

"THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM"  
FOUNDING OF THE MULHOLLAND CLUB

[A talk given by Irving Zeiger on the occasion of retiring the original mortgage on the Club's facilities, April 4, 1987].

My pleasant task this evening is to recount how the Mulholland Club came into being. I take you back to 1964. Picture, if you can, this entire mountain on which our Club now rests as a continuum of decomposed granite and natural brush extending from Court 6 all the way down to Mulholland. Skyline Road had just been built and a series of pads sprinkled the mountain. I don't recall any houses.

The idea for the Mulholland Club came from Bill McClellan, to whom we owe our continuing gratitude. Bill was an energetic, enthusiastic man, an engineer for the L.A. Flood Control District. Bill approached me with an idea for a tennis and recreation club to be built on 6-1/2 undeveloped acres at the top of Skyline Road. The idea, of course, was perfect and we were off and running.

We first had to enlist a group of other unrealistic and crazy people. Ours was "The Impossible Dream". Within a few weeks about 60 people had put up \$150 each. The money was stipulated as a gift, since we had no corporate permission to

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solicit funds or any way to assure members their money would result in a club. For \$1,000 Bill obtained a two-year option on the land. The price of the land was \$200,000. With faith in the idea and belief we could make it happen, our membership began to grow. Meetings were held in member's homes. Later we met in the Litton Auditorium on Sunset Blvd.

Probably the most fortunate set of circumstances was in the composition of the first Board of Directors. Bill McClellan, our first President, was a dynamo with an abundance of energy and very knowledgeable in dealing with the City. Don Barr, a terrific Real Estate Lawyer, was our legal counsel; Joe Segal, a super accountant, was our first Treasurer. Don and Joe made their offices and secretaries available on a full-time basis to handle the multitude of club and membership documents. Sam Match was a popular tennis personality and Pro; Helen Stout, our first Secretary, gave the Board dignity and credibility. Chuck Colwell was in Real Estate Financing; Al Rose, a publicity and advertising man; Hal Linden, later Al Dick and Chuck Provin, builders; and myself, a tennis nut specializing in recruiting members. Everyone brought something to the party. Not one of us had ever belonged to a tennis club before, so obviously we were highly qualified.

In the two years that followed, I can't remember any matter requiring a Board Member's attention, whether during the work day or after, to which the Member failed to respond. The Board and all the Charter Members had one thing in common; we all believed fervently if the Club was ever built, it would be a wonderful addition to our lives and the lives of our families.

Things began to fall into place: 1) More than 200 members joined up, still listing their \$150 as a gift. 2) We went door-to-door and won neighborhood support for the Club. 3) Dick Hunter, our Architect, developed spectacular plans that have become the Club. 4) The Board of Zoning Appeals, despite certain organized Hillside opposition, granted the necessary zoning variance, limiting membership to 400 families. In return, our Club built Crestview Drive, connecting Skyline to Green Valley - providing the entire community a second way out of the canyon in the event of a fire or other catastrophe. 5) A skeptical Corporate Commissioner finally succumbed and granted us a permit to issue stock. The \$150 gifts were then credited to the stock price. 6) All that was left was finding financing for construction. Just think of it, asking a sane financial institution to loan money to a non-profit, membership-owned, single-purpose recreational club, in a residential community requiring a zoning variance, without personal guarantors. Not to worry.

1965 thru 1967 were among the worst years in California Savings & Loan history. S & L's were going under as we went looking for money. We were turned down by everyone. Just as panic was beginning to set in, Sam Match put us in touch with Brentwood Savings & Loan, where a friend and former student of his, Bill Glickbarg, was on the Board of Directors. Bill was and is a tennis fanatic. He convinced Brentwood's Board to consider the loan. The Loan Officer sent to investigate had never seen a tennis club in his life, which figured. Remember, this was 1965. Tennis had not become big. There were not more than five tennis clubs in all of Greater Los Angeles. Sam Match, Bill McClellan and myself met with the Loan Officer at the Beverly Hills Tennis Club to show him what a tennis club looked like. Shortly thereafter, Brentwood agreed to the loan.

I thought the terms were positively usurious. The loan was for \$250,000, at the exhorbitant interest of 8 percent. Moreover, Brentwood withheld the first \$50,000 as insurance that we would make our payments in an orderly manner. The loan required no personal guarantors, an unheard-of deal then and even now. Had another two months elapsed, getting the loan would have been out of the question and there would have been no Mulholland Club. We pay tribute tonight to Bill Glickbarg.

With financing in hand, construction began. A major crisis in every marriage is when you build or buy a house -- and especially when you decorate it. Conventional marriages involve two people; in our marriage there were 20 of us -- 10 Board members and 10 wives. Everyone became instant authorities on architectural plans, grading, construction, landscaping, tennis courts, swimming pools, air conditioning (we blew that one), gyms, saunas, jacuzzis (I told 'em not to buy a used one), club managers, bartenders, tennis pros - you name it. Then, of course, interior decorating. I remember one hot Sunday afternoon when the entire Board went down to the Sportsman's Lodge to look at their carpeting because the wife of one of our Board Members hated the carpeting we had selected. From that day to this, election to our Board of Directors immediately endows the elected with instant expertise on all Club matters. It's a legacy I'm certain will remain with us forever.

We were on a schedule of a problem a day and a crisis a week. We were undaunted. With Bill as our leader, problems were solved, compromises made, frayed nerves assuaged. Slowly, surely, miraculously the Club was completed in the Fall of 1966.

We were on a roll. We now were more than a half-million dollars in debt -- \$250,000 to Brentwood; \$200,000 to the land; and about \$100,000 in conditional sales contracts. Membership was \$500, shortly raised to \$750 and dues \$25 per month. In December 1966, the Mulholland Club opened with the most gala banquet imaginable -- ice sculptures and all. The dining room was open six nights a week, gourmet meals were a bargain; we had live music on Friday nights; and a huge staff in the dining room, including a Maitre d' with white gloves and, of course, no one could match our view. The Mulholland Club was the most exciting place in town.

Six months later, the Club was broke and we were C.O.D. with everyone. We had 315 members and six tennis courts. To solve the crisis, the Board recommended selling 25 more memberships and raising the dues to \$35. In a legendary meeting that lasted until 2 o'clock in the morning, the Membership disapproved the Board's recommendation and instead assessed itself <sup>400</sup>~~\$200~~ per member. Eleven of the twelve Board Members resigned on the spot. It looked like the Club, indeed the World, had come to an end. The following day a new Board was created, including some of the resigned members, and we were back in business. From that day forward this Club has had the

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commendable history of having a membership willing to face up to the financial requirements of being part of this jewel on top of the mountain. It has not been easy and frequently some of us have gone kicking and screaming, but always our members have understood.

The Mulholland Club has survived, not just because of our willingness to make the financial commitments, but because of the enormous personal contribution each and every member has made in the course of our history. As I prepared myself for this evening, I looked over an extensive file on the Club I have kept, as well as an even more extensive file Ben Bell made available to me. I was struck by the enthusiasm and generosity with which every member has contributed talent and energy at some time in the course of these 20 years -- from serving on the Board, to serving on committees, to creating evenings of entertainment, to organizing special tennis events, to providing business, legal, accounting and creative talent, to publishing newsletters, to building and maintaining a children's program, to working to improve the Club's facilities and ambience -- the list goes on and on. Lastly, we salute those wonderful, almost masochistic Don Quixotes who have served as our Presidents.

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What we are enjoying tonight is an extension of a glorious tradition that has brightened all of our lives and given us lifetime friendships. Every member, past and present, has made this evening possible and it should be a source of pride and joy we are here to see our Impossible Dream a reality.

Who says you can't dream the Impossible Dream?

Irving Zeiger #11

The Evening the Mortgage was Burned

April 4, 1987