

To Build a Memorial

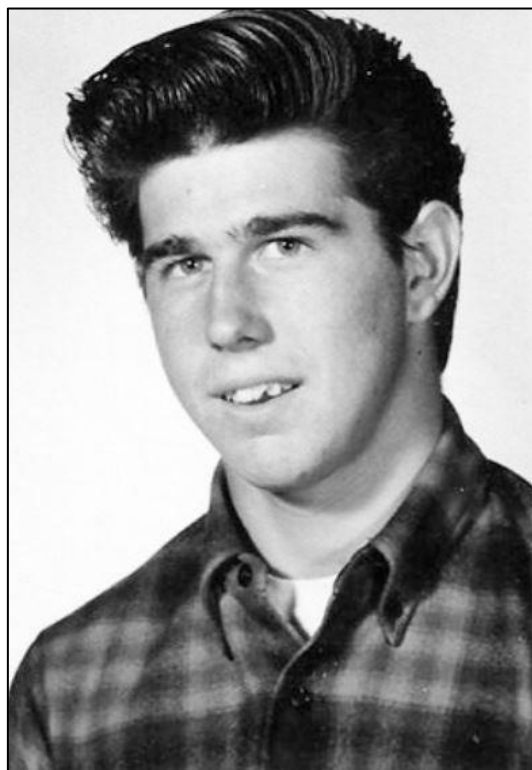
The Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group are four classmates from the 1969 graduating class of Terra Nova High School, who have banded together to establish a permanent memorial to honor Pacifica's Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq fallen. Along with a physical memorial, each of these young Pacificans is being memorialized through biography. Read the article about the Memorial Group and the goals of their project, [here](#).

March 17, 2020

The Story of David McKay

1951-1970

BY JEAN BARTLETT



David McKay, Terra Nova High School junior year photo, 1968.

In *Pacifica Tribune* writer Lois McNally's June 10, 1970 tribute article to David McKay, she talked about some of the Pacifica boys who grew up in the Galvez Drive, Rosita Road neighborhood of Linda Mar.

"There were the Childers boys, Johnny White, David McKay," Lois began.

"Stan Childers, whose family later moved to Alicante from Rosita, died in Vietnam in Feb. 1967. Johnny White, 1207 Galvez, died there, April 1970.

"Last Saturday, at 10 minutes to 12 noon, David McKay's family, 1116 Rosita Road, were told of his death June 4 in Vietnam."

* * *

"My dad and I were out front mowing the lawn," said David's little sister Beverly (McKay) Fontana, interviewed, along with the other interviewees, in March of 2020. "We had an old lawn mower where you had to pull the cord. My dad was working on the lawn mower and I saw this little sports car, a green Triumph, pull up and this man get out in uniform. And I said, 'Dad, Dad, this guy is here.' I knew what it was."

Bernadette Marver grew up in Pacifica. She met David when she was in 7th grade. She lived across the street and four houses down from David's family. Bernadette attended St. Paul's Catholic Elementary and High School in San Francisco on Church Street. She was a year and a half younger than David.

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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"I knew all the kids in the neighborhood," Bernadette said, "though I didn't go to school in Pacifica. But David and I got to be friends in seventh grade and in eighth grade, he became my first boyfriend. He was also the first boy my father would even speak to! I knew David's dad really well because he was always outside working on something, or working on something in the garage. David was a lot like his father and he looked like his dad. My parents and his parents got along, and my little sister, Victoria, and his little sister, Beverly, were best friends."

"David and I were boyfriend and girlfriend on and off through high school," Bernadette continued. "We were always friends; we were just friends when he died."

June 6, 1970, the day that the McKay family learned of David's death, was a Saturday, and it was the day of Bernadette's graduation from high school.

"I didn't know until later that day, after I graduated, that David had died. His parents had originally planned to come to my graduation," Bernadette paused for a moment. "All these years later, it's still emotional. I'm glad his story, and the stories of the other Pacifica boys we lost in Vietnam, is being told."



In March of 1968, Bernadette and David, attend her school's spring prom.

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Born at St. Joseph's Hospital in San Francisco on March 4, 1951, David George McKay was the second of Leslie George McKay's and Doris (Starr) McKay's six children: Sandra, David, Leslie, Beverly, and twins Dennis and Jimmy. (Dennis is older by 20 minutes.) A World War Two veteran, dad Leslie McKay was a carpenter. The family moved to Pacifica before Pacifica incorporated in 1957. They lived at the top of Manor – 475 Glasgow Drive.

"We moved to Pacifica from San Francisco probably before 1955," Beverly said. "We were one of the first families. I still have the original Sharp Park phonebook."

In May of 1959, the family was devastated by the death of little Leslie McKay. Leslie was just 5 years old.

"Leslie was killed in front of our house," Beverly said. "He was hit by a car. We moved away to San Jose after my brother was killed because my father couldn't take it. But we came back to Pacifica after just a couple of years. My dad's work was in San Francisco."

Almost five years younger than David, Beverly talked about growing up in Pacifica.

"The whole family ate dinner together," she said. "Sunday nights we always watched, *Bonanza*." NBC's longest-running Western, *Bonanza*, still in syndication, was about an all-male ranching family living and working in Nevada before and after the Civil War.

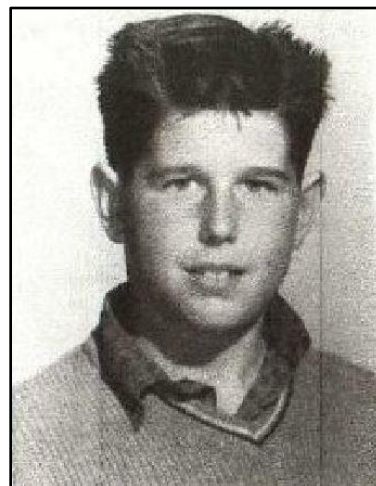
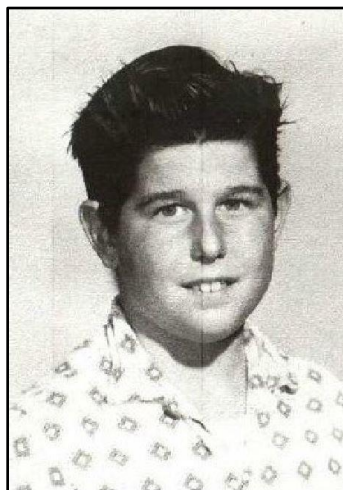
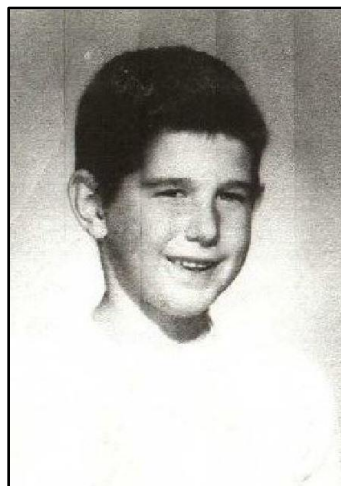
"We didn't do a lot of family trips," Beverly continued. "But my parents had a cabin in Monte Rio (a Russian River resort town), and my grandfather had a boat that he built and we went out on that."

David went to Sanchez Elementary in Pacifica and Linda Mar Elementary. He had a paper route as soon as he was old enough. When he was little older, he and his best friend, Joey Gorostiza, used to hitch a ride to the north end of town where they might find work as caddies at the Sharp Park Golf Course.

"We all did paper routes," Beverly said. "My dad would bring us around on the back of his pickup truck and we always had to bring the newspaper to the front door. They used to send me to collect because I got good tips."

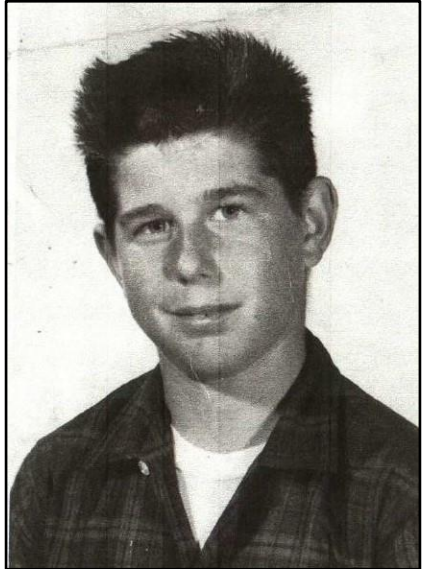
Their mom also worked. She had two part-time jobs: police dispatcher for the Broadmoor Police Department, and call-handler for an answering service.

"Stories I remember from David's earliest years?" Beverly pondered. "This one I was told by my folks. Apparently when he was pretty little, maybe kindergarten or so, he would walk around the classroom and ask all the kids if they had any milk. If they answered not to his liking, he would bop them on the head! So his teacher sent a note home."



David, in his elementary school years.

Barbara (Scopinich) Petersen, her future husband Butch Petersen, and David, all grew up in the same Linda Mar neighborhood: Rosita Road, Galvez Drive and Palou Drive.



David at about 14.

"I met Dave at Linda Mar School on the first day of 8th grade," Barbara said. "We were both 13. Mostly we hung out during school. There was a large group of us who played softball, basketball and volleyball – and snuck under the fence over to the Dairy for candy." (Back then, Pacifica's Sun Valley Dairy was a real dairy farm located at today's Shamrock Ranch.)

"I met Dave when the school district combined part of Sanchez School, where he was going, with Linda Mar School, where I was going," Patti (Topolinski) Hawker said. "We were buddies off and on through high school. He was always super nice, always had a smile and he was very easy going and very polite. As high school continued and we all learned to drive, we would ride around in cars and visit the beach with a group of friends, which included: Barbara Scopinich, Butch Petersen, Bob Stuckey, David, Joe Gorostiza and me. It was a good time!"

"I met Dave in 7th grade," Rich Jasso said. "We met when the first wave of transferred students from Sanchez School came to Linda Mar School.

"We were friends in elementary school and high school. We had an established friendship but we'd reconnect all the time like one does when in high school. He was a high energy, affable good guy. He liked to joke around and always gave you the impression he was going, or wanted to go, somewhere. It was easy to be drawn to him, you wanted to be his friend, and he had this great, robust laugh."

"He played sports and I didn't," Rich continued. "I don't remember having any classes with him at Terra Nova except PE, where he was always on fire!"

Barbara Petersen, Patti Hawker, Rich Jasso and Mike Jelinsky are the four classmates from Terra Nova's class of 1969, who are working together to establish the permanent memorial to honor the Pacifica kids who died in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. This includes their friend and classmate David McKay.

"Dave and I played football together at Terra Nova," Mike Jelinsky said, "and he was a good football player. He was primarily a running back and also played defensive back. We hung out with different groups but we liked each other. I always remember him as a guy who liked to joke around and he was a good prankster."



David, at a Terra Nova High School assembly, 1966.

"David was always very proud of the nice head of hair he had," his sister Beverly said, "using Dixie Peach (men's hair pomade) and all! He would comb it back and then take two of his fingers and pull the front forward a bit.

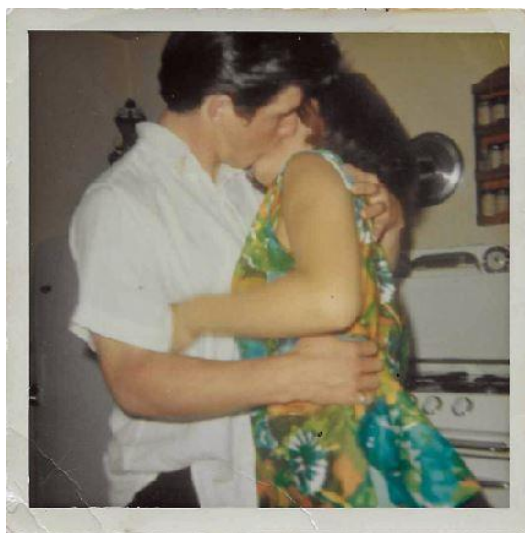
"I remember when he took Bernadette to the prom. When I look back on him on prom night, I'm reminded of the movie, *Grease*. David was cool and Bernadette was a saint. I remember Bernadette's parents really liked David, though I'm not sure they completely liked that he was going out with their daughter!

"All these years later, we are still in touch with Bernadette. She was heartbroken when David passed away."

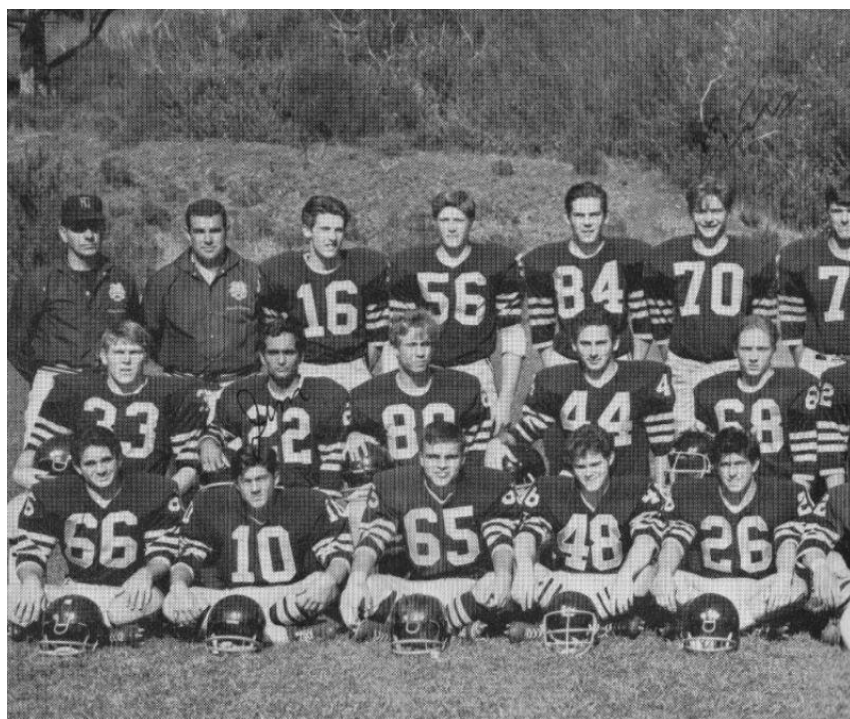
"My mother loved to feed David," Bernadette recalled with a laugh. "She would make him 'Dagwood' sandwiches because he loved them."

"How would I describe David?" Bernadette smiled. "He had the best personality and he had a lot of friends. People just liked him. When I look back now on actor Henry Winkler playing 'The Fonz,' David reminds me of the real Henry – a really good guy, a lot of fun, a jokester with the best smile." (Henry Winkler played greaser, and cool, bad boy Arthur "Fonzie" Fonzarelli on the 1970s American sitcom, *Happy Days*.)

"David was sweet and loving," Bernadette added, "and he could really kiss."



Photographed by Bernadette's mom, David and Bernadette kissed in the kitchen.



1968. David, number 26, and Mike Jelinsky, number 70, played on Terra Nova High School's varsity football team.

Barbara said she really got to know Dave better in her junior year, when she started dating Butch. Butch and Dave were good friends. They did the typical stuff that teenagers do on a zero budget. The three would go riding in Butch's VW Bug, or walk around, to see who was out and about.

"Dave was a steadfast, loyal friend to my husband, who valued his friendship greatly," Barbara said. "He always dressed in black and he had an even temperament. He loved to tease me and joke a lot. He was a gentle soul. He was a good friend."



Dave enlisted in the Army, the day after his 17th birthday. He finished high school in the service.

"His grades were not good and he decided it was time for a different path and he took it," Bernadette said.

David did his basic training at Fort Lewis, WA, and his subsequent mechanic's training at Fort Ord, CA, and Fort Hood, TX. Closed in 1994, Fort Ord was located on 45 square miles of dunes and forest along the coast of California's Monterey Bay.

"When he finished training at Fort Ord, the family went down to pick him up and bring him home," Beverly said. "I remember all of us kids were in the car."

When he headed out of Pacifica, shortly thereafter, Butch, Barbara and Bernadette drove him to the Oakland Army Base.

"He was a mechanic in a Signal Battalion, a wheel vehicle repairman," Beverly said, noting that David most certainly arrived in the service with mechanic skills. "My dad did all his own car repairs and I'm sure David was right beside him from the time he was a little kid."

David served in Vietnam for 12 months and during that time Bernadette sent him a lot of brownies.

"We sent them in coffee cans and I wrapped each single one in foil," Bernadette said. "Sometimes he got them and sometimes he didn't, but when he did he always shared them. Mostly we just sent brownies because that's what he wanted. I made those same brownies not too long ago and they are still good. I call them my Vietnam brownies."

Bernadette is still amazed that David phoned her on her 16th birthday. She doesn't know where he was, but she'll never forget it. He also wrote Bernadette and she wrote him. In addition he wrote to his family and to his friends, including Patti, Butch and Barbara.

"He did not discuss his assignments in his letters," Barbara noted, "just that he didn't like the regimentation. He expressed that the Army was not what he had expected or hoped for and he was disappointed in the whole experience, though he did not go into particulars. Writing was not his strong suit! But he did write that he was looking forward to getting a job, earning money and beginning an independent life. Like all 18-year-olds!"

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"David was always a good big brother," Beverly said. "There was no drama. I don't remember us fighting. He got along with everyone. When he was home on leave, I would ask, 'Can I have a dollar?' And he'd say, 'No, you're a pain in the ass!' And then he'd give me more than I asked for."

Growing up, David and his twin brothers shared a room. They had bunkbeds.

"We were young when David headed off to Vietnam," Jimmy said. "But we looked up to him. He let us hang around with his friends back at the end of Rosita Rd. And in the end, we not only lost David, but we lost a bunch of his friends: Stan Childers, Medford Chrysler and Johnny White."

"When we were kids, one of David's best friends, Mike Farrell, used to call us Heckle and Jeckle," Jimmy went on to say. "Dennis is Heckle and I'm Jeckle. Dennis and I each got our name tattooed. It's a good memory."



63B10-Light-Wheel Vehicle Mechanic David McKay
Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai Province, Vietnam, 1970



After serving a year in Vietnam, David came home on leave. He was home from April 5 to May 5. He told his folks he had signed up for another six months in Vietnam so that he could be released from the Army earlier, in November of 1970, rather than March of 1971. He had plans. He wanted to go to college. He wanted to travel the United States.

Attending Johnny White's funeral was one of the hardest things David did during his leave home. The two were longtime friends from the neighborhood and through school. PFC Johnny Bryan White died in Gia Định Province, South Vietnam on April 16, 1970.

"It was an open casket for Johnny's funeral," Beverly said. "David told my mom he would not want that."

As both Beverly and Bernadette pointed out, David also met one of his greatest joys on his leave. He bought himself a "big, Honda candy gold motorcycle."

"We would take off on his motorcycle and go for rides," Bernadette said. "He absolutely loved it."

David's mom reiterated that sentiment in the *Pacifica Tribune* story. "He just loved that bike," she said. "It was his first possession, something he owned that was completely his."

He put 1,000 miles on it in those 30 days home.

"The first time David went over to Vietnam, I didn't feel any sort of extra feeling of worry," Bernadette said. "The second time, I was so afraid and I asked him not to go. I still remember our goodbye. It was extremely painful."

On June 4, 1970, U.S. Army Specialist 4 David George McKay, B Company, 53rd Signal Battalion, Second Field Force, was struck by a U.S. Army military vehicle in Biên Hòa, South Vietnam. He died as a result of his injuries.

He is interred at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno, CA. His service was held at Chapel By The Sea in Pacifica.

"David wasn't an angel," Jimmy said. "He was just a brother we looked up to. He taught us respect. He let us hang around with him. That was so cool. He was, he is, my hero."



David poses with his beloved Honda motorcycle, Pacifica, CA, 1970.

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Pacifica American Legion Post 238. 555 Buel Avenue, Pacifica, CA 94044. Hall phone: 650-355-4346. Checks may be written to Pacifica American Legion Post 238.

In the memo section of the check, write: "Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group" or just "Memorial Group." With additional questions, contact: Rich Jasso, jasso3@gmail.com or Mike Jelinsky, mjelinsky@gmail.com.

In addition, donations may be made directly to the Pacifica Veterans Memorial Group Go Fund Me Page, which is linked [here](#).



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.