

Historical Novelist Finds ‘Real’ Cézanne, Beyond the Museum Walls

Barbara Corrado Pope

Until a few months ago, all of my encounters with Cézannes had been on museum walls or in books or in my own imagining of the great painter in the aftermath of an obsessive love affair. That was until I opened an email from a real life Cézanne who had read *Cézanne’s Quarry* and asked me to sign her copy. Thus began my correspondence with Aline Cézanne, the artist’s great granddaughter.

We finally met last month in a San Francisco bistro (with the wonderfully apt name, l’Absinthe). She stood outside the entrance with her husband, Pinky, waiting. Having googled her, I recognized Aline at once, a small, compact woman, with short silvery blond hair, wearing a leather jacket, dark red lipstick and a ready smile. By the time we sat down to eat and talk, I had discovered that she was open, unpretentious, and full of joie de vivre. I asked her about her journey from being the bearer of an iconic name in France to building a life very much her own in the Bay Area.

FAMILY HISTORY AND THE RENOIR CONNECTION

Her grandfather was Paul Cézanne’s only child, Paul Jr., who had four children, two of whom lived to adulthood. The great painters, Paul Cézanne and Pierre-Auguste Renoir had been friends, but after the death of Cézanne, his son Paul Jr. drew even closer to the large, warm Renoir family. So close, that when Paul Jr. was 41 and thought he would never marry, Auguste’s wife Aline suggested a match between him and Renée Rivière, a motherless young woman who had become part of the Renoir household. Thus began the line of Alines, for Paul Jr. named his first daughter Aline (at 94 she is still active), and Paul Jr’s son, Jean-Pierre, named his daughter, Aline. Our Aline.

Paul Jr. developed a particularly strong friendship with Renoir's son, Jean, even though the famous film director was more than 20 years younger than him. It is to Jean that we owe a description of the escape from Paris in 1940 which could be taken straight from Irène Némirovsky's *Suite Française*, except that this story has a happy ending.

Finding Paul eager to organize an escape from Nazi-occupied Paris, Jean rented a three-seat Peugeot, into which he invited Paul, Renée and the paintings Paul still had in his collection. Jean Renoir's wife, Dido, and Paul's son, Jean-Pierre and his new bride, Marjorie, followed the car on bicycles. Jean-Pierre had married Marjorie because she was part Jewish, and he hoped to save her from a concentration camp. She was also pregnant.

Of course the multitudes who shared the dusty, crowded, dangerous roads wondered why this little troupe was expending so much energy in protecting its "windbreakers"! The entire party (including the canvasses) arrived safe and sound at the farm of Père Antoine, where they took up most of the barn. The villagers loved hosting "their" celebrities, and according to Renoir's account, Paul felt that his father's painting had never been shown to better advantage, against the rustic stones of the barn, under the oil lamps, with drafts making them come alive.

This story is a part of family lore. Aline, however, was not alive until much later, the product of a post-war reconciliation between Jean-Pierre and Marjorie. She had two older siblings, one of whom is still alive, Philippe, who runs a Cézanne Foundation. She does remember sitting on Jean Renoir's knee as a child, and she would come to know two Renoirs during her adulthood in the Bay Area (Alain, who had once worked on films with his father and became an English professor at Berkeley, and Maurice, a pediatrician).

SHADES OF THE DA VINCI CODE

When I asked her if she ever found it a burden to carry the Cézanne name, she told me "not anymore". However, when she was young, the name was a heavy one to own, for her elders expected her to be an artist while her peers were unimpressed. One day, as she

was on a school visit to the Louvre she told a friend that the portrait of her great grandmother Hortense Ficquet really should be hers. Her friend disagreed, and to make a point Aline reached out and touched it. This set off alarms and put the students into a lockdown! Fortunately, the curator knew Aline's family and let her off with a warning.

THE ODYSSEY

As a young adult, Aline was even more adventurous. After meeting a young American woman during her travels she decided to look her up in the Claremont colleges. Despite her mother's fears and tears, she set out from Paris at 5 a.m. in the morning to Luxemburg where she boarded the "Virgin Air" or "Jet Blue" of the day, Icelandic Airlines, and headed for New York. After a few days with relatives, she got on a Greyhound. During the long journey, she bonded with a 12-year-old boy from Salt Lake City, in part because she understood his English. There was a big Texan she could not understand at all. Apparently he thought that Aline and the boy were brother and sister, for he bought them cookies and milk at every stop.

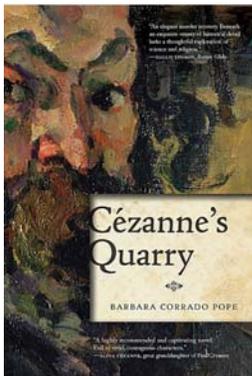
After her arrival in Los Angeles, life took a decidedly more "adult" turn: she got married, got a green card, and modeled for sculpture classes. But she did not like LA, and so she headed for San Francisco, where she lived in a typically 70's hippy household. This is where she met "Pinky," who was on leave from the navy and found Aline in what he considered to be "his" bed. He was unimpressed by the Cézanne name, since he knew nothing about the history of art, but quite impressed by Aline.

Since the paintings of Cézanne were sold off a long time ago ("My grandmother and grandfather liked to have a good time"), Aline has always had to make her own way. When she arrived in San Francisco, she got a job in a French restaurant, (presumably according to the owner, because she could speak French), washing dishes! Later she flipped crepes, made desserts, and did office temp work. She also got married to Pinky. Her mother still worried. When Aline had her first child, Marjorie Cézanne sent Maurice Renoir, a pediatrician, to take a look and make sure that everyone was okay.

Fourteen years ago Aline took a permanent position as an accountant at the University of California San Francisco, where, according to a friend and colleague, she makes sure that everyone toes the financial line. (Her aunt Aline, the formidable 94-year-old, is also an accountant.) She lives with Pinky, her two sons, a dog, and occasionally her grandchild, and grows a lot of vegetables in her garden.

Barbara Corrado Pope has an undeniable passion for making history come alive. She is an historian, and founding director of the Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Oregon. She has a PhD in the Social and Intellectual History of Europe from Columbia University and has taught women's studies in places as diverse as Hungary, Tuscany, the University of New Mexico, Harvard Divinity School and Provence, where *Cézanne's Quarry* is set.

Born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Barbara resides in Eugene, Oregon, where she is actively pursuing a second career as a novelist. She has just completed "*The Blood of Lorraine*," a second Bernard Martin mystery, which will be published in both the U.S. and Germany in the spring of 2010.



For more information about *Cézanne's Quarry*, the author, and her work, please visit www.CezannesQuarry.com

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