

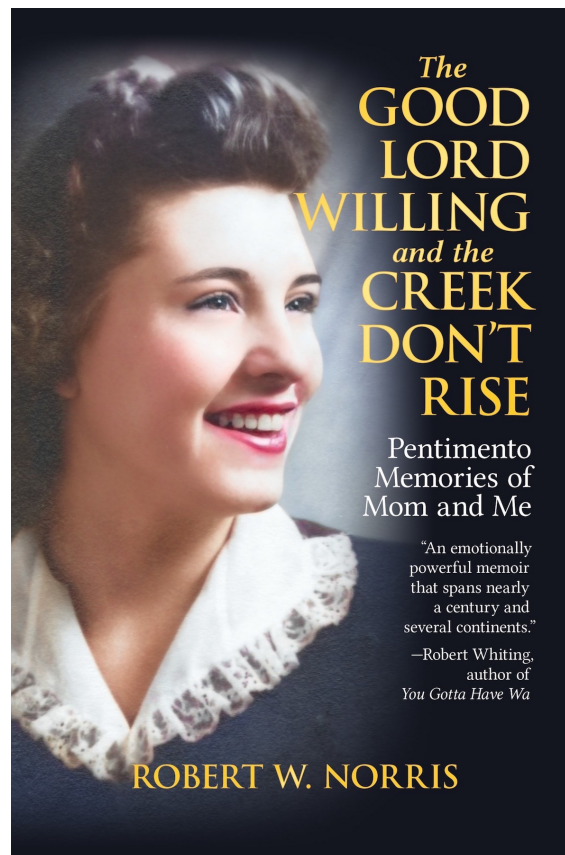
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THINGS TO DO/LIFESTYLE

A life story

AHS grad shares ‘memories of Mom and me’ in new book



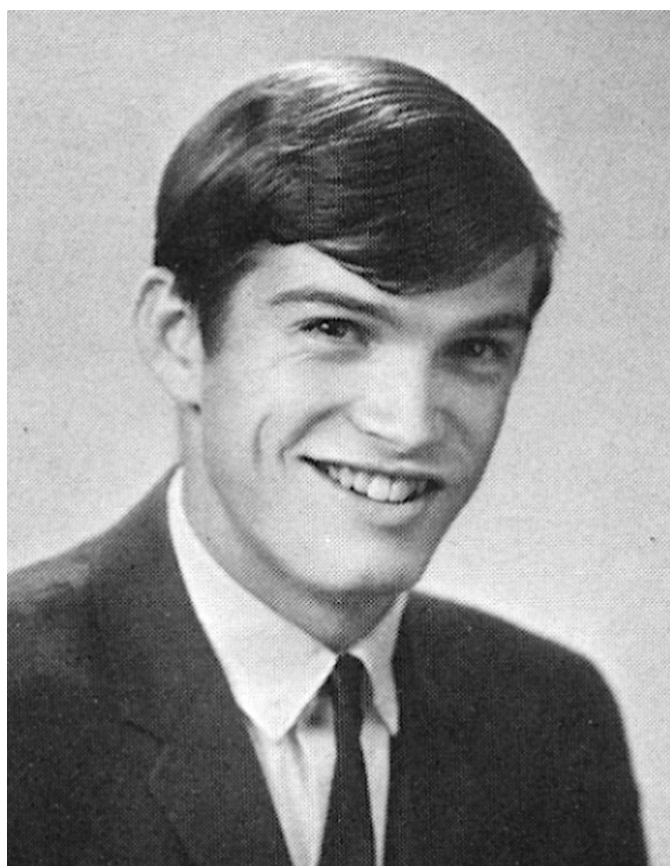
"The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don't Rise: Pentimento Memories of Mom and Me" is a new book by 1969 Arcata High School graduate Robert W. Norris. (Courtesy of Robert W. Norris)

By **HEATHER SHELTON** | hshelton@times-standard.com | Times-Standard
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A 1969 Arcata High School graduate is releasing his life story next week.

Author Robert W. Norris — who was born and raised in Humboldt County and now resides in Fukuoka, Japan — says his new book, “The Good Lord Willing and the Creek Don’t Rise: Pentimento Memories of Mom and Me” (Tin Gate Books), is a tribute to his mother, who died just four days short of her 95th birthday in 2021.

“My mother had more of an influence on me than any other person in my life,” Norris said in an email interview with the Times-Standard. “She was a strong, independent and optimistic woman who always encouraged and supported her kids. She was an artistic and adventurous soul who always saw the good in people. She was a great storyteller and no one could make me laugh as hard as she could. Simply put, she was my best friend. When she passed away, I wanted to preserve her spirit and show other people what a wonderful person she was.”



This photo of Robert W. Norris is from the 1969 Arcata High School yearbook. (Courtesy of Robert W. Norris)

Norris says until he was 5 years old his family lived in a small house on South G Street in Arcata. After that, they moved to the Bayside area, where he went to school for five years. He then attended schools in Fortuna for five years and spent his final two years of high school at Arcata High School.

In his new book, Norris explores the separate life paths that he and his mom, Kay, traveled and the bond between them that was as constant as her unconditional love, he said.

“The early chapters put the reader in (her) shoes as she grows up during the Depression, marries young, rebels against her husband’s controlling family, battles the Catholic Church authorities, remarries and starts anew as a legal secretary in her 40s,” Norris said.

The book goes on to recount how, after an idyllic childhood, Norris entered the U.S. Air Force in September 1969 and subsequently became a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War.

“By the time I refused my order to go to war in 1970, the antiwar movement had become quite strong throughout the country,” he said.



Robert W. Norris is pictured in 2019. Now living in Japan, Norris was born and raised in Humboldt County. (Courtesy of Robert W. Norris)

“... One of the more difficult things to deal with (regarding my decision) was the split between our generation and our parents’ generation,” Norris said. “My own father had been a World War II hero and was quite patriotic. He couldn’t understand why I did what I did. In his eyes, I was throwing my entire future away. Years later, however, his views changed and he came to agree with what I’d done.”

After serving six months in a military prison for “negligent disobedience,” Norris was released and went on to embrace the counterculture in his 20s, he said, traveling across the United States, going to Europe twice and making one journey around the world.

“Even after I got out of the service and began a rather nomadic life,” Norris said, “Humboldt County remained my home base for the next few years.”

During that time of world travel, he worked as a millhand, construction laborer, stevedore, mailman, baker, sauté cook and oil rig steward. His goal, however, was to be a writer.

“I met a lot of young hippies from many countries on the road,” Norris said. “To me, their lives seemed exciting and fulfilled. There were many artists, poets and musicians among them. Most of them could speak more than one language. I was heavily influenced by them. My dream was to live in a foreign country and study a foreign language.”

In 1983, Norris moved to Japan, where he still lives today with his wife.

“Around 1982, a writer friend told me about the possibility of teaching English in Japan. He introduced me to a friend in Japan who put me up for a couple of weeks and helped me find a job at an English conversation school near Osaka,” said Norris, who eventually completed a master’s degree in the teaching of English as a foreign language and began working at the Fukuoka Women’s Junior College then later at Fukuoka International University. He retired in 2016 as a professor emeritus.

Norris is also the author of three novels (“Looking for the Summer,” “Toraware” and “Autumn Shadows in August”), a novella (“The Many Roads to Japan”) and several research papers about teaching.

His new book — to be released Jan. 17 — is available now for pre-order on Amazon. It can also be ordered through any bookstore, he said.

“My purpose in writing this story was to try to evoke the importance of family bonds in helping us overcome difficult times and to remind people not to be afraid of the unknown,” Norris said. “I believe it’s a good book for not only mothers and sons, but also for people who’ve wondered what the road less traveled would’ve been like had they just taken that first step. I hope readers come away from it with a positive feeling.”

For more information about the author, go to www2.gol.com/users/norris.

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