

# FEATURES & BUSINESS

## A Piedmont Grande Dame takes a 21st Century bow



Photo by Treve Johnson

A surprising mix of antique and contemporary brightens the living room of this Piedmont Grand Dame.

By Jan Howland

A centrally located, thoroughly remodeled classic Piedmont manor will host the VIP breakfast during the Children's Support League Heart of the Home Tour this year. To be held on April 28 and 29, this will be the charity's 29<sup>th</sup> annual tour, and will present five beautiful homes in Piedmont and the Oakland Hills. The VIP breakfast speaker will be Piedmont author Julie Barton, whose book *Dog Medicine, How My Dog Saved Me from Myself* was a *New York Times* bestseller. (For more on Julie Barton see the sidebar.)

When the current homeowner saw that this house was coming up for sale, he jumped on it right away. He was attracted to the central Piedmont location where his children could easily walk to school and their friend's houses. He was also attracted to the large three-quarter-acre lot that included a pool, sport court, and the potential for a nice garden with fruit trees and a bocce ball court. The house itself suffered from deferred maintenance, and even had evidence of a fire inside the basement and living room walls, but he saw the potential in the beautiful lines and layout of the home.

Despite the significant amount of work it would take to improve this classic home, he was ready for the challenge and was able to envision what a gem the house and property could become.

The house was built after the

1906 earthquake for the Williamson family, who were residents of San Francisco before the earthquake. A Tudor-style addition was built in the 1920s, and the kitchen had been remodeled in the 1970s.

Even so, the kitchen layout needed to be reconfigured. A big surprise came



Piedmont author Julie Barton to speak at VIP event during CSL House Tour.

once renovation began with the discovery that the grout for the masonry, including the chimneys and foundation, had begun to crumble to the touch. It was a wonder that this house survived the October 1989, Bay Area earthquake.

Work to replace the entire foundation started right away in August 2012. That was closely followed by demolition of almost the entire house. About 95% of the house was replaced or supplemented, with a central massive redwood pocket

door being preserved. The owner worked closely with his architect, Amy Wong Nunes of Sunnyhills Studio. As the owner describes it "I had a great relationship with Amy. She kept the lines clean and I focused on flow." His aunt Linda Williamson, who did the interior design, was also a great influence on the remodel.

The house was modernized with structural steel for safety, and it was entirely re-plumbed and rewired. Sound and security systems were added. The lower level family room was dug out, the addition from the 1920's removed, and a few rooms were expanded off of the back of the house. Every window and surface was replaced. All of this took almost three years to complete.

The owner and his children moved in the house in January 2015. They lived amid dust and turmoil until construction was completed in May. When asked what he now likes best about the house, the homeowner has several things to say: "I like that the house doesn't feel big inside. It is very livable. There are cozy nooks and crannies in the house that are not immediately evident. The kids like the big TV's, and we have space for several. They also like having a couple of areas to hang out with their friends." In fact this house, because of its central Piedmont location and inviting spaces, has become the place where the homeowner's children and their friends gather for lunch and on weekends. The owner wanted every bedroom to have a view for his kids, but one bedroom presented a problem in that it faced the street. That was solved with the addition of an attic playroom above the bedroom that is reached by a pull-down ladder. This playroom probably has some of the best views in the house. The garden is also a focal point, and soon there may be chickens in the chicken coop.

When asked why he put his house on the CSL tour, the owner said, "I have known about CSL since moving to Piedmont 17 years ago. I wanted to support the good work they do in the community."

Tickets to this year's Children's Support League Tour are \$45 for the tour of five houses, and \$55 to include lunch. Tickets are now available online at

ChildrensSupportLeague.org. Limited VIP tickets are \$125 and include a Kick-Off party on Wednesday, April 26 at a sixth Piedmont home, as well as the VIP breakfast with guest speaker Julie Barton. A Boutique will be open to the public at the Piedmont Community Center from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, April 28, and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday.

### Piedmont author Barton at VIP Reception

Julie Barton, a Piedmont resident and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dog Medicine, How My Dog Saved Me from Myself*, will be the speaker at a continental breakfast for Children's Support League VIP tour ticket holders on Friday morning, April 28.

*Dog Medicine* is a deeply moving memoir about a young woman's battle with crippling depression and how she found the strength to overcome it with help from the most unlikely source: a Golden Retriever puppy. It follows Julie through her difficult relationship with her broth-



It's back to the 1950s in this room, with a 1953 Seeburg jukebox and a pair of retro aviator chairs.

er, unhealthy romantic relationships, and the depressions that always simmered just below the surface.

At age 22 Barton collapsed on the kitchen floor of her barren Manhattan apartment and didn't get up for two days. In and out of consciousness, she managed to call her mother, who drove to New York and brought Julie back to the family home in Columbus, Ohio. As a child, Julie often

took deep solace in the family dog, a Golden Retriever puppy whom she named Bunker. Bunker helped Julie feel the safety and comfort that she had been waiting for her entire life. With him by her side, she decided to try again at life and love.

Barton lives in Piedmont with her husband, two daughters, and a small menagerie of pets.

## Piedmont Forum to show film, *Facing Fear*, Apr. 2

Piedmont Community Church will be showing a free screening of the 2014 Academy Award-nominated documentary short film *Facing Fear* this Sunday, April 2 at 5 p.m. at Piedmont Community Church, 400 Highland Avenue.

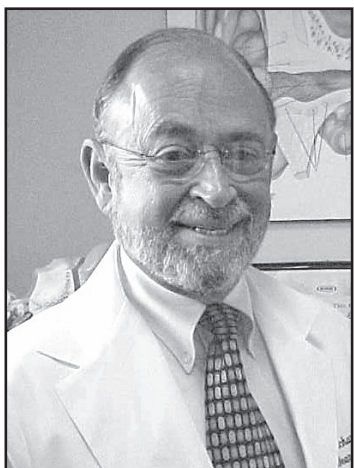
The film tells the story of a 13 year-old boy who was thrown out of his home for being gay. While living on the streets of Hollywood, he was savagely beaten by a group of neo-Nazi skinheads. Twenty-five years later he meets one of the former neo-Nazi skin-

heads who attacked him. The film retraces the haunting accounts of the attack, the revelation that brought these men together again, and their struggles with doubt, anger and fear on the way to healing and reconciliation.

A discussion with the filmmakers Jason Cohen and Tom Christopher will follow the screening.

For more information, contact Rev. Don Ashburn at 547-5700, ext. 105 (don@piedmontchurch.org).

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