

The Heckman Family

From mountain trips and family camping traditions to community work and a garden overflowing with possibility, the Heckmans bring heart, humor, and purpose to Petaluma.

T Trathen Robert Heckman and Mary Patricia Heckman first crossed paths at Chico State, where they lived in the same apartment complex. Mary grew up in a military family that lived from California to England, while Trathen's roots stretch from outside Buffalo, New York, to the Bay Area. After moving in together in Fairfax, a dappled-light drive along the Bohemian Highway toward Occidental helped draw them toward Sonoma County and the Russian River area.

Their Petaluma life now runs on a mix of meaningful work, outdoor adventure, shared projects, and plenty of humor. Mary is a Human Resources Manager at Buckelew Programs, the North Bay's largest behavioral health provider. Trathen founded and leads Daily Acts, a Petaluma-based educational nonprofit working to build more equitable, connected, climate-resilient communities.

Their daughter, Ella Emmy Heckman, 14, brings a generous dose of creativity to the family. She has tried

softball, soccer, competitive cheer, snowboarding, and camping, but she is just as happy reading, baking sweet treats, crafting, or bedazzling nearly anything that will hold still. Time with friends is important, too, as it should be.

The garden is one of the family's favorite places to be. **With about 130 varieties of fruits, berries, grapes, medicinal plants, and vegetables, there is almost always something ready to pick.** Before Ella could walk, she would crawl through the garden in her diaper, grazing on berries or holding herself up on a blueberry bush as she made her way along. These days, the harvest draws a steady parade of visitors: raccoons, possums, baby skunks, birds, and lately, a beautiful fox enjoying the mulberries on the ground.



Meet the Heckman Family

At the Heckman home, the garden is always busy. Berries ripen, chickens wander, cats collect nicknames, and even a fox has discovered the fallen mulberries. For Trathen, Mary, and Ella, that lively little ecosystem reflects the way they live: connected, curious, creative, and always growing.

Meet Your Neighbor - Continued

Ripple, 7, and Candi, 2, complete the household's indoor crew, each with roughly 10 nicknames in circulation. Candi arrived as part of a large litter that Ella convinced the family to foster, then became a permanent member of the home. Eight chickens add to the routine, complete with their own rainwater catchment system.

When they step away from the garden, the Heckmans make time



Plant more—food, medicine, habitat, hope, and connection.

for seasonal traditions: winter trips to Mammoth Mountain, camping with friends in the Sierras and at Lake Siskiyou, skiing, snowboard-ing, and other adventures that change with the weather. Mary enjoys reading, kayaking on the Petaluma River, traveling, and exploring new places. For Trathen, snowboarding remains a longtime passion, joined by mountain biking, hiking, camping, backpacking, gardening, neigh-borhood happy hours, and quiet mornings in the garden with tea and a journal. Mi Pueblo is a longtime favorite when the family is ready for a tasty meal and beverage. Saturday nights often mean dinner with friends or relaxing at home with a movie.

Trathen's work with Daily Acts grew out of a decision he made



about 30 years ago: to face the challenges affecting people and the planet without closing off, fighting only the bad, or becoming overwhelmed. Encounters with people restoring land and strengthening local commu-nity set him on a path toward permaculture, sustainability, and the belief that daily choices can help create wider change.

He has seen that idea take root through garden transformations, volunteer projects, workshops, and community gatherings. His simple invitation to neighbors is to “plant more”—food, medicine, habitat, hope, rain gardens, rain tanks, and connection. Even a smile and hello can be part of the work.

That philosophy feels natural at the Heckmans’ home. Their family life makes room for projects, adventures, changing cat nicknames, and the small wonders that keep showing up in the garden. It is a reminder that community can grow in practical ways: one shared meal, one helpful gesture, one planted seed, and one open gate at a time.



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