

Bartlett's News Briefs

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AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CRAB KING

90-year-old Andy Pappas prays for better days

BY JEAN BARTLETT



Jean Bartlett photo

Andy Pappas and Rebecca visit inside Andy's open garage, January 26, 2021.

"What so many of us need right now during this pandemic, and all the troubles of 2020 and 2021, is what I am lucky enough to have," Andy Pappas stated, "neighbors who look out for one another."

Andy has been a Pacifica resident since 1967. "That was the same year I married my beautiful wife Vivian. I still miss her, every day." (Vivian died in 2011 from the complications of Alzheimer's. Andy took care of Vivian at home throughout her illness. "One of the best and one of the hardest things I have ever done.")

Andy grew up in San Francisco's Mission District. His dad Steve was from Akrata, Greece and his mom Annie was from Itzehoe, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. Andy is the third of their four children.

"It's just me and my younger brother John now. John's a kid. He'll be 90 this year. I'll be 91 on February 24. I'm a Pisces, ladies!" Andy let go of one his famous one-syllable laughs.

The first time Pacifica's legendary Crab King fished Pacifica was in 1957, when the city incorporated. That was in front of Nick's Restaurant, one of his favorite places to fish. When the Rev. Herschell Harkins Memorial Pier, aka the Pacifica Municipal Pier, opened in 1973, Andy pulled up a chair and started crabbing. He's been crabbing, cooking crab, crab advising and chatting while crabbing, just about all the years since. That's how he got his nickname. He's also caught salmon off the Pier, with several of his 30-plus-pound-catches earning him multiple photo ops in his hometown-paper.

"I don't fish like I used to, but I still drive there and take in the view. We live in one of the prettiest places on the planet."

Andy said that when he wakes up every morning, he thinks about the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's a horrible situation. I feel so sorry for the people who passed on because of it and I feel sorry for their families. Every morning I say a prayer for them, and a prayer to please help anyone who has it and to help that person's family and friends. I think our new President, Biden, will do a nice job and he'll help us get through it. I also pray for our first responders: nurses, doctors, all medical caregivers, our teachers and anyone who works in an essential business. They are putting their lives on the line for the rest of us."

Andy, whose scenic Pacifica backyard offers the best place in town for signage, has a banner up to thank first responders. He said one of the best things we can do to say "thank you" is to follow the rules: wear a mask, stay socially distant and do regular hand washing.

He misses neighbors coming by and pulling up the chair next to him when he sits in his driveway—though they certainly still wave and shout "Hello Andy!" as evidenced during this interview. Andy also misses visits with his brother John.

"He lives in Belmont. I haven't seen him since last March, but we talk three or four times a month."

He misses seeing his nephew Jim, a longtime crab-fishing partner who only lives a few blocks away.

"I worry for our businesses. I miss going into Nick's. I miss sitting at one of their tables and talking to the great people who work there. And I miss their food, which is always outstanding. I miss sitting at a table in the Vallemar Station. It's a wonderful place. And I'm so sorry that this pandemic has closed the Devil's Slide Taproom. It was such a good restaurant and the family that ran it was tops.

"Like most people, I worry that I can survive this pandemic. I also worry that it is not going to get any better for a long time."

One of Andy's neighbors, a retired nurse, put Andy's name on the online waiting list for vaccines.

"I have Kaiser. They don't have enough vaccine yet. Nobody has enough vaccine in this area. But I'll tell you, as soon as they do I will be at the ready to do my duty and then, when it's time, I'll get right back in line to get my second vaccination as well."

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The Korean War veteran talked about his neighbors.

"My neighbor across the street – she's the retired nurse – she is a good neighbor...like State Farm!" Andy laughed, referring to the insurance company's jingle. "She calls me every day to see how I am doing. Once in a while, with all the proper precautions in place, I go over to her house for a Bloody Mary."

"My neighbor next door is Greek. She brings me delicious soup. It's the chicken soup that my dad used to make, Avgolemono. I absolutely love it and it brings back memories. I've got a number of neighbors that bring over treats and one of my neighbors just placed this colorful streamer over my garage. It's cheery. People can think of a lot of things to put a smile on someone's face. That's what we need right now. We need neighbors looking out for each other and cheering each other up."

Andy is also thankful for his buddy, Pacifica-based realtor Pete Lommori, who has sent him so many "wonderful surprises" over the years. Recently Pete sent Andy "the most delicious cheesecake!" Andy said he's got some friends that used to live in Pacifica that moved to Orangevale, and they send him packages that might include six dozen homemade cookies. He additionally wanted to give thanks to the Pacifica Resource Center, a local social services organization.

"Direct to my door, they bring fresh vegetables and canned soup, spaghetti, apples, pears, canned tuna fish, milk and eggs. I love the PRC. They do so much good in this town. And I can't forget my mailman. He works hard and he goes the extra mile. He is a great human being."

Andy said he has days when he doesn't feel good. He might even stay in bed for a couple of days. But it's not because he's sick.

"It's because I'm 90! My energy is not what it used to be. But then I'm back up. Today, after this interview, I am heading to Safeway. But first I'm going to the Dollar Tree. They are both right there in the Fairmont Shopping Center. Every time I go into the Dollar Tree, I've got a buddy that works there and she always gives me a big friendly hello and says, 'Andy, I've missed you!' Making someone feel good – we can all use that and we can all do that."

Andy had a health scare right before California's March 2020 lockdown. He had an enormous cyst on the right side of his face. Though it wasn't cancerous, they couldn't get it all at once and had to treat it with radiation.

"I'm grateful that I'm doing okay. I'm grateful that I can still drive. I'm grateful that I can still order a Mortadella sandwich on a sourdough roll with everything on it, at Colombo's here in town, and then drive over to the Pacifica Pier and enjoy the view. I also drive up to Mussel Rock and meditate on all of the people I've been lucky enough to know and love.

"I'm also so grateful for my two cats. If it wasn't for them, I'd be lost. I got Honey Girl not long after Vivian died and she has been a godsend. She's my indoor buddy. Rebecca just showed up one day, like a miracle. She's my outdoor kitty. She comes running for meals and pats. She eats like a horse!

"I am taking care of myself the best way I know. I am following the rules. I think the rules will help us all take care of ourselves and each other, so we can love each other in person again."



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also an award-winning children's book author, a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and the author of two historical biography books on some of the more than 370,000 interred at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma.