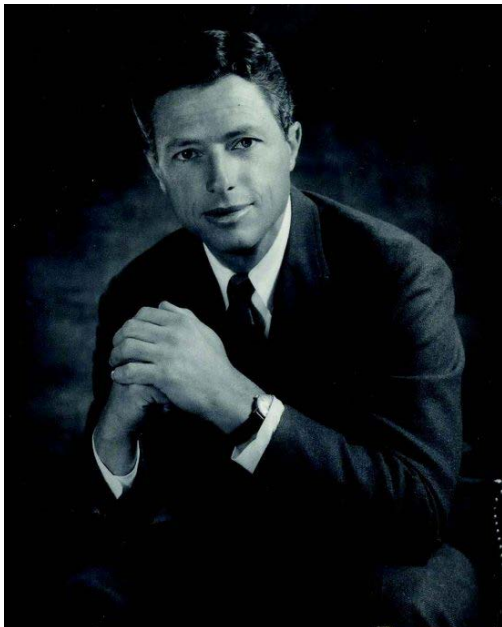


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## Walter Earle Cunha



Sept. 12, 1920 - Aug. 3, 2017

Goodbye Walter Earle Cunha: music man, military man, family man, businessman, and gentleman. You lightened the hearts of many throughout your life, which spanned nearly 97 years until you exited the stage. Son of Ella Mae McGovern and Walter Charles, younger brother of Jane Eileen. Berkeley was your hometown and that of your beloved CAL Bears, where you sold football programs as a boy.

Before graduating from Berkeley High School in 1938, your music career began with the violin, but your vocal talents as a "swooner" could not be denied. You appeared with Jimmie Howard's Orchestra at Oakland's Sweet's Ballroom and hotel venues in San Francisco including The Palace, St. Francis, Sir Francis Drake and the Mark Hopkins. Your singing career continued every weekend at the Claremont and Alameda Hotels until you joined up with Buddy Maleville's NBC Orchestra. A tour to South Lake Tahoe, State Line Country Club (now Harrah's) and Rio Del Mar (now Aptos) soon followed. Performing at the Rio Del Mar gave you "air time" Coast to Coast and landed you a regular Saturday night gig at the Hotel Del Monte, the West Coast's premier resort in Monterey, where Bob Hope and Bing Crosby were masters of ceremony. Faced with the dilemma of whether to tour the nation with the band or attend

college to further your education, you wrote to Bing Crosby (after finagling his address from a desk clerk), who advised in a written reply, "Go to school; the music will always be there. Don't pass up the opportunity to pursue a top-notch education."

So off to UC Berkeley you went and became engaged in the ROTC program. After graduation in 1944, you went to Officer Candidate School in Fort Benning, Georgia and achieved the rank of captain. Chinese language school followed, which was a bit wasted as you were eventually stationed in India. You stayed in touch with your Army buddies, who remained some of your closest friends. You all skied together in Switzerland and France into your early 80's.

After completing military service, you returned to Berkeley and Boalt School of Law for your next chapter. However, the lawyer track was unrealized upon meeting and marrying Mary Ellen Goepfert on July 31, 1948. Meg (d. 2003) was one of only five women in the class and a wise choice! A large family of six children followed and was predominantly raised in Orinda: Jim (Christine d. 2002), Anne (Dick Jacobberger), Paul (Carol), Stephen (Mary), Catherine Soso and Elizabeth (Fred Ehmke). As a father, you strongly encouraged us to do our best, used humor to make a point and set an example on how to live. You also welcomed 11 grandchildren: Maggie Jacobberger, Camille Wolfman, Katie Heaps, Kevin, Catherine, Rob, Jack, Alex, and Elaine Cunha, Carter and Grant Soso, and three great-grandchildren: Morgan Heaps, Connor Wolfman, and Riley Cunha.

When not changing diapers, you could be found on the ski slopes or on the golf course. Orinda Country Club membership fulfilled your volunteer inclination, where you served on various committees and for two years as President. You provided many members fun memories by producing "The Foolies" from 1963-1966. This vaudevillian spoof of life at the club and the community of Orinda was performed to packed audiences who roared with laughter and applause.

Your professional life was all about automobiles. A district manager position with the Pontiac Motor Division eventually led you to become a partner with Don Doten at his dealership in Berkeley. When Don moved on to open a dealership in Oakland, you became the owner of Cunha Pontiac on Telegraph Avenue for five years. Campus riots during the late 1960's and early 70's forced the doors to close. Involved with the Berkeley City Council you even had a bodyguard at one point. You completed your career teaming with Chris Maggini at his Chevrolet dealership in Berkeley.

Your later years had you often on the golf course, ski slopes (taking your last run at age 90) and back on stage with the Big Band of Rossmoor and at Lafayette's Stanley Middle School, where you quickly achieved icon status as "Mr. Plaid Pants" by singing your various favorites and Christmas songs for students and parents. "I still see him running around the room getting high fives from all of the kids. To them, he became a rock star," remembered Stanley Middle School music teacher Bob Athayde.

Your sense of fairness, humor, and integrity are your legacy. You never lost the ability to find joy in the

every day and to laugh at yourself. You were an exceptional role model on how to age gracefully and pass with dignity. We will hold a Celebration of Life on Friday, Sept. 22 ,10 a.m., Church of Santa Maria in Orinda, California, to honor your wonderful spirit your life well lived.

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