

Chapter 6

“A DIXIE CUP INSTEAD OF THE HOLY GRAIL”

Sharon Hormell, a new staff writer for *The Signal* who had the significant advantage of having reported on the incorporation of Moreno Valley, a city almost as large as our proposal, was the first to write on the differences of opinion between Connie Worden and Jill Klajic. Connie was a college graduate and veteran of years in the Canyon County formation drive and the League of Women Voters. She was thoughtful and articulate. Jill attended high school in Turlock, and had some small business experience, some of it in a machine shop that she described as an aerospace corporation.

On June 5 Sharon described Connie as “the one with a quote always at the ready. She enjoys apparently close relationship with government officialdom and endless savvy on cityhood topics.

“Klajic is the one who collects both accurate gossip and bogus rumors, speaks on behalf of cityhood before clubs and handles myriad details, pursuing her tasks with the enthusiasm of a new insider.”

It had become clear to me that Jill Klajic wanted her finger in every pie, but she was very secretive about her volunteers, whom she had organized. She had a big list, she said, of six hundred volunteers, but she would not allow anyone to see it. Later, the total number of volunteers proved to be less than two hundred. She had made it clear that she was available for the position of office manager. Neither Connie nor I wanted to give her the job.

Connie suggested first that we hire an office manager. Then she suggested that Art Donnelly, our fund raising vice chairman, fill the position. Jill blew up. “I don’t know why you feel that I’m such a threat to you.”

To this Connie answered, “I never know what you are doing, nor does anybody else. We need to be sure we are working as a team.”

“I come here...and report on everything I’ve ever done. I report on every conversation. I have them written down,” responded Jill. “I want to work with volunteers, with the speakers bureau, sending out letters. I would like to work with the forums.”

Klajic complained that she did not like restrictions. I said, “We have had things go out to the press that have been injurious. Jill, you did say you would do what had to be done and you wouldn’t be muzzled.” She had once reported a conversation with a LAFCO commissioner who later denied the comments she had noted. This reflected badly on the committee, and hurt Jill’s standing with the rest of us.

Jill appealed to me. “Carl is our chairman. Why doesn’t he ever have anything to say about what you do?”

I spoke up reluctantly. “The reason my profile is relatively low is that I’ve recognized that we have a number of personalities and areas of expertise on this committee. I’ve tried to stay out of it so we could keep the committee together.

That’s the biggest challenge I have to face.” I continued with the thought that we must stick to the organization chart that Jill had had a hand in creating.

Unfortunately, the argument went on so long that we had to postpone our scheduled session on team building!¹

Meanwhile the *Los Angeles Times* devoted almost a full page on June 7 to staff writer Lynn O’Shaughnessy’s effort to explain the workings of Los Angeles County LAFCO to the public. Ruth Benell ran an operation that was different from that of any other county. Only in Los Angeles County was the incorporation study written by LAFCO staff from material which county departments were forbidden to reveal. This meant that the general public could not check the figures, and we had no confidence in them. Neither did our opponents. *Signal* publisher Scott Newhall was so frustrated that he referred to Benell as another “Attila the Hun,” wielding a “magic adding machine.” He sued for data, and Benell produced it before being dragged into court. Most telling was the fact that Westlake Village’s revenue was higher than Benell’s estimate by 70%, and Agoura Hills enjoyed 54% more income than they had been told to expect.²

As Supervisor Pete Schabarum continued to apply pressure for a delay in incorporation it became apparent that we had to negotiate. I was taking a distinct disliking to the man. He forced us to go LAFCO with a request that they consider further boundary changes which would cut our territory and revenue, and that they order us to repay Los Angeles County \$2.7 million after we had been incorporated for five years. This was the estimated cost of county support until July 1, 1988. To me this was extortion; there was no provision for it in the law. I was not disappointed that he went to jail later.

We met privately with several of the commissioners. Kenneth Chappell, then Mayor of West Covina, continued to support us. Hal Bernson was on our side. We thought we might have the support of Henry Pellissier, and met with retired municipal court judge James DiGiuseppe, who was perceived to be the swing vote.³

During the final LAFCO hearing on June 24 Supervisor Schabarum complained that we were going to cost the county \$4 million annually by incorporating. Mayor Tom Jackson of Huntington Park exclaimed, “Now I know why you don’t want them to become a city.” We lost another few hundred acres in the process.⁴

LAFCO sent our proposal to the Board of Supervisors for a public hearing on July 9, but we still had no idea where we would get three votes to move forward. Ed Edelman was in Europe for a couple of months. Kenneth Hahn was seriously ill, having suffered from a stroke, and was not attending meetings. We still did not have Schabarum’s support. July 9 passed with no action.

Meanwhile a little levity surfaced. I became aware of the Donna Rice satire when my wife, Chris, began laughing hard while reading the Escape section of *The Signal* on July 15. I had been linked, along with some others, to Donna Rice, who appeared in sloppily-cut photos with Supervisor Mike Antonovich and Senator Ed Davis, but had fallen for Milt Diamond, who owned the General Store

in downtown Newhall, and was thirty years my senior. Dan Hon called, sounding outraged. Did I want to sue? “No,” I said. “It’s just a good laugh.”

By August 5 it had all come down to “if.” August 6 was the last meeting of the Board of Supervisors during which a vote could be taken to put us on the November ballot. If it was taken, council candidates would have little more than twenty-four hours to take out petitions, get twenty valid signatures, and return them to the county Registrar-Recorder’s office, which was some miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles. Supervisor Deane Dana was not happy with us. Edelman’s attendance was a problem. Kenny Hahn had not been to a meeting in months. Louis Brathwaite and I had spoken to his chief deputy, Mas Fukai, saying that we did not want Supervisor Hahn to jeopardize his health, but it he could make the meeting we would really appreciate it.

The tension was building, and apparently it was time for me to take some licks. Scott Newhall laid it on in one of his typical editorials, “Nearer My God To Thee,” above the masthead.

Well, as may have been expected, the grass roots drive for Santa Clarita Valley cityhood is winding up with the kind of cliffhanging suspense reminiscent of the immortal afternoon in Mudville when mighty Casey came to bat.

For months – or has it been years – Carl Boyer III, chairman of the cityhood volunteers, has been following in the unsteady footsteps of Indiana Jones I, leading his doughty disciples safety past the pitfalls of petition gathering; through the mine fields strewn by Ruth Benell and her Local Agency Formation Commission; past the booby traps of renegade housing tract developers, mad dogs, and barking Los Angeles County Supervisors.

We have survived months of alarms and excursions. Deadlines have come and gone; cityhood plans have been created and destroyed; proposed new cities have been expanded and compressed. They have been rejected because they would make too much money or lose too much money; because they would be too large or too small; or because the new city might no[t] be able to finance its dog catchers, and restroom swampers.

Well, after all these months of bickering, debating, politicking, arguing, and back-scratching, a recommendation for a new and genuine, independent, self-governing Santa Clarita Valley city has been sent along to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. Accordingly, these selfsame Supervisors must, under law, place this issue on the ballot and set an election date so that we, the people of the SCV, may vote whether or not to answer the clarion call for independence from Chairman Boyer and his cityhood volunteers.

Nevertheless, as simple as this procedure sounds, the cityhood election is still stalled and the next 48 hours will be a Perils of Pauline cliff hanger, at least for those patient people who are still devoted to the

cause of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As of this moment the following confusions remain the order of the day.

First, the cityhood volunteer committee is still plumping for the Supervisors to set a November election date for a vote on the new city. However, according to the latest advices coming from the political bowels of Greater Los Angeles, unless, during their meeting tomorrow, the Supervisors vote to include the cityhood proposition on the November ballot, the Santa Clarita Valley cityhood election will be postponed until next April.

Now here comes the 24-Hour Catch. If tomorrow the Supervisors do indeed vote for the November election date, any and all candidates who wish to run for a seat on the new Santa Clarita Valley city council will have only 24 hours in which to secure their 20 sponsors and file their nomination papers at the County Registrar’s office in the City of Commerce. In other words, all potential candidates will have only a single day to make the great plunge into SCV municipal politics.

This is a preposterous dilemma. Such last-minute hip-hip-hurrah scramble and racing back and forth in order to participate in the grave business of self-government is not an acceptable prospect for climate in which to formulate important personal decisions.

For example, some of the finest minds among our local movers and shakers are at this moment cruising through the boondocks on vacation or possibly pursuing genuine business out of town. Are such fine potential candidates to be barred from city government simply because a last-minute 24 hour “window” for filing papers is in effect?

Turn back the history book, and contemplate what would have happened if after all the months and years of defeat and victory, of pushing, shoving, argument and bombast in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the candidates for office in the newfangled United States of America had been given only a single day to make up their minds and announce themselves for office. What kind of gaggle of founding fathers do you suppose would have gathered together for the maiden convocation of the U.S. Congress?

This awkward last-moment November election hurrah is not the practice of prudent men and women. This is not good solid all-American popular government. This off-the-wall democratic adventuring might be nicely appropriate for places like Botswana, or possibly Tumbaroo. But it is not the legendary stuff of American self-government.

It is absurd that the cityhood volunteer committee has not relaxed its passionate insistence on a hurry-up November election long enough to request the Supervisors to put over the vote until at least next April. Such a later election date would provide all candidates time to sniff the wind.

The very sight of Chairman Boyer's volunteer committee stubbornly plunging ahead, with only 24 hours of grace, brings to mind the memory of

that grizzled seadog Commodore E.J. Smith high up on the bridge pushing the old Titanic full speed ahead through the North American iceberg fields in his hurry to make port. Is Captain Boyer ready for the perils of premature elections? Has he ordered his ship's orchestra to practice *Nearer My God to Thee*?⁵

As Bill Roberts put it, the last minute filing might "limit the field slightly," but "if they're not interested enough to find out about the timetable, maybe they shouldn't be running." We were not about to allow the county another five months of control over planning and zoning, and did not want a special election in April with a light turnout. The more people who voted, the more they would support city government.

Connie Worden announced a party at our offices for the evening following the decision of the supervisors, and predicted that this "fundraiser would find candidates scurrying about to get last-minute signatures."⁶

As we drove to the Board of Supervisors meeting on August 6 we had a feeling we had a chance for a decision, after four postponements. Mike Antonovich had kept us on the agenda just in case he could get us three votes. We had no support from Pete Schabarum or Deane Dana. Kenneth Hahn had let it be known he would attend the meeting, the first since his stroke in January, and that he would support us, but we prayed for his health nonetheless. Mike Antonovich was with us. Ed Edelman was in town and would attend. We did not know if we could count on him, but according to the *Times* he favored a November election.⁷

The Board meets fairly early, and sometimes the meetings go all day long. However, many of the items on the Tuesday agenda are on a consent calendar, which is voted on at one time unless the item is taken off the calendar by either a supervisor or a member of the audience, who might wish to speak to it. If someone does not know the system, an item can be approved before anyone knows it, even though the county staff people are as helpful as they can be.

But this was a Thursday meeting, and we were first on the agenda. We got there before the supervisors did, and were very glad to see them all take their places, with Kenny Hahn, wheeled in. Supervisor Hahn (the father of James Hahn, later Mayor of Los Angeles) was a teacher at Pepperdine who got started in politics with the help of his students. He was elected to the County Board in 1952, when there were thirty-one cities in the county. Since that time fifty-three more had been incorporated, and we hoped to become the eighty-fifth.

Greg Warnagieris wrote in *The Signal*:

A frail man in a wheelchair with a soft spot for the underdog returned to cast the deciding vote for a November cityhood election....

Swarmed by reporters and photographers, [Supervisor Kenneth] Hahn entered through a side door, bringing the meeting to a halt.

Schabarum greeted his long-time opponent, asking Hahn if he was ‘feeling more conservative.’

Apparently not.

Once the fanfare had died down, the board addressed the cityhood issue, the first item on the agenda, and Hahn took the microphone.

While his fellow Supervisors haggled over how much money the county might lose if the election were approved, Hahn spoke of self-government.

“The birth of a child is painful and the birth of a city is painful.”

“It will be good for the people of Santa Clarita to have their own home rule, their own government. That’s the best government we know of in America, the government that’s closest to the people...”⁸

The *Times* quoted him as saying, “Let’s have faith that this city will produce revenue for the county once it gets going and grows. The best government is the closest to the people.”

This great man with a good heart had held to his convictions, but had also paid the price. He was to serve forty years on the board, but was only elected by his fellow members to two one-year terms as Chairman.

Ed Edelman spoke in favor of putting us on the ballot on November 3. We were going to have our chance to determine our own destiny for the first time! Edelman was quoted by the *Times* the next day, “The thrust of California law is to allow home rule.” He noted our agreement to reimburse the county \$2.7 million. “This is the first time a city has recognized the county’s dismal financial condition.” The board voted three to two to put us on the ballot in November.

“You people remember that I made this effort just for you,” said Supervisor Hahn, turning towards us. We gave him a standing ovation, blowing him kisses as he turned and was wheeled out of the room.⁹

We were elated. After talking to reporters briefly a bunch of us headed for the Registrar-Recorder’s office in the City of Commerce to file to run for the council. Connie Worden had announced she would not run. A Hart school board member, she had proved to be a remarkable public servant. Lou and Rita Garasi, both of whom would have been great council members, would not be available, and had gone on vacation. Jan Heidt was in Hawaii on vacation, but had announced her intention to fly home in time to file, and Don Jennings took out papers on her behalf.

I had hoped that about half of our Formation Committee members would file, but of our group only Louis Brathwaite, Gil Callowhill and I would make the drive to the City of Commerce. Jo Anne Darcy, field deputy for Supervisor Antonovich; Linda Storli, a Canyon High School government teacher; Andrew Martin, the insurance agent; Kenneth Dean, an interior decorator; Don Benton, who was by this time an insurance agent, and civil engineer Roger Meurer joined us on the Santa Ana Freeway. Arriving shortly were Edmund G. Stevens, Raymond F. Potocki, Richard M. Vacar, Maurice D. Ungar, Monty L. Harrell, Barry E. Golob, and Dennis Conn of Valencia. Dennis was there to take out the

papers for Gail Klein, and then decided he might as well file for himself at the same time. I was glad see Howard "Buck" McKeon walk up to the counter. He had served for years on the Hart school board member, understood government, and mentioned that Lou Garasi had asked him to run.

Don Benton of Saugus confused everyone by filing twice, as Donald Mark Benton at 1:17, and as Donald M. Benton at 2:42, with different residence addresses. Frank A. Parkhurst was another candidate from Saugus.

Also from Canyon Country was William J. Broyles. Newhall was represented further by candidates Jeffrey D. Christensen, Robert Silverstein of Friendly Valley, and Michael Donald McSkane.

Carl E. Lux of Canyon Country took out papers Friday morning.

By the time filing had closed at 5:00 p.m. on Friday, Bill Hilton, a minister from Valencia; Dennis Koontz, a retired fire captain from Saugus; Michael D. Lyons, an engineer from Saugus; Vernon H. Pera, a manufacturer's representative from Canyon Country, and Ronald J. Nolan, a law clerk from Valencia, had also joined the list.

That Thursday evening we held a fund raiser on the patio outside of our borrowed office space at the Old Saugus Schoolhouse. A lot of the candidates attended with petition papers in hand. Several did not have much of an idea about what they were doing, but those of us who had completed getting at least twenty valid signatures showed them the ropes and introduced them to people at the gathering so they could get their signatures. We had held a candidates' forum the previous Thursday in anticipation of the turn of events, but a number of those who wanted to file had not attended.

Potocki, McSkane and Lux did not complete their filing in time. The others made the deadline, with William Broyles filing for reelection to the community college board as well as the city council. When told he had to choose one or the other, he chose the college board.

As a candidate for the council I was due to resign from the Formation Committee, but there was one more thing to do before the evening's meeting on Tuesday, August 11, which I realized while reading the paper at 2:48 p.m. We had until 5:00 p.m. to file an argument. I paused for five seconds, thinking there was no way to meet the deadline. Then I called Connie Worden and told her to start writing something and bring it over to the house. She wrote something she called "a quick and dirty argument that I am personally embarrassed by."¹⁰

With little time to spare I started the long drive to the Registrar-Recorder's office in the City of Commerce, running into horrible traffic. I wound through the back streets southeast of Los Angeles, doing my best to keep going in the proper direction, and reached the office parking lot at 4:58, according to my watch. I ran to the counter, not knowing whether the county clock and my watch agreed, and gasped out why I was there. They time-stamped the argument and that allowed me to catch a breath and walk back to the appropriate office.

There I was told that the argument had to be signed. As chairman I could sign it, but that would give me an unfair advantage in the council race. I did not

want to embarrass myself. Fortunately they agreed to accept a signature list as long as it was postmarked before midnight. The opposition, such as it was, had no clue.

For those who were not regular readers of *The Signal* in 1987, Scott Newhall’s editorial of August 14 was a fine example of his efforts.

Is It the Holy Grail Or a Dixie Cup

The hour of triumph began when frail little Kenny Hahn, the Supervisor whom millions of the Southland faithful worship as the Living Buddha, was rolled into the downtown Hall of Administration in his wheelchair.

The great man had been laid low on his sick bed at home for months, and this was his first appearance back on his throne at the most bizarre political swap meet in these United States. A cheer went up from the assembled multitude when the Supervisor was pushed to his place on the dais, for he had come to vote on, among other matters, a resolution to place the Santa Clarita Valley cityhood election on next November’s ballot.

Kenny Hahn beamed at the crowd and the TV cameras. He delivered a brief and gentle sermon on the sweet pleasures of self government. And then the Supervisor’s clerk called the roll.

Supervisors Peter Schabarum and Deane Dana, the reigning Visigoths of county Republican politics, voted “No.” But Kenny Hahn, in company with Mike Antonovich and Ed Edelman, responded “Aye.” The motion carried and so, come next November 3, we, the people of the Santa Clarita Valley, after decades of false starts and near misses, shall finally be able to vote whether or not we wish to form ourselves into a real, honest-to-goodness city.

How sweet it would have been if this historic vote last Thursday morning could have been welcomed with unrestricted joy; if it could have been hailed as a clean cut victory of the little people over the giants of power and privilege; if the Second Coming of Kenny Hahn and his swing vote for the November election could have been greeted with dancing in the public square, a blast on the heavenly trumpets and the chorus of angels crying “Hallelujah” in the blue skies overhead.

But alas, last Thursday’s November election date by the Supervisors was no such simple and praiseworthy affair. This seemingly refreshing legislative decision turns out to be just another example of how the American democratic process can be hounded and manipulated by half-blind zealots, who, in the heat of political tumult, lose sight of the principles of democracy, and blunder into foolishness.

Before pursuing this historic miscarriage of common sense and the repudiation of fair play, all potential voters of the Santa Clarita Valley should understand that the issue before the board last Thursday was not the question whether or not we, the people, were to be allowed to vote

for or against forming a city. That fight had already been won. The Local Agency Formation Commission had previously advised the Supervisors that a cityhood election must be held. The only question left to be decided by Kenny Hahn and his artful colleagues was the setting of a date for such election.

Last Thursday the Supervisors had a choice of voting for the earlier date – November – or they could have settled on a later date – next April, for example. However – and this is the key to all the melancholy nonsense that has since followed – if the Supervisors did indeed establish the earlier deadline in November, then under the election laws of our bountiful state of California all candidates who wish to file for a council seat in the new city would have to complete their nomination by 5 o’clock the next afternoon.

In other words, the November vote meant that the almost 50,000 registered voters of the Santa Clarita Valley were given only a single day in which to make up their minds and act if they wished to participate in the possible new world of SCV self-government.

And because of this outrageous one-day deadline there is not a ghost of a chance that if a new Santa Clarita Valley city is actually voted into existence next November, we shall have the benefit of leadership by the best and brightest among our citizens.

Now, let us ask the provocative question, namely: “Before the Supervisors cast their fateful votes last Thursday, was a single voice raised among the cityhood zealots suggesting that the Board delay the election from November to next April?”

The answer to both questions is a resounding “No.”

And therefore, indubitably and sorrowfully, as far as these paragraphs are concerned, last Thursday’s hurryup action was a cheap, tawdry action that precludes a fair and sensible cityhood election free from favoritism and the machinations of a select group of inside wheeler-dealers.... [B]ecause of this single miscalculation, the old cityhood volunteers have not distinguished themselves as custodians of the public trust.

As an example of the chaos caused by such cowboy statesmanship, our readers are referred to Miss Sharon Hormell’s crystal clear Page One account of Chairman Carl Boyer III’s race against the 24-hour deadline.

The premature November election may not be illegal, but it should be. For the Supervisors and the cityhood committee have totally ignored the theory of popular rule in general and the majesty of American self government in particular. By unnecessarily racing their wheels, the SCV proponents, unwittingly, perhaps, have succeeded only in discouraging, not encouraging, wide public participation in the pageant of free elections. They have in essence denied equal opportunity to all comers who aspire to the purple here in the Santa Clarita Valley.

It is difficult if not impossible to forgive and forget this frantic last minute scramble. Admittedly, the smell of honor and power in high public office is sweet, but visions of political sugarplums cannot excuse anyone from playing fast and loose with the American democratic tradition.

Perhaps the most brilliant demonstration of unfairness caused by the November speedup is the fact that because of the 24-hour deadline no “Argument against the Proposition” will appear in the voters’ handbook. As you may read on Page One, Carl Boyer III, the veteran drum major for cityhood with a ten-year history of horn tooting for home government, was able by virtue of superhuman effort to file the “Argument for Cityhood” with the county registrar only seconds before the deadline filing door was slammed shut Tuesday night. Because of the last minute weekend chaos, confusion and disorganization among uninitiated voters, there was no comparable opportunity for SCV residents who might have wished to file a contrary argument and express opposition or criticism of the projected new city.

At best this fateful November election date was accepted by a dedicated band of volunteers who have waited and waited for cityhood almost beyond endurance and who finally lacked the self-discipline to wait another four months for their hour of triumph.

At worst it was a betrayal of the traditional process of American self-rule by volunteer insiders, who is full knowledge of California’s convoluted election laws, managed to gain an advantage over the great bulk of Santa Clarita Valley voters.

As a summation of the confusions, inconsistencies and inequities raised by the Supervisors’ ill-considered November election date, one may be amused by the off-the-cuff remarks of a young reporter who has been tracking the tumult and shouting of cityhood. To wit:

Look, for months the earlier election date – the November date – has loomed up ahead, shining and shimmering like the Holy Grail. Obviously, in this tantalizing moment of truth, the cityhood people couldn’t let go of it.

So now we’ve got a Dixie Cup instead of a Holy Grail.¹¹

Scott’s editorial was brilliant and I could not complain. At the time all I wanted to do was finish the election process. It was time to get out and campaign for cityhood, and if I got elected to the council that was good too. Yes, there were moments when I wanted even to be the first Mayor, because I knew the council would be setting precedents, and wanted to be part of that.

¹*The Signal*, 5 June 1987.

²*Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1987, Valley section, p. 4.

³*The Signal*, 24 June 1987.

⁴*Los Angeles Times*, 25 June 1987.

⁵*The Signal*, 5 August 1987.

⁶*The Signal*, 5 August 1987.

⁷*Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 1987.

⁸*The Signal*, 7 August 1987.

⁹*Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1987.

¹⁰*The Signal*, 14 August 1987.

¹¹*The Signal*, 14 August 1987.