

## BACK IN TIME

# The 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition and my grandmother 'Katie' Byrne

BY EVELYN BYRNE WILLIAMS WITH JANEEN SATHRE

I was 13 years old when a trip was planned by my family to attend the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition, a World's Fair in San Francisco that celebrated, among other things, the city's two newly built bridges. I had not been that far away from home before so the trip was very exciting to me, especially the visit to our relatives living near there. I would be seeing my paternal grandmother, Mary Catherine "Katie" Byrne, who I had not seen in ten years.

Of course, we needed a bigger and better vehicle in which to make that

long journey being as there were six of us going: my parents, brother Morris, his wife Florence, my sister Gladys, and I, plus our luggage. Mother had purchased the car in the summer of 1939 while Dad was still posted on Tallowbox Mountain, the forest service's fire lookout. He trusted her in doing such an important task and she came home with a used 1935 V8 Ford sedan, all shiny, a dark-tan color with black fenders. Gladys and I said it was the "cat's meow," an expression commonly used then.

Preparations for appropriate clothing kept mother busy at her sewing machine making our dresses. I got a wonderful coat with a real fur collar (*see photo*), a hand-me-down from an older girl cousin.

By the first part of October, mother had everything ready for the exciting trip. So much of this has escaped

my memory, especially where our luggage was put. That is a mystery. There was no trunk for it and I know it was not on top of our vehicle so it must have been secured to the back with the spare tire.

We left October 19 in the wee hours of the morning. Morris was the driver with our parents in the front seat and Florence, Gladys and me in the back. For some reason, I recall little of that long ride. Why I don't remember stopping for lunch or points of interest along the way is strange. The only part I remember well is seeing all those many distant city lights when arriving late that night at Pinole, California, where Dad's sister, Stella, her husband Emmett O'Brien, and Grandma "Katie" lived.

The next day, I spent much time getting reacquainted with my grandmother. She had come to visit us for a time when I had my third birthday. She gave me a doll buggy and a small table with two chairs and teacups (I still have them). Because tea was her favorite beverage, we had tea parties at that table. Mother said I became terribly spoiled by Grandmother during that visit. I remember being so impressed with her very thick white hair coiled on top of her

head—the most hair I had ever seen.

Days at Pinole went by with much visiting. Then we went to San Jose where Dad's sister Maud and husband Harold Watson lived. On October 26, they escorted us to the fair on Treasure Island, which was built specifically for the exposition. I know we saw many interesting things so new to us. Mother enjoyed the Singer Sewing Machine exhibit and was given an attachment for making rugs on the sewing machine. The only problem was she just had an old treadle Minnesota machine and it would not accept the rug maker.

I was more interested in the outdoor artist doing quick pastel landscape paintings and I begged Mother for one. I know the price must have been low because she bought me one. Sad to say, after many years it disappeared from our household, probably because it was never framed.

Time has taken its toll on my memory so these are just bits and pieces of that delightful trip and time spent with those dear relatives, back in time.

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**Left to right:** Uncle Emmett O'Brien, Grandma "Katie" Byrne, John Byrne, Aunt Stella O'Brien, Aunt Maud Watson, Gladys Byrne, Florence Byrne, Pearl Byrne, Evelyn Byrne (and her coat with the fur collar), and Uncle Harold Watson.