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The Big Hysto



Local mover and shaker takes on racial medical malpractice with fibroid documentary

See pages 3-4

Cover image is a seated portrait of documentary producer, Melissa Muganzo Murphy

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‘I dated Joan Didion,’ says Sacramento native

By Lance Armstrong

Editor’s note: This is part three of a three-part series, with the first part featuring artist Wayne Thiebaud. This article and the series’ second article are about writer Joan Didion. Both Didion and Thiebaud spent years living in Sacramento. They died two days apart in late December 2021.

Sacramento native Bob Weidner is one person who can speak with authority when it comes to talking about some of the early years of the late author Joan Didion. After all, he dated her before she became famous.

“I dated Joan Didion,” he said in a recent interview with this paper. “(That was) from 1952 till 1956 or 1957, about five years.”

Didion, who herself was a Sacramento native and a 1952 graduate of C.K. McClatchy High School, died of complications of Parkinson’s disease at the age of 87 on Dec. 23, 2021.

In her post-Sacramento years, Didion would become renowned as a writer who, through her novels, essays and other writings, chronicled American society. References to her native city appear in some of those writings.

Weidner, 88, mentioned that both he and Didion were living in Sacramento and attending Sacramento Junior College – today’s Sacramento City College – when they began dating.

“(His friend), Maurice (Read) and I belonged to a junior college fraternity and there was a dance coming up,” he said. “My regular girlfriend was in the hospital (with a) bad back, and I needed a date, and Maurice was going out with Nancy Kennedy, who happened to be Joan’s best friend at McClatchy (High), and for years afterwards.

“There’s a sideline on that. She had a little brother, a brother a couple years younger than her who we called Tony Kennedy. He was later known as United State Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. So, anyway, I started going out with Joan then and went with her all the way through till graduating from (the University of California, Berkeley), both of us.”

Weidner, a 1951 graduate of Sacramento High School, noted that while he and Didion were dating in Sacramento, Didion lived with her maternal grandparents near Sacramento Junior College.

“(Didion) lived with her grandfather and grandmother (Herman and Edna Jerrett) – her mother’s parents – (at 2941 Highland Ave.) in Sacramento when I first met her, and that’s where I always went to pick her up,” he said.

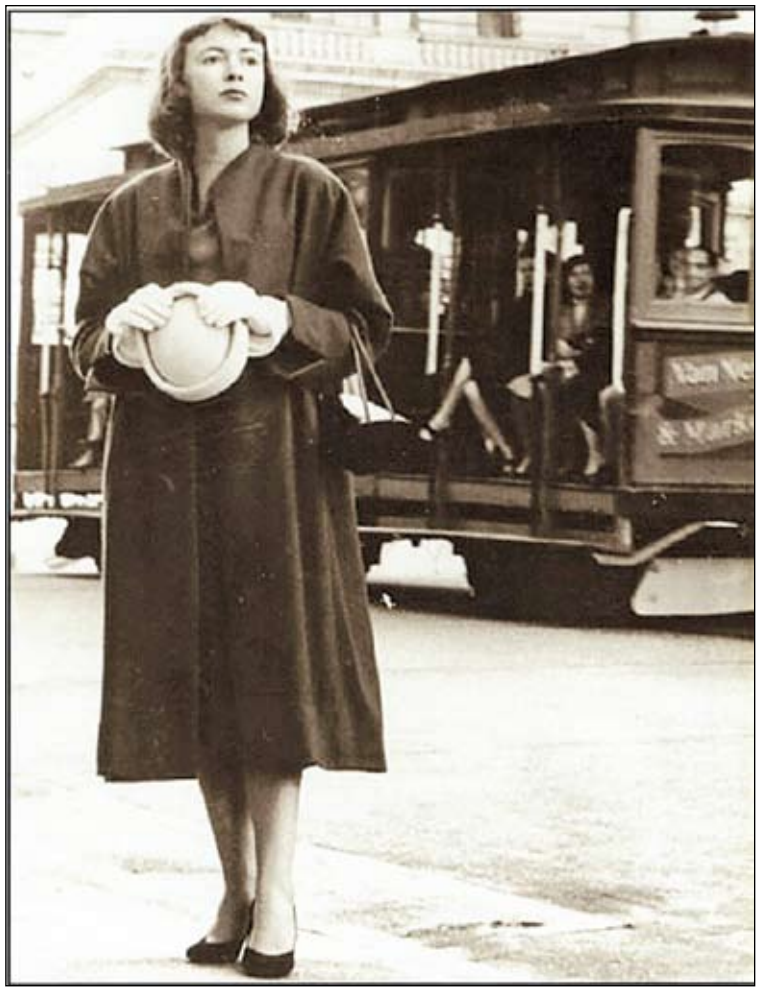
He also recalled going with Didion to many local motion picture theaters, including drive-in theaters of that time.

“We did the regular stuff (such as watching) movies at the Senator Theatre (at 912 K St.), Tower Theatre (at 2508 Land Park Drive, and) the Alhambra (Theatre at 1101 Alhambra Blvd.),” he said. “You know, regular things that you go to.

“Back in those days, occasionally, you would go into the snack bar at the drive-in (theaters), and once in a while there would be a Wayne Thiebaud painting for sale at the snack bar.”

Weidner’s recollection of viewing Thiebaud’s artwork was timely, considering that Sacramento lost another one of its famous people, with his death last Christmas.

In addition to his memory of seeing Thiebaud’s art in the theater’s snack bar, Weidner also mentioned that both he and his brother, Edwin F. Weidner Jr., took art classes from Thiebaud in Sacramento.



Joan Didion stands near a cable car in San Francisco in 1956. This photograph, which Didion submitted to Vogue magazine, was taken by her then-boyfriend, Bob Weidner.

Returning to the main topic of Didion, Weidner briefly shared why he was drawn to his former girlfriend.

“We got along very well together, and I just liked her, that’s all,” he said. “That other girl got out of the hospital, but I stopped going out with her.”

Recalling Didion’s passion for writing, Weidner noted that she may have received much of her motivation to excel in writing through one of her teachers at McClatchy High.

“She told me that she had an English teacher at McClatchy that told her that she would never make it (as a writer), and I think that was one of her driving forces to show that he was wrong,” he said. “I don’t know who the teacher was.”

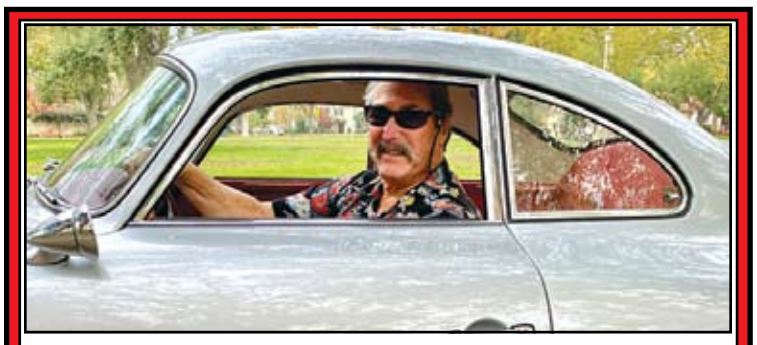
Both Weidner and Didion left Sacramento to attend the University of California, Berkeley, and Didion graduated six months ahead of Weidner.

“I had another six months to go, because I had been in the service, because that’s when the Korean War started and we all had to go in the service,” Weidner recalled.

It was around that time when Weidner and Didion began discussing their future together.

“Maurice married the girl that he was going out with, and Joan and I were talking about what we’re going to do, and one of the options I had was I had a rich uncle who had a Lincoln-Mercury dealership in Bakersfield, and he had no offspring, and he was asking me if I wanted to take that over,” he said. “Joan

See Didion on Page 5



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‘The Big Hysto’: Local mover and shaker takes on racial medical malpractice with fibroid documentary

By Monica Stark



Local fibroid survivor Melissa Muganzo Murphy suffered cystic acne, uncontrollable weight gain, and heavy period bleeding just thinking they were rights of passage into womanhood. It wasn’t until a Black nurse practitioner pulled her aside after a medical appointment to tell her that she has fibroids and that she could help and that the doctors wouldn’t tell her this because she is Black. “That’s when I realized I was one of many who were victimized by the racial bias seeped into our medical sytem’s history,” Muganzo Murphy said.

Now 10 years in the making, a documentary about Black uterine health and medical injustice masterminded by Muganzo Murphy inspired by her own journey and those of countless others, titled The Big Hysto, will premiere this July, National Fibroid Awareness Month. The trailer has recently been released in time for Black History Month.

The documentary includes interviews with 15 Sacramento natives and transplants who have their own stories about medical malpractice, today. While it features their journey to joy, journey to freedom, their journey to family in 2021, it also chronicles the malpractices and the horrors along the way, as Muganzo Murphy says, “So that people can see this is not right.”

While the documentary is groundbreaking in approach, the experiences for those people who have been suffering the whole time are not. Perhaps therein lies some beauty, however, as Muganzo Murphy explains: “These stories will be like me to my auntie, to my grandmother, to my neighbor, to my daughter, to my cousin, to -- It’s a huge conversation that’s happened for generations, and we just didn’t say anything because we didn’t trust the doctor. So we’d rather not go to the doctor, which is harmful because then you’re missing all these preventative steps that could, you know, basically intercept the harm.”

One of the stories, as retold by Muganzo Murphy, includes a cast member who, in their 20s, was having a really hard time with fibroids and was given two options by the doctor -- to either deal with it or get a hysterectomy, an irreversible process. The patient opts for the removal and then later found out there are other treatments available. Identifying as trans, the patient, 26, was assumed to not want to have a child in that way at some point in their life. “So there’s this misgendering. There’s sexism. There’s medical malpractice. Injustice is happening because of the black body, right?”

She said that while the patient was able to have two children via their partner, there was still “guilt and shame” that they felt for having the procedure done.

Muganzo Murphy’s experience differed in that she wanted a hysterectomy at age 23 but was denied the procedure by two female doctors who couldn’t believe that she didn’t want to ever have children of her own. The first doctor had a 9-month-old baby at the time and Muganzo Murphy felt their deep connection to their child, however they had personalized that moment and recognized her suffering. Also, they didn’t ask crucial questions like: Are you in a relationship? That is an agreement with you wanting kids in the future, right? Does

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Big Hysto

Continued from Page 3

your partner have children? Are you in a relationship where sex is penetrative? She said they assumed that when she marries her husband, he'd be upset that she can't have children. "It's ageism, layered with heterosexism and racism. And it's all very layered," she said.

The suffering was intense. When she got on birth control, she bled for eight months straight, changing tampons every 30 minutes. She couldn't cough or sneeze or laugh. An entertainment dancer, a cheerleader, a choreographer trying to figure how she'd perform her two-hour show with that going on, Muganzo Murphy would ask herself how she'd be able to get through all that. "(My) acne was out of control. Headaches were out of control. I'm anemic. I mean, I was gaining weight out of it. It's horrendous, right?" she said.

The nurse-practitioner who guided Muganzo Murphy suggested a vegan diet and cutting out sugar to rid her body of the fibroids. So she did and her bleeding went from eight months to two days and without any cramps. "When I went vegan and I eliminated sugar, no more cramps," she said. "And this whole time I have been told that cramps were a rite of passage. No. Cramps are a sign that you have a uterine illness going on." She said the hormone-ridden foods that are common in our diets coupled with sugar are like a "buffet" for the fibroids.

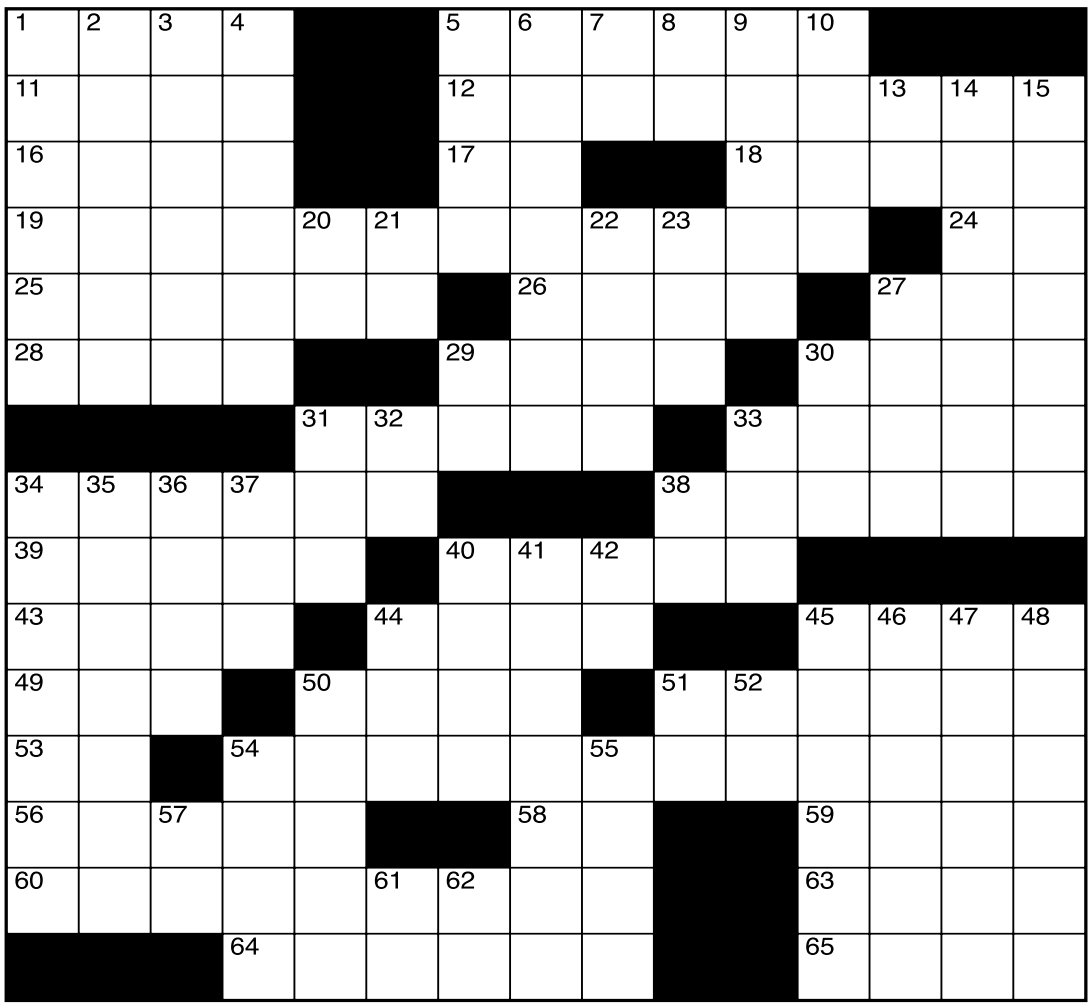
Instead of saying cramps are showing you a problem, Muganzo Murphy says that instead the industry pushes Midol to end them. "Big pharma always gives us capitalism. So we're going to capitalize on your pain, which is really your body telling you it's (expletive) up. And you start to recognize that patriarchy and racist practices happen over the female body and reproductive organs."

An expert on racial medical malpractice, Last year Muganzo Murphy was named the USA Fibroid Centers inaugural west coast ambassador and wrote on Aug. 26, 2021 in an article titled "You're welcome: Why we all owe Black wombs a round of applause" and published on LinkedIn that according to USA Fibroid Centers, "1 in 8 womb holders will experience uterine health trauma in their lifetime and 1 in 3 of those people will be Black-identified. (Yeah, the same people who sacrificed their livelihood to ensure we all could celebrate life today.) This means that while Black wombs are disproportionately impacted by this issue, all communities are susceptible to the residue of unjust medical practices that began in the 1800s. Racial undertones impact all of us and have generational rippling effects on all genders, races, and nationalities."

For many years Muganzo Murphy wouldn't wear white pants and opted for a lot of black to hide any blood, but she proudly wears white now. "Someone asked me, 'How did you wear white pants after Labor Day?' And I told him this whole reclamation that I'm on because I've worn black for so long."

Follow Muganzo Murphy on her website: muganzoentertainment.com/

CROSSWORD



CLUES ACROSS

1. Remain as is
5. Functional
11. News magazine
12. Popular treat
16. Area units
17. Artificial intelligence
18. Marten valued for its fur
19. Forms of matter
24. Home of the Dodgers
25. Bordering
26. Part of the eye
27. It might be nervous
28. Visualizes
29. Crest of a hill
30. Measures engine speed (abbr.)
31. Tears in a garment (Br. Eng.)
33. Not easily explained
34 Song in short stanzas
38. Detonations
39. Intestinal
40. EU cofounder Paul-Henri __
43. Balmy
44. New Mexico mountain town
45. Gobblers
49. Insecticide
50. Golf scores
51. Has its own altar
53. "Pollock" actor Harris
54. Being livable
56. NHL play-by-play man
58. "The Great Lakes State" (abbr.)
59. Unpainted
60. Swam underwater
63. Native American people
64. Containing salt
65. Exam

CLUES DOWN

1. Small bone in middle ear
2. Long, angry speech
3. Move out of
4. Male organ
5. Two-toed sloth
6. Making dirty
7. Article
8. Oil company
9. Emits coherent radiation
10. Amounts of time
13. Unit equal to one quintillion bytes (abbr.)
14. Forbidden by law
15. Drains away
20. Not out
21. Sea patrol (abbr.)
22. Bird genus
23. Gratuity
27. __ and feathers
29. Spiritual part of an individual (ancient Egypt)
30. Hot beverage
31. Pouch
32. It followed the cassette
33. Large northern deer
34. Ones who offer formally
35. Famed genie
36. Bequeathed
37. Skeletal muscle
38. Atomic #56
40. Silk garment
41. They deliver the mail
42. Equally
44. Check
45. Light-colored breed of hound
46. Drug that soothes
47. Railroads
48. Most slick
50. Jacket
51. A radio band
52. Hello
54. His and __
55. Supporter
57. Popular software suite (abbr.)
61. Railway
62. NY coastal region (abbr.)

Didion

Continued from Page 2

and I discussed that and we decided nobody wanted to live in Bakersfield."

Weidner also spoke about being a part of Didion's life in 1956, when she won a Vogue magazine essay contest, which would launch her career in the professional world of writing. Her winning essay was called "Self-Respect: Its Sources, Its Power." For winning that contest, Vogue offered her a job at this New York-based fashion and lifestyle magazine.

"(Didion) was kind of not really the most brave person in the world, and she was a little reluctant to go back to New York by herself," Weidner said. "And I told her that if she didn't take that job with Vogue magazine that she would spend the rest of her life wondering what her life would have been like if she had gone and taken that job. So, she went and we kept in touch."

After having what he referred to as "a billion correspondence" with Didion, Weidner noted that his relationship came to an unexpected end.

"We had a billion correspondence up until that point – her in New York and me in San Francisco – and I knew she was coming back, which she had done several times, you know?" he said. "And I had seen her every time. Well, this time was different. She came back and I picked her up at the airport like I usually did. This time she told me that our relationship was over."

Weidner mentioned his belief that had Didion not won Vogue's essay contest, she would have likely become his wife.

"Well, yeah, we probably would have (gotten married), if she hadn't won that contest," he said.

Although Weidner mentioned that he was "kind of devastated" by the breakup, he added that his life moved forward with much happiness.

"Well, actually, it turned out that she did me a big favor, because I found the most wonderful woman in the world," he said. "I'm still married to her. Unfortunately, now, she has Alzheimer's (disease) and can't live here anymore. She's (in the) severe stages of Alzheimer's."

Weidner, who spent 29 years working for the State Farm insurance company and currently resides in Novato, married his wife, Brenda, on May 27, 1962, and they have two sons.

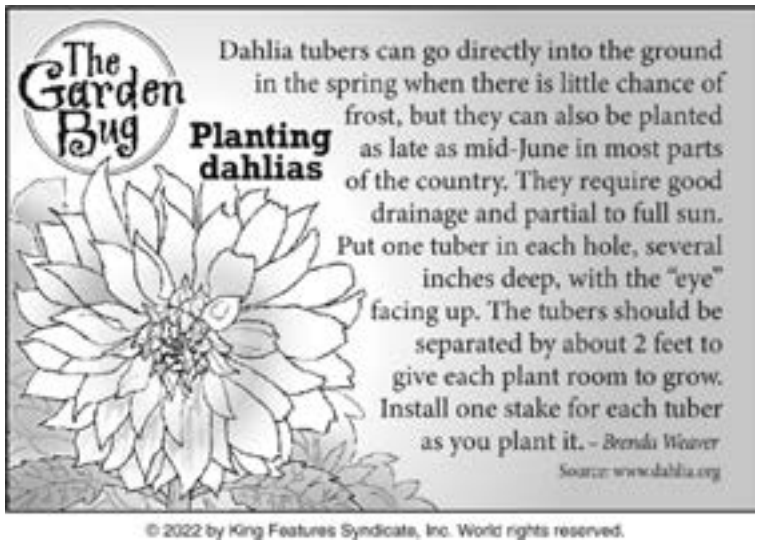
Reflecting on having dated a woman who achieved great fame as a writer, Weidner noted that he read nearly every book written by and about Didion.

"Well, obviously, she's terrific, and an interesting thing for a guy like me – who is now living 3,000 miles away from Joan for 50 years or whatever the heck it is, because she's so famous – I know what she's doing all the time," he said. "So, I was able to keep up with her life. Of course, she had no idea what was going on in mine, I don't imagine."



Caption: Bob Weidner sits in his backyard with his son's dog, Newman.

Photos courtesy of Bob Weidner



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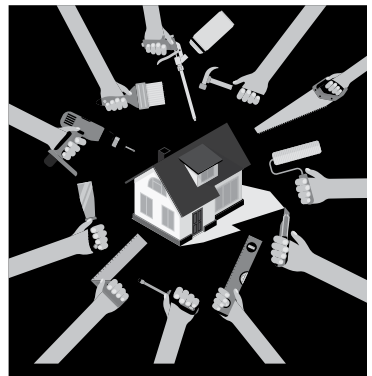
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‡The Wells Fargo Furnishings credit card is issued by Wells Fargo Financial National Bank. ONE YEAR Special Financing applies to qualifying purchases of $1,500 or more charged with approved credit and 35% down payment. Minimum monthly payments are required during the promotional ONE YEAR period. Interest will be charged to your account from the purchase date at the APR for Purchases if the purchase balance is not paid in full within the promotional ONE YEAR period. Paying only the minimum monthly payment will not pay off the purchase balance before the end of the promotional period. For new accounts, the APR for purchases is 28.99%. If you are charged interest in any billing cycle, the minimum interest charge will be $1.00. This information is accurate as of 1/01/2022 and is subject to change. For current information, call us at 1-800-431-5921. *Since the State of California requires that tax be paid on all retail sales, we reduce the purchase price by an amount equal to the tax on the reduced purchase price except "Special Buys", all "Mega Clearance" and icomfort products. Offers not available in conjunction with any other promotion, discount, or financing. Offers not available on previous purchases. Sale ends 2/21/22.