

Pitching in to serve community needs a way of life for this Dragon lady

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Cynthia Dragonâ??s mural on the front of Kwik & Convenient, the neighborhood market on Monterey Boulevard near Foerster, shouts â??Welcome to the Sunnyside,â?• in large vivid yellow letters over a bright orange sun, with a colorful flower and bee off to one side.

The mural is a labor of love, and itâ??s a vivid example of Dragonâ??s lifelong commitment to community service and generous action. It took several early morning trips to Recology to scrounge the paint, donations from neighbors and a local hardware store, and seven days of work by Dragon and her niece to complete the 8-foot by 36-foot mural.



Cynthia and Jim Dragon. (Photos courtesy of Cynthia Dragon)

â??Itâ??s happy art â?? I meant it to be uplifting,â?• said Dragon. â??I wanted to do it. Itâ??s where my husband picks up our morning paper and the plywood looked like it needed something.â?•

Jumping into a project like the mural is small potatoes when compared to all the generous acts upon which Dragonâ??s life is built. But itâ??s a good example of how she seizes the day, whether to help others or simply to embark on a grand adventure. Over the decades, Dragon, 71, fostered 115 children in the tiny bungalow she shares with her husband. Now, she volunteers as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children going through the court system. Her aide is a court-certified dog trained to comfort children.

Sheâ??s also the kind of person who likes to bind a community together. Just one example: Several years ago, when she realized she knew her neighbors but they didnâ??t know one another, she invited them over for tea parties â??12 at a time. â??Now they know each other.â?• Her attitude to life is direct: Make the most of every moment. â??Volunteer for (and commit to) whatever youâ??re passionate about.â?•

â??Make the most of every momentâ??

Since the pandemic, she has sewn hundreds of face masks that sheâ??s donated to health care and public safety workers, friends and neighbors.



Cynthia Dragon at her sewing machine, making masks for health care and public safety workers â?? and friends.

â??I donâ??t know about reincarnation,â?• she adds, â??so I have to fit it in now.â?•

Like many whose heart was claimed by San Francisco, Dragon first arrived on a lark, encountering the city as the end point of a cross-country road trip she took with her mother and sister in 1970. Sheâ??d grown up in Babylon, N.Y., and studied architecture and fine art but when they left, she hadnâ??t yet finished her degree. It turned out, she never would. When the threesome reached San Francisco, Dragon decided to stay. Convinced she would not change her mind, her mother and sister joined her in renting an apartment in Pacific Heights.

Falling in love sealed the deal. One day, soon after moving to San Francisco, â??I got picked up by this hippy guy in a beat-up truck.â?• She and her husband, Jim Dragon, have been together ever since.

He worked as a carpenter for the San Francisco Unified School District while she stayed at home with the children for 18 years â?? â??115 of them, although not all at the same time,â?• she added.

Dragon and her husband began fostering children when they realized they could not have children of their own and knew that the adoption process would take more years, so they applied for foster care in the interim. They ended up being basically an emergency shelter for newborns and very young children from Family Court, keeping them until the Court decided where to place them. That could be for one night or several months.

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115 children fostered, 2 adopted and one of her own

â??It was an amazing adventure,â?• Dragon said. â??Most were born drug addicted. Their cries didnâ??t sound healthy. They werenâ??t comfortable being handled, and we had to teach babies how to suck.â?•



Cynthia Dragon and her son.

Dragon and her husband eventually adopted two of the children they fostered. Her daughter, now 38 and a mechanical engineer, lives â??up the hillâ?• with her husband. Her son, now 36, grows marijuana in the Gold Country. And when Dorothy was 40, she became pregnant â?? with a boy. He works for the San Francisco Police Department. The Dragons later adopted another child, and were actively involved in raising Dragonâ??s sisterâ??s daughter, her fellow artist on the mural.

Today, the years of fostering infants are past, and while Dragon would like to reopen her house as an emergency shelter, her husband is ready to take a break. Still committed to helping children, she signed up as a CASA volunteer. â??Me and a woman about a mile away share Nemo. We bring him to court. It takes us about 15 minutes to go through security. Everyone wants to pet him.â?•



Cynthia in San Juan.

One thing she still longs for is travel â?? the passion that led her to San Francisco but got put aside during the fostering years. Before the pandemic, Dragon had taken many trips alone; her husband doesnâ??t care for travel. â??I stay at youth hostels. Theyâ??re cheap, the people are interesting, and they donâ??t seem to notice my age.â?•

With her sister, a United Airlines gate agent whose perks include low-cost travel for her and family, she has been to Paris, St. Petersburg, Krakow and Israel. Mongolia was on her list for this year.

â??Three years ago, we stayed for four days with a friendâ??s mother in New Delhi. Weâ??d go out on the balcony, the neighbors would shout, â??the Americansâ??, and weâ??d give them the Queenâ??s wave.â?•

Next up: Travel in teardrop trailer

Of course, now that that kind of travel isnâ??t possible Dragonâ??s husband has decided heâ??s ready. But it will be across the country not oceans. The two are waiting to receive their new teardrop trailer. Sheâ??s happy about that, because many of the things she liked to do before the pandemic â?? target shooting, horseback riding and kayaking â?? have been set aside with the shelter-in-place order. But she has managed to continue her archery, creating a space in their front yard when the range closed.


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Cynthia and her husband are members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary

The pandemic may have shut down global travel and sidelined favorite pastimes, but Dragonâ??s not one to sit and fret. Instead, as usual, she set her sights on a community need. â??I love to sew, so I started making masks,â?• she said. She used her sisterâ??s old airline uniforms to make 180 masks for United Airlines flight crews. She also made 500 dark blue masks for the Coast Guard (she and her husband are members of the Coast Guard Auxiliary), 12 for the mounted police in Golden Gate Park, 200 for â??It Takes a Village,â?• a volunteer group that makes masks and face shields for healthcare workers, in addition to masks for friends and neighbors.

Years ago, when she turned 50, her daughter asked her if it was scary getting older. Her answer: â??No, I have good health, a caring husband, beautiful children.â?• In the midst of the pandemic, she still feels that way. â??Itâ??s been a good life,â?• she says. â??And there are still so many adventures.â?•

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1. All Posts

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