

AVIANO - FIRESIDE

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# Friends & Neighbors

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*the*  
Snyder/  
Gilderbloom  
Family

*A Modern Love Story*

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# The Snyder/Gilderbloom Family

## *A Modern Love Story*

Written by Barbara Starr | Photos by Lara Lipscomb Photography

**F**rom high school rivals to a beautiful late in life marriage, a modern love story is being lived by Fireside residents Dr. John Hans Gilderbloom and Carla Snyder.

John and Carla first felt sparks at 7th grade church camp in the San Francisco Bay Area but this still led to rivalry and tension. "We were polar opposites in our political views and lifestyle at that time. I was labeled a brainiac and John was a troublemaker rebel who ran with a tough but popular crowd," reminisced Carla. "We competed vigorously in debate competitions that often ended in dispute and anger. But in our joint remembrances, we always had feelings and you know the saying opposites attract."

Graduating in the early seventies, it was a time of great promise and in the midst of a cultural revolution with Haight Asbury 15 miles away. "Santana, Neil Schon (who later started Journey) and Grateful Dead played at our teen dances and Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham played at our big high school graduation party," shared John. "I organized a Students for Democratic Society chapter and helped farmworker Cesar Chavez with a 'grape boycott' at our local Safeway and also organized a walkout at school during Nixon's bombing of Cambodia."

Also going on were classmates going to Vietnam and dying, massive anti-war demonstrations and Black Panthers having shootouts. "Again, there was a loud debate over these issues and lots of division. We never really talked to each other; it was more like shouting most of the time and it was fierce enough to bring me to tears at times," said Carla. "It was a time of 'question authority' and we were questioning everything."

So much questioning that Carla had a graduation party at her house and invited all the seniors, including the troublemakers - John and his friends. The troublemakers arrived at the party not dressed for church like most of the others. John was wearing streaked blonde hair to his shoulders, polka dot shirt, stolen rental bowling shoes, blue sailor pants and smelling of petulia oil. "John went straight for the Fritos and ate handfuls. My mom suspected he had the munchies from smoking pot so without my knowledge, she had several of the jocks escort him out," described Carla. "But not before my mom sensed a strange vibe between us."

After graduation, Carla and John went their separate ways. John went to the University of California Santa Barbara to earn his numerous degrees and Carla went to Arizona State University.



Life happens and during their 30-year hiatus from each other, there were both tragedies and triumphs. John lost both his son and wife under horrific circumstances as well as suffered a life-threatening illness and a home invasion with gunfire. Carla was a single parent from the time her children were one and three years old, maintained a career on the road to support the family as well as have four major surgeries, which could have been forever debilitating.

"Other than high school reunions every ten years, our paths did not connect until a fateful day on August 4, 2018," explained John. "I had flown up to San Francisco with friends to attend a book tour John was hosting for his latest book," said Carla. "I went up to buy my book from John. He took my \$20 and grabbed my other hand and uttered the words 'oh my gosh, are you single?'"

Considering John was a tenured professor at the University of Louisville, neither of them held much hope for a long-distance relationship but since they had such a shared history, certainly they could enjoy a friendship.

Friendship blossomed into something more and in May 2019, John gathered the family together in Phoenix, dropped to one knee and proposed to Carla. In November 2021, they married at a park on top of a hill in Santa Barbara with 360-degree views of the ocean and mountains.

"His wedding ring is made out of my mom's ring. We keep laughing and wondering what my mom would say up there



in heaven. Perhaps, John is the last person on Earth she wanted her daughter to marry and how truly ironic it is that he is wearing her ring," shared Carla. "On second thought, she might be saying after so many years alone, my sweet daughter found the love of her life and John found his and she wishes the best for us."

John has taught since 1980 at the University of California, University of Wisconsin, University of Houston and, currently, at the University of Louisville where he is Professor of Graduate Planning, Public Administration, Sustainability and Urban Affairs program. John is ranked as one of the world's top urban thinkers and was an advisor to Vice President Al Gore's White House Sustainability Commission, Livable Communities initiative. He received the American Sociological Association Lifetime Achievement Award in Urban and Community Studies. He is now director for the Center for Sustainable Urban Neighborhoods at the Neighborhood Associates in Washington D.C. John is a legendary figure in urban affairs with significant contributions to cities worldwide in urban development, sustainability, housing, health and transportation. Beyond being a renowned urban planner, John is a visionary for seeking sustainable solutions for concrete chaos. He is a prolific author with his latest book title is *Climate Chaos: killing people and the planet and what to do about it*, due out later this year.

Carla is currently the CEO and Igniter at Impact Transformation LLC. Carla was recently honored as the Businesswoman of the Year for 2024 by the Phoenix Business Journal. In 2020, she received the International Women of Peace Award for her extraordinary commitment to her community. Her crowning achievement over the last 15

years has been working in multiple capacities with the Valley of the Sun United Way. Carla also represents VUCAMAZ, a cutting-edge leadership development experience essential for communication in the era of artificial intelligence influence. An avid writer, Carla's first book of poetry, *Liberte*, was published last year to positive reviews.

John and Carla's latest endeavor is filming *Climate of Hope: Cities Saving the World*. John is featured and Carla is co-producing this documentary to highlight opportunities to reverse climate change using the tools available in cities and to positively impact the future of our Earth.

When not working to make a significant impact on communities around the world, John and Carla enjoy time together while being active locally. Season ticket holders at the Phoenix Suns and all access pass members supporting the Phoenix Theatre, they are frequent attendees at concert venues throughout the Valley like *Celebrity*, *Footprint* and the *MIM*. "We both attend Unity of Phoenix and Carla regularly volunteers on the worship team," said John. "In addition, we are active in supporting the Valley of the Sun United Way with time, treasure and advocacy."

John and Carla are fortunate to have Carla's two kids nearby. Jonna is a certified doula and dance teacher living in Peoria with her husband Mark and two grand boys, Hudson and Jackson. Gavin is in the building securities business and lives in the Scottsdale area with his fiancée Janelle, a professional photographer.

"We love having the whole family over and we head to the clubhouse to swim, play games and enjoy the amenities," said Carla. "Always, my grand boys find other kids to play with at the pool. John and I enjoy the tranquility of the jacuzzi at the lap pool as well as pumping some iron in the gym."

The Sierra Pointe subdivision has been home for three years. "We have made great friendships with our neighbors and love to come out in the shared driveway to catch up," shared Carla. "The walking path is visible from every window of our home and strolling it, we have met so many friendly neighbors and get satisfaction from all the licks/pets bestowed on us from the dogs we encounter along the way. The events at our clubhouse have really widened our circles of friendship as well."

### Climate of Hope: Cities Saving the World

Please join John & Carla for a joyful time talking about the filming of their documentary and their hope to create a better world for our children and our grandchildren.

Saturday, August 10  
 10am - Fireside Community Center  
 5pm - Aviano Community Center  
[www.climateofhopefilm.org](http://www.climateofhopefilm.org)