

# Bobby Sox softball origin: It all started with a walk to Linda Mar Shopping Center



By [HORACE HINSHAW](#) | Pacifica Tribune

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*(With the help of Diane Hart, I was able to contact Shirley Sherwin (Coleman), who, with her late husband, Nick, brought the Bobby Sox Softball League to Pacifica in 1970. Today, Shirley lives in Aptos, CA)*

In 1966, Shirley Brown and her first husband moved from Pennsylvania to San Francisco. Several months after arriving in the Bay Area they moved to Pacifica.

Shirley had an extensive background in playing softball. At the age of 19 she started playing semi-pro ball and also with a traveling league sponsored by her employer, Bell Telephone, in Pennsylvania.

“Shortly after moving to Pacifica, we divorced,” said Shirley. “I joined a ladies softball league sponsored by the Pacifica Parks, Beach and Recreation Department, playing at White Field. I also played on a Triple A traveling league coached by Nick Sherwin.”

Shirley and Nick married and moved to a house on DeSolo Drive, adjacent to the Linda Mar Shopping Center. Her closeness to the shopping center eventually led to the organization of the Bobby Sox softball league.

“One day I was talking to the lady across the street from our house. She drove a school bus for the school district,” said Shirley. “She told me about a situation at the shopping center where young girls were loitering every day.”

“Over the course of several days, while I was walking my dogs, I continued to notice that young girls were always standing around in the shopping center. I was appalled,” she added. “I thought to myself that we needed to have something for these girls to do.”

“Nick and I talked about the girls playing softball. Nick started searching for a youth league,” said Shirley. “Nick found this Bobby Sox League in Los Angeles. We met with the league officials. The timing was just right as the Bobby Sox League was looking to start a girl’s softball league north of San Jose. The league officials supported the idea of Pacifica having a program.”

The Sherwins contacted many of the women playing softball to see if they wanted to help with the program. Many of the women had young daughters. Pamphlets were posted around the shopping center that registration was being held for players.

“We contacted the recreation department to see if there was a field available,” continued Shirley. “They told us we could play on the field at the top of Cabrillo School.”

“It was the worst field in Pacifica. It was just terrible. It was all rocks. It was a real mess and it was very cold,” exclaimed Shirley. “Give credit to the parents. The league did not have any funds. They went to the school district and got permission to build backstops and fences. They put a lot of work into that field.”

“Then the City told us that we would only be able to play on the field for one year,” Shirley said. “Allegedly, HUD (Housing Urban Development) was going to develop the field. The principal at the school really wanted the girls to continue to play on the field. She helped us keep the field.”

The principal at that time was Leslie Linhares. She had been principal at the school since 1959.

“I wanted that playground for the children,” said Linhares, who today is living in retirement in South San Francisco. I told the City that the field needed to stay.”

“I have a fondness for recreation,” added Linhares, whose background was in recreation. “I started working recreation in Daly City when I was 19 years old. The parents had already done a lot of work on the field. It should stay for the girls.”

(As a sidebar, Linhares' brother, Rod Linhares, a former principal at Linda Mar Elementary School, was the first recreation supervisor for Pacifica prior to incorporation of the City in 1957)

The league opened in 1970 with seven teams, four minors and three majors. Nick Sherwin was the league president for the next two years, stepping down in 1972 to become the district commissioner. He also formed a softball traveling league for girls 15 through 18 year old who wanted to continue playing. Shirley was selected president of the league along with her executive board, Judy Dallman, Diane Hart, Rich Seyler and Fran Roe.

Shirley headed the league for two years, then severed her ties with the executive board to umpire the games. For the next 20 years Shirley would umpire softball games of all age leagues throughout Northern California, averaging 600 to 800 games a year, before retiring 10 years ago.

In 1972, the league's third season, the Minor League All Star team was very successful. The team, managed by Sandy Seyler, with coaches Shirley Sherwin and Dell Underwood, advanced to the national tournament in Buena Park, CA.

"My fondest memory of that year was the camaraderie and the support we had from everybody. The entire town supported us," said Shirley. "I don't think we had \$50 in the bank and we needed \$1,500 to get the girls down south. We held car washes. People would come up to the girls at the fundraising events and hand them \$5 or \$10. Everybody wanted to be part of this team."

"The 1972 team was great," she added. "They worked hard but certainly enjoyed the reward. We didn't win the national championship but people in Los Angeles certainly knew where Pacifica was during the games."

The All Stars won the area and district title to advance to the nationals.

"In the course of a week we played 10 games, something like 50 innings," laughed Shirley. "We found ourselves playing in the losing brackets in the tournaments and having to play doubleheaders to eventually win. By the time we left the district tournament in San Jose I hadn't had much sleep."

"We went to Buena Park to play. We lost both games in the seventh inning to Southern California teams," said Shirley. "Yes, we lost but our team certainly showed the best sportsmanship of any team at the tournament. They played so hard in all the games."

"In losing they still had fun," stated Shirley. "If they had kept winning they would not have enjoyed Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, the museum and all the fun things they did in Los Angeles. It was a year to remember."

Among the all stars was their daughter, Luanna Sherwin. Their older daughter, Linette, also played softball.

Shirley also served as secretary for the Redwood City umpire association for many years. She became a pitching and catching coach. Two of her students were outstanding players — Nadine Hart and Sue Taddei.

Nick and Shirley left Pacifica in 1974. They settled in various cities over the next 40 years. Nick died four years ago. Years later Shirley, 73, remarried and moved to Aptos. After retiring from her employment with the City of Santa Cruz, she continued to umpire games.

In talking about the Cabrillo Field, Shirley reflected on her association with Joy Lockhart. The playing field at Cabrillo is named in Joy's memory.

"Joy was involved with Little League," said Shirley. "We played together in the housewives softball league. Everybody loved her. We all wanted her on our team. We had a real nice group of people in that league."

"When we found out that she was terminally ill, we wanted to do something," added Shirley. "We knew she wasn't involved with Bobby Sox because she was unable but she had been involved with youth programs in the town. We thought to honor her we would name the field Joy Lockhart Field. We got permission from the school district. When the field was dedicated she had passed, but her husband came to the field to thank everybody. Joy was truly one of a kind."

Shirley said of her involvement in helping to organize the Bobby Sox Softball League, "when I was a kid, my parents told me it was important to give."

I'm sure Shirley is very humble about her role in bringing girl's softball to Pacifica, but certainly she is due her place in Pacifica sports history.