

The Mayor as Mom

The Life and Times of Jane Weed

By Dawn Atkins

Jane Weed is a working mother. At 8am, she changes and dresses her toddler Dash, 1, while his brother Luke, 5, waits by the dirty white picket fence for his ride to school. Weed converses in Spanish with her Hispanic neighbor who arrives to take Luke to school. Then she drives across town to the Toddler Center and spends half an hour talking with Dash's "care giver," Bobbie. After kissing her baby goodbye, she heads to work downtown. Arriving at work at 9, she pours herself a cup of coffee and settles into her job—the mayor of Santa Cruz.

As mayor, she drafts and signs letters, responds to telephone calls, heads city council meetings and attends to an endless list of decisions every day. As a wife and mother she is careful to spend as much "quality time" with her kids and husband, Ron Pomerantz, 35, as possible.

Weed, 31, and her husband, have strong convictions about the "importance of community and social responsibility." Pomerantz is a firefighter for San Jose. He has served as chair of the Santa Cruz Water Commission. Weed does not leave her convictions in the public arena. Her lifestyle is representative of her beliefs—her family does not use the dryer unless it rains, has never used their dishwasher, use their heater sparingly and have a wood burning stove. "We hang our clothes on the line, because we don't like to pay PG&E and give them one more reason to build another nuclear power plant," explains Weed.

They have rebuilt their home of 10

years to incorporate energy consciousness, with lots of natural lighting, insulation and recycled materials. Weed gave birth to children at home with family and friends. She breast-fed her children and uses cloth diapers.

Weed feels that people make a difference at the grass-roots level. "I am an optimist," says Weed. "I think if people work together on projects, they make small victories, they move forward and there is a multiplier effect. At the same time I am completely dumbfounded by the breadth and extent of injustice. There is a climate of intimidation that makes it so difficult for people to survive in this society, let alone decide to be voting members of society. These are really tough times, there is real repression happening and I will go so far as to say the police state is in existence, healthy, and right under the surface."

Even her political opponents have a difficult time finding anything bad to say about her. Council members Katy Sears-Williams, a moderate, and Joseph Ghio, a conservative, both say that she is a hard worker and sticks diligently to her liberal political beliefs.

Ghio, however, feels that Weed is too uncompromising while at the same time claiming she is unsure of herself with the public. Weed describes herself as "accommodating" because she is "a Libra," yet controversial because she holds strong political principles.

Weed is not a native of California. "I grew up in the mountains of Colo-



Dash Weed and his mom the mayor

rado, about 25 miles west of Denver in the foothills of the Rockies," she says. "When I was born my brothers were 14 and 12 and my sister was 10. I was definitely an afterthought. I was a tomboy, rode horses and had a great deal of freedom." Her mother was divorced when Weed was 9 and ran a country store.

It was around the old potbellied stove in the country store that Weed got her first lessons in politics. "Many of the bankers, lawyers, advertising agents and others who commuted to Denver would come to the store before they went home at night and tell jokes and stories," Weed explains. "I got some early politics with the atmosphere. Politics were pretty important early on but at the same time there was always a real humanistic view of things. I give my mom most of the credit," Weed says; "she

instilled really early in me the appreciation for everything's place in life. No real particular religious upbringing but a sense of everything being devout."

Her mother, Fran Runner, who now lives in Bonny Doon, says her daughter was always very different. "I always felt she was born full grown and had come from another planet or something. She was just a real little person when she was still a tiny baby," says Runner. "She always seemed to manage for herself. She takes the world very seriously, but not herself."

Weed's next big lesson in politics was when she was 11. Her mother remarried and they moved to Philadelphia where her mother's new husband, Ken Runner, was offered a job. "It

was the height of the Vietnam days, and we went with the American Friends Service Committee, also known as the Quakers, in peace marches in Washington, D.C. and New York," she says.

When she was in high school, Weed's family moved to San Diego. In 1974, Weed chose to attend the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC).

She describes her experience there, especially the first year, as remarkable. Her roommate had cancer and only a year to live. "So that year was dealing with the issues of independence from our parents, establishing ourselves in terms of academics, trying to figure out what our future was, the interdynamics of living with seven other women, and dealing with the issues of death and dying," says Weed. The following August her roommate died. "It was a hard year," she says, "but part of life."

In her second year at UCSC, Weed took a quarter off and studied Spanish in Mexico near the Guatemalan border. She explains that her major, psychology, wasn't meeting her needs as a "political being." She found that a woman traveling in Mexico alone would face quite a challenge: "It wasn't easy or comfortable as a woman traveling there, but I used my own devices and I got out of a lot of bad scrapes." Her mother says that one of those "devices" included telling aggressive men that she was about to become a nun.

When she returned to UCSC, Weed majored in Community Studies. Her first independent study was as a volunteer with the Resource Center

for Nonviolence in Santa Cruz in 1976. "About that time I saw a bumper sticker on a car that said 'Question Authority' and it was from the Resource Center. So I got in

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touch with those folks and asked if I could do an independent study with them."

She followed her work there with a return to the American Friends Service Committee, this time in San Francisco, where she did a big field study. "They welcomed me. I learned a lot of organizing skills, demonstration organizing, press releases, conflict resolution, nonviolence training, group facilitation and other skills there," says Weed. From her work there, Weed prepared a slide show telling "everything you always wanted to know about nuclear power but didn't know how to ask." The slide show won honors and she graduated in 1978.



Weed at work

While working with the American Friends Service Committee she was involved in several protests including the International Hotel in 1977 and Diablo Canyon in 1978. She was almost arrested at the International Hotel protest.

Weed, her future husband Ron, her mother and 493 other people were arrested in the protest of the construction of a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon. Her mother describes the time in jail as "a lot of

singing, talking and endless rallies." Runner says, "We were sitting on the floor in a great big circle holding hands and singing when this female guard seemed to accost one of us. She reached down and grabbed one of the red armbands we wore to show our solidarity. We stopped singing and looked at her. Then she put it on and went back to leaning against the wall, and everybody was clapping."

Weed says that was heavier than the usual punishment for trespass:

"We were given political punishments." She says that many people refused to pay or serve their time. In fact, she and her mother did not clear up their warrants until just before the 1983 run for city council. "Before I ran for office," Weed says, "I thought I had better clear up this lingering legal issue in my life so it wouldn't be used in the campaign. My mom and I went and knocked on the door of the jail and said we want to serve our time in lieu of paying the fine. It was right before the Fourth of

July weekend so we only ended up spending about three days in jail." She says no one ever brought it up during her campaign.

After Diablo, Weed returned to Santa Cruz and went to work with the Resource Center for Nonviolence again and continued to work against nuclear power and weapons. Following that she joined Energy Action, a group doing research on alternative energy, as director of Small Business Energy Conservation. When their grant ran out they received money from the National Science Foundation Science for the People Program to do a year long study of an energy program using citizen participation called Energy Future Santa Cruz. Weed was the outreach coordinator.

In 1980, Reagan axed the Science for the People Program and the project was cut short. But Weed was able to implement some of their work when she was appointed to a city Energy Advisory Committee.

That year, Weed, then 25, and Pomerantz, who were already living together by this time, got married. They exchanged vows in a redwood grove at her mother's place in Bonny Doon among friends. They even wrote their own ceremony. A year later their first son, Luke, was born. Dash (Daniel Asher) followed in 1985.

In 1982 a group of women activists approached her about running for office. At first Weed was reluctant because she felt she was too young, but they convinced her it would work. "I met with a lot of people in

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the community to see what they thought about it, sort of testing the waters," Weed says. "I did a lot of soul-searching but finally decided to

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do it." She announced her intent in July and "worked [her] butt off and actually won." Then came the election challenge.

Weed was elected to the city council in 1983. After her 142-vote victory, losing conservatives charged that the election had been invalid. They said 472 UCSC students had voted in the wrong precincts. The plaintiffs said because those UCSC precincts had voted overwhelmingly for progressives, including Weed, her victory should be overturned and conservative runner-up, Bill Fieberling seated instead.

The election results were upheld in 1984 by then-Superior Court Judge Harry Brauer. He called 292 voters to the stand and decided that

the majority had voted legally. Last November, the appeals court overturned his decision. Weed appealed the ruling to the state supreme court, which heard arguments on the case Sept. 10 at the University of San Francisco Law School. The dispute now centers on 193 ballots cast at UCSC precincts by voters not actually living on campus at the time of the 1983 election.

Weed points out three major flaws in her opposition's arguments. First, it is only presumed that those students voted for Weed. The ballots could have been for any of the other candidates or even left blank. Since it violates the voters' privacy to ask who they voted for, no concrete answer can be found.

Her second point is that in singling out only the UCSC precincts it is selective enforcement of the law. No other precincts were brought up in the argument, even though it was a citywide election.

Lastly, Weed says that even if these people had all re-registered at a new location it wouldn't have changed the election results. "I think philosophically if I am removed from my seat, it's a real slap in the voters' face," Weed says. "It is overturning the popular will of the people on a technicality. There is a real swing to the right in this country that is shutting the people out of the process."

Joe Ghio feels differently: "To my view, you have in effect an illegal vote of which three-and-a-half years of political decisions have been made, which is counter to what would have been appropriate."



Dash, Jane and Bobbie

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Since the Sept. 10 hearing, Weed is optimistic. "I am actually encouraged by the nature of the questioning," she explains. She explains that her attorney brought up the importance of democracy and the role voting plays in one. According to Weed's attorneys, the ballots cast in 1983 by students who voted on campus were valid because those highly mobile voters had not really established new "permanent" addresses. They contend that under state election law, the university remains the student's legal residence—or "domicile"—until a new one has been established.

Her case was further aided by the

state attorney general's office, which filed a "friend-of-the-court" brief supporting Weed's argument. In court, a representative from the attorney general's civil rights division brought up the problems with voter disenfranchisement—the possibility of excluding voters who are without permanent homes.

Weed was somewhat amazed at the opposition's argument in court. She says, "Years ago, when this first started going down the pike, they said they were doing this to stop the possibility of fraud. But what they ended up arguing was that once you leave a domicile with the intent not to return, you must re-register every

time you move, even if you will only be there a few days. That seems to open the door to fraud even more."

If the court rules in Weed's favor, she will remain in office until November 1988. Weed's current term was originally to expire this November. But her term, along with those of other incumbents, was extended in 1985, when city voters approved a charter amendment changing council elections from odd to even-numbered years.

The state supreme court decision could come at any time. Meanwhile, Weed continues her busy life as mother and mayor.

Luke is entering first grade and Dash leaves the Toddler Center in October for preschool. Weed herself is to lead a delegation to formalize Santa Cruz's relations with its sister city in the Soviet Union. Weed, two city council members, two sister city committee members, the president of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce and the editor of the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* will visit Santa Cruz's fifth sister city, Alushta, Sept. 24 through Oct. 7.

Weed is very excited about the trip and although she is a little worried that a court decision against her could upset her plans, she is determined to think positively.

If the case goes against her, Weed points out that it would give her more time to campaign for re-election. "I am evaluating whether seeking another term in office is where I can best use my energies." In either case she insists that she will "find something to keep [her] busy." •