Once upon a time in the small northern California hamlet of Oakland, a family of six lived in peace and harmony. There was a mama and a papa and four children. On October 12, 1933, a day that will live in infamy, a fifth child was born. She was given the same name as her mama, Nina Elizabeth Warren. Papa Warren’s second son was called a Junior because he shared the same exact name as his papa, Earl Warren. Baby Nina could not be a Junior as that was a title reserved for boys only. So what should Mama and Papa do?

Two years passed and soon Baby Nina would sit on Mama’s lap and listen as she read wonderful stories to her. Baby Nina liked one book more than any other. It was titled “The Honey Bear”.... and guess what? One evening when all the children were tucked in bed and kissed goodnight, Mama and Papa went to the kitchen for a snack. It was there that they decided to give Baby Nina the nickname, Honey Bear. It was a name that was to follow her for her entire life which has now reached nearly eight decades. She will be happy to know that I have “spilled the beans” on her real age while she harbors a much younger look.

Once upon another time in a small hospital in the same town, Honey Bear’s baby brother was born, a full fifteen months younger than her. She had also been born in Paralta Hospital but because she was a Bear, she was not allowed to visit me during my three-week stay.

Once I got home and got my feet on the ground, I began to catch up with Honey Bear, and by age three I was close in size, so much that we were thought to be twins. She was a good playmate and we always did fun things. One day when Mama was doing what she did every day, cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, sewing and more, Honey Bear and I decided to play barber. When we proudly approached Mama with the final trimming, we quickly realized the error of our ways. The tears in Mama’s her eyes welled up the size of small grapes, but there was no punishment, just sorrow. Mama did retrieve the clippings and saved them for another day. Oh yes, I forgot to mention the identical blond curls that covered our foreheads prior to the barber shop episode. The curls never grew back, but an envelope saved the trimmings for posterity.

When you are five years old and the baby of the family, everyone looks bigger.. .......except Honey Bear. The twin look continued. We took on new challenges, almost locked at the hip as we rode horseback both for pleasure and competition. Peanuts, Porky, and Nozama gave us endless hours of joy at the Barbara Worth Stables. Jumping, trail rides, and daily rides at the stables was a routine we always cherished. We seldom had disagreements, but one that never could be resolved was the game of “Got you last.” It went like this. Honey Bear would touch me with her index knuckle and announce “Got you last!” I would quickly do the same thing to her. The argument heated. Finally, we decided that if you touched the other person, he or she was also touching you. Get it? If you did......”I got you last.”

The transition from Crocker Elementary to California Jr. High separated Honey Bear and me for the first time. I could see her through the adjoining fence, but her activities were different from mine. She tried the violin. I felt sorry for the poor violin. I played the French horn, then the trumpet, and then the trombone. I recall a trumpet duet with Jimmy Silverman, whose father owned a music store on J Street in downtown Sacramento. The song was “Humoresque” and it
was humorous but not funny at the time. I believe it was in A Flat but I played in Flat, Flat. Jimmy was an excellent musician for a twelve year old.

Our interests changed. Long gone were the horses. Honey Bear was into social activities at C.K. McClatchy High School and an off-campus sorority known as the Manana Club. I was into sports, mainly football, and joined an off-campus fraternity known as the 36 Club. We both shared wonderful experiences in our grade school education in Sacramento with one exception.

In the fall of 1950 polio was on the rampage throughout the United States. There was never a thought given to the possibility that we might be exposed. Honey Bear was a cheerleader for McClatchy and had performed at a Friday night game. The next morning she experienced difficulty walking and was unable to move around the house. The parent of a very close friend of the family called to say that their daughter Maggie had contracted polio, as had her brother. Maggie Cavanaugh was also a cheerleader at McClatchy. A quick medical exam and tests confirmed the worst. Honey Bear had two new goals in life. One was life itself, the other was to walk again.

Fortunately, Honey Bear’s leg and abdominal muscles were the only muscles seriously affected. As soon as she was ready for therapy, Papa made her a deal. When she could walk by herself, he would buy her the dream car she had always talked about, a green Chevrolet convertible. The therapy plan included lots of warm water activities. So Mama packed their bags and off they went to Waikiki Beach on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. For two months she swam daily in the warm tropical water, eventually learning to surf with the help of Dave Rocklin, a local life guard. Hard work and dedication paid great dividends. Honey Bear could again walk with the aid of crutches.

As Honey Bear slowly walked across the stage, with her temporary supports, her classmates and their families rose to applaud her effort. The event was the 1951 high school graduation ceremonies at the Memorial Auditorium in Sacramento. Soon she would be enrolled in the University of California, Los Angeles. Her first and only employment was that of a receptionist in a physician’s office in Beverly Hills. You’ll never guess what happened.....she married the boss, Dr. Stuart Brien. Elope was not a word in our family’s vocabulary so when it happened we were surprised. I thought I had escaped the coat and tie “thing,” but a large reception took care of that thought. My brothers and I planned to meet Stuart for the first time with a little “tongue in cheek” greeting......like “Hi Carl, welcome to the family.” or “Glad to meet you, Mike.” It never happened. Stuart was too great a guy to play such a trick on. Besides, he was a former boxer at the University of Pittsburgh and I had no desire to test his skills. Once upon a time......time was upon us. So as one story ends another begins.