

**The Hon. Quentin L. Kopp (Ret.) ~ Fun and informative, this California history maker is from Syracuse ([page 1](#))**

Author: Jean Bartlett ([www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com))

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## The Hon. Quentin L. Kopp (Ret.) ~ An interview

Fun and informative, this California history maker is from Syracuse

Written by Jean Bartlett, August 23, 2021

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The first time I met The Hon. Quentin L. Kopp (Ret.) was on September 12, 2010. It was in San Mateo County Courtroom A and the retired judge was playing Judge George Buck in a San Mateo County Historical Association production of "The Strange Case of Constance Flood." The play, written by Joan Levy and based on the book by Willa Okker Iverson, tells the true story of the controversial case of Constance Flood Gavin – a case which took place in 1931 (in the very same court room as the 2010 theater piece). Constance Flood Gavin petitioned the court to recognize her as the daughter of the late James Leary Flood. James L. Flood was the son of 19th century silver baron James Clair Flood and when James L. died in 1926, he left behind a fortune. The details of the case were as jaw-dropping to the public then as they were in 2010, especially because the public was on the side of Constance. Judge George Buck, who sided with the unpleasant widow of James L. Flood, halted the case mid-trial and demanded the jury find against Constance's claim. This was after he allowed witness Eudora Forde Willette—a scandalous windbag purported to be the mother of Constance—to ramble away on the stand in order to prejudice the jury against any claim by Constance. What was factually true was that in his lifetime, James L. Flood publically acknowledged Constance as his illegitimate daughter, and in fact, Constance was raised by James L. and his first wife Marie Rose Flood as a Flood child. When Marie Rose died in 1899, James L. married Marie's younger sister Maude. Under the maternal tutelage of Maude, Constance was promptly sent away to live in a convent and to never again be acknowledged by James L., other than she received a monthly allowance for her education.

I was reviewing the play for the *Pacifica Tribune* and the late, great Pacifican Surrey Blackburn played the indecorous Eudora. She was brilliant! As Judge Buck, Quentin Kopp was gleefully devious as he squashed the evidence that supported the claim of Constance. He was booed by the courtroom theater goers, just like Judge Buck was booed by the 1931 courtroom attendees. (Judge Buck's mishandling of the case ended his career.) I titled the article: "*Quentin Kopp and Pacifican Surrey Blackburn level the California justice system,*" After the play, both Quentin and Surrey were surrounded by theater goers, including me, who shook their hands and sang their praises. Quentin is still a member of the [San Mateo County Historical Association](#) and the Association's History Museum is located in the former, 1910-built, San Mateo County Courthouse.

After that 2010 encounter, I came across the retired judge several more times, all at [Mazzetti's Bakery](#) in Pacifica. For the past 30 years, Quentin has done a daily swim in San Francisco at the Olympic Club or at City College. Often on Mondays, this is pre-pandemic times, he would swim at City College and then head to Mazzetti's. He sat at his own table with his newspaper. Behind his back, was a table loaded with Mazzetti regulars. That table met over coffee and baked goods daily to shoot the breeze. Constantly they included him in their conversation, ribbing him about his too-good-for-them ways. He always responded, without turning around, a false curmudgeon – turns out the regulars all like him and vice versa. They even exchanged phone numbers. For my part, back in the day when I asked a weekly question on the street for the *Pacifica Tribune* called "Bartlett's Bullets," and for which I headed to locales all over Pacifica, I

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always knew I could count on the Mazzetti regulars, no matter the day, to answer that week's question. Several times over the years, Quentin was enjoying his coffee and his paper at Mazzetti's, and somewhat ignoring the back table of shenanigan-makers, when I stopped in with my camera and notepad. Would he mind answering? No he wouldn't. He thought on the question, gave a quote and smiled for the camera. Several of these questions and quotes, which ran in the *Pacifica Tribune*, are included here.

Asked March 3, 2014: *Do Americans work too much?*

Quentin Kopp: *No. People have an exaggerated sense of nonworking time, including retirement. Working keeps the brain healthy.*

Asked January 5, 2014: *What message would you like to send to Congress at the start of 2015?*

Quentin Kopp: *I would advise Congress to stop wasting time and political strength by trying to repeal entirely Obamacare. I would enact bills, direct or otherwise change its worst provisions – like penalizing people for not obtaining coverage. I would also enact legislation to reverse or amend every illegal, unconstitutional executive order Obama has issued to prove the point that a President cannot enact a law by claiming he can effectuate a policy through Executive Order without Congressional approval.*



(Jean Bartlett photo)

**Quentin Kopp, playing but not looking like, notorious-jerk Judge George Buck, and Surrey Blackburn, still in character as lying blowhard Eudora Forde Willette, in the 2010, San Mateo County Historical Association's production of: "The Strange Case of Constance Flood."**

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Before stretching back to Quentin's earliest days, here is a brief look at his résumé to date: Korean War veteran; trial lawyer; San Francisco Supervisor, first elected in November 1971, re-elected four times thereafter, served through November 30, 1986. Was President of the Board in 1976, 1977, 1978 and 1982.

"We were elected at large," the retired judge elucidated regarding his time as a San Francisco Supervisor.

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"There was a brief two-year period of district elections when I represented West Portal, Lakeshore Acres, Merced Manor, St. Francis Wood and Forest Hill. After the assassination of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk on November 27, 1978, we mounted an initiative to end district election of supervisors and restore the election to at large, with six seats one year, and two years later, five seats. That passed and remained that way until 1986 when I left the Board of Supervisors after my election as a State Senator." (During his time as a San Francisco Supervisor, he additionally ran for Mayor of San Francisco against Dianne Feinstein in a runoff election. He finished second.)

As the first non-incumbent, Independent candidate elected to the California Senate since 1878, Quentin served three terms as a California State Senator – from December 1, 1986 through December 7, 1998. He served California's 8th Senatorial District. He hosted a weekly radio program, every Sunday night on KGO-AM, for ten years until 1992. He was the founder and chairman of the Bay Area Super Bowl Task Force which brought Super Bowl XIX to Stanford Stadium in January 1985. He was appointed to the San Mateo Superior Court on January 1, 1999 by Governor Pete Wilson and retired from the bench, at the age of 75, on January 31, 2004. Retirement? That doesn't seem right.

"Well, it wasn't complete retirement," he relayed readily, "because I was eligible for the Assigned Judges Program of the California Judicial Council. This program was established under the California Constitution and the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court administers it. There are about 350 retired judges in the program and it consists of assignments to courts which need a judge because of a vacancy, or illness or some other reason. I stayed in my own courtroom, predominantly, for five years, thus serving a total of ten years as a Superior Court Judge."

Except for vacations, which were his own choosing to take, the Superior Court Judge was on assignment every day. When not serving in San Mateo County, he had intermittent assignments which took him to Superior Courts in the following California counties: San Diego, Los Angeles, Humboldt, Sonoma, Napa and Santa Cruz. Married, the father of three and the grandfather of four, Quentin is not yet retired. He still writes his monthly column, "Ruminations of a Former Citizen Supervisor," which runs in three San Francisco newspapers: the *Westside Observer*, the *Sunset Beacon* and the *Richmond Review*. He has written his column for more than 10 years. He also keeps a law office on West Portal Avenue in San Francisco and is there daily, Monday through Friday. From there he works primarily as a rainmaker, meaning he brings new business to others. "I get the clients. They do the work!" He is also "of counsel" to four lawyers in a small firm started by his late friend Fred Furth, a noted antitrust attorney and philanthropist. In addition, he: works as a lobbyist on land development projects for a Connecticut firm called Republic Group, served as the head of the California High Speed Rail Project, fought to have the San Francisco BART (Bay Area Regional Transit) system include service to the San Francisco International Airport, and is the President and Chairman of the Board of the Korean War Memorial Foundation. In 1998, CA State Highway Route 380 in San Mateo County became officially known as the Quentin L. Kopp Freeway. A longtime member of Congregation Beth Israel Judea on Brotherhood Way, this California history maker from Syracuse, New York turned 93 the day after our interview.

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Quentin Lewis Kopp was born on August 11, 1928 in Syracuse, New York to Shepard Sanford Kopp and Gertrude (Shulman) Kopp. Gertrude was born in Binghamton, NY, on June 25, 1900 to Jacob and Sarah Shulman. She was the eldest of five: Gertrude, Louise, Edythe, Albert and Harold.

"My mother never went to college," Quentin said, "nor did her two younger sisters. She had to leave high school after her junior year so she could earn money to pay for the college and medical school education of her two younger brothers. She was an excellent typist and stenographer and was hired by the richest man in Binghamton, Willis Sharpe Kilmer." (Willis Sharpe Kilmer was a patent medicine manufacturer, newspaperman, horse breeder and entrepreneur.)

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"Mr. Kilmer became wealthy through dissemination of Kilmer's (Swamp) Root Tonic." Quentin stopped to chuckle. "Mr. Kilmer had a large estate along the Susquehanna River on Riverside Drive in Binghamton. It was a good job and my mother was a good worker.

"She was tall for that time, five foot seven, and my father was only five foot eight. How tall am I? I was six foot three and now am six foot one and a half. They met at a party in Syracuse. Syracuse was about two and a half times larger in population than Binghamton. They were married on her birthday in 1925."

Born in 1897, Quentin's father was from what is now Belarus, a landlocked country bordered by Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest, Russia to the north and east, Ukraine to the south, and Poland to the west. It was then part of Russia. He was the youngest of six children and his family lived in a shtetl devoted to farming.

"My father, Shepard Kopp, immigrated legally to the United States, through Ellis Island, in 1912 when he was 15 years old. He followed in the footsteps of his oldest brother, whose name was Harold H. Kopp. 'Kopp' was a shortening of the family's original name, Koppolovitch. My dad also had a sister who lived in or near metropolitan New York. In addition, he had another brother who immigrated to New York. His name was Yonkel which he anglicized to James. He also changed his last name to Koeppel. Everyone else stuck with Kopp.

"After settling in Brooklyn with his oldest brother, my father went to high school, learned to speak English and in 1915, enrolled in the Brooklyn College of Pharmacy which was part of Long Island University. It was a two-year course then. Now it is six years. He graduated in the spring of 1917 and by June 1, he was enlisted in the United States Army."

On April 4, 1917, the U.S. Senate voted in support of the measure to declare war on Germany. The House concurred two days later.

"My father was assigned to a hospital unit and went to France with the first contingent of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe. He served in France under General John J. Pershing (Black Jack Pershing) who was the Commander of the AEF on the Western Front. In France my father was naturalized as a U.S. Citizen.



"It was in France that my father became friends with Quentin Roosevelt, a pilot in the United States Army Air Service."

Born on November 19, 1897, Quentin Roosevelt was the youngest child of Theodore and Edith Roosevelt. While attending Harvard, the young Roosevelt dropped out to join the United States Army Air Service where he became a pursuit pilot. He was killed in aerial combat over France on Bastille Day, July 14, 1918. He is the only child of a U.S. President to be killed in combat. He is buried at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in France, and along with being awarded the Purple Heart posthumously, he was also granted a degree from Harvard in 1919, the year he would have graduated with his class. For WWI soldier Shepard Kopp, the only thing that mattered was that he had lost his friend.

← 1917. Army Air Service Lt. Quentin Roosevelt. Photo by New York National Guard taken at Saratoga Springs, NY.

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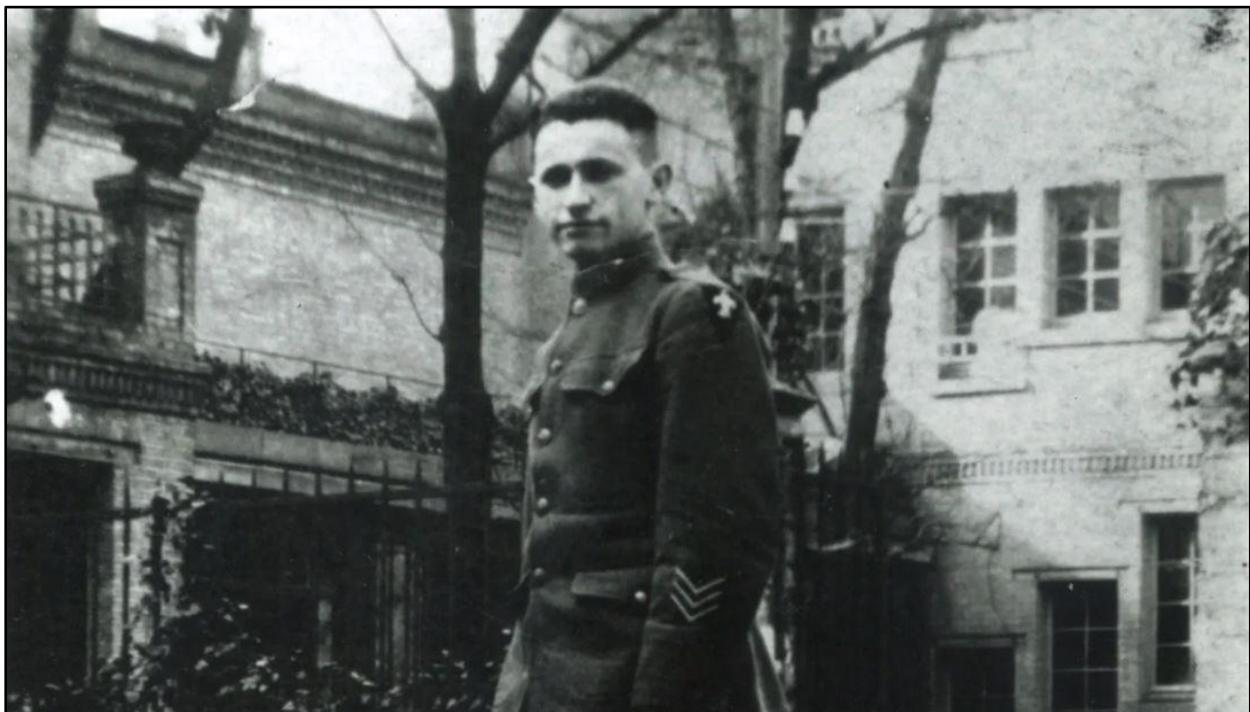
"Jewish custom and tradition requires naming a child after someone who is dead and that was the origin of my being named, Quentin." (Quentin is the modern form of the Roman family name Quintus. It is of Latin origin and means "fifth.")

After the War ended on November 11, 1918, Shepard Kopp was one of one hundred soldiers selected to be with the American Mission to Armenia led by Major General James G. Harbord, U.S. Army, and Brigadier General George Van Horn Moseley, U.S. Army.

"The three-month mission was devoted to investigating reports of an Armenian genocide perpetrated by the Turks," Quentin explained. "My dad was chosen because he could still speak Russian and if it was necessary to communicate with either Armenians or Turks, they were more likely to speak Russian than English and my dad would be able to translate. At one point, half the detail was captured by Turkish brigands who thought the soldiers were Armenians. My father secured their release after discreetly revealing that he was circumcised and, therefore, couldn't be Armenian. The investigation concluded the genocide reports were genuine. More than one million Armenians were massacred by the Turks in both Turkish Armenia and Russian Armenia.

"Now just before this event happened with the Turkish brigands, my dad was a corporal, two stripes. One night he had too much to drink and he slept through Reveille. He was supposed to head out that morning with the first contingent, which was under the command of General Harbord. He missed it and his stripes were torn off. He was back to being a buck private. However, it was when my father left with that second contingent, which was under the command of General Mosely, that they came upon the Turkish brigands, and General Mosely never forgot my father's actions which allowed the Americans to pass. My father's stripes were restored.

"As to General Moseley, after his retirement from the U.S. Army in 1938, he became a Nazi sympathizer. My dad and he had corresponded for some time, I believe right up until Pearl Harbor, and my dad would write, 'Why do you believe this?'"



**Shepard Sanford Kopp, WWI, American Expeditionary Forces, 1917. Photo courtesy of the Kopp Family.**

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In the spring of 1919, Corporal Shepard Kopp was discharged and he returned home to open a drugstore.

"When I was born, my parents lived on South Beach Street in an upstairs flat that is close to the Syracuse University Campus. During my mother's pregnancy with me, my mother spent the last five or six months of her pregnancy in bed. This was due to her suffering two miscarriages before I was born. Twenty months after I was born, my sister Vivian came along in 1930. Vivian is very bright. She graduated from high school at 16, went to UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) and then transferred to Smith College in Massachusetts and graduated in 1950. Now a widow, she lives in Los Angeles where my wife and I will be tomorrow celebrating my birthday." (This interview transpired on August 10, 2021.)

"When I was about 4, we moved to another flat in Syracuse that was on the corner of Allen Street and Lexington. When I was 7, we moved to 123 Lincoln Park Drive. At that time I was in the third grade at Lincoln School which doesn't exist anymore. We lived there for five years until 1940, when my father bought a new drugstore at the corner of East Fayette Street and Croly Street, and he bought a house at 368 Bruce Street. My parents remained on Bruce Street until 1957, when my father sold his last drugstore in Solvay, New York, and they moved to Los Angeles."

Shepard Kopp enrolled his son in kindergarten when Quentin was 4 years of age.

"My dad would tell the kindergarten teacher that he would bring my birth certificate the next day and the next day and the next day," Quentin smiled at the recollection, "and the teacher gave up because I was able to perform as a kindergarten student should."

Naturally sociable and proud of his military service, Shepard Kopp was very active in veteran affairs.

"He was Commander of his VFW Post. He was County Commander and then he was District Commander which was three counties. As a family we were involved in veteran activities. My mother was a member of the VFW Auxiliary. I remember being in Boston when I was 9 or 10 and marching in the VFW parade with my father. The VFW had its national convention in Boston and I was thrilled to have a part in it.

"My parents were community doers and they inculcated me with that. Besides being in the VFW Auxiliary, my mother was the President of the National Council of Jewish Women in Syracuse. She was President of the Board of the Onondaga County Tuberculosis Sanitarium, which was quite an important agency at the time. She was always active in local civic affairs.

"My parents were Democrats and they were involved in local politics. In 1935, when my father was 38, he was induced to run as candidate for Treasurer of Onondaga County."

Quentin's father spent about \$200 of his own money for his campaign with the understanding that the party would raise money for him. Unbeknownst to him, those with the money actually had another Democrat in mind to win the ticket. "My father was the sacrificial lamb. He didn't win but he pulled in more votes, from the top of the ticket, than anyone expected." As it turns out, however, there was a complete distraction for Quentin's parents on Election Day. Quentin got sick.

"I remember I was in bed and my mother kept coming in and out of the room. She was obviously upset and I heard her crying in the evening."

Seven-year-old Quentin was diagnosed with what was then called "infantile paralysis," an old synonym for "polio." He had it in both arms and both legs. There wasn't a cure for it. The most successful treatments for it would come along later in the 1930s. Developed by Australian and self-taught nurse Elizabeth Kenny, her treatments—initially jeered by the orthopedic community and then lauded—used a combination of warm moist packs, massage and exercise to prevent muscle tightening and paralysis.

"I was treated at Syracuse City Hospital with a spinal tap under ether. Altogether I had two maybe three spinal taps. I was extremely interested in sports – baseball, football and basketball. And for about a year I believe it affected my speed. There were a couple of other kids in the neighborhood who also got it. My parents were really worried and there was a school nearby, Percy Hughes School, for kids with special needs. You'd see kids at the school with their leg or legs in braces. I do remember being interviewed to attend that school but I didn't go. I remained at Lincoln Elementary. After that year, there were no lingering effects. I was lucky."

When he was about 11 and a half, he went to work after school at his father's drugstore.

"That is my not-so-favorite memory of childhood," he laughed. "I had to walk about a mile and a half to the drugstore. Up until then, when I came home from school we'd play football or baseball in the street. If we found a gym, we'd play basketball. In the spring it was tennis. We'd go ice skating in the winter. At my dad's store, I unpacked cartons and swept the floors. I was always washing the display window. My sister worked there as well. She started two years after I did, same age as when I started.

"When we moved from Lincoln to Bruce Street, our home was just a block from the drugstore. That became an advantage in high school because drugstores had soda fountains and they were the place where high school students congregated after school or after a dance. It was a social mecca." (As an aside, Quentin was 16 when he graduated from high school. The early kindergartner also skipped half a year of fourth grade.)

Quentin recalled his short escapade with varsity football in his senior year of high school. He was then, six foot two and 160 pounds. He noted that being a year and a half younger than his classmates had some disadvantages both physically and socially.

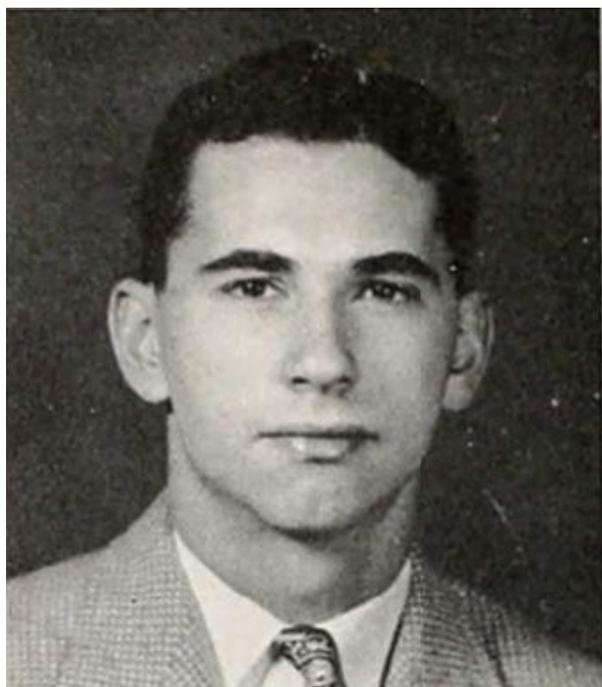
"A buddy of mine persuaded me to go out for the team. But instead of playing end, I played guard because there were too many players ahead of me. Playing football meant I wasn't available to work in the store after school, though I could still work after dinner for a couple of hours. After the third game my father said to me, 'You are not getting into the game. You are wasting your time. You quit and you start working after school. So I did. Even when it was a social mecca, somehow I always objected to working at that store.'

How were things for Quentin and his family during the Second World War and for that matter, during the Depression?

"During the Depression we always had food on the table, plenty of clothes and a roof over our head. However, my father did lose a great deal of money in the stock market crash which was why we always rented until my parents bought their first home in 1940. But we were never not comfortable. During the Second World War, just like everyone, we followed all the news we could on the radio. My Aunt Edythe's husband Leonard planted a victory garden in our backyard and also tended it. I was too young for the military but I had a cousin in the armored division of the Army, another in the Coast Guard and one in the Air Corps. My mother's brothers—who both went to Syracuse University and then to Syracuse University Medical School—served in the Army as doctors. And there was a lot of talk at the soda fountain. Guys four, five and six years older than me were leaving town, going into the service. I wrote a lot of correspondence.

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When Quentin was a kid, he wanted to be a sports announcer.



**Quentin Kopp, Dartmouth College, 1949, graduation photo.**

"I got a catalog from the University of New Hampshire which had a radio school. But my parents wanted me to be a doctor, like my mom's brothers."

The retired judge vividly remembers the time his dad came to his high school, William T. Nottingham Senior High School, in support of that dream of Quentin becoming a doctor.

"The high school used to have a printing class, which was easy, and I took it in tenth grade and I could take it again in eleventh grade. My father came to the school one afternoon, which was unusual because he was in the drugstore seven days a week. He went to the principal's office and said, 'I want him out of printing class and into physics.' Because physics, along with biology and chemistry, was a prerequisite for med school. So Principal Harold Coon came to the printing class and just said, 'You are coming with me.' My father was there with him and they took me over to physics so I could take physics and get a 'D' in it. Ha! Ha! I had no interest in it. I was satisfactory in chemistry and probably a

C student in biology. My best subjects were history, English and Latin. I took Latin for two and a half years and took Spanish as a romance language. At Dartmouth, initially with a pre-med major in mind, biology and chemistry continued, along with another D in physics and a D in comparative anatomy!"

When Quentin was a junior at Dartmouth, he decided to pursue law and began applying to law schools. There were some law schools that would admit juniors and by that time, he was able to persuade his parents that he was not going to be a doctor. He was accepted into the University of Virginia School of Law, but was dissuaded from going there by his government teacher who said it was a school for the sons of rich politicians. He also applied to Columbia Law School and Stanford Law School. In the meantime, between the summer of his third year at Dartmouth and the beginning of his fourth, he spent the summer working in Los Angeles on a construction project on Pico Boulevard.

"This was the summer of 1948. I drove to California with some Dartmouth undergraduates and got dropped off in San Francisco. I didn't really see San Francisco. I was on my way to the construction job in Los Angeles. I hitchhiked to Los Angeles. You could do that then. I stayed with my aunt and uncle—this was my dad's eldest brother Harold—for half the summer, and my cousin Hermione and her husband for the other half."

This wasn't Quentin's first job outside of his dad's drugstore. In 1946, he got a job at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital. He waited tables in the nurses' dining room. He was the youngest Dartmouth student working there at the time. Most of the others were returned WWII veterans. Hearing their stories of the War had a great impact on the 18-year-old. "I would just sit and listen with my mouth agape." In the summer of 1947, he worked as a bus boy at the Dartmouth Outing Club House. "It was like a lodge and the work was strictly seasonal: June, July and August."

His California summer job in 1948 was not his first visit to California.

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"In 1940, when I was almost 12, my father, sister and I drove to Los Angeles to see my aunt and uncle. The way my father drove, and he would drive all night – seeing was believing! His favorite drink was a rye whiskey called PM. He would keep it in the glove compartment and had a theory that that would keep him sharp to drive! So every couple of hours, he would pull it out and have a swig! The next time I was in California was June of 1947. My sister finished her freshman year at UCLA, and my father and I drove to get her and then drove back to Syracuse.

"When I came back to the East Coast in 1948 after working construction, I got a letter of acceptance from Stanford Law School. I thought about going, but it was formidable to turn around and go back. I got a letter from the Dean at Columbia. He told me to reapply the next year. My father's idea was that I should go to Tuck Business School at Dartmouth and then go to Law School because then I would have everything I needed to be successful! I disliked Tuck School and my grades showed it, except for marketing, I got an A in marketing. I left Tuck and graduated from Dartmouth with a major in government."

Graduating with honors, he was a Rufus Choate Scholar. He applied to Columbia Law School, Yale and Harvard. He was wait-listed at Harvard, turned down by Yale and accepted by Columbia.



Quentin Kopp, front center, 1949, Rufus Choate Scholar, Dartmouth College.

"Tuition at Columbia was \$600 and I was awarded a \$200 tuition scholarship. I had a room in John Jay Hall."

It was September of 1949 and Quentin was getting ready to leave for New York City. His cousin Bobby, his cousin Hermione's brother, was out from California on a business trip to Montreal. He stopped to see his Uncle Shepard and Aunt Gertrude in Syracuse.

"My cousin Bobby was a genius and very successful. He was Phi Beta Kappa at Columbia. He was on the Harvard Law Review. He was a finalist in the Ames Moot Court Competition. My cousin Hermione is also a genius and very successful. But back in 1949, Bobby happened to stop by the day the mail arrived with an acceptance for me from Harvard. And Bobby said to me, 'You've got to go to Harvard. You want

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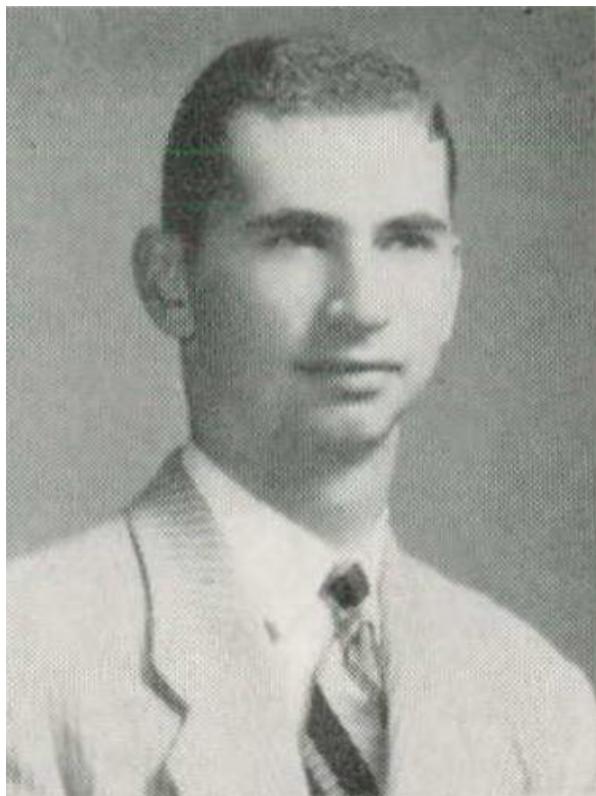
to live in California. You want to practice law in California with California lawyers and they don't know Columbia in California. But they know Harvard.'

"'But I've got a \$200 scholarship to Columbia,' I told him. 'I'll give you \$200,' he said, 'and then you'll qualify for a scholarship your second and third year.' And so I went to Harvard but I didn't qualify for that scholarship either the second or third year. At the end of my first year, I finished probably in the low 50 in a class of 500. I came back the second year and jumped about 200 places in the class and finished in the middle and the third year, I didn't do as well but better than the first year. But my cousin gave me the \$200 every year. Fifteen years later when his son, Robert E. Kopp, Jr., went to Harvard Law School, I gave him \$200 every year towards the tuition. As to my Harvard Law School education, it was first rate."

At Harvard, Quentin was in the Chancery Club and the Blackstone Club.

"The Chancery Club was a social club, eating and drinking. As to the Blackstone Club, Harvard Law School had a system of dividing clubs for the Ames Moot Court Competition in which you argued appeals before three judges and lawyers who would volunteer their time to do that. Each club had a faculty member as an advisor. I joined Blackstone Club. The Club had eight members and our advisor was Professor Mark De Wolfe Howe, whose brother was Quincy Howe." (An American journalist and commentator, Quincy Howe was best known for his CBS radio broadcasts during World War II.)

On June 25, 1950, North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel, invading South Korea. On June 27, 1950, in response to a call for aid from the United Nations Security Council, President Harry S. Truman ordered the U.S. military to aid South Korea in repulsing an invasion from North Korea.



"I was almost drafted because I was 1-A (available, fit for general military service) when I should have been 1-A-S for student, which made you exempt until you graduated from either college or graduate school. I got a summons with two other classmates to report to the Boston Army Base for a physical. I passed everything and so did one of my two companions. The other was a wise guy from Newark, New Jersey. The last station was two doctors who would look at all the results and then say, 'Is there any reason why you shouldn't see service?' And you'd say, 'No.' But he said, 'Yes.' One of the doctors said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'No guts.' Ha! Ha!

"I passed everything and called my mother and said, 'Everybody except me is 1-A-S.' Draft Boards consisted of three people who volunteered and the Chairman of our Draft Board in Syracuse was a liquor store owner who my parents knew. So my mother called him and my 1-A was changed to a 1-A-S. So I finished law school and towards the end of the semester in 1952, in about April, I learned about an Air Force Program which gave you a direct commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Office of

Special Investigations. I went out to the field, north of Boston, went through a physical and answered questions, and in May I was commissioned and it was signed by President Harry Truman. You had to wait until you were ordered to active duty.

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"Many of us from Harvard went to Washington DC. It had the first bar examination in the third or fourth week of June and there were at least 50 of us there, and this same fellow who said, 'No guts' – he and I, and a third classmate found a room which had three beds. So we stayed there and it was close to George Washington University Law School and we took a Bar Review course taught by a husband and wife for three weeks. Then we took the DC Bar Exam which was three days. It was different. It was short answer questions, not essay, like California. But it was hard. Then I was called to active duty in August and told to report to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base outside of Dayton, Ohio in a town called Fairborn."

The base was named to honor the contributions to flight by brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright, whose flight experiments and later flight school became the location of the Air Force Base. "Patterson" is for First Lieutenant Frank Stuart Patterson. He was killed in a plane crash at Wilbur Wright Field in 1918, testing the newly installed synchronized machine gun on a DH-4 biplane.

"After I was sworn in, I took a train to Dayton and then there was a bus that took you to the base. There were about six people from the law school, about five from my class and one fellow in the class ahead of us. After a few weeks in the bachelor officer quarters, we got permission to move off the base and we moved to a terrific place on the road to Dayton. The base had a gym, an indoor swimming pool and an outdoor swimming pool. There were graduates of Tuck School there as well, because this was a branch in the Air Force called the Air Materiel Command, like a Quartermaster Corps in the Army. So all these business school graduates from Dartmouth, about six of them, were stationed there."

At the end of September, the Bar Exam results were published.

"I passed. You could apply then to transfer to the Judge Advocate General Court (JAG). I applied. I was accepted and was then sent to a 90-day training school outside of Montgomery, Alabama—Maxwell Air Force Base—which had all the Air Force special schools. We had about 40 Air Force lawyers, all the same as I was. That was a three-month course, learning the Uniform Code of Military Justice and some other things. You went out on the firing range and had a bivouac (improvised camp site/shelter). Then at the end of it, you could make a request for where you'd be stationed. I wanted to be stationed in Europe. Ha! Ha! My second choice was Iceland because I had an older friend who was stationed there in WWII. Instead I was ordered to McClellan Air Force Base outside of Sacramento. I had never been to Sacramento."

This time, Quentin drove to California and he did so in his new, two-door Plymouth sedan. He got it for \$600 from a friend of his dad's who had a Plymouth Dealership in Norwich, NY. He was stationed at McClellan for about a year.

"I prosecuted and defended court martial cases. You get selected to do one or the other. In 1954, I was transferred to Tinker Air Force Base outside of Oklahoma City. There I prosecuted felonies and defended misdemeanors. In Uniform Code of Military Justice jargon, felonies are called a general court martial and misdemeanors are called a special court martial. It was interesting.

"Another lawyer, Jim McCullough from Washington DC and a Georgetown Law School graduate, was also sent to Tinker Air Force Base. He and I got permission to move off base. We had a housing allowance of probably \$120 a month and we found a two-bedroom house. Jim would be the defense counsel on the general court martials and he would be the prosecutor on the special court martials, and vice versa for me.

"People disparage the military judicial system. I don't know its current state, but I thought it was excellent. You are getting paid to get experience trying cases and fulfilling your Selective Service requirement and you are defending someone or prosecuting someone. And those cases wouldn't be filed unless the prosecutor was reasonably sure of a conviction. So acquittals were seldom. The courts

consisted of three people. Say a lieutenant colonel would be the presiding court martial judge, and you would have one enlisted man and you would have a lieutenant, and you had to get a unanimous three-to-zero verdict. I got only one acquittal. In fact, the entire eight months I was there I think that was the only acquittal. It was a special court martial of an airman who was a guard in the stockade. He was accused of allowing a prisoner to escape. By that time, a fellow who was a year behind me at Harvard Law School, whom I had never known and who was smarter, was stationed at Tinker Air Force Base. He was from Los Angeles. On this special court martial he became my assistant counsel. His name was Ken Karst. He later became a professor at UCLA School of Law. I had a hangover when that case started. I had gone out the night before. Ha! He just shook his head when he saw me the next day.

"Before the trial started, I found the prisoner. He had been captured and was at some stockade at a base in Tennessee. I figured I would get him transported back as a witness. So they brought him to the phone. 'How did you do this?' I asked.

"The prisoner told me he had asked for permission to go to the bathroom and that my client was standing 'over there' in a spot watching him. The prisoner said he waited until, 'Your client was looking the other way. He never saw me leave.' I got an acquittal.

"I was discharged in 1954 and then I went to work against the mob!"



Well, that didn't happen immediately. When the First Lieutenant was discharged, at a monthly salary of \$350 or \$375 a month, he returned to Syracuse because that was where he wanted to practice – there or someplace else in Upstate New York. (When you transferred to JAG you were promoted to First Lieutenant, which paid \$20 or \$25 more a month than Second Lieutenant.)

"An ex-mayor of Syracuse, who had served four terms and had an office with one lawyer in it, interviewed me in 1954. He offered me a job at \$10 a week. Next offer happened at a wedding reception where I met the partner of the then Mayor of Syracuse, a Democrat, Donald Howe Mead. After I told the partner what I had been doing he said, 'Well, I would be interested in hiring you. We can give you \$25 a week and a third of any case you bring in.' I went to Albany, Rochester and Buffalo and almost got hired in Buffalo at \$60 a week. In Rochester there was a job that paid \$35 a week. After about a month and a half my father said, 'You better get a job.' And I said, 'I am not going to work for less than what I was making in the Air Force.' And he said, 'You're not

going to work around here.' And he was correct. I never thought of New York City because for an Upstate boy, New York City was too fast a place. But now I thought of it.

"My sister was in New York City, working at an ad agency. My best friend from high school, who went to Colgate and then Harvard Business School, was there. So I went to New York City to interview and the placement operation consisted of a Harvard graduate who was downtown near Wall Street. He had a 3 by 5 card box and after 5:00 o'clock, he would see job applicants. He was the employment officer for the law school. He was a nice fellow and he had this card that said there was a vacancy at the Waterfront

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Commission of New York Harbor. 'It's an entity set up by New York and New Jersey dealing with racketeering on the New York waterfront.'

*The Commission was created in 1953 because of the pervasive corruption on the waterfront in the Port of New York-New Jersey. This corruption was documented in the early 1950's during public hearings held by the New York State Crime Commission with the assistance of the New Jersey Law Enforcement Council. As a result, in August 1953, the States of New York and New Jersey, with the approval of the Congress and the President of the United States, enacted a compact creating the Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor. (Source: [wcnyh.gov](http://wcnyh.gov).)*

That corruption was also the basis for the 1954, American crime film "On the Waterfront." "I saw that," Quintin chuckled, "and before I took the job!

"I said to this fellow with the card box (his name was Louis Toepfer and he was the eventual Vice Dean at Harvard Law School), 'I don't want to work for government. I just spent two years working for the government.' And he said, 'No. This is a temporary governmental entity and the boss is a Harvard Law School graduate with a Wall Street firm. He took a leave of absence at the request of Governor Thomas E. Dewey to run this, and you are not expected to make it a career because it will be over as soon as the waterfront is cleaned up.'

"So I went over and had a 20-minute interview with the Executive Director, Samuel Lane, and told him I was making \$375 as a First Lieutenant. And he said, 'Well, we'll pay you \$425. New York City has a higher cost of living.' So I said, 'Can I tell you tomorrow' and he said, 'Sure.' The next day I went back to Syracuse and told my father and mother, 'I think I should take it,' and they agreed. I called Mr. Lane. 'Mr. Lane, thank you. Tell me when to report.' And he said, 'Report next Monday.'

The office consisted of about fifteen lawyers and four or five investigators. Three of those lawyers had come from the New York District Attorney's office and they were seasoned prosecutors. Of the other twelve lawyers, most had just gotten out of the military and a few were recent law school graduates. It was a good group of people.

"There were three different sections of the New York Harbor: one was Manhattan with the cruise ship piers; Brooklyn was the second; Staten Island and New Jersey were the third. I was assigned to Manhattan on the North River, where those cruise line piers were—they're all gone now—and then on the East River to the Fulton Fish Market where all the fish were brought in. The Mob had control of it all.

"In Manhattan the luxury liner piers were run by an Irish family, the Bowers. (The Bowers, Mickey and Harold, were cousins and Irish gangsters.) One of them had a son who was in it and later I saw him at a Democratic fundraiser at the Fairmont Hotel. Ha! Ha! Brooklyn was the Anastasia family, famous because Albert Anastasia was getting a haircut and they shot him in the barber shop chair (October 25, 1957 in the barber shop at the Park Sheraton Hotel). Then there was Staten Island/New Jersey and I don't recall who was running things there.

"The investigators were led by an ex-New York City detective who was tough as could be, and a couple of ex-FBI agents. We had an investigator who was maybe the toughest of all. He was about five feet tall and he was always carrying a pistol. For some reason I wanted to see the Jersey Piers. One of my co-workers was on the Jersey Piers and Staten Island, and so we took the ferry to Hoboken, and as you came to Hoboken, there was the union, the ILA (International Longshoremen's Association), not the ILWU (International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union). The ILA at that time was crooked from top to bottom. The ILWU was tough but honest. But these ILA guys were looking out the window at us and this little investigator looked at us and said, 'This town just reeks of criminality.' Ha! Ha! But it was a little scary because these ILA guys were following us as we walked.

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"That was a good year. There was no courtroom activity. You had the power to subpoena witnesses and to interview them under oath. You had court reporters who would then prepare the transcript and you could refer clear criminal cases to the District Attorney of New York County. And everybody on the waterfront had to be licensed, from a Steamship Commodore down to somebody carrying suitcases off the cruise ships – you could take away the license, administratively."

In October of 1955, Quentin had two weeks vacation. He still wanted to practice in Upstate New York but hadn't found anything. He had taken and passed the California Bar so he used his two weeks to look for a job. He spent a week looking in Los Angeles and a week looking in San Francisco.

"I didn't want a big firm. I wanted a firm with five or six lawyers where you would get to work with clients immediately. I had a friend living in the Bay Area, Atherton Phleger, a Stanford graduate and a Harvard Law School graduate. His dad, Herman Phleger, was with San Francisco's second biggest firm – Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison. But I didn't want to interview with his dad's firm, too big. But Atherton told me about this Harvard classmate of ours who was working for Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro, a law firm I hadn't planned on interviewing at because it was also too large. Now this classmate was the kind of person who never liked anything. Everything was terrible. But he liked working at Pillsbury, Madison & Sutro. Well if Hartley liked it, I should too!"

Back then Pillsbury was 75 lawyers and located at 225 Bush Street. Their biggest client was Standard Oil. Quentin got an introduction into the firm through a cousin and was immediately sent one floor up to Jack Sutro's office. Jack Sutro did all the interviews.

"I went to Jack Sutro's office and he was getting his shoes shined. They used to have a shoe-shine man, he came to every office. He interviewed me for about 20 minutes. I thought San Francisco had a lower cost of living than New York City and I was then being paid \$425 a month. I told him, I would be satisfied at \$400 a month. He said, 'Alright.' I flew back to New York City, went into the office the next day and there was an offer for \$425 a month. I gave my 30-day notice to Mr. Lane, went back to Syracuse, said goodbye to my parents and drove to San Francisco."

This time he drove in his new Oldsmobile Convertible which he had bought when he got out of the military. "Was it flashy? Yes it was flashy. It was orange and white!"



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The new San Francisco resident worked for Pillsbury for three years. He started December 20, 1955 and left March 31, 1959. Through a friend, he found an office in the Mechanics Library Building at 57 Post Street. A Harvard Law School graduate, Leonard Bloom, class of 1937, rented him the space for \$60 a month.

"That was not a lot then and Leonard told me if he had overflow, he would refer them to me. I also got a start with a lawyer by the name of Dick Shortall. He was from an old San Francisco family. His father had been a judge and his sister was then on the Board of Supervisors. He gave me about five or six files. In the beginning, I was looking for personal injury, mostly, some criminal.

"The first corporation that I ever incorporated was the Squaw Valley Improvement Company after the 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley." (The Squaw Valley Ski Resort, then known as Squaw Valley, was the host site for the 1960 Winter Olympics.)

"Governor Pat Brown gave the lease, because it was State property, to old man Newsom, Gavin Newsom's grandfather, William Newsom. They had six investors, including Gordon Getty and Ron Pelosi, and they made me their lawyer. That was the first time I had ever incorporated a business. I also got breach of contract cases, a lot of divorce cases, and every year my revenue increased. That's not a bad thing!

"Is there a most interesting case of my entire law practice? I do have one.

"It was a will contest, about 1966, that involved the Lynch family who lived in Forest Hill. Ed Lynch had two brothers and a mother still alive. Ed Lynch's father had been a co-owner of Winterland – a music venue in San Francisco later run by rock promoter Bill Graham. Earlier in 1965, June Lynch had substituted me as her attorney in a divorce case against Ed Lynch. They had four children. Boy, boy, girl and the youngest was a boy. The nature of the suit in 1966 was this will contest. After the divorce between Mr. and Mrs. Lynch in 1965, Mr. Lynch took a cruise in the Pacific somewhere. Before he left, he changed his will to cut the children out entirely because they sympathized during the divorce action with their mother and he substituted his two brothers. He had an electric company and some other business. They were well-to-do. Then, when he was out in the Pacific, he almost drowned.

"When he came back, he flew back from Hawaii, his eldest son came down to the airport to meet him. His brothers didn't, his mother who was still alive, didn't. And it turns out when he almost drowned, all he could think of was, 'I've got to change my will so that I leave everything to my children.' Lo and behold before he could do that, he died a couple of days later from a stroke. The will contest alleged that the mother of the decedent, his mother, and his two brothers had exercised undue influence. That trial occurred I believe in 1968. It was a four or five week trial and in the middle of the trial came Yom Kippur, (Thursday, April 25), so we took that day off, no court date. After sundown, I went down to my office, which at that time was at 351 California Street, to prepare for the next day. My then wife, Kaye, and I lived on 38th Avenue and Shoreview Avenue in the Richmond District. I drove home, up Pine Street, and as I got to Presidio Avenue, a car coming from the right at about 10 at night, hit me. The ambulance took me to the hospital and I was in the hospital for about four days. My head was still dizzy but I went home.

"The trial was abated then for about three weeks. A friend of mine who was a trial lawyer said, 'Don't go back. Take a mistrial and start over because you are not going to be able to stay up with everything from a mental standpoint.' But I went back.

"Mr. Lynch's will also included the University of San Francisco. USF got a fourth of it and USF was represented by Pillsbury. The two brothers and their mother were represented by their lawyer. The USF lawyer was a guy a year ahead of me at Harvard Law School. That trial went another two weeks. The jury

went out, came back with a verdict in our favor, that the mother had exercised undue influence. The whole thing, except the car accident, was very interesting."

\* \* \*

It was in 1958, that Quentin first got involved in California campaigns. Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Stanley Mosk was running for Attorney General of California and Quentin got on board his campaign, which Mosk won. Quentin also became a member of two California Democratic Clubs. One was in the Assembly District where he lived at the time. That was the 21st Assembly Democratic League. The other was the Tipplers Club. "That was Democrats in their post-college, post-graduate school years. It was kind of an anecdote to the Young Republicans."

In 1959, he campaigned for San Francisco Supervisor, Clarissa Shortall McMahon who served from 1953 until 1966 when she left to return to her law practice. He was involved in John F. Kennedy's 1960 Presidential campaign. And during that time he was locally appointed chairman of getting out the vote in San Francisco and San Mateo.

A Democrat from a Democrat family, why did Quentin switch his registration to Independent in 1985?

"I've got a story on my mother to begin that answer," the Independent laughed. "As I mentioned, my parents were both Democrats, lifelong Democrats. My mother only veered once and that was in the 1952 when she started and ran Citizens for Eisenhower in Onondaga County – Eisenhower being a Republican.

"My father's drugstore was in Solvay, which is an industrial suburb of Syracuse. His drugstore was on the corner. He had a picture of a cop with his hand up and it said, 'Stop! There's a Kopp on the corner.' This was his promotion. His store was on Milton Avenue, which is Solvay's main street, running east, west. In front of his store was a mailbox. Well, anything that would attract people to the store was important, so that mailbox was important to my parents. It was removed. My mother blamed President Truman and the Democrats for its removal. I don't remember her thinking on this, but she did nevertheless. So while she didn't officially re-register, she ran her Eisenhower campaign. Eisenhower was elected that November. In December of 1952, the morning newspaper did a piece on local women making a difference, and my mother was selected as Woman of the Year in Politics!

"And then let's move forward to 1985. By that time I had been the subject of Democratic County Committee resolutions condemning me for two initiatives. Because I never lost an initiative; I had about nine of them. These two initiatives were: urging the President and Congress of the United States to repeal that part of the Voting Rights Act which requires ballots in foreign languages; and the other one was a State law which allowed counties to charge per diem expenses to prisoners who could afford to pay. Both passed. Those were 'no-no's' from the Democratic County Committee. At that time I had signed up for a trip to Israel, my first, in a program called Volunteers for Israel in which you were stationed at a military base and performed noncombat responsibilities. There were about 20 from the Bay Area in that particular group. I did that because I had met a retired general of paratroops in David's Delicatessen in San Francisco one night. David Applebaum, the original owner, was a friend and anytime we went to the theater we would go there afterwards to eat. This general's last name was Davidi. David introduced us and the General told me about this program which had started as a way to relieve reservists who otherwise wouldn't be around. They would be called to active duty at harvest time. And there had been a conflagration with Lebanon. (Israelis began a phased withdrawal from Lebanon in June 1985.) So the theory was if you had more help in noncombat activities you wouldn't have to call them up. Before I left I said the heck with the Democratic County Committee and I am going to register as an Independent and that's what I did. It was a 30-day service in Israel."

Volunteers worked at the Nevatim Israel Air Base in the Negev Desert. They wore uniforms and slept four to a barrack.

"I worked in a warehouse, unpacking equipment as it arrived. Most of it came from the United States. Israel and Egypt had just entered a treaty and the U.S. had pulled all U.S. equipment Israel had from Egypt. And this airbase was the closest to the Egyptian border so you had all this equipment from tanks to screwdrivers arriving at this base. We had several WWII veterans, a Korean War veteran and several Vietnam War veterans."

The retired judge said it was a symbolic time in his life and he did not make any public announcements about registering as an Independent or going to Israel.

\* \* \*

There is too much to Quentin Kopp's career to report in this mini biography interview. Much can be found online including through the *Online Archive of California (OAC) Guide to the Quentin Kopp Papers, Collection number: LP445, California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California*. And so I asked him, was there something that he was most proud of from his days in the Legislature that he made happen. The answer was, "yes."

"I got a bill passed which prevents Board of Equalization members from sitting on any appeal from a tax which involves a contributor to their political campaign. That is the only legislation which was named the Quentin Kopp Act."

*(The Quentin L. Kopp Conflict of Interest Act of 1990 requires a member of the State Board of Equalization who has received a contribution or contributions within the preceding 12 months in an aggregate amount of \$250 or more from a party or his or her agent, or from any participant or his or her agent, to, prior to rendering any decision in any adjudicatory proceeding pending before board, disclose that fact on the record of the proceeding. A member is prohibited from making, participating in making, or in any way attempting to use his or her official position to influence, the decision in an adjudicatory proceeding pending before the board if the member knows or has reason to know that he or she received a contribution or contributions in an aggregate amount of \$250 or more from a party to the proceeding, or from a participant in the proceeding the member knows or has reason to know has a financial interest in the decision. The act also requires a party to, or a participant in, an adjudicatory proceeding pending before the board to disclose on the record of the proceeding any contribution or contributions in an aggregate amount of \$250 or more made within the preceding 12 months by the party or participant, or his or her agent, to any member of the board. A person who knowingly or willfully violates any provision of the act is guilty of a misdemeanor.)*

What does he think people in this country should do for their country?

"I'd say serve in the military for a couple of years. I'd say participate in raising money for nonprofits. I'd say participate in leadership or board positions with boys and girls clubs.

\* \* \*

Quentin and Mara (Sikaters) Kopp have been married since 1987. Their wedding was officiated by the late California Appellate Court Judge Bill Newsom, California Governor Gavin Newsom's father. Mara Kopp is President of the Cow Palace Board of Directors.

"My son Shepard is the eldest and is a criminal defense lawyer in Los Angeles. He is married and the father of two, a daughter and a son. Number two son is Bradley and he is a paralegal. On the weekends he

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is a drummer. He is not married. My daughter Jennifer (Kopp) Putnam is Executive Director and CEO of the Napa Valley Grapegrowers (NVG). She has two boys, 11 and 7.

"My daughter, my 11-year-old grandson and I just came back from Syracuse. It was a six-day trip down memory lane in part. It was also inclusive of a visit to Cornell University which is where I hope my 11-year-old grandson will be admitted in seven years and play on the polo team, which is the best polo team of any college in the United States. The trip included lunches and dinners with friends who remain or younger friends who have matured since I left in 1955. There was part of a day in Binghamton, NY, my mother's hometown where I spent five summers between the ages of 8 and 12. The last day was a visit to the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.

"Still on my to-do list? Keep fighting for the underdog, and God willing I would like to see my 11-year-old grandson admitted to Cornell University. Did I mention my daughter is a champion polo player? She's been riding horses since she was 5. I am not a champion polo player. Ha! Ha!"



(Jean Bartlett photo)

**Quentin Kopp at Mazzetti's Bakery in Pacifica, January, 2014, answers a *Pacifica Tribune* question on the street.**



**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 additionally the author of: two historical biography books on some of the more than 370,000 interred at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma, CA; as well as the children's book, "[IndiAsia and the Dragon](#)." A produced playwright and former Hallmark Card writer, her website is [www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com).

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