

## My Life with Penny

The story of my life with Joanne is told in many of the memoirs in this collection. I now want to tell about my second marriage, to Marcia Penny Linch. Penny had been married to my cousin Albert Linch since October 29, 1977, when she became my cousin-in-law. I had known Albert since 1946 when I was 5 years old. We lived in the same house in Atlanta and played together every day. After he married Penny, two daughters, Karina and Natalie, were born. Each established thriving careers, married, and started families. Over the years, Joanne and I had frequently visited Penny and Albert on their farm in Virginia. We attended their wedding, as well as the weddings of both daughters. Each Christmas, we would stop on our trip to Georgia in my airplane and spend the night in the beautiful farmhouse. We developed great respect for Penny because of the way she was raising her daughters.

In 2012, Joanne and I learned that Albert had leukemia. We then drove all the way from Austin to Florida to visit him while he was undergoing treatment. I was impressed with the way Penny was shouldering a tremendous load of responsibility, both holding a job and monitoring his treatment. She invited us to lunch, explained the type of work she was doing and the treatment Albert was undergoing.

Over the following months, Albert's condition varied from dire to, at one point, being in remission. Then, toward the end of the year 2012, with things looking terminal, he went into hospice where he died on January 1, 2013.

In April of 2013, while attending my high school class reunion in Atlanta, Joanne began to feel ill. She had no appetite and had various vague symptoms. Back in Austin, it became apparent that something was wrong so we went to the emergency room where they performed an x-ray and immediately found a tumor on the pancreas. I was stunned! It was soon determined that she had pancreatic cancer. The tumor was in an area that could not be operated on. Subsequently, she went through chemotherapy, including an experimental program. In June she decided to go off the program. From that time, she went rapidly downhill, and on June 30, she died in hospice at The Christopher House of Austin.

I began to plan a memorial service for Joanne. I decided that our friends in the area would be invited to our house, I also asked Penny to come, representing the Linch side of the family. The service would also be broadcast on the internet for those who could not attend. So, on August 3rd, with more than 50 people in attendance, the service took place at our house on Shadow Mountain Drive. Several neighbors brought refreshments to serve after the service. To begin the service Penny and Joanne's best friend Rosemary Detrich gave short tributes. Next, I gave a eulogy. Finally, several attendees stood and gave short remarks. It was a moving service.

The next day, I wanted to show Penny a little bit of Austin before she returned to Florida, and we went downtown to observe the famous bat flight at the Congress Street bridge. We had dinner at a restaurant and then, as darkness approached, walked to the middle of the bridge to observe the flight of bats. I felt my admiration, my affection for her as we walked out over the bridge. I think she felt something as well.

On the following day, it was nearing time for Penny to return to Florida. I came to the realization that I needed her in my life, and that the feeling might be mutual. So, I came right out and said that I thought we would do well together in marriage. She replied "Well, you really haven't asked!". So, I did exactly that. I proposed to her, and she immediately accepted. We then went to a local jewelry store and bought engagement and wedding rings. This opened a new chapter in my life!

Then Penny returned to Florida and immediately told her mother Virginia about the engagement. There was great excitement about the idea of moving to Texas and becoming my wife! At that point however, the two daughters Natalie and Karina had not been informed of the news. A few days later, Penny flew up to New Jersey to visit her daughters and families. Natalie met her at the airport, and when Penny showed Natalie the engagement ring, she was very excited. After the drive to Montclair the rest of the family found out about the engagement. At first, Karina was very surprised. After some discussion, she became very supportive, and we then made plans to be married in early September in Delray Beach, Florida. After the required prerequisites were completed, on September 6, we were married by the Palm Beach County Clerk and then enjoyed a few days at the Boca Raton Beach Club.



A follow-up get-together took place on October 26 at a beautiful restaurant located at the Eagle Rock Reservation near Montclair. Karina and Natalie were very helpful. Many people were invited to the celebration. Penny's two daughters, their extended families, several of Penny's best friends and two of my good friends. At the appointed time, the bar opened, and I ordered a Manhattan, something I had not done in years. The bartender filled my glass four times without my asking. I was so busy talking to people that I didn't realize the amount I had consumed. While everyone was waiting for the dinner to be served, I attempted to give a short talk about me and Penny. Because of my condition, it did not go well! Some of the attendees were quite upset. Later, I spent a miserable night by myself. The next morning I called several people to apologize. It was an unfortunate event – one which I still regret.

We now had to make the big move from Delray Beach, Florida to Austin, Texas. and the beautiful house on Shadow Mountain Drive. Since there were just too many steps, the house was unsuitable for Penny's mother Virginia, so we made the decision to look for an assisted living facility. I looked at several places, and when Penny joined me in Austin, we looked further and decided the best place was the Court at Round Rock, located nearby. Here Virginia would have her own apartment with a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. There were three meals a day prepared by a chef. There was also frequent planned entertainment and the opportunity to play card games like bridge and gin rummy.



Finally, the moving van left Delray Beach, with all of the belongings of both Penny and Virginia. After it arrived in Texas, we moved Virginia into the Court at Round Rock and unloaded Penny's furniture into our house. We then began a new life in Texas.

At this point, I started to build a relationship with Penny's family. Both daughters lived together in a two-store house in Montclair, New Jersey. Karina, her husband John and sons Max and Sam lived upstairs while Natalie, her husband Dave and sons Fred and Wynn lived downstairs. In April of 2016, a third son Finn was born to Karina and John. Penny and I would visit for major holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as birthdays. We would use the bedroom upstairs. Both daughters had interesting and challenging careers. Karina co-founded the firm BrainPOP, which has grown into a multi-million dollar company used by thousands of school systems worldwide. Natalie, a well-known photographer, who began her career photographing for several well-known magazines, started a respected photography business. Frequently, the two families would eat together in the upstairs dining room. When Penny and I were visiting we would join them for dinner. There would always be

interesting conversation with the boys about what they were doing at school and at home. The kids called Penny by the name “Mimi”, and me by my first name Ben.

In Austin, we both began to enjoy the house at 6300 Shadow Mountain Drive. Penny really loved the house, the pool and the hot tub. She enjoyed planting colorful flowers in the yard. The entire house was decorated with both of our keepsakes. She made immediate friends with the neighbors, especially Karen and Marsha. I introduced her to several of my friends – Robert and Alina, Rod and Mary Ann, Gerry and Cathy, as well as Bob and Rita in California. Frequently, we would go to Central Market for music and dancing. Many well-known groups played here.

Holidays were special of course. Each year, many kids would knock on our door for Halloween treats. For Christmas, we always placed a large tree in the great room. Virginia visited the house frequently, especially for the holidays. Many times we would have the daughters and their families, as well as Penny’s sister PJ and husband Wayne. We also enjoyed many parties with our friends and neighbors.

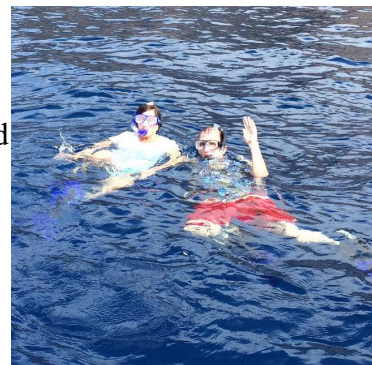
From the very beginning we had a seed feeder on the rear deck, which attracted many interesting birds, such as Baltimore Oriole, Lesser Goldfinch, House Finch, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren and Bewick’s Wren. Cedar Waxwings were frequently seen feeding on the berries of nearby trees and bathing in the water outside our kitchen window.

Traveling was something we both enjoyed. Frequently, we flew to Montclair, New Jersey to visit family, especially the grand-kids. Each one of them had special talents that I came to appreciate. Max enjoyed musical endeavors, reading and sports. Sam also enjoy music and sports such as soccer. Finn was quite young but you could see that he also enjoyed music and reading. Wynn was good at basketball and enjoyed painting and drawing. Fred was good at mathematics and sports, especially football.

In the next few years, we made some really big trips. Our first was to Costa Rica in February, 2015. We boarded a nonstop flight from Houston to San Jose. Our first visit was to Tortuguero where we took a river tour and viewed several interesting bird species. Next, we rented a car and drove to the area near the Arenal volcano. We stayed at a beautiful place with cabins and saw an interesting bird called the Crested Guan. After that, we drove to the town of Monteverde where we saw several monkey species as well an incredible bird, the Resplendent Quetzal. There were several in an avocado tree. One even flew right in front of Penny. Finally, we traveled to the Pacific coast where we enjoyed a beautiful beach and great seafood.

I had been to Hawaii before, with Joanne, back in 1982, so I proposed it for our second big trip. Penny and I made advanced arrangements online for November 3 -through 18, 2015, We departed for Hawaii, flying first to Los Angeles and then on to Honolulu. We then rented a car and drove up into the hills above Honolulu spending the night in a beautiful home overlooking Waikiki Beach.

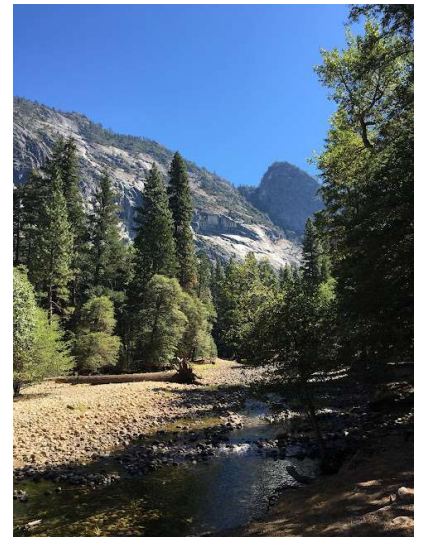
On November 7, we flew on Air Hawaii to the Big Island where we stayed at the Red Coffee Country Cottage where we enjoyed 3 days of adventure. This included a snorkeling trip to swim with dolphins where we donned our masks, jumped into the water from the boat and watched in fascination as a pod of dolphins swam beneath us. On November 10<sup>th</sup> we drove south to the Green Sand Beach and then up the road to the Punaluu Black Sand Beach where we saw sea turtles and temple ruins. We then stayed one night at the Hawaii Volcano House in Volcano National Park.



On the 13th, we went up to the north end of the island where we went to the International Hula Competition. I tried to get Penny to enter the competition, but that was fruitless! On November 14, we drove to a lovely estate owned by two men named Dennis and Paul. They treated us royally. We enjoyed 3 days here with several side trips. In the town, we could see the results of past volcanic eruption. Lava flowed into the center of the town and stopped at a fence. It was a dramatic display of volcanic activity. Fortunately the volcano was dormant during our visit.

Finally, on the 17th we flew back to Honolulu Airport, to Los Angeles and then on to Austin. This ended a most memorable journey.

In September of 2016, we flew to San Jose, California where we rented a car and drove to Berkeley where I attended The University of California in 1959-60 We spent the night in a BnB which was a docked sailboat! Next we journeyed north visiting Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia national Parks Next, we drove up to Portsmouth, Oregon to visit a friend from my days at Berkeley. We then enjoyed a drive down the Oregon coast.



In March of 2018, we boarded a sixteen hour non-stop flight on Air New Zealand from Houston to Auckland, New Zealand, immediately followed by another flight to the south island where we landed at Christchurch. We then rented a car. Of course, we knew that in New Zealand you drive on the left side of the road. However, knowledge is one thing and actually doing it is another. Every move is the opposite of what you would expect as in the United States. The steering wheel is on the right side of the car. Traffic circles move clockwise instead of counterclockwise. When entering a highway, you check for traffic on the right instead of the left.

For our first stop we visited our good friends Camille and Frank joining a Saint Patrick's Day party. It was a delightful get-together, and we had the opportunity to visit with several interesting New Zealanders. After our visit, we drove down to the southern tip of the South Island where we checked in to Brushy Point Fernbirds, a delightful BnB run by Ian and Jenny Campbell. The Fernbird is a rare endemic species that can be seen here, and with Ian's help, one was observed. Later, in the town of Invercargill, we went to a restaurant and enjoyed a delightful seafood meal of New Zealand mussels. Here we discovered an interesting fact about New Zealand, namely that tipping is not expected and even frowned upon. The feeling is that if you tip, you're sending a message that local wages are not sufficient to live on. The next morning we were served a delightful breakfast, sitting at a big picture window which looked out at a bird feeder with several New Zealand birds.

We next went north through the town of Timaru where Camille works as a physician at a local hospital. We then met Frank and the four of us went wine tasting. New Zealand has fantastic wines which have a

unique bouquet. Next, we flew back to the North Island and stayed at a BnB in Auckland. Continuing further north, we visited an area that has a unique tree called the Kauri. Up we watched in fascination as the Maori guide sang in the Maori language while looking up at a large Kauri.



Over the years, we made many journeys to Santa Fe, New Mexico – summer, fall, winter and spring. There were several favorite locations that we visited -- museums, restaurants and places to buy authentic Indian jewelry.

During the year 2019, after an extended illness, Penny's mother Virginia decided to join the hospice program while remaining at The Court at Round Rock. The hospice program worked quite well for over a year. The nurse Sherry was very caring and Virginia liked her a lot. After well over a year, her condition worsened. On February 13, 2020 with Penny, Natalie and me by her side, Virginia died. Granddaughter Karina flew in from New Jersey and arrived shortly afterwards. According to her wishes, Virginia was cremated by the Neptune Society.

A family get together was planned for Florida to scatter Virginia's ashes. In April of 2022, everyone traveled to Delray Beach, staying for several days in a multi-unit rental. The group included Natalie and Karina and their families, Penny and me as well as Penny/s best friend Rachel. Then on a beautiful April day the ashes were scattered in the ocean nearby.

The big move: As the years passed, we began thinking about the practicality of our home on Shadow Mountain Drive.. It was a big responsibility and there were so many steps between the rooms. We finally decided it was time to downsize to a place which was all on one floor, -- a "single store" house. So, we put our Shadow Mountain on the market and with a lot of searching found such a place in Cedar Park, Texas, a suburb of Austin. It had beautiful trees, a fenced in backyard and a Jacuzzi hot tub. So, on June 6, 2021, we moved into our present house on Hunter Ace Way and shortly thereafter, sold our house in Austin. For both of us, it was both an end and a beginning.