

The Vanderlips at 100: Meet Palos Verdes' Most Influential Family p.82

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EDITOR'S LETTER

## History Lessons

I remember one of my first conversations with our Moon Tide Media company founder, Todd Klavin, months before publishing a single issue. We shared our enthusiasm for local history and expressed a mutual desire to explore this kind of content once we launched the magazine.

In the seven years following that discussion, *Southbay* has featured stories on The Lighthouse and Bijou Theater in Hermosa, the Surfridge neighborhood in Playa, Metlox Pottery in Manhattan Beach and La Venta Inn, Marine-land and Wayfarers Chapel on the Peninsula, to name a few. Singularly, they are fascinating tales of time gone by; together they weave the essential fabric of our region's legacy and offer important lessons for the future.

This issue, we take on a subject we've been anxious to cover for a long time now. Thanks to the friendly persistence of writer Diane Barber and the gracious hospitality of the Vanderlip family, we go inside Villa Narcissa to explore the life and legacy of Frank A. Vanderlip, Sr. and the subsequent generations who keep his traditions alive.

An original "pioneer" of Palos Verdes, Vanderlip's passion and dedication proved instrumental in the creation of the Peninsula as we know it. Though you'll find names like Narcissa on street signs and buildings throughout town, the family is actually quite humble and private. We appreciate the opportunity to share their fascinating story.

Speaking of history, any idea how RAT Beach got its name? It might not be what you think. We did some digging and discovered some interesting facts.

After nearly 100,000 votes cast online, the winners are in for our 2013 Locals' Choice Awards. Be sure to check if your favorites made the list and show them some support with your patronage.

As summer comes to a close, we're packing our calendar with all sorts of activities, from the colorful Lilly Pulitzer exhibit at the new Palos Verdes Art Center to the AVP Manhattan Beach Open hitting the beaches in early August.

Plenty to celebrate and look forward to this season. Enjoy!



**Vanessa Wade**

STYLIST, "Street Smart"

With 10-plus years in the fashion industry, Vanessa has created a service with women, like herself, in mind. Not only an editorial stylist, she also works as a personal wardrobe stylist, helping clients clean out and reinvent their closets. Her passion is helping people look and feel their very best.



**Michael Neveux**

PHOTOGRAPHER, "Locals' Choice"

Michael is a commercial photographer/videographer who shoots fashion, fitness, sports, product, architecture and lifestyle. He has had a studio in the South Bay for more than 25 years. In his spare time, he enjoys cabinet-making and collecting antiques.



**Diane E. Barber**

WRITER, "Vanderlips at 100"

Diane is a South Bay-based lifestyle journalist, interior designer, equestrian and animal lover. Her writing is inspired by her passion for celebrating incredible people, animals and the arts. She is a construction design expert, and when not creating new living spaces or crafting new stories, she is immersed in her beloved horse world.



# THE VANDERLIPS

AT

# 1000

As Palos Verdes' most influential family celebrates a milestone centennial in the South Bay, we look back at the man whose passion and dedication transformed the Peninsula as we know it ... and the descendants who keep his legacy alive.

WRITTEN BY  
DIANE E. BARBER  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
STEPHAN COOPER AND  
SIRI BERTING





**Education. Hard work. The arts. Love of nature. Adventure. Philanthropy. Zest for life. All have been synonymous with the Vanderlip family name for generations.**

While it is well known that the late Frank A. Vanderlip, Sr. purchased 16,000 acres of the Palos Verdes Peninsula 100 years ago, less is known about what lies at the core of his family's legacy. Beneath the veil of perception, one finds a clan with deep devotion to their roots, a steadfast work ethic, a profound appreciation for education and a special reverence for culture.

Images of land barons and servants quickly give way to the heart of a family who, for a century now, has been grounded in a commitment to family tradition, living life to the fullest and generously making a difference in the lives of others. This is their story.

**FROM CORN FIELDS TO WALL STREET**

A self-educated Illinois farm boy who spent many days navigating childhood with his beloved dog, Snap, at his heels, Frank A. Vanderlip, Sr. had an affinity for beauty and nature that many years later attracted him to California and the South Bay peninsula. His memoirs vividly reflect the joy of feeling the earth under his bare feet, the splendor of wild flowers and his love for animals.

"I was extraordinarily sensitive to all of the afflictions to the creatures on our farm," he wrote. Though he relished the farm life he was born into in 1864, his inquisitive mind hungered for more.

When his father sent him and Snap to herd the cows, Frank tucked historical books and the literary works of Shakespeare into his overalls to quietly devour history and prose among the cattle while sitting atop his pony, Dutchman. When he received \$12 as his first pay for the sale of a farm calf, he bought a six-year subscription to the *New York Weekly Tribune*, which came with a Webster's dictionary.

While enchanted with boyhood and books, a family tragedy bestowed a new form of education upon young Frank—a lesson in life that would forever change him. At the tender age of 11, he was catapulted from boyhood into manhood when his father suddenly died.

Unable to keep the farm prospering and pay the mortgage, his mother was forced to sell it in 1880. He stood alongside her and his younger sister as the land was auctioned off

at \$46 per acre. The livestock, equipment and most of the family belongings were also sold.

Heartbroken, they moved to live with his mother's family, where he took on the role of man of the house and his first job that paid \$.75 a day at a machine shop. For more than three years, Frank worked nine-hour days, six days a week to support his family.

Though the drudgery of machine shop labor weighed heavily on him, Frank's spirit prevailed, with his sights set on furthering his education. Eventually he was earning \$1.25 per day and managed to put himself through one year of college.

But finances prevented him from continuing school, so he took a shorthand course through the mail while working at the shop. Determined to get out of overalls and away from factory work, he applied for a city editor job at a local newspaper. The well-read 21-year-old, who had never written before, landed the job at \$6 a week pay.

His shorthand course later paid off when he was hired as an office clerk in Chicago for \$15 per week. He studied mortgages and wrote reports on his findings. Before long, he had another pay increase when he became a *Chicago Tribune* staff reporter and eventually the financial editor.

Financial reporting jobs were significant stepping-stones for Frank in realizing his dream of boardrooms and business suits. His work had him shaking hands with some of the most influential bankers and business leaders of that era.

In 1897, one of those businessmen convinced Frank to go to Washington, D.C.

with him. Soon after their arrival, Frank was appointed assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury. Such was the beginning of his financier trailblazing.

He went on to become vice president and then president of National City Bank in New York, the largest bank in the world at the time. He was instrumental in drafting the Federal Reserve Act and became a trustee at the Carnegie Foundation with Woodrow Wilson, among other esteemed appointments.

It was during his banking career that he married the young and brilliant Narcissa Cox. In addition to raising six children with him in New York, she worked tirelessly to champion women's rights, education, wartime relief projects and the New York Infirmary, where she presided over the board for many years.

She chaired the New York State of Women Voters in the early 1900s and recruited Eleanor Roosevelt to serve on her board. Together they greatly influenced ending child labor, developing pensions for the elderly, full citizenship for women and federal aid for education.

The Vanderlips purchased their first home on the Hudson River in New York—a beautiful estate called Beechwood. It was around that time, at the age of 46, that Frank humbly acknowledged that he had become a millionaire.

He wrote, "I did not indulge in a Champagne celebration. That was not my way. From boyhood I had been driven, always, by the haunting knowledge that I had dependents. Security for them was the thing I had been trying to buy with all of my efforts. I never bought a yacht. I never bought a stable of racehorses. I never kicked up my own heels. Education was what I had yearned for always."

When reflecting on building a school on the estate for his children to attend with 300 other students, he wrote, "That, I confess, was luxury."

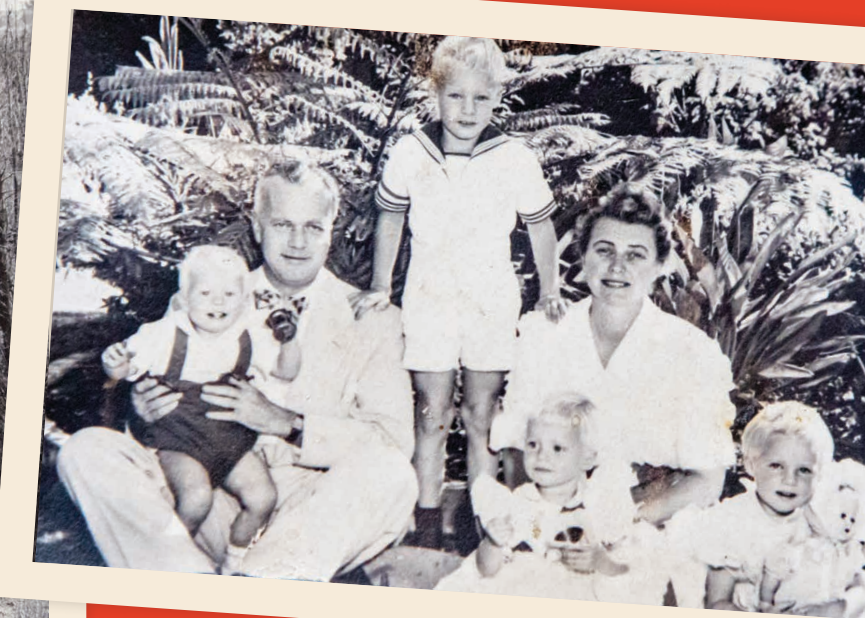
**CALIFORNIA, HERE WE COME**

While Frank Vanderlip was prospering in New York with his family, buyers of a 16,000-acre California cattle and sheep ranch called Rancho de los Palos Verdes were close to defaulting on the real estate deal. In an effort to save their investment, the purchasers traveled to New York to try to sell it.

When the opportunity came to Frank's attention, he raised the capital and purchased it sight-unseen for the original \$1,500,000 price (\$93.75 per acre). The former farm boy traveled to California from New York to see the land for the first time in 1913. When



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**GOLDEN DAYS**  
Left: Guests at one of the Vanderlips' grand costume parties. Above: Kelvin, Sr. and Elin with their children.

HISTORIC PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE VANDERLIP FAMILY



he arrived and looked across the expansive oceanfront ranch, he saw its potential and called it “a dream of land, sea and sky.”

Frank shared a vision for a new Italian Riviera with Narcissa, which influenced the early architecture and landscaping of the peninsula. He and a group of investors planned a development of 100-acre estates with a yacht club and country club. Unfortunately, the outbreak of World War I in 1914 discouraged his business partners and unraveled his grand dream.

He instead set out to develop smaller communities. By July 1914, preliminary drawings were submitted to the investment group for an exclusive planned community reminiscent of Mediterranean villages. He hired landscape and architectural planners and had two model villages built—one of Lunada Bay and one of Malaga Cove.

The villages were intended to be a mix of affluent people and artists, modeled after those in Europe, with a strong sense of community. He also developed housing for military personnel on land that later became Marineland—where Terranea Resort is perched today.

While Frank Vanderlip and his family continued to reside in New York, he traveled to and from California by train. In 1916, he brought his family to Rancho Palos Verdes for the first time for an extended vacation and began building the Vanderlip estates

near Portuguese Bend. A meteorologist helped him select the plot of land where there would be the most sun and least amount of fog and wind, and he built the family’s home-away-from-home: The Cottage.

He later built the Italian Renaissance Villetta (later re-named Villa Narcissa) for guests—a villa that for years to come would delight visitors with gracious Vanderlip hospitality. The once-barren ranch and farmland had landscaping and new roads that were graded by mule-driven wagons, and the peninsula was being transformed by the vision and passion of Frank and his wife.

### THE LEGACY

Before his dream of creating an Italian Riviera lifestyle on the peninsula was realized, Frank A. Vanderlip, Sr. died in 1937 at the age of 72. In 1945, his son, Kelvin Vanderlip, Sr., who loved California, carried on with his father’s vision.

Like his father, he too married a brilliant and spirited woman, Norwegian Elin Brekke, who quickly embraced the family dream. Instead of raising their children in New York as his parents did, Kelvin and Elin made Villa Narcissa home with their four children, Kelvin, Jr., Narcissa (“Cissa”), and twins Henrik and Katrina—a home life that was centered in a “work hard, play hard” spirit.

“Saddle the horses, mix the martinis and

let’s ride down to the beach,” Kelvin, Sr. was known to exclaim upon arriving home from work. He had a great affinity for the tenant farmers on the ranch and was busy developing the 9,600 remaining peninsula acres, which he called the “jeweled earlobe of Los Angeles.”

He was instrumental in planning the Strawberry Lane, Dapple Gray, Portuguese Bend, Eastfield and Rolling Hills communities, while presiding over the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and chairing the building of the Wayfarers Chapel, the Portuguese Bend Beach Club and a schoolhouse for military families (now St. Peter’s by the Sea Presbyterian Church).

In keeping with the Vanderlip tradition, Kelvin, Sr. and Elin were energetic, philanthropic and passionate people who loved art and nature. While her husband was following in his father’s footsteps, Elin carried on in her own family’s industrious tradition—her widowed grandmother had raised nine children alone on a farm in Norway, where Elin summered as a child. She began to make her mark on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, co-funding the Abalone Cove Nursery School and hosting lunches nearly every weekend for up to 40 guests that frequently included movie stars—to attract potential home buyers to the new communities on the peninsula.



**FATHER FIGURE**  
L to R: Frank Sr. and Narcissa Vanderlip in their finest; portrait of Frank, Sr. that hangs in the home today; Villa Narcissa today on a sunny Palos Verdes afternoon.



The family's work ethics—ingrained for generations—were balanced by a joyful and creative celebration of life, including birthday parties for Kelvin, Sr. with historical themes. Elin carefully researched the chosen period in history, and Kelvin, Sr. crafted clever invitations that were sent to their wittiest friends.

“Saddle the horses, mix the martinis and **LET'S RIDE** down to the beach.”

Upon arrival to the parties that started at noon and lasted until midnight, each guest was required to do a skit about who they were portraying. Kelvin, Jr., Cissa, Henrik and Katrina were presented as pages and later lovingly dismissed while guests indulged in a movable feast throughout the grounds.

The family enjoyed four such birthday celebrations with Kelvin, Sr. before, like their grandfather before them, the Vanderlip children lost their father at a young age. Kelvin, Sr. died of cancer at the age of 46. Elin was so devastated that she rented out Villa Narcissa and moved with the children to Europe to mend their hearts and immerse them in education, languages, travel and adventure, which shaped the rest of their lives.

After eight years, Elin brought her children

home to Villa Narcissa to continue their education in the U.S. Elin resumed her commitment to the family estate, the arts and charity.

In 1967, a fire destroyed much of the property and the trees that they had planted. With the insurance settlement, Elin built 10 cottages and created a mini-version of an Italian hill town to generate rental income to sustain the estate. Up each day at 6 a.m., she toiled alongside the workers as the general contractor of Villa Narcissa and was often seen hauling homemade lemonade up the hill to them.

She saw to it that her favorite color, blue—which reminded her of her beloved Norway—was planted and painted throughout the grounds. Like her mother-in-law, Elin was a philanthropist and raised \$6 million for art restoration through her foundation, Friends of French Art.

She lived by the mantra “l'art de vivre,” introducing American patrons to the French “art of living in style” with more than 22 annual guided trips to France and countless lectures and fundraisers at the family home, in Los Angeles and across the country. After a wonderfully charmed and adventurous life, Elin died at the age of 90 in 2009.

**THE NEW GENERATION**

Though much has changed on the Palos Verdes Peninsula since Frank A. Vanderlip,

Sr. arrived, little has changed in the hearts and spirits of his grandchildren. They are carrying on as their parents and grandparents did with the importance of family, friends, education and culture at the root of their lives.

Kelvin, Jr. (“The Engineer”) and his wife, Michele (a South Bay native), were living in London when Elin Vanderlip died. They moved to Villa Narcissa to manage and preserve the family property.

“Grandfather was a banker, so I thought I better be a banker, too,” he says. “I started as a teller and went back to school for my MBA at Cornell. I worked as a CPA but always loved computers, and in 1980 I became a computer engineering consultant.”

In his spare time, in true Vanderlip form, Kelvin, Jr. can be found fixing toilets and maintaining the landscaping at the estate. Michele, who previously was CFO of a charter school and has degrees in social work and gerontology, takes care of the day-to-day property management. Their three children reside in London and Singapore.

Narcissa (“The Producer”), who is called “Cissa,” says of their upbringing, “We were raised with a love of beauty and culture and a responsibility to share what we received with a lot of people.” The theatrical world was her life's calling. After graduating from Cornell with a degree in philosophy, she received an M.A. in cinema in 1971 from the





University of Wisconsin.

She has produced award-winning musicals, dance theatre and, in keeping with her grandfather's love of The Bard, Shakespeare-in-the-garden productions. Cissa has also worked in film production alongside Woody Allen, Ron Howard and other Hollywood greats.

She now lives in West Los Angeles with her husband, Parmer Fuller, a composer, music director and USC professor. Their daughter, Lili Fuller, is an actress and choreographer in Los Angeles, carrying on a family passion for Shakespeare by co-creating and co-starring in "Complete Works," a new comic web series about a national Shakespeare competition.

Henrik ("The Financier") followed his grandfather into the financial world. He graduated from Princeton and then Columbia Business School and went straight into Wall Street in the '70s. He since founded Viking Capital Partners and serves on boards for nonprofits, including the New York Infirmity, over which his grandmother formerly presided. His athleticism and love of the outdoors balance his demanding business life and have also made for some great family story-telling.

"My brother learned to surf in the family pool. He and his friend, Scott Miller, used to tie a rope to a Volkswagen car. One drove and the other held on and 'surfed.' That ended when a surfboard went through one

of the windows of the house," says Kelvin. Henrik lives in Greenwich, Connecticut, with his wife, Louise, and four children.

Katrina ("The Artist") has had a deep appreciation for art and art history since childhood. "My mother encouraged my painting

**“My brother learned to surf in the family pool. He and his friend, Scott Miller, used to tie a rope to a Volkswagen car. One drove and the other held on and ‘surfed.’ That ended when a SURFBOARD WENT THROUGH ONE OF THE WINDOWS of the house.”**

from the time I was very little," she says.

Having trained at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum, Katrina is an art conservator who has worked for leading private collectors and museums, including the

Musée du Louvre, The National Gallery, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Getty Museum. She currently is planning her second watercolor artist's reception at Terranea Resort and is illustrating a children's book.

She lives in Long Island and the Bahamas and spends a few weeks each year at Villa Narcissa. Her son, Eric de Carbonnel, writes a financial blog and teaches on Long Island. Her daughter, Alissa de Carbonnel, takes after her globe-trotting grandmother, Elin, and is a journalist for Reuters in Moscow.

Though Frank A. Vanderlip, Sr. hung up his overalls more than 100 years ago, he never hung up the virtues of solid work ethics, integrity and honor that he garnered during his farm and factory years. Today, his family might not don overalls, but they can be found now and then with dirt on their hands from doing repairs and tending to gardens—while proudly carrying on with the same qualities that were the driving force behind Frank's vision and passion.

Regardless of the era, anyone who has had the pleasure of spending time with a Vanderlip has most certainly walked away smiling with some very special memories.

For more on the family history, check out local author Vicki Mack's book, Frank A. Vanderlip: The Banker Who Changed America, [vintagepalosverdes.com/books](http://vintagepalosverdes.com/books). ●



**KEEPING TRADITION** Left: Great-granddaughter Lili Fuller and Chase Williamson on the outdoor amphitheatre stage at Villa Narcissa in a scene from the upcoming comic web series "Complete Works." Above: Kelvin, Sr. in costume with Katrina.