



Once Upon a Time at Fairyland

By C.J. Hirschfield

Working to live

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Earlier this year, Fairyland – and all of Oakland – lost one of our brightest lights. Susie Elkind had worked tirelessly and cheerfully to make her community a better place, and her life was cut much too short. She didn't ask for attention or credit, so her name may be unfamiliar to you.

But her life just may inspire you.

I knew many of Susie's family members decades before I ever met Susie herself. My ex-husband studied drama with her father at San Francisco State in the 1960s. I worked for Susie's aunt on a community newspaper in the 1980s. I met Susie's sister and nieces and nephews in the 1990s through a mothers' group organized by a mutual friend.

I finally met Susie at Oakland Rotary. I'm a member; Susie ran the office. Every Thursday I looked forward to seeing her warm smile and viewing new photos of her nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews.

And for years, every Tuesday morning Susie volunteered in Fairyland's gardens, where she was the uncontested queen of deadheading roses.

But here's the thing: Susie knew a million people from a million different worlds, so it had been only a matter of time before we connected. Sadly, it was much too short a time before we disconnected: On May 22 of this year, Susie died, peacefully, at her home.

In August, Fairyland was honored to host a celebration of Su-



Among many other things, Susie Elkind knew how to cut a wedding cake...

sie's life. The service was sweet, loving and often humorous, and it gave legions of friends and family members a chance to learn more about this unassuming lady who truly worked to live, and not the other way around.

Susie held a variety of interesting part-time jobs – among her many skills, she was a stellar copyeditor – so that she could seek out adventures both locally and abroad. Here at home, I frequently ran into Susie at the Berkeley Rep and the Aurora, where she was a volunteer usher. She regularly attended jazz, opera and dance performances. Trips to New York and London for arts events, and jaunts to more exotic destinations seemed to charge her batteries. She was a tap dancer and a die-hard Giants fan.

Susie's obituary observed that she had "stitched together a life full of 'small-world' stories," and many of them were shared

that night. Susie's sister, local writer Risa Nye, shared "Susie moments," suggesting that if we experience them, we should take notice and remember Susie.

I agree, and pass along some favorites:

You're experiencing a "Susie moment..."

When you have the opportunity to dance, and you dance.

When you describe what you had for lunch or dinner – using your hands.

When you pack more events into a weekend than seems possible, especially if you urge your friends to come along.

When you are the first to arrive at the party and the last to leave -- after helping with both setup and cleanup,

When you step up and cut the wedding cake, because no one else knows how to.

When you root for the home team, no matter what, year after year.

When you send a birthday card via snail mail.

When you come to stay as a house guest and take over the kitchen to make several meals that are enjoyed by all.

When Fairyland horticulturalist Jackie Salas and I visited Susie shortly before she died, we told her that we wanted to plant a special rose for her at Fairyland. She thought a while about which rose was her favorite, and finally chose "Double Delight," a fragrant and showy award winner. As soon as the weather cools down, we'll plant a "Double Delight" in the middle of our bed in front of our Chapel of Peace.

Appreciating the beauty of a rose and taking the time to smell it – that's definitely a Susie moment.

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