

GEORGIE CLARK

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15. "I named her after a French woman I knew," says Georgie in a loving tone. She describes how she

and Sommona Rose did everything together: traveled, hiked, climbed rocks and mountains, even learned to fly together when Georgie trained as a pilot in the U.S. Ferry Command in World War II.

They were riding bicycles on the California coast when a drunk truck driver hit the girl, killing her instantly. The police tracked the driver, but Georgie declined to bring charges. "It wouldn't bring her back," she says quietly.

For a few weeks, she lived in depression. Then she met Harry Aleson, a fellow Sierra Club member and explorer. Aleson showed her slides of his hikes in the canyon country of Arizona and Utah. Georgie was hooked. A new world opened up and she suggested they hike it together. She and Harry became friends, and over the years, they covered many miles. Twice they floated down the Colorado River of the Grand Canyon.

"I was out here on the river 25 years when there was absolutely nobody here," she recalls. "All the people on my trips depended on me, period. There wasn't nobody else. There was

no helicopters, there was NOTHING down here. The park rangers were not here. That was before the dams were built. These were long trips, one- and two-week trips."

At 80, she is strong in body and mind. She takes pride in not being emotional. "My mother taught us not to cry. We don't have that emotion. I don't have it about marriage or nothing.

I was never one who had stars in my eyes. I was not one who grew up wantin'



...she believes most young people lack the strong fiber of her generation. "I look at kids today and feel sorry for 'em. They don't have a mother like mine, who taught me to be self-sufficient.

or being man-crazy. In fact, the men had to prove themselves to me!

"Oh, sure," she goes on. "I miss the people who've died, like my sister Marie, because we were peas in a pod. But there's no way I was going to cry, because I don't know HOW to cry.

"I don't go to funerals. I don't see funerals at all, because when people are gone, they're gone. They're out of it. You do whatever you want to do for 'em in lifetime."

Georgie has been "doing for" people all her life, starting with her older brother and sister. "We were always taught that no matter what, you helped one another and supported one

another, good or bad," she says. She's helped Navajo Indians who live in the Grand Canyon. At Christmas, she persuaded friends and businesses to donate food, candy, and clothing, then

trucked it herself to the reservations. "I like the Navajo," she says quietly. "I could've been a Navajo, lived as one.

"The Navajo feel the same way I do about life, about nature and sex. If they need it, they do it. That's that. They don't use all this build-up, with fancy dress and undress.

This is RIDICULOUS. The Navajos never did such a thing. It flows natural. When I was young, I didn't even think of sex. If I wanted anything, I took it. If I didn't, forget it!" She laughs.

"There's no emotion in sex, there's no nothing. It's like eating. If you need it, you need it. If you don't, to heck with it.

"I keep busy," she says. "People need to be busier. If they've got time, they think about themselves too much. Then even any little thing, they can FEEL it, and that little thing gets

bigger. If they got too much time on their hands, they're going to think about their ills. Naturally!

"A lot of older people don't have interests," she continues quickly. "They go into condominiums, things are done for 'em, they don't have the interest. This traveling around by bus and all, tours, any of this stuff, that's for the birds." Her

voice is impatient. "I could have less interest in a bus trip than the man in the moon!"

At home in Las Vegas, Georgie drives blind people on errands. "I think of all things on earth, the worst is not being able to see. So my sympathy has always been terrific for them." She donates clothing and leftover food from the river trips to a local mission. "If I get two minutes, I do somethin' like this," she says.

She reads U.S. News and World Report, Reader's Digest, and The Wall Street Journal. "Not the financial stories," she says quickly. "I'm not interested in that. I like their stories on the actual things in life. When they tell a story, it's really stated very carefully. They have a lot of stories on different things."

Later, she confides, laughing, she uses the newspaper to line the animals' litter boxes.

Her religion is the Golden Rule: "Do as you'd be done by," my mother always told us." Nature is also a religion for her. "The Navajos are like that, the Navajos ARE nature," she

explains. "Their original belief is complete nature. I could come on the river being a Navajo, because I've been with Navajos. I used to give 'em parties and get food and all for 'em, in the old days before there was civilization. I like the nature, I believe in nature, and I think everything's the way it's meant to be."

She's healthy, lives on fruit, vegetables, cheese, and bread. She takes no vitamins. "I think they would be an off-balance to you," she says adamantly. "I don't eat a lot. As a youngster,

I didn't get a lot of food. None of us did. I never smoked, because I couldn't afford it."

She likes beer and an occasional glass of blackberry liqueur, but only at night. A new law forbids anyone to drink and operate a boat on the river. She says some river runners used to drink beer all day and became dangerous to other boatmen.

Georgie has a number of young friends in river-related businesses. But she believes most young people lack the strong fiber of her generation. "I look at kids today and feel sorry for

'em. They don't have a mother like mine, who taught me to be self-sufficient. They aren't bad. It's just a case of the times.

Times change and they're going with the times. It's simply the different day they're raised in. They don't know different, so what would they do any different?"

She loves children and welcomes them on her trips. "I wish that more families would bring their children," she says. "We get some, but not as many as I'd like. Sometimes I'll get children of the Girl and Boy Scouts who hiked with me in the early days."

Georgie seems to be at peace.

What's the key? I ask.

"I see the good in everybody and just forget the bad," she replies. "I just forget it, pick out the good and leave the other alone, 'cause everybody's got good and bad faults. It just depends on the person who's judging."

When she turned 80, friends and admirers honored her. "Ted Hatch of Hatch River Expeditions put on a party, a great big party!" she exclaims. "They had 400, 500 people at Marble Canyon, at the Hatch Warehouse, and it was a real blow-out! No one will ever forget that party." She cackles.

"There was a guy with long blond hair in leopard-skin cape and tights who jumped out of a cake that came down from the ceiling. Then he took me on a ride in a Cadillac. I'm not so sure I liked that, because he liked to drink," she whispers. "That guy loves a WILD time, that guy loves a wild time." She shakes her head and smiles.

"Then he drove me up in the hills above the warehouse, and all of us watched some fireworks. They put on a real show. Yeah, it was SOME party."

Her eyes glisten and she grins

Anne Crosman is an author and free lance journalist in Sedona, AZ. She teaches memoir writing and edits books.

Her earlier book Young At Heart: Aging Gracefully With Attitude (2003, 2004, 2005) won a national Benjamin Franklin Award and a Washington Irving Book Award in Westchester County, NY.

She has been afternoon host for "All Things Considered" on KNAU, Arizona Public Radio, Flagstaff, AZ.

She was a CBS and NBC Radio Network News Correspondent in NY, Washington, and Geneva, Switzerland. She freelanced for The Christian Science Monitor, The Washington Post, and Newsweek.

She is working on a new book about organ-transplant recipients and welcomes ideas from any CCZ readers.

Anne has been a member of the Sierra Club since 1955, when her parents took her down the Green River on a SC trip.

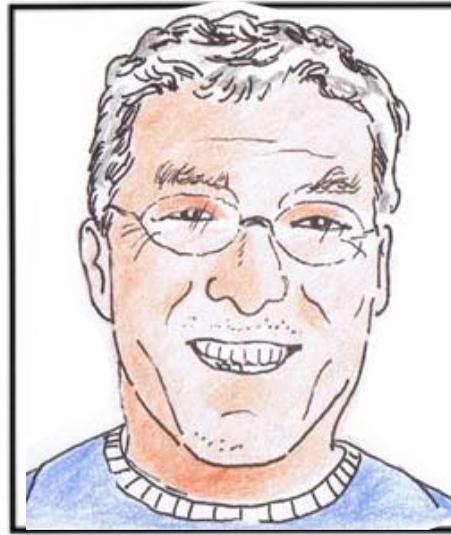
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