

# **HAREM SCAREM IN EL CERRITO**

**The Life of a Little Girl Growing up in  
El Cerrito, California**



by  
**Neva Calvert Carpenter**



**HAREM SCAREM**  
**IN EL CERRITO**

**BY NEVA CALVERT CARPENTER**

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MEMORY'S DOOR

by: Dora P. Fortner

Old homes, old towns, old friends,  
Old ties we all hold dear,  
All bind us closer to the past  
With every passing year.  
The far horizons lure  
And beckon us; in youth.  
We journey forth for fortune, fame,  
Or maybe, search for truth.

The hours, the days, the years  
Speed blithely on their way  
And all material things in life  
So quickly fade away;  
But, memory holds the key  
To joys we gladly share,  
The hallowed scenes of childhood days  
And loved ones dwelling there.

Old homes, old towns, of friends,  
Old ties we all hold dear,  
All locked within our memory  
Glow dearer every year;  
And when we use the key  
That opens memory's door,  
We see old homes, old towns, old friends  
We loved long years before.

## DEDICATION

To my parents who raised me with much love and affection, my siblings Jerry, Mary and Patty who were there to help raise me during my mother's illness and my father's absence. And to my three daughters Leona, Linda and Sharon who have stuck by me through thick and thin and were there for me during a serious illness .

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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8-Christine Greaves, another friend who helped in the editing of my story.

9-Richard Schwartz, the well-known Berkeley, California historian and local authority on Indians who took the time to find a large outcropping of rock my sister Patty and I always referred to as "our rock".

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# INTRODUCTION

SEVENTY-EIGHT, A GREAT AGE!

June 2006

By: Neva Sonia Calvert Carpenter

I am now 78 years old and I was sitting here thinking, I am glad to be the age I am. Why? Because it means that I was a child during a bygone age, an age that no longer exists and more than likely will never exist again. An age when as a child I was free (at a very young age) to run with my sister Patty through tall fields of grass. A child who could take a sack lunch with her sister to a large rock near home and play make believe at a spot where our father had told us that Indian children once played. A child who could pull a wagon from house to house collecting movie magazines, selling Christmas cards, or collecting newspapers for our school paper drive. A child who could go up the hill to the woods behind the Sunset View Cemetery (just up the street from our home) with our wagon and collect pinecones for our fireplace. A child who could go through the fields after a rain with a sack and spoon to hunt for mushrooms to take home to Mother. A child who as a young girl scout was able to hike more than seven miles to the U.C. Berkeley Campus and return home on the city transit in order to qualify for her hiking badge, without having her mother sitting home wondering if she was safe. A child who was able to play kick-the-can outside after dark with her friends.

As children we were free to go anywhere in our little town without Mother worrying about someone doing us any harm. Mother's worry was rather we would do ourselves harm, as we were very adventurous little girls. And what great fun my sister Patty and I had! We made a lot of wonderful memories together to tuck away in our "memory box". We could then pull them out from time to time to re-live those happy times over and over again, sometimes in our own thoughts and sometimes sharing them together, happily reminiscing about "the good old days".

The *little* town I am speaking of is El Cerrito, California, across the bay from San Francisco, at the foot of the Berkeley Hills. This *little* town no longer has fields of tall grass for children to run through. Those fields

of grass are now blocks of homes and shopping centers and the BART System running to San Francisco. The “Indian” rock where we loved to eat and play as children is now in someone’s yard and neighborhood children can no longer make believe they are playing with Indian children as they sit on it and look off into the distance. Children no longer pull their wagon from house to house or to the woods to hunt for pine cones. A mother can no longer let her child hike any distance from home without worry, not just for her small children, but also for her teenage children.

It is a shame that children can no longer live their lives as fully as the children of my day were allowed to do and as fully as God intended them to do, nor that a mother can feel her children are safe when they are out of her sight. My children were able to have this carefree life to some extent when they were growing up, but not to the same extent because they grew up in a town larger than El Cerrito and during a different time period. But they got a taste of it.

I became very aware of this change when I raised my oldest granddaughter. Even in her teen years, I was worried when she was out of my sight and I never let her go anywhere alone . . . not even to the store. She had to have at least two friends with her.

Do I hate that I am the age I am? NO! I would rather be the age I am now with the memories I gathered in my youth than to be young now gathering the memories of today’s world.

78! YES! IT’S A WONDERFUL AGE!

## PROLOGUE

My mother, Eva Rude Calvert, was the youngest of five sisters (two of whom had died as children). Mother also had two older brothers and one younger brother. Dr. Thomas Jefferson Rude, the father of my mother, passed away when my mother was fourteen. Her mother, Mary Ann Gentry Rude, passed away three years later. My grandfather Thomas Rude had been married once before; he married my grandmother two years after his first wife's death. He and his first wife had two girls, Dolly and Daisy. Daisy was the older of the two and twenty years older than my mother. After my grandmother Mary Rude passed away, my mother was taken in by Aunt Daisy and her husband, French MacDonald ("Uncle Mac"). I don't know where her siblings went.

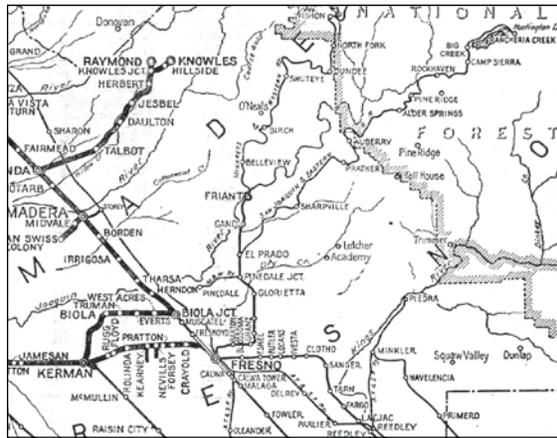
My father, Harold Calvert, and my mother met on July 2, 1918 on a boy-scout camping trip at Camp Echo in Missouri. Mother was eighteen at the time and Dad was twenty. Uncle Mac was the scout leader and Daddy was the assistant leader. Mother had gone with Uncle Mac's family and they set up a little camp close by. About a month later Daddy joined the Navy and went to boot camp in Chicago. World War I was still raging. During his time in the service, he and Mother corresponded on a regular basis. In August of 1919 he returned home and on November 1, 1919 they married. They made their home in Fort Smith, Arkansas with my father's parents: Francis (Frank) Easley Calvert and Louisa Rachel (Tucker) Calvert; plus my father's three younger sisters and two younger brothers.

Having just returned from the war, Dad was showered with attention by his family. Mother understood having to take a back seat and realized his family couldn't get enough of their loved one back from the war. My mother and father longed to spend more time alone together and when Mother became pregnant with my brother Jerry, they decided to find a place of their own nearby. Mother loved having more time alone with her new husband and having their own little nest, with her keeping it clean and cooking for her husband. Daddy was very attentive all through her pregnancy and couldn't do enough for her.

They still spent a lot of time with Dad's family and when Jerry was born it was a happy occasion for all concerned. But their joy was clouded when Jerry became very ill and they found he had malaria. Mother and

Dad were advised that unless they got him to a better climate, they might lose him.

After much discussion they decided to move to California, where there was plenty of sunshine. Also, Mother's sister Daisy and her family had just moved to California, settling in El Cerrito. Dad left immediately, hopping a freight train heading west to secure a job and find a home for his wife and son. He ended up in Fresno, California. Upon hearing that the Edison Company was hiring in the little mountain town of Big Creek, he took a job with them as a lumberjack. As soon as possible he found a little place for them to live. It was only a shack, but it would be a roof



*Big Creek (upper right) and Fresno, California*

over their heads. He immediately sent a letter to Mother telling her to pack up their belongings and come to Big Creek. It was July of 1921 and Jerry was almost a year old.

Mother had been packed and waiting for weeks when the letter arrived. She

quickly jotted him a note telling him that they would be there as soon as they could and she was able to get the very next train to Fresno. She had no difficulty obtaining assistance from other passengers who saw her alone with a sick little boy. They took care of him at times to let her get some rest before arriving at her destination. She reached Fresno about midnight several days later and she stood with all her worldly possessions and a sick son on the empty platform, expecting to have Daddy rush up and gather her in his arms at any moment.

But Daddy wasn't there. Nor had anyone else been sent to meet her. She never said why she didn't take a train to Big Creek. Instead, she found a room in a hotel near the station and spent two nights there, checking whenever a train came in from Big Creek, but to no avail. Running short on money, she decided to get to Big Creek any way she could. A woman at the lunch counter where she was eating heard Mother's plight and

arranged for her son to take Mother and Jerry to Big Creek in his milk truck. He made a short stop somewhere on the way; to Mother's surprise and delight she saw Daddy. He had just received her letter and was on his way to Fresno to try to find her.

Dad was apprehensive about showing her the little shack that he found. It was in the town of Dawn at the foot of Music Mountain, within walking distance from Big Creek. He had done all he could to it to make it as nice as possible for her. Mother was so thrilled to be with him she wouldn't have cared if it had been a tent. She was happy to be a family again and living in the mountains. They quickly adjusted to their new life. Why Dad had picked Big Creek, with its snowy winters, isn't clear; but even so, by the time winter arrived Jerry seemed to be thriving and soon returned to good health. He was a happy little "feller", as Daddy called him.

Mother and Dad's closest friends there were Donna and Earl Risdon ("Slim" as everyone called him, because he was tall and lanky.) He owned the ice cream parlor and lunch counter in Big Creek. Donna was fourteen years his junior and a very striking looking woman who dressed in excellent taste. She wore her hair short and combed straight back with a wave to add femininity. She was fairly tall, slim, and had a flawless complexion. Although she was somewhat younger than Mother, they hit it off from the start. The two couples remained friends for the rest of their lives.

When Mother became pregnant with their next child they moved from Dawn to Big Creek. Since Big Creek didn't have a cleaners in those days and people had to go all the way into Fresno to get their clothes cleaned, Dad opened a cleaning shop. Mother did all the washing and sewing that needed to be done.

Richard Eugene was born in Big Creek on May 26, 1922. Like most babies, Richard had the habit of kicking the blankets off. One cold winter night in November there was a blizzard and Mother wanted to be sure he stayed covered up. So she placed her fur coat over him, knowing he wouldn't be able to kick it off. When my father got up in the mornings, he normally put Jerry (who was two) and Richard in bed with Mother until she was ready to get up. She was already pregnant with my sister Mary at the time. On this particular morning when Daddy went in to get Richard out of his little bed, Mother wondered why he was taking longer than usual. Daddy slowly came back into their room and sat on

the edge of the bed, taking her hand in his. She noticed tears in his eyes. "Eva, our baby boy is gone."

Daddy made a little wooden coffin for his baby son. He had to leave his wife alone with their young son, Jerry, and her grief. With the tiny coffin cradled in his arms, tears streaming down his face, Daddy hopped a slowly moving freight that passed close to their cabin on its daily run to Fresno. Holding his precious cargo close to him in that freight car, sobs racked his body.

My mother always recalled how she heard the train passing as she stood at the window of their little shack numb and motionless, listening to the click-clack of the wheels against the rails as the train gradually chugged along the tracks, the whistle fading away in the distance, knowing it was carrying her precious baby to his final resting place. She had never experienced such pain. The sound was long gone before she became aware that her young son, Jerry, was anxiously clinging to her legs as he eyed the tears streaming down his mother's face.

I can't imagine what my mother must have been thinking, how she must have suffered in recalling that memory through the following years each time a train passed near our home in El Cerrito. How many years did the sound of a train bring this memory back to her?

While Mother was alone with her little son, she was in deep despair. She was sure she was responsible for the death of her baby boy, feeling he must have smothered under her coat. The guilt she felt was more than she could bear. She was almost willing herself to die. In her grief-stricken state, she felt the presence of her deceased mother by her side. She heard her mother's voice, "Eva, Richard is with me. I will take care of him until you join us. You need to stay with your family. Your husband, your son, and the little one you are carrying need you. You must go back to them." Mother managed to come through that tragedy, but not without scars. The rest of her life she felt as though she were responsible for her baby son's death. Through the years whenever it was brought up for any reason, she became very quiet and a sadness entered her eyes.

Years later after my mother had passed away, my daughter Linda and I were talking about Richard. She said, "Mom, they must have a record of his death at the Fresno County Court House. Why don't we go check?" So we went to the Court House requesting to see his death certificate. He had died November 23, 1922. We learned that Richard had died of lymphaticas, the improper functioning of the lymph nodes. Mother had nothing to do with her little son's death. It saddens me that we didn't

find this out before Mother's death. During all those years, Mother held herself responsible. I never got to know the little boy who would have grown up to be another big brother to me, but whenever I think of him I feel the loss and wonder about the difference he would have made in our lives.

Sometime after losing Richard in November, Mother went to El Cerrito so she could be with her sister Daisy when giving birth to my sister Mary. Mary Rachel was born in June of 1923 at Aunt Daisy's house. At that time Aunt Daisy, her husband French MacDonald ("Uncle Mac"), and their children were living in a shack on the property where they later built both their home and then one for us next to it. The shack was behind our homes for many years and the Hodges, who were friends of my parents, lived there for a time.

In 1925, when Mother was pregnant with my sister Patty, the family decided to move to El Cerrito to be near Aunt Daisy. They found a place

to live on Everett Street, near Central. Patricia Margaret was born in September of 1925 in this house. The house where Aunt Daisy and her family lived was on Central Avenue, at the corner of Clayton.



*The House where Neva was born*

My father and my uncles built a house for us at 438 Clayton Street, next door to Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac's. It was in this house that the life of the little girl known as Harem Scarem began.



HAREM SCAREM'S EL CERRITO ADVENTURES  
(1928-1941)

by: Neva Sonia Calvert Carpenter

Written September 2003-February 2006

El Cerrito, California, the town of my childhood, lies tucked away in my memory bank where it has surfaced through the years to warm my heart with happy memories. Even though they are happy, my eyes become misty for what was and can never be again.

I began life on June 16, 1928 in the upstairs bedroom over the attached garage of our home on Clayton Street in El Cerrito, California. El Cerrito was a small town nestled between Richmond and Berkeley. My parents were Harold and Eva (Rude) Calvert. My brother Jerry was soon to be eight, my sister Mary had just turned five three days before my birth, and my sister Patty was soon to be three.

I was desperately trying to enter this world. Mother had three false alarms and had sent my brother and sisters to various places. Jerry was getting very tired of waiting for his "little brother" to appear and asked Doc Spalding how much longer it was going to be. The doctor scratched his head in thought and asked: "*Do you want a little baby brother, or a little baby sister?*" Jerry replied, "*A little baby brother.*" "*Well you see son, it takes longer to make a baby brother than it does to make a baby sister.*" The third time my siblings were pawned off, I was born. My mother's water had broken three weeks before, so I had a dry birth. Mother said my skin was dry and cracked, which gave it a dark burnt color. Jerry took one look at me and said, "*Ya know Doc, I don't think you waited long enough.*" Because they were looking for a boy, my parents didn't have a girl's name picked out. So they named me "Neva", after Doc Spalding's nurse, Claudia Neva Zumwalt. My middle name, Sonia, was picked by the doctor after a heroine in a book he had read. Aunt Daisy helped with my birth.



*Jerry & Dad; Patty, Neva, and Mary*

Someone who was there during my birth had a bottle of Holy Water from the Holy Land and I was blessed with it. Later my Aunt Daisy, while working in the kitchen and thinking it was just ordinary water, poured it down the sink. When she overheard someone mention “Holy Water”, realizing they were talking about the water she had just dumped down the sink, she rushed to the kitchen and filled the bottle with regular tap water. I have often wondered how many babies were blessed with regular old El Cerrito water instead of Holy Water.

I was born with all four of my limbs doubled up because of the dry birth. The doctor said I might never have the use of them. My parents would not accept that diagnosis. Every day, several times a day, one of them rubbed warm baby oil on my legs and arms, massaging and pulling on them. I was told that I loved it and that helped them repeat it often. Jerry also helped, taking his turn at making it possible for his little baby sister’s legs and arms to become useful. There were also many prayers said during this procedure. They continued this until I could stand straight and strong at two years of age. Mary once told our father “*Daddy, you ought to kiss baby sister more, she has such soft kisses!*”

Before I was able to stand and walk, I managed to get all over the place even without the full use of my legs. One time my mother was at someone’s home and heard a crash. Upon investigation, they found me on top of their upright piano, where I had knocked down a vase. Another time she found me hanging by my fingers on the molding over the top of the door frame. It was beyond her how I accomplished these tasks.



*Neva at age 2*

After I gained the full use of my limbs and began a normal childhood, I never stopped running and climbing. I climbed trees as high as I could. I walked the two-by-four rails on fences and explored all the houses that were being built in our area, from their basements to their rooftops (this was a particular challenge to me.) My favorite part was stepping from two-by-four to two-by-four on the rafters of the attics before the slats were put in place for the ceilings. Like most children I skinned my knees, stubbed my toes and got many splinters. How I never came to any serious harm is beyond me. Daddy called me “*Harem Scarem*” because I was “*all over the place*”.

While we were living on Clayton Avenue in El Cerrito, my father and his two younger brothers, Robin (called "Big Brick") and Horace (called "Little Brick"), worked for French McDonald (Uncle Mac). Uncle Mac was the husband of Mother's sister (Aunt Daisy). He was a self-employed electrician. Uncle "Big Brick" received this nickname when he was young because he had red hair. Uncle "Little Brick" didn't have red hair but was so fond of his big brother he wanted the same name. The names stuck with them all their lives.

Before my birth a little girl had been kidnapped. They found her body where the Santa Fe tracks crossed Fairmont Avenue, east of the old greyhound racetrack site. (For years, the street had gone by both Fairmont and Fairmount; finally in the late 1960's the City Engineer made a formal decree that henceforth, the proper street name was "Fairmount Avenue.") This is the current site of the El Cerrito Plaza shopping center. An elderly man became worried about my brother and sisters and he gave my father a large black German shepherd for protection. His name was Cesar. He was well trained and through the years Cesar, along with my brother Jerry, became the family heroes. Mother felt safe leaving me in Cesar's protective care while outside. I would sit playing in the dirt as he lay beside me, every minute keeping a watchful eye.

One time something distracted Cesar's watchful eyes from me, perhaps a call of nature, and at that particular time I decided to head for the street. By the time his attention was back on his baby sitting job I was almost in the middle of the street. Mother looked out the window and saw Cesar bounding toward me. She immediately headed toward the door and by the time she got outside Cesar had me by the diaper, pulling me back toward the lawn. A car turned the corner onto our street just as Cesar got me back to safety. Wherever we lived, he was a watchdog for the whole neighborhood. Everyone felt more protected with him around and gave him scraps from their table. He was welcomed wherever he went.

There was a sweet old lady, Miss Johnson, who lived on the corner of Central and Clayton, facing Central. The side of her house was directly across the street from our home. She had worked for the wealthy Fuller Brush family as a nanny. They had bought the house for her when she retired. Patty and I kept in touch with her no matter where we lived while in El Cerrito. (Upon moving, I continued visiting her until her death.) She had a friend, Marie Bjorn, who played the mandolin; Patty and I loved listening to Miss Bjorn play.

Miss Johnson had a fence in her back yard that was covered with sweet peas. They were beautiful with all their different colors and their perfume permeated the neighborhood. Every time we visited her, she let us pick a large bouquet to take home to Mother. Since then sweet peas have been one of my favorite flowers. She also had lavender plants that had tiny seeds on them. She used the seeds to make little potpourri sachets to put in dresser drawers with undergarments, etc. and at times we would help her make them. Patty, Mary, and I would buy her a little Christmas gift for only a dime with our own money, usually a doily, perfume or a pretty little hankie. (I called her an "old lady", but now that I am 78 years old I'm not so sure she was as old as I thought she was.) Speaking of flowers, the fields around El Cerrito use to be full of poppies, lupine, and buttercups. We loved picking them. We would take some home to Mother and sell the rest on the corner of Fairmont and Pomona. We would also make a big pitcher of lemonade to sell. (I can't remember the last time I saw fields full of beautiful wild flowers. Progress has destroyed a lot of our natural beauty.)

# Chapter 2

**B**ECAUSE of a misunderstanding between Uncle Mac and my father, we moved from our house on Clayton to a rental house when I was two. I think the house was on Carmel, near the Albany Park. The depression had hit in 1929 and it lasted several years. During this time Mother found a job at Jackson's Furniture store in Oakland. (In later years Uncle Mac and Dad patched things up).

One night in 1931 my father became seriously ill in the middle of the night. The ambulance came and rushed him to the Letterman Veterans Hospital in San Francisco. He had a ruptured ulcer and he almost lost his life. Mary says when she thinks about it, she can still remember laying in bed the night Daddy got sick and hearing him moan. We had a goose at the time. After the ambulance left with Dad, the goose went under the house and kept pecking at the floor under her bedroom. It kept Mary awake and she laid there all night thinking and worrying about Daddy.

When Mary went to the hospital to see Daddy, for some reason he told her they had replaced his stomach with a goat's stomach. Why? Again, who knows! Mary was picturing our father with a hairy goat's



*Aunt Daisy & Uncle Mac's house in El Cerrito at Central and Clayton, with ours next to it on the right*

stomach and had nightmares over it for a long time. Mother said she noticed Mary kept trying to follow Dad into the bathroom. When she told her she couldn't go in with him, Mary said, "*But I want to see his goat stomach.*" Mother asked her what she was talking about and Mary told her what Dad had said. Mom explained to her about Dad's stomach, but she still thought about it and had nightmares. It wasn't his intention to frighten her when he told her. He had no idea how much she would be bothered by this.

Mother was left alone during this time to cope with four children. It was winter and she didn't have a coat. Traveling back and forth on the ferry to Letterman Hospital in San Francisco to visit Daddy every night was too much for her frail body. She became ill but ignored it at first, reasoning she was just overly tired and stressed. Fortunately, a member of our family was always there with a helping hand through the years. While Mother was sick, Uncle Little Brick stepped in and took care of us kids. (He was 21 at the time).

As the weeks passed, it was evident that Mother's illness was more serious than the doctor first thought. She was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and confined to her bed for several months soon after my father returned home. He had a hard time finding a new job, but finally located one with the Standard Oil Company in Point Richmond. He didn't like the work at all and kept looking into other possibilities. Because of Mother's illness, most of the household duties fell on my sister Mary's young shoulders, causing her to lose much of her childhood. She was only eight. Mary remembers standing on a wooden box to do the dishes. I recall that during this time, Daddy made us girls flannel nightgowns. Jerry also had to take on many of the duties around the house that were beyond Mary's young years, including cooking to the best of his ability. Mother laughingly referred to that time as "*The Burnt Toast Days*".

At such a young age it was hard for Mary to keep an eye on her two adventurous little sisters. One day when I was around three years old, I turned up missing. No one knew where I was, not even Patty, whose shadow I was. The "red flag" went up and Dad, my uncles, and many in the neighborhood started looking for me. My Uncle Big Brick found me sitting in the middle of Colusa Circle. "The Circle" is an area where six streets converge. In those days the streets were paved with tar and when it was hot enough, the tar would form bubbles. I loved to pop the bubbles and that is exactly what my uncle found me doing - sitting in the middle of the street popping bubbles. Why someone passing by hadn't gotten

me out of the middle of the street, I will never know. I guess they thought it was cute and felt I really wasn't in any danger.

The cars didn't go fast in that area as each of the streets had a stop sign. The circle was large, so I guess the cars just slowly drove around

me. Also the streets in those days weren't very busy. My uncle grabbed me up and tossed me in the back of his truck. I had tar all over me; when we got home, I had tools and things stuck to me too. Tar is not an easy sub-



*Colusa circle in 2003, once a great place to prospect for tar bubbles*

stance to get off. After spending quite some time trying to clean me up without much success and not wanting anyone to have to go through this again, he decided to teach me a lesson that I wouldn't soon forget.

He picked me up, taking me to the garbage can, removing the lid, and held me over it. *"I guess I will just have to throw you away! I can't get you clean!"* I started crying and pleading with him not to throw me away, promising I would never get tar on me again. He then held me in his arms, kissed me, and wiped my tears away. A few weeks later he came over to find me sitting on the porch frantically trying to get tar off my feet that had gotten there from walking across the street. I had tears streaming down my face. Realizing why I was in tears, he again took me in his arms, holding me close. *"Don't you know I could never throw you away? Anyway, getting tar on your feet from walking in the street doesn't count."*

I was still three and Patty was six when one day we walked over to play at the Albany Park playground, which was up the street from our home. It was only two or three blocks, but quite a distance for two little girls. I don't know why Cesar wasn't with us. It was one time when he should have been. The whole area of the playground was sand. While Patty and I were playing, a neighbor boy Patty's age, Bobby, whose parents were close friends of my parents, pushed me down on my back, sat on my stomach, and started scooping sand into my face. Patty took action. She grabbed a toy wheelbarrow with which we had been playing and repeatedly struck him across the head with it, screaming, *"Leave my baby*

sister alone!” The whacks on the head with the wheelbarrow didn’t seem to faze him at all.

The custodian, Mr. Payne, heard the commotion and came running. He yanked Bobby off me. Seeing that my face was full of sand and that I was choking, he grabbed me up and rushed with me to his workroom sink. Turning on the water, he started digging the sand out of my mouth with his fingers. After getting most of it out, he noticed that my tongue had been shoved to the back of my throat and that my face was turning blue. He grabbed the key chain that hung from his belt, shoved the longest key under my tongue and then rolled it out of my throat. Then he helped me wash out my mouth. My eyes and nose were also packed with sand and he washed them out as best he could. I owe my life to this man. I don’t know what punishment Bobby received after this incident, if any. But I imagine Mr. Payne must have reported it.

As with Miss Johnson, I kept in touch with Mr. Payne through the years. In 1949, while living in Merced, I sent an announcement to him after the birth of my first child. One day I heard a knock and when I opened my apartment door, to my surprise there he stood with the woman who was his nurse, along with her husband. They lived with him as he had become too old to live alone. He took me in his arms and started crying, saying, *“This little lady and her precious baby girl wouldn’t be here today if I hadn’t been around.”*

Bobby was a known troublemaker from a very young age. That never seemed to change. In a story about her life, Patty wrote: *“Bobby was in my class (this was the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade) and prone to get into trouble every day. Mrs. Reed would warn him once and there were no second chances. She was an old-fashioned teacher who didn’t spare the rod. She would march back to his desk, grab him firmly by the ear, and in this fashion escort him down the stairs along the outside corridor to the office of Mrs. Knoble, the Principal. It was Mrs. Knoble’s job to punish offenders by giving them a couple of swats across the hand with a thin ruler or by having them sit in the teachers’ lounge to be observed by every teacher who came and went.”*

We hadn’t lived in the house on Carmel very long when the owners lost their new, larger home due to the Depression and had to move back into the house we were renting. So Dad frantically started looking for another house to rent. He luckily found one at 249 Pomona Avenue, just a short distance from where we were living.

One day after moving into this house on Pomona, Mary and Jerry were playing hide-and-go-seek in front of our home with the neighbor

kids. Jerry was ten and Mary was eight. Patty (six) and I (three) were playing in the back yard with Cesar. The bigger kids who were playing with Jerry and Mary didn't want Cesar in the front with them at the time "because he is too good at finding where we are hiding." The whole neighborhood could hear their screams of delight while they were playing. It was



*Cesar, our hero and our best friend*

Jerry's turn to be "it" in their game of hide-and-seek. He was leaning with his head on his arm against a tree counting when he realized that the screams of delight seemed to have changed. He turned

around and saw that Bingo, a vicious neighborhood dog, had been stirred up by the children's loud playing, had jumped his fence, and was running toward them. Wanting to protect his sister and the others, Jerry took off his jacket and started flipping it in the direction of Bingo while yelling at him to attract his attention.

Dad heard it too, ran to the front door, and then out into the driveway. Cesar, also realizing the screams were different, came flying up the driveway from the back yard. He knocked Dad down as he raced past him. The neighbor children were running in all directions, their screams filling the air. As Bingo came toward him, Jerry kept flipping the jacket at him and backing away. Jerry worked his way to the curb but fell backwards into the gutter, which was all Bingo needed. He headed straight for Jerry's throat, baring his teeth and snarling. Jerry drew his legs up to his chest and covered his face and head with his hands and arms for protection. The neighbor kids stopped running and stood terrified as they watched Bingo biting and tearing at Jerry's arms and legs. Mary was running toward our house screaming for Dad. As Cesar saw Mary flying down the street he also saw Bingo attacking Jerry and leaped past her to Jerry's aid.

By this time Mother had gone to the front porch to see what all the noise was about. She saw Dad running up the street. Mary started to run into Dad's arms, but he had more important things to do. He told her to run home as he hurried past her. Mother then saw Cesar far in front of

Daddy and Jerry desperately trying to protect himself from Bingo. Mary ran to Mother sobbing, her face wet with tears. Patty and I were already at Mother's side clinging to her, terrified. She needed to be with us and fought her motherly instinct to run to her son.

Cesar tore into Bingo. Both dogs snarled viciously as they fought. Bingo backed away slightly and Cesar seized the opportunity to straddle Jerry. Cesar placed his four legs around Jerry while snarling at Bingo, showing his teeth, and baring his gums. For the first time in his life Cesar had become a vicious dog, protecting a loved one. Bingo had savagely attacked Jerry and already bitten him several times, but Bingo could see he was no match for Cesar. Upon receiving several severe bits himself from Cesar, Bingo decided he wanted no more and jumped back over his fence.

Everything had happened so fast that by the time Dad arrived, Cesar had full control of the situation and was licking Jerry's bloody wounds. Jerry's pants were torn and soaked with blood. He had been bitten ten or more times on his arms and legs. His body was shaking from shock. Dad grabbed Jerry up in his arms and hurried toward the house. Not wanting us to see Jerry hurt and bleeding, Mother hustled us into the house and told us to stay there. We watched out the window as Mother rushed to see her son. Daddy was placing him in the back seat of the car. She wanted desperately to go with them to the doctor's but knew she must remain with us. With tears in her eyes she gave her son a tender kiss and told him she loved him. Even in his shocked state he managed to give her a weak smile. Cesar quickly jumped in with Jerry, settling himself on the floor, his head protectively resting on the chest of his young master.

As Dad sped off, he looked in his rear view mirror. He saw Mother standing there watching him leave as we three crying girls ran back to her. He knew how this was tearing her apart. The thought of what she must be going through and not being able to console her made tears come to his eyes and run slowly down his cheek. She was still standing there as he turned the corner onto Fairmont Avenue a few houses down. Still looking in the mirror, his eyes went to his son, lying quietly on the back seat. Knowing how much pain he was in but not making a sound, he was amazed by the bravery of his young son.

Cesar refused to leave Jerry's side when they got to the doctor's office and the doctor allowed Cesar to go in with Jerry. Cesar stood close by watching as the doctor cleaned and stitched Jerry's wounds. The blood

had thickened in some of the deep wounds and had to be dug out. Jerry hardly made a sound. The doctor said, "*Son, doesn't this hurt you?*" Jerry replied, "*Hell yes! But you don't think I want HIM to know, do ya?*" He nodded toward Cesar whose watchful eyes hadn't left Jerry for a second.

The doctor looked at Cesar's anxious face and said, "*Well, I'm glad he knows I'm helping you!*" Dad said it was the first time he ever heard Jerry cuss. Cesar sat there patiently with anxious eyes waiting for his "buddy". As Dad and Jerry were leaving the doctor's office the doctor put his hand on Jerry's shoulder and said to my father "*You have a brave lad there, Mr. Calvert. You must be very proud of him.*" Dad placed his hand on Jerry's head and said, "*That I am. That I am.*" Dad then left the doctor's office and rushed Jerry home to the loving arms of our mother. We three girls hardly left our bother's side until it was bedtime.

The following days Cesar could easily have jumped the fence into Bingo's yard, but he didn't. He did make a path beside the fence as he paced back and forth for several weeks, daring Bingo to jump the fence again. Bingo knew better than to tangle with Cesar and never again jumped out of his yard.

There was a time that Cesar turned up missing. Dad and Mother knew he would never wander very far from home and us kids for a long period of time. They also knew that if something had happened to him such as an accident, someone would bring him home to us. El Cerrito was a small town and many people knew to whom Cesar belonged. There was only one answer: a stranger had taken him. After he had been missing for quite a while, my parents late one night heard a faint scratching at the door and a quiet whimpering. They opened the door and there was Cesar.

His hair was matted and dirty. His paws were raw and bloody. He was so weak he could hardly walk. The flesh around his neck was torn, showing that he had struggled to get free. It was obvious that he had been tied up far from home. Before he touched his food or drink, he slowly walked through the house, checking on each of us sleeping children. He gently gave us a lick or two and then, satisfied that we were all safe and sound, slowly made his way to his food and water. When he had drunk and eaten his fill, Dad doctored his paws and neck with Mother's help. He needed cleaning and brushing, but they decided that could wait until the next day. He then went into where Jerry was sleeping and slept on the floor next to his bed. Needless to say there was a happy bunch of Calvert kids when they woke up in the morning.

Several months later came a 'black day' in our lives. A man came to the door and talked to Dad in low tones. Dad told us girls to go to the back yard and play. We heard the front door shut as we went out the back door. We knew something was wrong. We could hear Dad and the man's voices again coming up the driveway from the front of the house. We went over to the driveway and looked toward the front of the house. A car was parked across the end of the driveway. There was our Cesar, lying tied to a rack on the back of the man's car, his head hanging limply to one side.

Cesar had been getting old and his sight wasn't good, plus his hearing was going bad. It was really unusual for Cesar to go any distance away from us kids without one of us being with him, but lately he had gotten into the habit of wandering away from home. Cesar had walked into the street at Colusa Circle. When a bus driver came upon him the driver honked, but Cesar didn't hear it. The bus driver wasn't able to stop the bus in time and it hit Cesar, killing our best friend and protector. (I was only three or four, but I can still remember looking up that driveway and seeing our sweet Cesar lying on the rack on the back of that car. Every time I see a heroic dog in a movie, it makes me think of our Cesar and the love he had for us. Even after all these years, it can still bring tears to my eyes.)

Times were tough during those Depression years. When Father and Mother had finished paying off our furniture, they decided to get a radio they had been wanting for years. They never spent money on a luxury. But they weren't able to keep up the payments and they received a notice from the company that their furniture was going to be repossessed. Daddy and Mother knew they had paid off that account and with Jerry's help, started searching all over the house for receipts to show that all the payments were made. They were not able to find the receipts. Mother felt that she must have put them in the trash, figuring the account was closed. They learned that because they had paid off the furniture at the same time that they purchased the radio, the radio was just added to the invoice for the furniture. Daddy and Mother had thought they were starting a separate account. But the company repossessed everything.

Friends and family gave us what they could spare. As soon as they could, our parents purchased some cheap wicker furniture. It was during this time that Patty and I had our one and only "cigarette". We noticed some of the wicker sticking out of the furniture. For some childish reason it came to our minds to break off a piece and smoke it, giggling at

the thought of doing something naughty. That evening Mom and Dad couldn't understand why they had two sick little girls on their hands at the same time. (Needless to say, we never smoked a *real* cigarette.)

These first few years of my life must have been hard years for my parents and for us. I was born with all four of my limbs crippled, I was almost hit by a car, the Depression struck, Dad became ill and almost lost his life, and Mother was stricken with arthritis. Then I almost choked to death on my own tongue, Jerry was attacked by a dog, Cesar was missing and then killed by a bus. It was one thing after the other.

# Chapter 3

*I*<sub>N</sub> the early 30's Dad went into business with Dick Pryde and Dick's brother. It was a bar and grill on the west side of San Pablo Avenue called *The Pastime*. It was near the foot of Fairmont Avenue and maybe three doors to the north. For some reason Dad gave up his part of the business, but the Prydes remained good friends. When Dad would go to visit them, they would give him a bag of candy bars to bring home to us. Instead of giving each one of us some candy, Dad would hold the bag above our heads, having us put a hand in to get a candy bar, as if it were a "grab bag". That way we picked which candy we got, not Dad. Jerry also got in on the act, grinning as he watched his kid sisters, but he always chose last.

While Dad was working for Standard Oil at Point Richmond, he thought of an idea to keep gasoline from sloshing around in the tanks as it was delivered to stations. His idea was to have the inside of the tanks corrugated. Having no finances to develop his idea, he talked to others in trying to have it patented. Before getting the needed finances, someone stole his idea and made a fortune. Dad received nothing for his brainstorm.

During the last six months of 1932 or the first six months of 1933, Dad found a house to buy a block up the street, at 375 Pomona. (The house number is now 325. It was changed because 375 didn't correspond with the other addresses on the street.) It was a repossessed home and Dad got it for only \$1,700. Even that was a lot of money for them, but both Mom and Dad felt that it was a start to getting away from the hand-to-mouth way of living that had been keeping them down emotionally.

The outside was in very bad shape. It needed a lot of scraping to remove all the peeling paint and required a couple of new coats of paint

to cover years of neglect. The inside was dismal and unkempt but my parents knew the house was well worth the price, even though it was so run down. They were sure that with some hard work, they could bring it back to life, that it was worth whatever sacrifices were required to once



Looking northwest at 375 (now 325) Pomona

again have their own home. (In 2006 I heard that this home sold for over \$700,000.)

I went to visit our old house in 2003. Part of the following is excerpted from the 1948 MGM movie "Enchantment" with David Niven:

Recently I had a visitor from the old days. She was reminiscing and remembering how it used to be when she lived within my walls. She didn't know that our memories were blending together. She didn't realize that a house can also think, feel, and remember and that while she was here, her thoughts and mine were blending together filling the rooms. As our thoughts blended I knew she was planning to write our story, hers and mine, and I flooded her mind with the memories we shared within these walls of mine. *"You must come in and spend a little time. Know what the clocks know, hear what the walls have heard, listen to your heart. I am more than wood. Some things are the same as with all houses. A doorbell echoes through the house, footsteps run up and down the stairs, a piano plays, windows open and shut, a door welcomes guests, water taps run and are silent, a light goes on in a room at night and then goes off again. But those are the pulse beats, not the heart."*

The people who live within the walls of a house make a difference in the home. I have had many families live within my shelter but I truly miss this family that lived here. My rooms will always be filled with their voices, their music, and the laughter of the children at play. Three little girls singing and telling stories to each other after they are tucked in at night. And their big brother teasing and chasing them through my rooms. They grew up here, the four of them, from their childhood to their teens. My memories of them warm me as the fire they once burned upon the hearth of my fireplace that was once here and has since been removed.

I miss that old fireplace. When they think of me their memories of me and mine of them merge together as one thought.

When they left, I watched them drive out of my sight and my heart was heavy for they took part of me with them. The best part, their love and laughter that echoed through my rooms. I haven't been the same since they departed. I miss them, as I know they miss me. Perhaps if you listen closely with your heart you will see and hear them as I do. There is no such thing as an empty room. Even when the people and furniture are absent the rooms are not empty. The memories continue to live within the walls, holding onto only the happy times, and forgetting the tears that may have been shed there. I choose this family above all that have lived within my walls. Their memories are the ones that warm my heart and are never forgotten. The ones that will keep me warm. Ah! She is remembering.

Our house on Pomona Avenue had a bedroom over the garage that was Mother and Dad's room. At the foot of the stairs that led up to my parent's bedroom, there was a tiny room that was Jerry's bedroom. The bathroom was next to Jerry's room and we three girls were in the room on the other side of the bathroom. All three of us slept in one bed. As



*Looking southwest at 375 (now 325) Pomona; Harding School is in the background*  
you came into the front room, you could walk straight back to the dining room and then on into the kitchen. The living room had a fireplace on one side of the room. During the winter, we spent a good deal of our time in front of that fireplace. Walls jutted out on both sides between the living room and the dining room, with a built-in bookcase on the right and a built-in desk with cabinets below on the left. The dining room had

a built-in china closet on the wall by the kitchen door, with drawers and a small cupboard below. The kitchen had a breakfast nook with a built-in table and benches on each side of the table. There was an ironing board that folded up into the wall. We removed these while we were living there to make the kitchen larger and after that we did all our eating in the dining room.

The laundry area was in a tiny space off the kitchen by the back door. It had a double washtub in it, the water heater, and room for a wringer-washer. The back porch was high off the ground, with a number of steps leading down to the yard. There was a pulley clothesline attached to the back porch and the clothesline ran to a wooden post at the back fence. (On my visit in 2003 I was surprised to see that the post is still there). While we were in school, we could see Mother hanging up clothes. Later a room was made for Jerry in the basement and Mary got the tiny room at the foot of the stairs. Sometime after that the washroom was moved to the basement and a room was built for Jerry next to the bedroom that Patty and I shared. The entrance to Jerry's new room was next to the kitchen, where the laundry room had been. Jerry's basement room then became Patty's and my playroom. Patty and I moved most of our treasured possessions there and spent many happy hours in that room.

The previous postmaster in El Cerrito had either died or quit working for some reason. Although Dad hadn't even finished grammar school, he felt he was capable of doing the job and applied for it. He was able to sell himself and was hired. I guess that back in those days in a small town it wasn't necessary to have a diploma. He hadn't been there for very long when he was offered a job with the Internal Revenue Service. The pay was better and there would be a chance of advancement so he took the job. It was the first job he had ever held where he would be able to wear a suit. He liked looking sharp and he was very handsome when all dressed up. On February 2, 1934, he started his new job as a Deputy Collector for the Internal Revenue Service. His office was in the Federal Office Building at the Civic Center in San Francisco. His job took him away from home on workdays.

At this time Uncle Big was manager of The White Log Tavern in Berkeley. I was thrilled the few evenings we got to go there to eat. I thought it was fun to be able to watch my uncle cook. He was also doing Adagio dancing professionally at the time. When and why he quit dancing, I don't know. In fact I wasn't even aware he had been a dancer until the 1990's.

Dad became a scout leader in El Cerrito before my birth. He followed Uncle Mac's tradition of taking his family on the Scout trips. The Scouts's campgrounds were at Putah Creek. Dad would set up our camp close enough to the scouts' camp to let him keep an eye on us and help Mother when she needed it. Actually the whole troop kept an eye on us and took care of our camp needs. The campgrounds were at Putah Creek. During one of these trips when I was three years old, Mother had forgotten to pack my bathing suit, so I had to go in the water in my bloomers. They



*Daddy and Jerry in their Scout uniforms in front of the Oak tree across from our house*

puffed out and held me up enough to help me navigate in the water. (I thought that was when I learned to swim, but Mary informed me that I could only dog paddle at the time.) We went there quite often, sometimes without the scout troop. Even though Mother had poor health, she loved to go camping and was able to manage it fine.

On special holidays the scouts used to have a parade that started at San Pablo and went up Fairmont Avenue to the cemetery, where they would hold a ceremony near the entrance. They also held their memorial services there. Dad and Jerry would be in the parade with Dad's scout troop. Other times Dad would be marching with the American Legion. To see the parades, all we had to do was walk the short distance to the corner of Pomona and Fairmont. From there it was only a couple of blocks to walk up to the cemetery to see the memorial service. I loved seeing Daddy and Jerry in their uniforms marching in the parade. In those days there was not a building at the entrance to the cemetery. When Jerry died in 1997 his memorial service was held at the mortuary that is now located in the same area that his scout troop once used for their memorial services. He had come full circle.

Long past his scouting years, after World War II broke out, Jerry joined the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. While serving in Europe, he and some

of the other men were in a foxhole having a smoke between fighting. One of the young men asked Jerry where he was from. He said, "*El Cerrito, California.*" "*Where did you say you were from?*" Jerry told him again. The young man said, "*Hell! I'm from El Cerrito! What's your name?*" "*Jerry Calvert.*" "*You by any chance related to Harold Calvert?*" "*He's my father!*" "*Hell! He was my boy scout leader!*" What a small world we have!

# Chapter 4

*I* was very much a tomboy. Recently, Robert Brooks, a cousin of mine from St. Louis, Missouri, told me that when he was a kid living in San Francisco and came to visit us, he was in awe at how fast I could run, how high I could climb, and how far I could throw a rock. He said he didn't know girls could do all that. I imagine I must have been showing off a bit for my boy cousin, who was younger than me.

After the weather warmed up in the spring I often ran around in shorts and no top. I got so tan that Daddy started calling me "Brown Shortie". That name stuck with me into my teenage years.

One day in June of 1932 our father came into the house calling us all out to the back porch. As we were on our way to the porch I could hear a loud, strange noise outside. Dad pointed to the sky, saying "*I wanted all of you to see this.*" I looked into the sky and saw something I thought looked like a huge whale. "*What is it Daddy?*" I asked. He answered, "*It's a blimp, Brown Shortie.*" I said "*Daddy, it's as big as my big brother.*" The U.S. Navy dirigible Akron had just flown over San Francisco, crossed the bay, and was now flying over our home. This was four days before my fourth birthday.

I loved the wide-open spaces in whose midst our home was located. Except to the south of us, where there were two homes close by, our house was surrounded by fields. The Dillon family lived right next door to us and the Lojo family lived next to them. Beyond their houses was another large expanse of open fields almost as far as our previous house at 249 Pomona. On our side of the street (the west side, where the three homes were) the block was the length of two or three "normal" blocks because there weren't any streets cut through. I have never seen one this

long since then and it remains this way. Our rental house on Pomona was also on this long block.

Across the street from our house there were no houses close by for several years. Almost directly across from us there was a creek with steep banks. When it had a lot of water in it, the water moved very fast. At Pomona the creek entered a long, covered culvert. Sometimes when the creek was dry, I used to walk through that long cement tunnel. It ran underground for several blocks, coming out somewhere in the area behind the tennis courts at Harding School. Since Patty doesn't remember this, I must have gone on these adventures alone. It seemed a bit spooky to me, but I was always a gutsy little girl and probably dared myself to do it. Often it turned out to be a bad idea to play in the creek, as many times we got poison oak. Along the banks there were buckeye trees. Buckeye trees had "fruits" on them the size and hardness of an avocado seed. Some of us neighborhood kids use to have buckeye fights (for fun), throwing them at each other's legs. Why we would think that was fun, I have no idea. They stung like heck.

Next to the place where the creek ran under Pomona, there was a huge oak tree growing right next to the sidewalk. I loved to climb it and one time I got so high that the neighbor kids had to run and get my father to help me down. One thing I liked about the tree was that it was full of Monarch caterpillars. I always thought they were so cute and I loved to watch them crawl on the tree. Sometimes I put one on my arm so I could feel the slight tickle as it worked its way up, now and then stroking it with my finger. There was a large hole in the tree where there had once been a branch. It became infested with red ants. So Dad got some cement and filled the hole, which eliminated the ant problem. Today, the creek is completely underground, with houses built on top of it. For many years the oak tree was in someone's front yard and many of the branches had gotten cut off or had fallen off. Now it is completely gone.

Across Fairmont from our home was a huge, wide-open expanse of fields that went up into the hills as far as you could see. A large part of El Cerrito in those days was nothing but fields, giving us a lot of room to run and play right around our home. The fields surrounding our house were also where we went to fly our kites. We would usually go up to the hilly area where we could catch more of the breezes. The field was so huge we could run as far as we wanted in any direction and not have to worry about getting our kites caught on anything. It was great fun.

Sunset View Cemetery was at the base of the hills next to the wide-open expanse. The Kensington riding academy was at the east end of the field, north of the cemetery. The road to the riding academy ran along the northern boundary of the cemetery, at the top of Fairmont. The riding academy was a well-kept place, neat and clean. There was a fence between the riding academy property and the cemetery.

Some of these fields were used for grazing cows and one time Dad told Mary he would give her a dime for every gunny sack of dry manure she could fill for him to use on his flower beds. When he got home from work, he couldn't get his car in the garage. She had hired the neighbor kids for a nickel and made a nickel per sack herself without doing anything. I'm not sure how old she was at the time, but she was nine when we moved there. She was quite the money-maker.

We didn't know it at the time, but hoof-and-mouth disease had swept the state in the mid-1920's, bringing on the demise of the local cattle and dairy industries. A number of quarantined cattle were shot and buried near the El Cerrito High School site. Little did we know what lay beneath our feet when we were running and playing in those fields.

Going west from our house was a chicken hatchery, on Ashbury just north of Fairmont. Patty and I used to go over there and watch them

candle eggs. I loved looking at the baby chicks after they had hatched and holding one when it was old enough. I was especially thrilled when I happened to be there as some were hatching, getting to hear their first "peeps". They taught Mary how to candle eggs; she did some candling by herself.



*You could see the hatchery over our back fence,  
it later became Alderett's Riding Academy*

After a few years the hatchery closed and the property became The Triple A Stables run by the Alderett family, a father and two sons. The son named Brian was around Patty's age and his brother Buddy was Mary's age. The Alderetts roughed out the old polo grounds about the size of a football field in the open space bounded on the east by Colusa, on the south by Fairmont, on the west by Ashbury, and on the north by

the creek that ran down the hill toward Central Avenue. They sectioned off an oval-shaped area and put short white boards around it. They rounded up enough of the local men to form a team. They even wore regular polo hats. Jerry often played. There was a little bit of a rise between the polo field and our house, so we couldn't see the field from our house. The



*A polo match in El Cerrito*

polo field goes back at least as far as 1932, if not before that. I heard that Brian Alderett played polo professionally in later years.

Just north of the polo field was a small creek that widened down near Albemarle (at the time a dirt road, of course). Mary and some neighbor kids made a raft and we would float around on it, using a long stick that would reach the bottom to give it a push. The creek was dry most of the time. Along one portion of the creek was a large growth of bamboo. We flattened out an area in the bamboo and wanted to spend the night there, but naturally our parents wouldn't let us. At the back of the field there were several eucalyptus trees. There was also a small stream near the west end of the polo field where we would catch polliwogs, take them home, and watch them turn into frogs. It was exciting to see the legs start forming out the sides of their bodies.

Patty and I use to take our lunches and play at a huge rock that



*Jerry ready for Polo*

was just below the Kensington Riding Academy. We would climb to the top of the rock, where we could look out across the fields down to the bay and even see the Golden Gate Bridge as it was being constructed.

Our father told us that Indian children used to play on the rock and that made me even more titillated because I had always been fascinated with Indians. I loved pretending the Indian children were there playing with us. Of course at the time we didn't realize what a big storyteller our father was, nor that the more times he told the story and the bigger the audience was, the bigger the story became. In all the years we lived there we never saw any other children at the rock so we always called it "our rock".

During later years Patty and I wondered if the rock was really as big as we thought it was. We remembered it being as big or bigger than a garage. But of course, being children, it could have just looked that big. In the last few years I spent some time trying to find "our rock". Patty told me that after El Cerrito High School was built, she could see the rock from one of her classrooms. She said she thought she remembered it being near the football field. I asked people there about it and no one knew what I was talking about. With the help of the El Cerrito Historical Society and the local historian Richard Schwartz, "our rock" was located.

Based on my recollections, Richard, who is very interested in any evidence of Indian activity in the area, found it. It is at 533 Bonnie Drive and it IS huge, at least 30' wide and two stories high. Richard also commented that whether Dad knew it or not, his story may very well have been true, as Richard has found evidence of Indians in the area. Since it now is partly covered with ivy, Richard was unable to look for signs of Indian activity on it. In Edward Standiford's book about El Cerrito, he noted that the artifacts left behind by the Indians are *"a reminder of the distant past when Indians lived in the El Cerrito area. Indians appeared in the Bay area as early as 7,000 years and perhaps 12,000 years ago."* So my father may have been more right than he or anyone else realized he was when he talked about Indian children playing on "our rock". Patty and I feel as if we have located a long-lost friend.



"Our Rock"

The Standiford book also says, *"Spanish explorations named many of the present-day landmarks, including El Cerrito -- (the little hill) -- the original*

*name given to the hill*”, which we now refer to as “Albany Hill”. The name given by the Spanish explorers didn’t stick to the hill but it did stick to Cerrito Creek. My sister-in-law Pat recently told me that my brother Jerry always called “Albany Hill” hill the “El Cerrito Hill” and that she could never convince him otherwise. Seems he was right about that from the original name.

Once our house had become infested with fleas. Dad gave each of us a small jar, telling us he would give us a dime for every flea we killed. We would then present the jar to Dad when he returned from his business travels the next weekend. He couldn’t understand how Mary was finding so many fleas. He knew we had plenty of them but was unaware there were so many. Then one day he came home to find Mary picking fleas off a neighbor’s dog. As you can see, Mary had quite a flair for making extra money and finding ways of improving on her lot. Patty was the one that was good about saving money for something special she wanted. Me? I didn’t have a flair for making or saving money. I had a flair for spending it!

Mr. Lojo, who lived two houses to the south of us, had a large vegetable garden in the open area behind his house. I loved the tomatoes he grew and he didn’t mind me eating them. He allowed me to eat all I wanted. Homegrown tomatoes are so much better than store-bought. I would also pull up his carrots to eat. After moving from there, when I went to visit their family, he would always tell the story about how I pulled up his carrots. He said, *“I didn’t mind the kid pulling up a carrot and eating it, but she would pull up several until she found the one she wanted, just the way she liked it, and leave the others laying there.”* He would be laughing as he told the story. “Dad” Lojo and I were very close.

In the evenings I often played on the living room floor, usually coloring in a color book or reading. At times when Daddy was home, if I grew tired I would lay on the floor to rest. After some time had gone by, I would hear Dad or Mom say, *“Neva, it’s time to go to bed.”* I would pretend I was asleep and Dad would pick me up and tuck me in bed. Of course, I wasn’t fooling him for a minute. I actually didn’t need to pretend sleep in order for my father to tuck me in bed, but it became a game with us. Sometimes I would talk Mom and Dad into letting me lay in bed with them for a while. I dearly loved those moments I spent alone with my parents. I would always ask Dad to sing me my favorite song. It was about a dog named “Rover”. After a bit he would carry me downstairs and tuck me into my own bed. Those are fond memories.

Every Sunday morning the first one awake would run to the front porch to get the paper. Then all of us would dash up the stairs to Daddy and Mother's room and pile into bed with them while Dad read us the funnies.

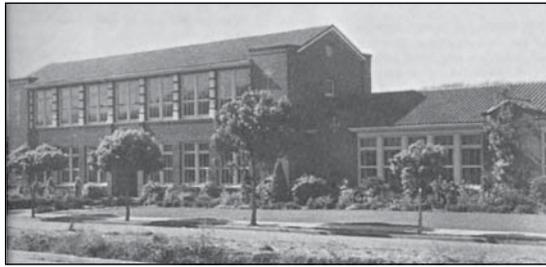
Next to the field behind the Lojo's there was a small house at 314 Ashbury, owned by Angelo Devincenzie. He changed his single garage into a small neighborhood grocery. Mr. Devincenzie was short and stocky with a round face, eyes that twinkled, and a small mustache. He reminded us of a toy maker that we had seen in our storybooks. Everyone called him Mr. D. We were able to go to his store through the opening in our back fence.

Patty and I loved to get a sack and spoon and hunt for mushrooms. As we worked our way through the fields I would yell, "*I found one!*" A few minutes later Patty would echo back, "*I found one too.*" Or one would say, "*I just found a bunch of them!*" and the other would help gather them. Mother had shown us a mushroom and a toadstool and taught us the difference. I guess we learned pretty well because when we took them home and Dad went through them, as far as I know he didn't find any toadstools. Dad loved mushrooms and would keep some for himself. The rest we would take to Mr. D. to sell. He gave us a nickel for each of his small boxes we could fill. We usually spent it for candy from the glass case in his store. One year Mr. D. and his sister Vie took Patty with them to Yosemite (with our parents' approval.) Patty had taken a trip to Yosemite with our father and when she excitedly told them all about it and how beautiful it was, they decided they wanted to see it. They asked her if she would like to be their guide.

I can still remember the first time I went to a large grocery store. It was at San Pablo and Cutting and it was called Andrew Williams. I was thrilled at the sight of all the produce in the store. That stands out to me more than any other part of the store. It is strange what can thrill a small child.

# Chapter 5

ON Ashbury Avenue, across the street from Mr. D.'s and the field behind our house, was Harding Grammar School. It was a large, beautiful, two-story brick building, built in 1927. We went to school through an opening in our back fence and could just walk across the field to class.



*My beloved Harding Elementary School*

A path worn across the field of high grass and weeds made it easy to walk.

Mrs. Knoble was the principal and our disciplinarian. She was also my teacher in High

6<sup>th</sup> grade. She was around 5'8", solidly built, stern but caring. She wore glasses that hung on a chain around her neck. While administering her discipline, she never swatted our hands hard enough to cause real injury, just enough to make us dread going to her office. She stood with her arms crossed in front of her when she reprimanded us, which gave the impression that she would stand for no monkey business.

One day I was playing on the bars in the schoolyard. The bars were at three different heights, connected next to each other. I was on one and another girl was on the second. We were both just sitting at the time, when the girl made the biggest mistake of her life. She said, "*Your mother is lazy. I heard she never does anything.*" Nobody had ever said anything bad about my mother before. I saw red, saying, "*You don't talk about my mother that way!*" and knocked her head over heels off the bar. The teacher

who had yard duty grabbed me by the arm and marched me to the office. The girl came also, both of us in tears, but for different reasons: she from being physically hurt and I from having my feelings hurt.

The teacher told Mrs. Knoble what I had done. Upon hearing the news she said, "*Neva, this isn't like you. What do you have to say for yourself?*" Through my sobs I told her what the girl said adding, "*I don't like to hear anyone say bad things about my mother. She isn't lazy! She's sick!*" Upon hearing the story, she then scolded the girl, telling her that my mother was very ill and a very sweet little lady. She also told me that I shouldn't have knocked her off the bars, that I could have seriously hurt her. By then class had started. Mrs. Knoble wrote a note to both teachers saying why we were late for class and sent us to our classrooms, telling us to stop at the rest room on the way to wash our faces.

I dearly loved my first grade teacher, Miss Cole. I wish I could remember more about her, but I can recall only that she was young and pretty. She heard I had never had a doll, so she bought one for me. I remember it had a blue dress. One day soon after getting the doll, I was sitting on the front porch of our home, holding the doll on my lap. A dog ran up on the porch, grabbed my doll, and ran off with it. I was in tears. It's the only doll I remember having.

One day my family was on the way home after one of our family picnics when we happened to see Miss Cole, sitting with her beau on a blanket at the side of the road also having a picnic. The next day in class I said, "*Miss Cole, I saw you with your boyfriend yesterday having a picnic.*" The class giggled at the thought of their teacher with a boyfriend. One time our class put on a performance of some kind and of all things I was the back end of the elephant. There was a string inside for me to pull to make the tail wag.

When Patty was in the second grade, she went into her classroom one morning before the second bell rang (which would signal the start of class) and sat at her desk innocently playing with her ring, sticking it on the end of her tongue and letting it dangle. Why? Who knows? It was just something a kid would do. But when Patty's teacher came in the door, it infuriated her. She yanked Patty out of her seat, dragged her up in front of the class, and while angrily whacking Patty's hand with a thick ruler, broke the ruler. Patty jerked loose and flew out the door, hearing her teacher scream, "*You get back here! Get back here RIGHT NOW, or that is just a sample of what you're going to get!*"

Crying hysterically, Patty ran across the street to our house. For some reason Mother wasn't home. Luckily Jerry hadn't gone to school and was in bed in his basement room. Sobbing, Patty told him what had happened as he tried to comfort her. In a rage, Jerry threw his clothes on, raced over to the school, and went straight into the principal's office. The principal, Mrs. Knoble, told him to go home and bring Patty back to school. When she saw Patty's hands, Mrs. Knoble was livid. Mrs. Knoble had Jerry take Patty down to the nurse's office, where the nurse applied salve to the welts and bandaged her hands.

The teacher was not in class the next day. She had been fired. Jerry was only twelve or thirteen at the time. It was a very young age to take on this kind of a situation, but he was always very mature for his age. This was probably because he had so much responsibility placed on him at a young age. Jerry was actually the man of the house much of the time, but he carried the load on his young shoulders better than a lot of grown men did.

Miss Crampton and Miss Reid were Patty's two favorite teachers. I believe Miss Crampton was the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher and Miss Reid the 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Harding. Patty remembers Miss Reid was about 5'6". Her hair was loose, wiry, dull red, and cut shoulder length. Her expression was stern and grim with her mouth clamped tight. She walked with a speedy pace that gave the impression she didn't have time to waste. She had very little patience for any distractions in class; when things got a little out of hand, she took a deep breath and blew on her whistle so loudly it could be heard the length of the school. But she sure got our immediate attention!

She gave our hands a light whack with a ruler if we weren't holding our pens correctly. She demanded respect and got it. Consequently, she was disliked by most of her students. But Patty was her pet and Miss Reed showed it in many little ways, such as wrapping her coat around Patty and whisking her into the room to help set up for the day's lessons. When Patty got married in 1946 she received a card from her.

Mrs. Begovich was my teacher for High 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but I remember very little about her. Mrs. Nathan was my Low 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Her husband taught at Albany High School. She was the yard teacher at times and Mary said that for some reason Mrs. Nathan took a liking to her even before she was in her class. She would come over to Mary, say "*Put your hand in my pocket*", and Mary would pull out a candy bar. She was also Mary's 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Even after Mary started attending Albany High

School, Mrs. Nathan came to the programs in which Mary was singing. One time Mary was singing in a high school program. I felt so proud of her and wanting everyone to know she was my sister, I said right out loud, "*That's my big sister!*"

I loved it when we got to go to the auditorium to see cartoons. Mickey Mouse, Popeye and Silly Symphonies were real biggies during those years. The only one I remember the name of was "*Steamboat Willie*", with Mickey Mouse.

In late 1934, when I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, the school auditorium was built. While it was under construction, it gave Patty and me another fun place to play. There was a big steel furnace vent that had been installed in the building. It went from the auditorium down to what would be the custodian's work area in a basement-type room. Patty and I liked to go into the auditorium area and slide down the vent to his room. It was great fun. One time when I went to the custodian's workroom to get something for my teacher, a man who worked at the school exposed himself to me. I was terrified and always made an excuse to my teachers to avoid going there again. I was too embarrassed even to tell my family. Even my sisters didn't know about this until I wrote this book. I still remember the name of this man. My beautiful old brick schoolhouse was eventually completely rebuilt and a school with much less character rose in its place. The old auditorium was the only familiar part left. Starting in 2003 the school district began renovating Harding School for a second time and this time they kept almost none of the appearance or features of original building.

When I was in the 3rd or 4th grade a girl accused me of stealing a nickel out of her lunch pail. I was sent to the office and told Mrs. Knoble I didn't take the nickel. My feelings were hurt when she wouldn't believe me. She had always believed me about other things. I guess this time was different because the girl's mother was a teacher at another school. She smacked my hand, sending me back to my room. But I didn't go to my room. I ran across the field in tears to my house, crying in my brother's arms as I spilled the story out to him. He was furious! He took me by the hand and we went back to the office. He tore into Mrs. Knoble, telling her that no one was ever to lay a hand on one of his little sisters again, that I said I didn't take the nickel, and that he believed me. They later discovered the nickel in her lunch pail after all. (I never forgot that licking and informed my children's schools that any disciplining was to be done by me. I also explained why.)

One year Patty and I were in the May Day Celebration put on by Harding Grammar School and several other schools in the area. The celebration was held at Richmond Union High School. We did the *May Pole Dance* and then we changed into our costumes for the Mexican dances we were in. Patty was in the *Mexican Hat Dance* and I danced in the *La Cucaracha* dance. I can still remember that red and green Mexican costume I wore with a flowing skirt and how thrilled I was to be in the show.

What stands out to me the most as far as special times at Harding School were the Halloween celebrations we had. I always looked forward to that day and evening. Weeks ahead the students would bring wood or whatever they could find that would burn (except paper) to a circular area that was roped off. The things we contributed were then placed in the circle, becoming a huge pile. We got to wear our costumes to school. After school we went home, took off our costumes until after dinner, then put them back on that evening before going back to the school. To help make money for the school, each class set up a game booth. Tickets had to be bought for a small fee and presented at each booth. There were several different kinds of booths where kids would dunk for apples, fish for a prize, etc. Some of the booths were outside by the classrooms and some were in the auditorium.

I remember the “fishing” booth that was set up in the auditorium. A tumbling mat was placed across the opening where the stairs went up to the stage. Someone would hide behind the mat, out of sight. We would dangle the string attached to our pole over the mat and the hidden person would tie a prize to it. There was a spook house set up on the stage in back of the curtains. Later in the evening the bonfire would be lit and the children would march around it in their costumes. Then everyone went to the auditorium where they would announce the best costumes and give out prizes. There would also be treats served there. It is a happy memory for me. It seems much better than how Halloween is celebrated now.

Living close to the school, we could hear the bell ring. There were two bells: the first one was the warning bell, which meant that you had five minutes to get to your classroom and be seated before the second bell rang. One particular morning Patty was sitting in the kitchen nook eating her breakfast as Mother was ironing her dress. Her coat was loose around her shoulders. At the first bell she rammed her arms in her coat sleeves and ran out the door. She heard Mother calling, but knowing she

had just enough time to get in her seat if she hurried, she ignored the call.

When she got to school, she started pulling her coat off in order to hang it up in the cloakroom. All of a sudden the whole class burst out laughing. Patty stood there red-faced in her slip. The teacher said, "*Patty, I won't mark you tardy if you would like to run home and finish dressing*". Embarrassed almost to tears, Patty went running out of the room with the ringing of laughter following behind her. As she raced across the field to our house, she knew the students were probably watching her out the window. She hated the thought of going back but knew there was no way out of it. When she returned to school, she went back with her head held high, determined not to let them see



*Harding School, Sonny, & my sister Mary*

her embarrassment. Evidently the teacher had talked to the class, as they were busy writing and didn't look up as she entered. She slipped quietly into her seat. She made sure she was fully dressed from that day forward.

# Chapter 6

ONE day when Patty was about nine or ten years old, she fainted in the classroom. When my parents took her to see the doctor, he said she was anemic and needed a certain iron pill to build her up. This was shortly after my Dad's problem with his ulcer. Seeing as he hadn't worked while he was in the hospital and hadn't been working long enough since leaving the hospital to be out of debt, he was quite upset. He didn't know how he was going to be able to afford the pills that Patty so desperately needed.

He didn't have a car at the time, so to get to work at the Federal Building in San Francisco he would walk down to the corner of Pomona and Fairmont to catch the bus that went to Solano Avenue. There, near the Oaks Theater, he would board the Red Train for the trip to the Oakland pier, where he transferred to the ferry for San Francisco. At the ferry building he would catch the streetcar to the Federal Building. This particular day he found a box a little bigger than a shoebox. Without opening it, he turned it over to the conductor who informed him that if no one claimed it within a week that the contents in it would be his.

After a week Dad went to see if the box had been claimed. It hadn't. The man reached under the desk and handed him the unclaimed box. Dad opened it right away to see just exactly what it contained. He couldn't believe what he saw. Inside the box was a year's supply of the very pills Patty so desperately needed. I remember they looked like tiny, clear yellow footballs. God does work in mysterious ways!

In 1935 Mary and Jerry started taking Adagio dance lessons from Uncle Big. I can remember them practicing their routine in the backyard. The four of us kids would occasionally put on a tumbling act for Mom and Dad. Mary and Jerry's Adagio lessons helped in making theirs espe-

cially good. One night soon after we were through, Dad left the room and went to his room upstairs. We had no idea he wanted to get in on the fun and was getting prepared for it. After some time went by our handsome father came limping into the room, one arm drawn up crippled looking. He had on a plaid robe with a pillow pushed under the back near his shoulders. His hair was messed up, hanging down over one side of his forehead. He had drawn a big scar running down the length of one cheek and a tooth was blacked out.

He did a wonderful “hunchback” act, twisting his body and limping around the room, chasing us girls. We screamed with delight. (In later years after ten grandchildren had arrived, the grandchildren were putting on a show for their grandparents. I took movies of it. Then I took Dad aside and told him I wanted to help him get ready to put on his show. I stuffed the pillow up his back and drew the scar down his cheek. Then I ran to the living room to grab my camera as he made his entrance. The girls began screaming as he came limping into the room. The boys rolled on the floor, laughing hysterically, then imitated their grandfather after it was all over. I treasure that movie.)

It amazed me how Dad could walk on his hands with his feet up in the air; I was clumsy and it was all I could do to stand on my head. Patty was much better at this than I was. I had to use the assistance of a wall. She could also do a back bend. Again I had to rely on the wall to help me. Having my back to the wall, I would bend backwards, placing the palms of my hands against the wall and proceed to walk my hands down the wall. Often as not I would fall in the process. Sometimes Patty would have her hand under my back trying to brace me, but to no avail. She was able to stand away from the wall to do her back bend.

One day Jerry overslept and was still asleep when we girls left for school. Because of Mother’s illness, she was unable to work her way down the stairs without help so she never had a way of knowing when Jerry missed school unless he came upstairs. It was a cold winter morning and he was sound asleep in his basement room. Mother’s piercing screams jolted him awake. He raced upstairs to find our poor mother’s clothes on fire. She had been dressing in front of the open oven trying to stay warm. He found her with her back to the wall, moving back and forth against the wall trying to put out the flames. He grabbed her and beat the fire out with his bare hands. Both were treated for burns but thanks to Jerry, Mother was not seriously burned. It was a blessing that he had overslept that day.

Another time he heard her scream as he walked out the opening in the back fence. She had been doing some washing with our old wringer machine when he left. He rushed back and found Mother's hair had gotten caught in the wringer. The machine was still on. Mother was trying to reach the control but because of her arthritis was unable to do so. She was close to being scalped and Jerry jumped into action. He turned off the machine, released the wringers, and began to unwrap Mother's tangled hair from them. She said, "Get the scissors, son, and cut my hair off." Jerry ran and got the scissors, then cut Mother's hair, releasing her from her torture machine. He hated cutting off Mother's beautiful hair, but it had to be done. She never had her hair shoulder length or beyond again. She preferred it long, but after that experience she felt safer with it short. (I can't remember Mother ever having long hair. She had it short for so many years).



*Our wonderful Mother*

In 1935, due to years of drought, there were dust storms in the Midwest, which led to that area being labeled "The Dust Bowl". Many people migrated to California with all of the belongings they could manage to bring with them. It was during this time Dad had been working in Modesto. On his way home one weekend, he stopped at a gas station in Stockton. While there, he used the rest room. After he got home, we needed to get something at Mr. D's. Dad had a long wallet he kept in his back pocket and reached for it. It wasn't there! He started sweating and got very anxious. The wallet was full of government money he had collected for the Internal Revenue Service. Dad figured he must have left it in the rest room at the gas station.

He knew it was probably useless, but he and Jerry raced out to the car and took off for Stockton. We were all very worried. You can't explain

away losing government money. It would mean jail for our sweet father. When they got to the gas station, Dad dashed for the bathroom. Naturally, as he expected, the wallet was no longer there. Sick with worry, he prayerfully went to the station attendant and frantically asked if a wallet had by any chance been turned in, fearing what the answer would be. The man asked what the wallet looked like and told him he would need to see some identification. Dad had no problem describing his wallet as he had hand tooled it himself. Even so, he needed some identification. But all of Dad's identification was in his wallet. He displayed his badge showing he was a federal officer. While Dad was describing his wallet and showing his badge, Jerry ran out to the car and returned with the car registration.

Satisfied, the attendant opened a safe, reached in and pulled out Dad's wallet. Smiling as he handed it to him, he said "*Mister, you're really lucky. An old truck came in loaded with a family and all of their belongings. They had several kids. None had on coats or shoes, and what clothes they had on were rags. The father came in, handed me this wallet and said, 'Some feller left this here wallert in the barthroom.'* He then turned away, calling to his kids who were running all over the place, piled them back among their belongings on the truck, and left." Relieved to see his wallet, Dad wondered if all the money was still in it. He knew some must be or it wouldn't have been in the safe, but was it all there? Upon closer inspection, he was amazed to find that not one dollar was missing! Dad always wished he could have known who this wonderful man was whose honesty was over and above clothing and feeding his family. That man's honesty and the honesty of the worker in the station likely saved Dad from a jail sentence.

The town of Richmond was next to El Cerrito. Most of the El Cerrito students went to junior high school and high school in Richmond until El Cerrito High opened in August of 1941. Some students chose to go to Albany High. Mary and Jerry went to Albany High. Jerry quit school and got a job when he was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, to help with expenses and also to have his own spending money. Mom and Dad weren't happy about his quitting and tried to talk him out of it. They told him how important an education was. His answer to that was that Dad hadn't finished grammar school and look how far he gotten, now working for the IRS.

When the weather got warm enough, a school bus would pick up at Harding School those children whose parents had given them permission to go to the Plunge in Point Richmond. (When I called Mary recently to tell her the Plunge was still there, she was as surprised as I was. She

informed me that all three of us girls learned to swim at the Plunge.) It first opened in 1925. It is enormous! The pool is 60 by 160 feet and holds approximately 365,000 gallons of heated water. It became a famous place for aquatic extravaganzas featuring big-band music that accompanied performances by nationally known swimming stars. I loved going there and always looked forward to those outings. Swimming and roller-skating were my two favorite things to do.

I had many memorable times at the Plunge but one stands out to me. Some of the boys from school were playfully chasing me in the water.



*Inside the Plunge*

*Courtesy City of Richmond*

I swam to the side of the pool and took hold of the water trough to pull myself out of the pool. My hand slipped and my arm rammed down into the trough. Hard as I tried, it wouldn't come out. It was stuck at the elbow! The boys tried unsuccessfully to help me get it loose too, but it hurt when they did. One of them ran to get a

lifeguard. I ended up with several of the lifeguards trying to get my arm out. They thought they were going to have to break the tile around my arm to get it out when all of a sudden it popped out on its own.

My classes went on a number of outings through the years; I especially remember Fleishacker Zoo, the Aquarium, and the Museum in San Francisco. We also went to the Shredded Wheat Factory and to Borden's Dairy, where they gave us our choice of chocolate or white milk. Once we went to a bread factory. We were served bread right out of the oven, with butter and jam on it. I believe it was Langendorf Bread. All three of these were in Oakland. I also can still remember how thrilled I was when we went to visit the fire station on San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito. The firemen showed us their sleeping quarters and demonstrated how quickly they could get into their gear should they get a call. We also got to slide down the pole. That was so exciting for me.

# Chapter 7

**S**HREDDED Wheat used to come in packages with dividers they called blotters between the layers of wheat biscuits. Some of the earliest blotters were 9 x 4 inches and had printed messages on them. The early messages were largely targeted at adults, with advertisements, recipes, etc. In 1936 or 1937 they started aiming the messages at children with the introduction of “Picture Story Albums”. There were also nursery rhymes, fairy tales, children of all nations, etc. Children would color these pictures. Patty and I were always anxious to see what pictures would be on the dividers. Each of us traced the one we had so both could have a copy to color. We collected quite a few over the years. Unfortunately, they were lost in a flood we had in 1940. We also loved tracing and sharing the pictures that were in our coloring books.

In those days, the theaters had “dish nights”, where they would hand out a dish to the adults. If they were handing out a certain piece of the set on a night when the movie was uninteresting people still went in order to get the dish. These came to be known as Depression glass and some are collectors’ items today.

Milk was left in bottles on the front porch. Mother would put a note in an empty bottle to let the milkman know what she needed. In the early morning as I lay in bed I could hear the clanking of his bottles as he was coming up the sidewalk and putting the milk on the porch. He also left butter, cottage cheese and other dairy products. Milk wasn’t homogenized in those days, so the top three or four inches of the “milk” in the bottle was actually cream. The bottle had a cardboard stopper on top with a little tab on it to make it easy to pull it off the bottle. Mother would get upset if we poured the cream in our cereal instead of shaking it and mixing it with the milk. We stopped having milk delivered when

Mr. D. opened his store. We could get a nickel for each bottle returned to the store. Soda bottles were also redeemable. Patty and I used to collect milk and soda bottles from the neighbors who didn't want to bother taking them back to the store and then use the money to go to the movies.

When margarine first appeared it came in a large white block with a small packet of dark yellow powder. This powder then had to be mixed into the margarine to make it yellow. I used to hate mixing it. It took a lot of mixing to make the margarine uniformly yellow.

When we went shopping in Oakland and Berkeley, the clerks in the big department stores didn't have cash registers. When we gave them our money, they put it along with the receipt into a cylindrical container about the size of a baby's bottle. Then they placed the container in a pneumatic tube, which extended stretched across the building and up to the second floor. The clerk would pull a cord and the container would shoot through the pneumatic tube all the way up to the cashier's office on the second floor. If there was any change coming back, the cashier would send it back the same way. There were tubes all over the store, between each department and the cashier's office. I loved watching the containers shooting back and forth.

Before we had a refrigerator in our house, we had an icebox. At the top of the ice box there was a space where the iceman would put a block of ice. Mother had a special card that was about 10" x 10". Each corner had an amount on it: 25 lb., 50 lb., 75 lb. and 100 lb. Mother would place the card in the window where it could be seen from the iceman's truck, with the amount she wanted pointing up. As I recall, each block on the truck was 50 lb. If Mother wanted 25 pounds or 75 pounds, the iceman had to use a huge ice pick to cut the block in half. The block had a groove etched into the center where the iceman would place the pick to split the block in two. Exactly how he did this I can't remember, but he must have hit the ice pick with a hammer.

The iceman had large clamps that opened like pliers and he would grab the block of ice with these clamps. Then he would sling the block of ice onto his back. There was a piece of leather on the back of his shirt to keep his shirt from getting wet and keep his back from getting too cold. He then carried the ice into the house and placed it in the icebox. While he was parked, the kids in the neighborhood would scamper into the truck to get a chip of ice off the floor. We would hold the ice with a piece of newspaper wrapped around it to keep our fingers from getting

so cold. If there weren't enough chips to go around, the iceman would chip off a few more for us. Before we had an icebox at 375 Pomona, we had a "cooler". It wasn't very wide and it looked like a narrow cupboard. It went from the drain board up to the ceiling. The bottom part of the cooler, next to the drain board, held the ice.

There was a hole in the bottom of the cooler that allowed the melted ice water to drain outside. The hole also served as an air vent. The cooler really didn't keep things very cold and if one wasn't careful, things would spoil. When we got our first real icebox, it was a separate unit and kept the food much colder and for longer periods of time. We loved chipping ice from the block for cold drinks or just to chew on, which we had not been able to do with the cooler because the ice didn't keep as long in it. We were one happy family to have something so special and modern in our own home.

Then there was the junk man, who came slowly down the street with a horse and cart. As he came up the street we could hear things that were hanging from the cart clanging against each other. He would be calling out, "*Rags, bottles, sacks! Rags, bottles, sacks!*" I can still hear him when I think about him. We would pick the foil off the gum wrappers and make it into a little ball. The foil on the gum in those days was thick enough and strong enough to hold together, making it possible to add to it as time went by. Cigarette packs had foil as well. By the time the junk man came around again, we had a good-sized ball. He would weigh it on his little scale and would pay us a penny for each pound. In those days, even a penny was exciting for a child.

A vegetable truck came by every week. The vegetable man had bells hanging from his truck so that women would know he was coming and could have their lists ready. His vegetables were displayed neatly at an angle so they could easily be seen. Mother would sometimes surprise us with a watermelon.

Gas stations were called Service Stations in those days and were much different. You didn't fill your own gas tank. A man, sometimes more than one, would come out to put the gas in the tank. He washed the windows, checked the oil, checked the tires, etc. People never had to get out of their cars. They took very good care of their customers in those days. One of the stations (I believe it was Standard Oil) handed out beautiful pictures of the United States we could put in an album that was specially made to hold the pictures. Also, we could get maps at the stations for free.

I loved to roller skate and in Oakland there was an indoor skating rink called "Roll-Or-Land". Skating inside was much more fun for me than roller skating outside. I loved the atmosphere with the music and the sound of the skates on the wooden floor. In a rink we did things on skates we didn't do out on the street: turning around and skating backwards, weaving in and out, skating with a partner, etc. It was great! (I donned skates again in the late 70's to go roller-skating with my granddaughter Michele, who was around eight at the time. I expected to make a fool of myself but was surprised to find that at the age of 50 I was not only able to stay on two feet but even able to teach my granddaughter how to turn and skate backwards.)

For many years Patty and I shared a bed. We would lie in bed telling each other stories. Sometimes we would make it a scary story and stop at a scary place to continue the next night. At times the one who wasn't telling the story would be tickling the other one's back as we listened, until we got bunk beds. We were allowed only so much time to "play" in bed. One particular night Dad had told us several times it was time to quiet down and go to sleep. Finally, getting firm, he yelled, "*If I hear one more peep out of you two girls I am going to have to do something about it.*" We then whispered very quietly for a minute and, giggling, both said, "*Peep! Peep!*" loud enough for Daddy to hear. He chuckled, "*You dad-burned kids, get to sleep now!*" Having enjoyed our little joke, we settled down and soon fell asleep.

There were a couple of sayings that Patty and I used a lot when we were kids. One was if we were sitting some place and needed to get up for any reason but didn't want to lose our spot. We would take our finger and make the sign of a big "X" on the spot and say, "*Criss-cross and no red rivers*", which meant that place was saved. (I wish I knew where that came from.) Another saying we had, if somebody else had something that we wanted to have when they were through with it was: "*I've got first 'dibs' on it*".

As much as I loved Patty and as good as we got along, as with most siblings I felt at times that she was spoiled. I would say "*You're spoiled, that's what!*" I still say that to her at times for fun and to bring back a childhood memory to the two of us. Recently when I said that to her she said, "*Was I really?*" "*You still are*", I said with a laugh.

Aunt Ruby was the oldest of Dad's siblings. (Dad was the oldest of the kids). She came to California to visit her brothers and their families in 1928, soon after I was born. In 1935, Dad wrote a letter to Aunt Ruby

telling her the latest about us kids. Jerry was fourteen, Mary was eleven, Patty was nine and I was six. He wrote,

*“Jerry’s room has pictures of Indians, cowboys, camping scenes, and many pictorial and colored maps of places all over the world. Pennants of schools, ribbons he has won in athletics, his trophies from scouting (badges of office, etc.), a complete set of branding irons used by the Castros years ago. A football helmet, an old powder horn, an outrigger canoe five inches long made by Kauakis in Hawaii. Book shelves made in shop at school full of books of travel and adventure: Kipling, Conrad, Dickens, Cooper, and many others. ----Clothes and shoes----Do you see it all?----A mares nest----A place of disorder and apparent confusion. Seldom cleaned----Just can’t seem to find anything after it’s cleaned up. It is his retreat from the classroom, from the strife heaped on him by sisters who ‘keep getting into his stuff,’ his kingdom and domain.”*

My father often used the term “mares nest”. I went to the Internet to find out more about it. The Internet source said it was first seen in use in the 1600’s. But there is no record of how it got started.

Continuing with the girls, Dad wrote, *“Mary, likes to dance and sing. She enjoys playing ball, marbles, spin tops and riding bicycles. She doesn’t have a bike but hires one from a small friend of hers. He charges her a nickel for an hour. Many ice cream cones have been forfeited for a ride on Lindie’s bike.*

*“Pat, she’s my pal, mainly because she is the girl of the family and will stay put long enough for a kiss from her dad—the other two are like grasshoppers.*

*“Neva, buggers description. She is a cyclone on two feet. Into everything . . . a perpetual tease. She gets into fights with the boys, comes home with a bloody nose, and goes back for more. She can ‘Take it’. ----Loves and idolizes her brother, who gives her piggyback rides and plays roughhouse with her. Oh me! Oh my! What a gang. A lot of fun. What a lot of love for me. - My family.”*

In a letter Mother wrote to Aunt Ruby before our trip to Fort Smith in 1936, Mother said she was watching Dad work in the yard one day when she heard horses hoofs pounding through the field next to our house. Then they saw Mary flying past at a full gallop, riding bare back like an Indian, hair flying and looking very confident and sure of herself (Mary was 13 at the time).

# Chapter 8

*W*HILE I was a child our family often went on camping trips to Putah Creek. But in August of 1936 we went by car on the only long-distance family vacation I can remember. On this trip we went east to meet our parents' families. On the way there, we stopped to see the Grand Canyon. It was beautiful! I couldn't believe it was all rock.

While in Arizona we came across a field full of Indian ladies. Some carried papooses on their backs while they were weaving blankets on the other side of a wire fence. There was a long line of blankets spread



*Mary, Mom, Jerry, Patty & Neva in Indian County*

over the fence. Dad stopped the car and everyone piled out to go see the Indians. Dad was sure I would be the first one there as I had always been so fascinated with Indians. Not so! Dad asked, "Where is Neva?" Mary said, "I didn't see her get out of the car Dad. She must still be in it." This puzzled Dad. He knew I had always wanted to see a real Indian and here was a field full of them.

over the fence. Dad stopped the car and everyone piled out to go see the Indians. Dad was sure I would be the first one there as I had always been so fascinated with Indians. Not so! Dad asked, "Where is Neva?" Mary

He went back to the car and found me cowering under a blanket on the floor of the car, sobbing my heart out. *"Neva! What's wrong honey?"* Hardly able to talk, my face wet with tears, I said, *"Daddy, don't trade me to the Injuns! Please don't trade me to the Injuns! I don't want to leave you and Mama and live with the Injuns!"* Dad's face fell as he remembered a joking conversation he'd had with my mother the night before and now realized that I overheard. I was almost as dark as an Indian from being outdoors so much wearing nothing but shorts. My hair was dark and cut like an Indian child's. Dad had laughingly said to Mother, *"Since Neva looks like an Indian and likes Indians so much, I think I'll trade her off for an Indian blanket when we see our first Indians,"* not knowing that my small ears were listening. And here we were with a field full of Indian women and a fence lined with beautiful Indian blankets.

He took me in his arms as the tears rolled down my face, sobs shaking my body as my arms went around his neck, hugging him tightly. He said, *"Brown Shortie, don't you know your ol' dad wouldn't trade you for all the blankets you see on that fence? Don't you know how much I love you?"* I raised my head and looked into his face, *"Ya-you're n-not going to gi-give me a-away?"* He pulled me closer, *"Never! Now, how would you like to go see those Injuns?"* *"You're, you're really not going to trade me to the Injuns for a blanket?"* *"I'm really not!"* *"You promise!"* *"I promise!"* *"Cross your heart and hope to die."* *"Cross my heart and hope to die."* As Daddy picked me up and carried me over to join the rest of the family, I watched and studied the Indians, fascinated but still hanging on tightly around his neck; not yet convinced that I wasn't going to be traded. Mother looked at my tear-stained face. Dad said *"I'll tell you all about it later."*

I was thrilled to get to Arkansas and see my grandparents. Because my mother's parents had died when she was in her teens and my father's parents lived thousands of miles away, I was never able to experience grandparents in my life. Growing up with grandparents nearby was something I missed out on and always longed for. When my dad's father was a young adult, he spent a number of years as a traveling evangelist. Then he settled down with his own church as a Baptist minister and also became an editor for the Calvert/McBride Printing Company in Fort Smith, Arkansas. When he got older he was almost completely deaf, although he could hear a person if they raised their voice loud enough. Consequently when he talked, he also yelled in order to hear himself.

Grandfather felt he should have a private conversation with his oldest grandson. Laying an arm across his shoulder, Grandfather led Jerry

to the back yard away from his little sisters. It was anything but *private!* Because of his hearing problem, not only the family heard him, but the whole neighborhood could hear my sweet grandfather *tactfully* telling his 16 year old grandson about the facts of life. Which, by the way, he already knew.

Grandmother was extraordinarily good with her hands and she could carve things out of fruit seeds ... even very small cherry seeds. She had a very tiny, sharp knife that she used. She did mostly little baskets and pitchers with thin, real handles on them, hollowing out each basket. I don't know what happened to the ones she gave me. The only thing I can figure out is some kid must have seen them in my room and taken them. I would never have gotten rid of them. (Since this writing, when Mary heard I no longer had mine she sent me a few of hers.)

Grandmother carved the three monkeys: hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil for Mary out of peach seeds. She carved an Indian head for my father, also from a peach seed. He always carried it in his pocket as sort of a good luck piece. In 1947 when we lived in Fresno, Dad heard a noise in their bedroom. As he went into the room to investigate, he saw a man's leg disappearing out the window. The man not only took Dad's wallet, he also took the Indian head. Dad was more upset about losing the Indian head than he was about his wallet. After my Grandfather died, Grandmother moved to El Cerrito about 1946. Until she died in 1958, she lived with Aunt Ruby.

Aunt Ruby had expressive dark eyes, deep dimples, and short curled hair which framed her beautiful complexion. She was only 5' 1" and had tiny little feet. She set her own fashion, adding different collars to a dress to change the style and wearing pretty perky little hats that she or my grandmother made. Her small, smooth-skinned hands were always busy with artwork or her favorite hobby, gardening. Still a beauty, she married for the first time at age 58 to a man who was 20 years her junior. She would smugly say, "*I was just waiting for Paul*". And she would smile with a twinkle in her eye. She outlived him by many years.

Other than Ruby, I don't remember much about the rest of the Arkansas family except for Aunt Betty. I remember more about Aunt Betty because she was visiting Grandmother and Aunt Ruby during the time of my graduation from high school in 1947. Aunt Betty was born after Aunt Ruby. She wasn't blessed with the beauty of her older sister Ruby. She had freckles and carrot red hair. When she was young, her fiancé was on the way to marry her when he was killed in a train wreck. She

grieved so much that she said she would never marry. I think he was the only man she was ever interested in.

She would have been an entirely different person if she and her fiancé had been able to carry through with their plans. She may not have been a beauty, but she had a beautiful soul. Aunt Betty was an accomplished artist and poet. She was published in many newspapers, in *Ideals Magazine*, and she was listed in the *Who's Who of Poetry*. Many of her oil paintings grace the walls in homes of judges, doctors and many others in the Fort Smith area. Her flower garden won many awards at the annual flower shows. A rose, *The Betty Calvert*, was named after her. She could also pick up a piece of paper, start cutting away, and end up with a great silhouette. It amazed me how she could do this without drawing a picture first.

Aunt Billie, the next in line, was Dad's only married sister until Aunt Ruby married in later years. She also didn't possess the beauty of her older sister Ruby, but was still a nice looking woman. She was such a dear lady and her personality made her more attractive. She had a quick wit and like her brother (my dad), she loved to tell stories about the family. Aunt Billie did this quite well, acting it out, changing her expressions, and showing animation as she talked. We could see a *picture* of the experiences as she related them. She kept us laughing and did everything she could to entertain us and show us a good time. I wish I could have known her better. Her first love was her family and she doted on them. She, like her sisters, was a wonderful gardener and good with her hands. She once won first prize in Fort Smith for her Christmas tree display. She had cut all the flower-like ornaments out of tin cans, placing a light bulb in the center to brighten her tree in a unique way. She also made beautiful quilts.

Aunt Billie's husband, Charles Crockett (usually called Sunshine), was a relative of Davy Crockett. Davy Crockett's father was Uncle Sunshine's great-great-grandfather. Uncle Sunshine said his father used to tell him stories that his father had heard as a little boy about Davy Crockett from his father and grandfather. Uncle Sunshine had a bakery in Fort Smith. He and Aunt Billie had two children. Joan was a year older than me. Richard was three and a half years younger. How I wish I could remember more clearly those days I spent with my cousins and how I wish that I could have known them through the years. They had a sister, Carol, who was born the year after our visit in 1936. I have never met Carol but I always enjoy her Christmas letters, in which she describes

her vacations to other countries. Carol has a real gift for writing, I can almost *see* what she's writing about.

On the trip we also met some of my mother's family as we traveled through Kansas. We stayed at my Aunt Myra's in Topeka, Kansas. She was the mother of Louise Brooks, the silent movie star, also called "Brooksie" and "Lulu". Louise now has a large following and has become a legend. The Internet is full of her life, which was colorful to say the least. Aunt Myra was different than anyone I had ever known. She was extremely sophisticated and highly educated. In fact, she had lectured in various places in Kansas. She was a gifted pianist and although I loved her, it was hard to feel close to her. She didn't possess the warmth and sweetness that her sister (my mother) did. In fact, they were as different as night and day. Without being told that we should keep our distance, she gave us the impression that children are to be seen and not heard. We kept busy elsewhere and fortunately they had a huge house. I was very young at the time but not too young to have kept a diary during that trip. How I wish I had.

One time in the late 30's, Aunt Myra had come to visit Mother. She had a very sophisticated way of talking that sounded strange to Patty and me. (I only wish I could type with her accent.) Upon hearing us call her "Ant" she proceeded to say, "*My dear child, I am not a creature that crawls on the ground. I am your Aunt!*" Patty and I got so tickled by this strange way of talking we would cover our mouths as we ran to our room, so we could laugh out of range of her hearing.

During our trip back East, Jerry was driving when a tire blew out and the car started swerving. Patty was in the front seat with Jerry and Mother, asleep with her head on Mother's shoulder. She hadn't been feeling well during our stay at Aunt Myra's and Mother thought she would feel better sitting in the front seat. Dad was asleep in the back seat with Mary and me and started to reach over Jerry to grab the steering wheel. Jerry said, "*I've got it, Dad*" as he brought the car under control. Later in the evening, Dad had taken over the driving. The car radio was on to the start of *Gang Busters*. When the program began there were always sirens and machine guns going off. Dad thought it would be fun to turn the radio as loud as possible as he passed the car in front of us. As we drove by, all we could see was a poor little man, slid way down in his seat, sitting just high enough to peek over the dashboard in order to see where he was driving, looking scared and wide eyed. I can't remember if there

was anyone else in the car or not. When Dad saw how frightened the man was, he felt like what he did wasn't such a great idea after all.

After having been gone about a month, we were very happy to get back home to El Cerrito and quite excited to see all our friends again. The day we got back was a nice summer day and I couldn't wait to run over to the Lojo's house to see them and tell them about our trip. We had many warm, happy memories of family members we had never known before.

# Chapter 9

WHEN Patty was 10 she went on a Girl Scout camping trip. While on the trip, she was exposed to poison oak. Somehow she got Impetigo, a serious skin disease, along with the poison oak. Blood poisoning began to show on her legs and the blisters started turning dark. The doctor gave Mother instructions on what to do. Dad was working out of town during this time. So Jerry, who was about 15, would spread towels out on the dining room table and lay Patty on them. Mother held her arms while Jerry would pop each blister, pressing each one tenderly with cotton balls. Then Mother applied Calamine lotion to them. It was very stressful for them to have to put her through this but it had to be done. The doctor said Patty could have lost her legs if they hadn't done this. As I watched them I had tears running down my face because my best friend Patty was crying and in so much pain.

When I was in the second grade, I was playing in the field across the street near "the big oak tree" with several of the other children in the neighborhood. We were running around in the field when I tripped, falling on my knees into a small hole. As I started to get up, my right leg was bent and one of the kids yelled, "*Neva! Look at your knee!*" I looked down at my knee and what I saw terrified me. I was staring at this hunk of meat hanging from my knee. The blood hadn't come to the surface yet and it had an off white-color. I could see the bone. I landed on something in the hole that had cut my knee to the bone from one side to the other. I hadn't even felt it happen. Because the leg was bent, the blood hadn't started flowing out yet.

As I stood up, the blood started gushing down my leg. I limped across the field to our house. I burst through the front room in tears. Dad, Mom and Jerry were sitting in the front room. "*I cut my knee! I cut*

my knee!" They took one look at the blood running down my leg. Jerry ran from the room, coming back with a couple of towels. As Dad wrapped the towels around my leg he asked, "How did you do this Brown Shortie?" "I tripped in a hole. It hurts Daddy." "I know it does honey. We will take you to the doctor and get it taken care of. What did you cut it on?" "I don't know." Dad carried me out to the car. Jerry helped Mother down the steps and into the car.

Jerry got in the back seat and then Dad put me in the back with Jerry, placing my leg across Jerry's lap. Blood was seeping through the towels onto his pants. I remember looking at my big brother, sobbing, "Don't let them cut my leg off! Don't let them cut my leg off!" At my young age I felt it was cut half way off and the doctor would go the rest of the way. "They are not going to cut your leg off, kiddo. They will sew it back together. You will be as good as new in no time, running and climbing trees again." The thought of having the doctor sew my knee together frightened me too but not nearly as much as the thought of losing my leg. I don't remember how many stitches I had, but the doctor told Dad that I was such a brave girl he wasn't going to charge him as much as he would have. I still have a big scar across my knee as a memory of that day.

Aunt Ruby moved to El Cerrito after our trip to Arkansas, in 1936. She lived with us for a few months, during which time she and Mary became very close. She later found an apartment in San Francisco on Geary Street. It was called "The Richmond Arms" and she started working at the Richmond Arms Photo Studio, which was located next door. Later the studio sold out to Velais, I believe it took on the name of "The Velais Studios" at that time.

Mary spent many weekends in the city with her. For some reason I never did get close to my aunt. She was always very distant with me when I was a child and never warmed up to me. I so desperately wanted her love and couldn't understand why I wasn't getting it from her. I think it may have been because I was such a tomboy. When I was little, I ran around in just a pair of shorts and no shoes. I wasn't a feminine little girl. Aunt Ruby preferred neat, clean little children.

Once when I was talking to Patty about this, she said she thought it was because I had such a mind of my own even at a young age, which meant Aunt Ruby's suggestions fell on deaf ears. Through the years she had my sisters and brother at her studio and took pictures of them, but never me. Although she was warm to me when I became an adult, I had a hard time warming up to her. I always remembered how distant she

had been to me as a child and how much it hurt to be left out or shoved aside. She was the only aunt on my father's side of the family who was in my life most of my growing up years. We saw my father's other two sisters, who lived in Arkansas, only on rare occasions. Aunt Ruby seemed to take to me more after I became an adult and had my own family.

In her early years Mary liked to play marbles with the neighbor boys, often winning. She also fought any of the neighbor bullies who gave Patty or me a bad time. Mary was very protective of us. After all, she wasn't just a sister. She was also a mother to us in many ways. So she had both the protective love of a sister and of a mother.

There was a greyhound racetrack where the El Cerrito Plaza shopping center is located today, several blocks down Fairmont Avenue from our home. The greyhounds would chase the rabbits around the track. Instead of using real rabbits, they used fake ones that were attached to a motorized steel bar that moved around the track. We could hear the loud speakers and the excited yelling of the crowd from our house. Jerry worked there in 1936 when he was 16, but only for one season because there was gambling going on, plus Mom and Dad didn't like the type of people that hung out there.

I loved to lie in bed at night and listen to the trains as they rolled down on the tracks, the clickity-clack sound they made as they went over the joints in the rails, and the sound of the whistle in the distance. I also loved to lie in bed and hear the roosters crowing early in the morning. I would hear the rooster at the Lojo's close by, then in the distance one at the hatchery would crow back. They would repeat their crowing back and forth. Sometimes I would mock them and crow back and forth with them.

I don't remember how old I was at the time, but I used to follow the firemen around the neighborhood as they burned the grass in the fields before it got too tall and dry. They did this all over town to keep down the risk of a major fire. My feet were so tough from going barefoot all the time that I could walk across the fields while they were still smoldering.

In 1937 the whole family got all dressed up to go to a movie theater in Richmond. It was the very first time that the entire family went to see a movie together, which made the evening even more exciting. We were going to see a new movie phenomenon, "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*." I loved cartoons, which consisted of Mickey Mouse and Popeye and all those old black and white shorts. But this was going to be a whole movie in color. As any little nine-year-old girl would be, I was so excited

I couldn't sleep the night before. Not only because of the movie, but also because we had new hats and coats to wear that our brother Jerry had gotten for us. Both Patty's and my coat and hat had matching muffs.

When the witch was after Snow White, I hid my eyes against my brother's shoulder. I cried with the dwarfs when I thought Snow White had died and I was so happy when I saw she hadn't. The whole



family enjoyed the *The family all dressed up to go see Snow White* movie. I replayed it in my mind for several days, holding the memory close to me. It has always been my favorite Disney movie. I remember that family outing as if it was yesterday.

# Chapter 10

ON Christmas day in 1937 the Cerrito Theater opened. It was on San Pablo Avenue north of Fairmont Avenue. The lobby had a large etched-glass partition showing a goddess with animals standing near her. On the walls next to the stage were large paintings of frolicking gods and goddesses. Another wall had women doing the cancan. Patty and I and often times Mary no longer had to walk all the way to the Oaks or Albany Theaters. We loved having a theater a lot closer to home and went most every Saturday and Sunday. After the movie was over, by the time we got close to home we could smell the dinner Mother was preparing. She always timed it so it was ready when we arrived. She had round steak often, which was one of my favorite meals.

Going to a movie was a lot different in those days. It was much more exciting than it is today. Mom would give us each a quarter. With that we could pay for the movie, get candy and popcorn, and buy a double-decker ice cream cone to eat on the way home. The theaters were much larger than most theatres are today, but they didn't have a snack bar. Instead there was usually a place next door where we were able to purchase our snacks. This was true at the Cerrito Theatre. There was often a long line of kids going down the block, waiting to get into the matinee.

As we entered the beautiful spacious, carpeted lobby, there was a uniformed employee to greet us and take our tickets. Many theatres had a huge, sweeping staircase that went from the lobby to the balcony. (The Cerrito Theater didn't have a balcony.) There was only one movie screen in the building. There were beautiful lamps on the walls that illuminated lovely, painted murals. One theater had a ceiling whose painted-on clouds gave the appearance they were moving. The bathrooms were attractive and clean with comfortable lounges and chairs. On Saturdays

and Sundays, once inside, the theater would be packed with anxious, excited kids.

Before the movie started, the organist would play. At some theaters the organ came up out of the floor on the stage, rising up as if it was on an elevator. The organist would be playing before we could see him. After a bit, the organ music stopped and we knew the movie was about to start. Sometimes before the movie, the screen would display the words to a song. We sang along as a bouncing ball followed the words, which kept us all together. There were always two movies plus a cartoon, the news, and a serial that always ended with a cliff hanging scene. This of course meant that you were left hanging and had to come back the following week to see what happened in the serial.

When the theatre lights finally went out, the children would all clap their hands, stomp their feet and whistle. They also clapped at times during the movie or yelled when it was exciting. Saturday and Sunday matinees were no place for an adult. It was the kids' time and they could make all the noise they wanted. But they were quiet when necessary. After the lights were out, at each aisle there was an usherette with a flashlight to show late-comers to their seats. On Saturdays, as we left the theater, the person who had taken our tickets as we came in would hand out 8 x 10 glossy pictures of one of the stars of the movie. Sometimes it was a close-up of the star, often it would be a scene from the movie we just saw. That was always a thrill to us. We lost all those pictures in the flood in 1940.

The Albany Theater was unique in that it had a "Mother's Room". This was a small, soundproof room in one of the back corners of the theater. It had glass walls and a sound system so that mothers could see and hear the movie. There were theater seats in the room, a place for the mothers to change their babies, and a heating unit for bottles. This let the mothers relax while watching the movie, knowing that if their baby cried it wouldn't disturb others in the main theater. Even as small as I was, I thought that was great! I have thought about this room through the years and told many people how great it was.

Kay Harcourt was a professional dancer and a girlfriend of Jerry's. Her professional name was Rana d'Harcourt. Kay's mother took to me and now and then she invited me to stay overnight at her home. Sometimes I would get to spend the weekend. In 1937 or 1938 the boyfriend of Kay's mother heard my mother play the piano. When he learned that Mother didn't have a piano, he arranged within a week to have one

delivered to our home. During my last visit with Jerry (just before he died in 1997) he and I talked about Mother's piano. Jerry said he had bought the piano for Mother. Jerry must have made payments for the piano to the boyfriend of Kay's mother over time because Jerry wanted it to be from him.

In September of 1938, Dad and Jerry started adding a new room to the house for Jerry. They built it in the back, off the kitchen, right next to Patty's and my room. The walls were knotty pine and I loved the room. I use to sit on his bed, wishing the room was mine. Jerry would give Patty and me a little money to clean it up for him. Sometimes I would find a large, empty soda bottle and a wrapper from a good-sized cake. I didn't see how anyone could eat a whole cake and drink one of those big bottles of soda in one evening. Now I realize all teen-age boys eat like that. This was when Patty and I got the basement room to play in. We loved it. Little did we know in transferring our things from our bedroom to our playroom that in the 1940 flood we would lose many of the things we cherished and held dear.

After Jerry's new room was added on the back of the house, the washing machine was moved down to the basement. Dad cut an opening about 14" x 14" in the floor of the linen closet (which was next to the bathroom) and put a trap door on it. He then went to the basement and hung a blanket under the hole, nailing each corner of the blanket to a two-by-four. When we had dirty laundry, we would throw it down the hole in the linen closet to the blanket below. This made it easy to gather up the laundry on laundry day.

One day when I threw some dirty clothes into the chute one of my shoes went in, too. I could see it lying on top of the pile of clothes. Not wanting to go all the way down to the basement and climb up on a chair to retrieve my shoe, I thought I would try to reach it through the opening. I lowered the upper half of my body down through the hole and stretched my arm out to try to reach my shoe. In doing so, I started slipping forward further through the opening. I reached up and grabbed the sides of the opening and there I was, upside-down with my legs sticking up out of the floor. I was afraid I would go the rest of the way through, tearing the blanket loose from the nails and landing headfirst on the hard cement floor of the basement. I hung onto the opening for dear life and yelled, "*Help! Get me out of here!*"

Patty was in our room and she came running to my aid. Seeing just my legs sticking out of the linen closet, she made a grab for them. "*Neval!*"

*What kind of a mess have you gotten yourself into this time?*” she said as she tugged at my legs while I pushed on the sides of the opening. She managed to pull me out. After I was safe and sound, she started laughing, *“You should have seen yourself! You looked so funny! Your legs sticking out of that hole kicking around trying to get out.”* Even though she was laughing, she knew that it could have turned out very badly if she hadn’t been able to pull me out. We must have been alone at the time because I can’t remember anyone else responding to the noise.

# Chapter 11

*m*y Uncle Big was such a fun uncle. He always had a teasing smile for us, joked freely, and made each of Dad's four kids feel important to him. He had no children, so all his love for children spilled over to us. He wasn't a handsome man, but he wasn't bad looking, either. He had plenty of charisma. He was tall and thinner than his two brothers and he had red hair. He drew people to him like a warm fire on a cold day. He liked to smoke a pipe. His face is as clear to me today as it was when I last saw him. As mentioned earlier, Uncle Big's talent was dancing. Singing was not his "bag". The only song I remember him singing is, "*The Three Little Fishies*". We girls would crack up when he sang it. He loved our giggles.

Aunt Hilder, Uncle Big's wife, was a tall, well-shaped Swedish girl. There was a hint of red in her dark-brown hair, which hung just below her shoulders in long Mary Pickford curls. She kept it pulled up at the sides with hair clips. She had a quick, delightful laugh that made her face glow. Her specialty was cooking and having family dinners. She would let Patty and me sit in her room and look through her jewelry box full of beads. When I would see something I especially liked, I can remember saying, "*Aunt Hilder, can I have dibs on this when you're through with it?*" I adored her and considered her an aunt even when years later she and my uncle divorced. She also played the piano but a much different type of music than Mother played. She never had a lesson and was entirely self-taught. The piece I would always ask her to play was *The Bumble Boogie*. I watched every movement of her fingers as they would fly over the keys and I was fascinated at the speed in which they moved. (The last memory I have of her is in the early 70's, sitting at her piano, again playing my favorite request).

Uncle Big and Aunt Hilder lived in Aunt Hilder's family home. It was a large three-story home on the corner of Stockton and Albemarle. Several members of her family lived there. It seemed like quite a distance from our house. To get to their house, we usually walked up the dirt road past the Alderett's stable, along the polo field, and beside the creek where we used to look for polliwogs. Other times we walked up Clayton to get there. (That big old home was moved to another part of El Cerrito years ago).

My uncle Little Brick was the youngest of my dad's siblings. He was shorter than his two brothers. His dark hair had no hint of a wave, so he kept it combed back as was the style in those days. He flashed a teasing smile when he was having fun with us. And even as children, we were aware of his boyish charm. He was not ambitious as were his brothers. He dreamed of being a singer and often was paid to sing for clubs or at weddings. He had an outstanding voice and with the right breaks he could have made it.

But in the 30's it was hard to break into the music scene. So he seemed to be searching for his place. We dearly loved uncle Little Brick. He was loving and sweet to all three of us girls. I never knew whether he had a favorite among us girls because he never showed it in any way, making each of us feel special. He was always quick to come into our bedroom when there was a thunderstorm at night to assure us that everything was OK. He sometimes sat in our dark room as the lightning flashed and the frightening thunder boomed, singing to us to calm our fears.

I can only vaguely remember Uncle Little Brick's wife, Mary, probably because I was very young at the time they divorced. Patty recalls that she was a short, well-endowed little woman. She had a sweetness that gave her a pleasant, attractive appearance. Her dark hair was curled close to her face and always well kept. She smiled easily and her personality was warm and friendly. We didn't see much of Mary and the children Dian, Steven and Sue after they divorced. I have no idea why. It seems like uncle Little Brick would have brought our cousins by to play with us from time to time. I do remember Mary was always very sweet to us and we liked her. Patty remembers her curling Patty's hair by tying pieces of rags in her hair and then combing it out after it dried. Patty said she always felt very pretty after she was finished. I can't remember where their house was or even going to it, but we must have visited.

We loved playing with our cousins. Dian was a pretty little girl with big eyes, curly dark hair, and an olive complexion. She was quiet and shy. Her brother Steven was very quiet. He wasn't boisterous and rambunctious like most boys. He was small, dark skinned, and went along with whatever we wanted to play. Sue was a darling little curly-haired girl. They were all younger than us and I remember all three being cute, well-behaved kids. Uncle Little Brick had a game he would play with Sue. He would pick her up, look lovingly in her eyes, and give her a little swat on the bottom. She would frown and rub herself saying, "*You spank me by me sedah*". (She called it that because she sat down on it.) Another time she was scratching her bottom and her father informed her that little girls shouldn't do this in front of people. She said, "*But Daddy, when it scratches you gotta itch it, even if it's in your britches.*" I can still hear that cute little voice. I was eight years older than Sue.

I'm not sure when Uncle Little and Aunt Mary were divorced but some time after, in 1938, Uncle Little Brick lost his job and had to live with us for several months. We girls loved having our uncle there. During this time there was a lot of singing around the piano as Mother played. Having my uncle there was just like having another big brother in the house. It was great! I thought the world of my Uncle Little Brick.

I don't know if I would say I favored him over Uncle Big, but I felt closer to him. This was probably because he had lived with us for a time and he was like another brother to me. But even so, I couldn't possibly pick a favorite between my two Uncles. They were both so special in their own way and both dearly loved our family. Even though there were ten years between Uncle Little Brick's and Jerry's ages, he and Jerry use to date Kay Harcourt at the same time, competing with each other. Jerry was very mature for his age and I guess Uncle Little Brick was younger than his age. Kay's age was somewhere between the two so this made it possible for both to be interested in the same girl.

The one and only time we saw Dian and Sue again was at my wedding in 1948. In 2001, I had been deeply involved in working on my family genealogy on the Internet. I made a correction about my grandparents on the Calvert Message Board. A year later in Sept. 2002, I received a note in my e-mail. It was something to the effect of, "*Neva, I saw your message on your grandparents. They were my grandparents too. I am your cousin Sue and I haven't seen you since your wedding in 1948.*" I was elated. I immediately sent a note back and we have been in constant communication since.

Aunt Daisy and her husband French MacDonald were what I call pioneer stock. I was crazy about my Aunt Daisy, but at the same time I feared her. By that I mean she was a person I didn't want to make angry. As the saying goes, "*When she said jump, you asked how high?*" The reason I came to this way of thinking was because one of the few times I sass'd my mother. Aunt Daisy overheard me and gave me a good licking. She said, "*I don't ever want to hear you sass that sweet mother of yours again! Do you hear me, young lady?*" Believe me, I heard! I felt it too. In her late years she sometimes had to wear a black patch over her eye, which made her look rugged. But even though she was strict, she was special in her own loving way. I was told that she broke her own horses up into her 60's.

After the Depression hit, Uncle Mac lost his electrical business and their home next door to where I was born. They went to French Creek near Oroville, California, to seek gold. They stayed until September, finding just enough gold to survive. When winter set in, Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac folded up their tent, which had been their home for several months, and moved to Washington. There they lived with Mother's brother, Uncle Paul, until spring. The next summer they moved to Gridley (west of Oroville) and picked fruit until the season was over.

After fruit season they lived with their son, Tommy and his wife Frances for a few months. Finding it extremely hard to live with her daughter-in-law, Aunt Daisy found a shack and the church they were attending provided them with the funds to stay in it. She plugged up the holes in the walls with cardboard and they lived there for several months. The next year Uncle Mac applied for a franchise to sell "McCannon" products. He sold door to door from 1934 to 1936. By then he had enough money to start another electrical business. They then moved from the shack to the Kiester Ranch near Oroville. His business did well and they were able to buy property in Palermo (south of Oroville), where they built a house. They remained there until they died.

Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac had three children, two girls and a boy. Their first child, Tommy, was born in 1904. He and his wife Mary lived near Colusa Circle. In 1938 Tommy and Mary had a little boy, David. Patty, and I often went to play with our baby cousin. (In 1979, David was shot and killed by his wife during an altercation.) In 1944, after my family had moved to Merced, Tommy and Frances had another son, Paul. We never saw Tommy and his family again after we moved, so I never met my cousin Paul.

Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac's second child, Betty, was born in 1906. After graduation from school, Betty moved to Richmond. There she worked as a manager for the phone company. I don't remember Betty being in our life at all or even seeing her until after I became an adult. I guess she was too busy with her job when I was a child in El Cerrito. When Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac died, Betty and her husband Louie moved into her parents' place in Palermo. After a few years they moved to Mountain Home, Arkansas. Louie has now died but Betty, at age 100 (in 2006), is still quite active, gets out with her friends, and has a very sharp mind.

Aunt Daisy and Uncle Mac's third child, Mary, was born in 1911. She and her husband Earl had two daughters: Patricia (everyone called her Patty) and Jamona (everyone called her Jimmy until she started high school, after which she started to go by June). Patty and Jimmy were the only two cousins with whom I had a lot of contact, as they came to our house quite often. They were darling little blonde girls with sweet smiles. Patty had Asthma and was a frail little girl, easily excitable, squealing in her delight - which caused her to cough and lose her breath. It was hard to keep her calm while we were playing our little girl games of dolls and dressing in grown-up clothes. Jimmy, on the other hand, was quiet and stood back, letting her sister Patty be the center of attention (which she loved). We all got along well and never had any childish spats.

To me Uncle Mac always seemed sweet. He reminded me of a big cuddly bear. I can remember like it was yesterday going to their place one time and hearing him ask Mother, "*Would you like a sandwich?*" "*No, not right now. Thanks anyway.*" "*How 'bout a cup of coffee?*" "*Maybe later.*" "*Some fruit, maybe?*" "*No, thanks.*" "*Will, lookie here Ever, how 'bout a tomato?*" The way he said it, sounded so funny. I loved being at their place in Palermo when it rained. They had a barn with a hayloft. Patty and I used to dash out there to lie in the hay and listen to the rain pounding on the tin roof. We would take deep breaths of the aroma of the alfalfa as the rain drenched the dry fields.

Donna and Earl Risdon, were my mother and father's best friends from Big Creek. I don't know when Donna and Earl moved to Oakland but they became part of our family and were just like an aunt and uncle to us. Uncle Earl was called "Slim" because he was tall and slender. They had a son Patty's age, Earl Jr. I loved these people as though they truly were related to me. "Uncle" Earl paid special attention to me. I think one reason was because I was such a tomboy. When I was real little, he loved

to chase me around the house to give me a kiss. And although I loved kisses from my uncles, somehow this became a game with us.

As he chased me, I would run in the bedroom and scoot under the bed to get away from him. He would start to scoot after me and I would spit at him. Not really spit, but make the noise like I was. After that he called me his “Little Spit Ball”. Even when I was grown up and married, he started his letters out to me “*My Dear Little Spit Ball*”. I always thought “Aunt” Donna was a beautiful lady. Daddy called her “a handsome woman”. There was something about her voice I liked and I enjoyed listening to her talk. We kept in touch by phone until she passed away a few years ago.



*Our friend Earl Risdon*

Earl Jr., their son, was a very good-looking boy and never lost those good looks. What we girls hated was that his mother dressed him in “*Little Lord Fauntleroy*” pants and kept after him with a wash rag to keep him clean. He wasn’t able to play and have fun with us because he would get dirty. One time he was standing in the Polo Field watching us play on our raft we had in the creek that ran along the north side of the polo field. It had rained hard that winter and there was enough water to make a small pond. He was talked into stepping on the raft, feeling he wouldn’t get dirty just standing on it. It tipped, making him slip into the water. He got muddy water on his shoes and the lower part of his pants and had to put on some clothes of Mary’s that were fitting for a boy to wear. He was then able to have a ball with us girls.

# Chapter 12

*J*ERRY came in one day and asked, “Where the heck did these damn kittens come from?” Jerry didn’t dislike cats. He just didn’t want any around the house. None of us knew what he was talking about, but he was sure Patty and I had something to do with it. We all followed him



*Sonny and one of his “adoptees”*

to the back yard and there were three darling little kittens, safely tucked in the box that Sonny, our black Cocker Spaniel, used for a house. Jerry was still accusing us of bringing them home when we saw Sonny coming through the back fence opening with a kitten in his mouth. Jerry found out a mother cat at the Alderett’s barn had been kicked by a horse and killed. Sonny was adopting her kittens. I don’t know how long we had those

kittens, but I do know we didn’t get rid of them right away.

Sunset Cemetery, which was close to our home, is also a source of many memories. Patty and I liked to go there and read the gravestones, sometimes taking flowers with us to put on some of the graves. We would sometimes visit with the gravediggers, taking them a sandwich. Above the cemetery there was a wooded area. Patty and I would pull our wagon through the cemetery plots, going way up to the “woods” at the top of the cemetery, to get pinecones for our fireplace. Dad liked to use them

to start the fire. One time we were busy loading the wagon when we heard a woman scream. We left our wagon where it was and went tearing down the hill screaming. The gravediggers stopped us and asked what the problem was.

We told them we heard a woman screaming in the forest. They dropped their shovels and ran up the hill to where they saw our wagon. They stood looking around, wondering in which direction to go to look for the woman. As they were standing there, they too heard “her” scream. They went in the direction of the scream and discovered it was a screech owl. They came down the hill laughing and pulling our wagon behind them. Those men looked funny coming down that hill pulling a kid’s wagon.

Much of these “woods” are now gone, replaced by a forest of grave-stones with deer wandering around among them. Sunset View Cemetery is the prettiest cemetery I have ever seen. Near the top, close to the area where we heard the “screams”, there is a beautiful view of San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. It is quite a sight. In those days, a low



*Patty poses at the cemetery in 1940*

rock wall ran along Colusa Avenue at the boundary of the cemetery. In this area, not far from where Fairmont enters the cemetery, there was a pond with a pretty little waterfall. Patty and I would sometimes take our lunch there to eat. When she and I were there in later years there were graves around the lawn area. The cemetery has since been remodeled and the graves, pond, waterfall, and rock wall are no longer there.

There was a place in the cemetery above Colusa Avenue where Patty and I liked to go. It had a large, level area with squared-off pools full of water. Each pool was several yards long but not nearly as wide. The dividers between the pools were made of cement and were about a foot wide. I can’t remember how many pools there were, but Patty and I use to like to walk around them on the cement dividers. It was similar to walking on the curb and trying not to

step on the sidewalk. We weren't too concerned about doing this because even though the water was very deep, we knew how to swim. We were aware, though, it might be dangerous and we didn't want to fall in. Also, how would we explain being wet to Mom?

In the 70's I had gone to visit Mother. She was living with Patty at the time. Patty and I were reminiscing about the old days with Mother. We started talking about the water area. Mother said, "You what!?" We



*The EBMUD Water Plant, Albany Hill is in the background*  
Courtesy EBMUD, El Cerrito Historical Society collection

told what we had done. She had a fit and told us it was a very dangerous thing to do. Later Patty and I made a memory trip to El Cerrito. We were wandering around the cemetery and I mentioned try-

ing to find "the water place" to see why Mother had such a fit. We walked in the general direction of where we remembered it to be. Before we got there, we heard what sounded like a huge waterfall. We came to the top of a hill and looked down on what we had been searching for. Each square section had water shooting high out of the center. We had no idea that it even did that. We saw why Mother had such a fit when we told her about it and we realized what lucky little girls we had been.

Just across from the entrance to the cemetery, where Fairmont, Carmel, and Colusa come together, was a place on the south side of Fairmont where stonemasons made monuments for the graves at the cemetery. We loved to go there and watch the stonemason engrave the monuments with a chisel. We would visit with him and draw on a big chalkboard he had. In those days we didn't have to worry about strangers the way the children of today do. Even though a little girl had been found murdered near the Santa Fe railroad tracks several years earlier, this was a very rare incident. In fact, it was the only one I ever knew about. Bad things just didn't happen there in those days (unless we were too young to hear about it). I guess we were pretty good kids because the people we kept pestering never seemed to tire of us and didn't seem to mind us being around or act like we were under foot. We used to go to

many businesses and watch them work - shoe repair shops, a blacksmith shop, etc.

Further down Fairmont, on the north side of the street right where the Santa Fe tracks crossed Fairmont, there was a building materials yard. The yard had a very large bunker where they stored sand and gravel.

The huge bunker stood at least two stories high and was several yards wide. It stood on a number of huge square pillars that were four or five feet wide. The bunker covered about a quarter of a block in length and was made of wood and some type of reinforced metal. There was a belt that ran diagonally up the side of the structure, with buckets similar to the ones you see on a water wheel.



*The building materials yard*

*Courtesy El Cerrito  
Historical Society*

This worked in the same fashion, with the buckets carrying rocks and gravel to the top, where they were crushed into smaller pieces and then dumped into the bunker.

The buckets on the belt were close enough to step up from one to the other, like on a ladder. When it was in operation the workmen would yell at us, warning us to stay away from there and play some place else. When it was empty and no one was around, we would climb up the buckets, then down a ladder inside to the bottom of the bunker. We would then run all around inside, loving the noise it made as we ran back and forth. Sometimes we would play in it for quite awhile. (Again Mother, hearing how we entertained ourselves when we were kids, was horrified!)

Quite a few years ago, maybe in the 60's, I remember reading in a paper about how two boys had been playing inside that very same bunker. Not knowing that the boys were inside the bunker, the workers started running the system that dumped gravel into the bunker. The boys started to scamper out. When the first one got to the top of the ladder, he looked down and saw that the other boy hadn't made it and was being covered with gravel. The boy at the top noticed a large wooden box close by and dropped it down over his friend's head. Then he ran for help. The workers got to the boy before the box over his head had

been crushed by the weight of the gravel. They said that the air inside the box had saved the boy's life.

Underneath the bunker it was very dirty and at night very dark. When we would come home from the movies at night with Mary and Jerry, Jerry would always walk faster than us on the way home. When he got to the bunker, he would hide somewhere in its shadows, we would never know where. The front was near the sidewalk and when we got near enough, he would jump out, scaring us. We always knew he was going to do it, but each time it still frightened us.

Down near the foot of Fairmont Avenue, on the same side of the street as the bunker, was a small house that had been made into a library. It was between Lexington and Liberty Streets. The El Cerrito branch of the Contra Costa County library had originally been set up inside the post office in 1913, by Faye Breneman (a daughter of the original "town doctor", Dr. Joseph T. Breneman). In 1915 the library was moved into a room at the Breneman house. Then in 1925 it moved to the house on Fairmont. Patty and I loved going there. We would go to the children's section and sit on the floor with books spread out around us, spending an hour or more trying to decide which ones we wanted to take home. We were only allowed three books each, so it was hard to choose. We wanted to take them all home. Our father gave us a love for books that has stayed with us through the years.

Mother was able to be up and around by the time we moved to the house at 375 Pomona in 1932 or 33, but even then there was a long period of time when she was unable to get out of bed without help. We couldn't touch any part of her body to help her up because it hurt her too much when we did. I remember taking hold of the pillow on each side of her head, lifting a little, swinging her around and then pulling her up into sitting position. Patty said she remembers locking her fingers behind Mother's neck in order to do this. Mother was later able to get up on her own.

As much pain as Mother always had, we never heard her complain. She was a very tiny, gutsy little lady. I don't know if she ever hit a hundred pounds on the scale. Even though she was no longer bed-ridden, as her arthritis progressed she became more and more crippled over the years. Her jaw and fingers became misshapen. She got to the point where she couldn't walk flat-footed and had to wear heels all the time. When her shoes were off she had to walk on her tiptoes. Mom had a hard time turning her head or looking up. In fact, she had to lean back to look up.

Later she developed a slight hump to her back. But no matter how bad it got she never complained. We only knew she was in pain if we would see her rubbing an area, or when she would ask one of us to massage her neck and shoulders.

Patty came across a letter in Aunt Ruby's belongings after her death. Mother had written it to Aunt Ruby in 1936 telling her about something I didn't remember. She wrote, "*A few years ago I went totally blind in one eye. This was caused by arthritis and I was in bed with both eyes bandaged for two months. Then I went around with dark glasses, one covered with adhesive tape. It was quite some time before I could use my bad eye again.*" Mother never elaborated on her ills, past or present.

# Chapter 13

*m*y sister Mary was more than five years older than I was. She was very often busy doing things in the house (instead of playing) or she was spending the weekend with Aunt Ruby in San Francisco. One memory I have of her that has always stood out is how she would let me go to bed with her in the tiny little room at the foot of the stairs. I loved to hear her sing and would talk her into singing to me. I always wanted to hear her sing *Cowboy Jack* and also *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*. There was another song I liked her to sing about a man in prison. The first few words were, “*If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly*”. Its name was “*The Prisoner’s Song*”.

Another memory that stands out was watching Mary tap dance. She tapped all over the house as she did her work. She never missed a movie with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. She watched them closely, practicing what they did when she got home, trying to learn their steps. With a few pointers from Uncle Big, she taught herself how to tap. When Daddy saw how serious she was about tap dancing he bought her some taps to put on her shoes. Mary became good enough to dance for clubs such as the American Legion. When she finished her dance, they would throw money on the stage. She also sang while she did the dishes. Mary had a beautiful soprano voice. Dad thought we all sang well and tried to get the three of us girls to learn to harmonize.

One time Patty and I got a wooden box and a two-by-four. We nailed our old skates to the two-by-four and nailed the box to the other side of the two-by-four. We then nailed a piece of wood to each side of the box near the top for handles, making a scooter that we could ride up and down the street.

Sometimes we would get our hands on an old rubber tire. Patty or I would curl up on the inside of the tire and hold onto the sides of the tire above our head; while the other one would roll the tire down Fairmont Avenue. It wasn't easy holding onto the tire and sometimes we would fall out or the tire would tip over. One time when my great-grandchildren were visiting, I remembered how we loved to play with the tire and told them about it. I found an old tire and brought it out to try with them. But I found children can't do this any more. The opening is smaller than it was when I was a child and children can no longer curl up that way. In the past years I have found out that "progress" has taken away a lot of the fun things that children used to be able to do.

Both of my parents were very special people. Everyone who knew them loved them. We couldn't have asked for better parents. They gave us a full life and filled it with love and a close family relationship. They rounded it off by sharing with us the love of good music, the love of



*Dad & Mom in 1937, with Sunset View Cemetery in the background*

poetry, and the enjoyment of reading a good book. I always looked up to them and was proud to know they were my parents.

Without the presence of a father during the week and having an ill mother, Patty and I were pretty much free to roam. As you can tell already by what I have written, we were freer than most other children and we could come and go as we pleased from a young age. For this reason, we built memories together starting as toddlers, developing a closeness we have carried through the years.

We pulled our wagon from house to house selling Christmas cards or collecting magazines. We were mostly interested in the movie magazines, going through them and cutting out the pictures we wanted to put in our scrapbooks. We made separate scrapbooks just for Shirley Temple. Unfortunately, these scrapbooks were another item lost in the flood in 1940.

We also used that wagon to collect newspapers for the school paper drives. Harding School was in competition with Fairmont School to see

which one could gather the most newspapers. Patty and I would bring the ones we collected home and put them in the garage. When we had quite a bit there, Daddy or Jerry would help us tie them in bundles and pile them in the wagon. Then we took them to school, where they first were placed in the cloakrooms of the respective class. Patty and I each got half of what we collected to divide between our two rooms.

The newspapers would be weighed by some of the boys in the classroom. After they were weighed and recorded, the newspapers would be moved to a large storage area with no front wall. This storage area was next to the entrances to the bathrooms near the office. (Doing this made room for more incoming papers.) The storage area was about the size of a large room. By the end of the paper drive, the pile of papers would just about fill the storage area. We weren't only competing with Fairmont School but also with each classroom in our school. The classroom that collected the most was given a party at the end of the drive and the school that collected the most papers received a special prize.

Sometimes, on cold winter nights when we had to find things inside to entertain ourselves, Patty and I would lay a blanket over the dining room table to make a cave underneath. Then in the dark of our hideaway we would tell scary stories to each other. During the day we would extend the table and it would then become our playhouse.

Dad started doing leather work while we lived in the house at 375 Pomona. I can still see the dining room table with pieces of leather and his tools laying on it, watching while Dad slightly wet the leather in order to engrave it with the tools. He had a large piece of glass he placed under the piece of leather. I loved watching him. He made some beautiful wallets and photo albums. Because of this, I dabbled in it a little bit myself while I was in high school.

Dad wrote poetry, mostly about and to Mother. A few years ago I put together a binder of his poems for my sisters and brother. Not too long ago while visiting my sister Mary, I was pleased to see she had her binder on her coffee table for visitors to enjoy. Patty and I also write poetry. Some of Patty's were published in a small booklet called "*Embers of Life*", for which her husband, Ray Nieland, did the artwork.

To hold down arguments about whose job was whose, my father always made a work chart for us girls. Beside each chore were small squares representing each day of the month. As we did our chores, we would get a star placed in the square. We would get a gold star if we did our work on our own and a silver star if we were told to do it and did it

willingly. If we didn't do it at all, the square would be blacked out. We were paid for each star according to the color. We were docked for the blacked out areas. Also there was a place on the chart for Mother to mark if we were caught arguing with each other or saying a bad word.

Sometimes we ended up owing Dad at the end of the month, which would be taken off of our next month's "pay". On the top of the work chart there was a seal with a short ribbon that ran through it. Dad wrote special things under the seal as a reward ... an outing of our choice, a trip to San Francisco, or something else we had our hearts set on that was special. In the summer, it could be a week's trip with him wherever he happened to be going on business that week. Sometimes there would be a dollar bill. Whichever one of us girls had the most gold stars got to pull the ribbon to see what was under the seal and won whatever prize was written there.

One evening when my father was in Modesto, I asked Mother if I could sleep with her. She said it would be fine and that she would be up in a little while. It was a cold winter night and I had on my long flannel nightgown. When I went to bed, I laid on Mother's side of the bed so I could warm it up for her. By the time she got there, her side of the bed was nice and toasty. After she got in bed, I scooted under the covers and lay across the foot of the bed. "*Neva! What on earth are you doing sweetheart?*" she said as I pulled up my gown, placed her cold feet on my warm chest, and covered them with my gown. "*I want to warm up your feet, Mama, so they won't be so cold and hurt so much.*" She tried to coax me out, but I wouldn't budge. After that, every now and then I would scoot under the covers to the bottom of the bed and warm my little mother's feet for her. Sometimes I would stay in bed with her for the night and other times, after her feet were warm enough for my satisfaction, I would then go to my own bed.

Patty and I used to go to San Francisco on the ferryboat with Daddy. Sometimes the rest of the family would come with us. I thought it was so neat to be able to drive out that long pier at the Berkeley Marina onto a boat and have it carry our car across the bay to San Francisco. I can still remember the rumbling sound of the tires rolling over the wooden floor of the ferry on the deck where the autos parked. We would then get out of the car, go up to the next deck, and watch as San Francisco came closer to us. I was always thrilled when I knew we were going to take the ferry.

Construction started on the Oakland/San Francisco Bay Bridge in 1933. Dad often took us to Albany Hill where we would have a picnic and watch men working on the bridge. It was too far away to see the actual men, but we could see the machinery as it moved things into place. It was fun and exciting to see the bridge take shape. It opened in 1936 but after it opened we could no longer take the ferry. I hated not being able to ride it anymore. It was much more fun than driving across the bridge.

# Chapter 14

*W*E were a close, loving family with a lot of togetherness. Because my father was gone a lot, he tried very hard to spend quality time with us when he was home. In the evenings the family would gather around



Mary, Dad, Neva, Mom, Jerry & Patty

and Dad would read to us: *The Human Comedy*, *Green Mansions*, *Green Dolphin Street*, *The Egg and I*, *Kazan*, *The Son of Kazan*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Wuthering Heights*, to name just a few. Since he was only home weekends, it left long gaps in the stories, leaving us wondering about the next chapters for

a long period of time. He also read a lot of poetry to us, helping us acquire a love for poetry. He had a flair for reading, changing his voice for the different characters and sounding dramatic when needed, bringing the story or poem to life and giving it more meaning for us. Some of the poems he read to us were: *Little Orphan Annie*, *Little Boy Blue*, *Cruise of the Spun Glass Ship*, *Annie & Willie's Prayer*, *Dot Leedle Boy of Mine*, *The Bear Story*, *Jack the Giant Killer*, and many others.

Dad enjoyed taking the family on drives up into the hills. My favorite drive was a ride above Berkeley. In the evening on the way home from these little trips, he had a favorite place where he would park for awhile. He always timed it so we could see the sun setting across the bay behind the Golden Gate Bridge. The stars would come out a few at a time, forming a huge chandelier sparkling overhead. The panoramic scene that was

spread out before us was beautiful, even to a youngster like me. Below us we could see Oakland, Berkeley, El Cerrito, and Richmond, with San Francisco across the bay.

Slowly the lights in all the homes and along the streets would start coming on, twinkling like the stars. The Golden Gate and Oakland/San Francisco Bridge lights always made me think of Christmas lights hanging high in the sky. Dad would turn on the radio and we would sit listening to *Major Bowes Amateur Hour*, *Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy*, *Jack Benny*, *One Man's Family*, and other shows that might be on at the time we were there. I always hated to leave that spot to go home. How I would love to re-visit it some lazy summer evening with a cassette of old radio shows to listen to, remembering the times the family parked there.

We spent many evenings listening to Mother play the piano. She was quite an accomplished pianist, even with her arthritis. I loved watching her hands as she moved them over the keys. When I concentrate, I can still hear her playing *Moonlight Sonata* or *Clair De Lune* and see the slight movement of her body. Or *The Hall of the Mountain King*, with her fingers flying over the keys. At times Mother would play while we sang, sometimes all together and sometimes alone. Jerry took singing lessons and had a beautiful voice. I loved listening to him. His songs that stand out to me are *Dust*, *The Old Lamp Lighter*, *Little Old Lady*, *High on a Windy Hill* and *Walking by the River*. When Uncle Little was living with us, he would always join in. He also had a beautiful voice, in fact he and Jerry took singing lessons from the same teacher. I loved to sing and Uncle Little was making plans to take me to his teacher but before we could go through with it we were making plans to move.

Washing dishes was one thing I hated to do. One particular evening I decided to add some life to my task by imitating W. C. Fields. He had a routine he did on the radio of pulling a thing out of his pocket and naming what it was. I proceeded to copy him - out loud but to myself. As I stood there washing dishes, I started mumbling, trying to imitate his voice, "A key . . . wonder what that's for. A piece of chewing gum, thought that was all gone. A marble, hum, must have been some kids. A dime, I can make a couple of phone calls with that. What's this? Well what do ya know, a check for a short beer."

I heard a noise coming from the dining room area. I looked over at the open doorway and there were Dad, Mom, Jerry, Mary and Patty, all sitting on chairs they had lined up, watching and listening to me do my act. When I looked over at them, they started clapping and whistling. I

said “Hey, You guys!” Jerry said “*You do a pretty good W. C. Fields there, kiddo.*” What a family! The dishes were then finished without the benefit of further entertainment for them.

I don’t remember when Patty and I started going to a little neighborhood church, but I do know we went for quite awhile. The minister was Reverend Makee. We loved this little church, which was located near Albany High School. When we had singing, he would ask if anyone had a special hymn they would like the congregation to sing. It got so that whenever he saw my hand raised, he wouldn’t even ask me what I would like them to sing. He would just say, “*Yes Neva, we will sing ‘In the Garden.’*”

Valentines Day was a special day in our household. My parents always made holidays even more special for us kids. Dad would get an old hat box and cut a slit in the lid. He then decorated it with red and white crepe paper and put Valentine decorations on it. It was then set on our buffet. We girls would spend weeks before *the big day* making valentines and putting them in the box with the names of family members on them. We went to the five and dime store to get valentines for our friends and schoolmates. It was a lot more fun shopping for them in those days. Kids didn’t buy them in boxes, taking whatever they got. Instead, we would pick out just the right one for each child. It took a lot of time as we read each one to see if it fit anyone.

The next day we would take the cards to each room at school, dropping them in a box placed on a table. Then, on Valentine’s Day, the teacher would read the name on each card in order to pass them out. It was quite time consuming. (The only thing I like about the way it is done now is that all the children in the class receive an equal number of Valentines. That way no one is left out or receives just a few, while others get a fistful.) On Valentine’s Day while we were at school, Mother would move our box to the center of the dining room table. In the evening after dinner, Dad or Mom handed out our Valentines to the proper person as they read the name. It was an exciting time for me. It was more fun because the cards were home made and not something bought at the store. We were anxious to see how creative each one of us had been.

Before one Valentine’s Day, I was at the Lojo’s. Dolores Lojo had given me a hat pin that had a pretty bead on the end of it. As I was leaving, mom Lojo was coming up the stairs. I thought that if she saw the pin, she wouldn’t want me to keep it, so I hid it in my mouth. While going down the stairs she asked me something. When I started to answer her, down went the pin. I grabbed my throat and immediately ran down the

stairs for home, leaving poor mom Lojo wondering what on earth was going on.

I told my parents what I had done and they took me right to the doctor. He took x-rays to see where the pin had lodged. He then took my folks aside to give them instructions, talking in low tones so I couldn't hear. On the way home Mother said "*Neva, it was wrong of you to let Dolores give you that pin without first asking Mrs. Lojo if it was alright for you to keep it. You must have known this or you wouldn't have put it in your mouth to keep her from seeing it. When we get home you will go to Mrs. Lojo and tell her why you ran down the stairs in such a hurry and apologize to her.*"

Upon arriving home my parents gave me instructions that I was not to flush the toilet, and that I was to let them know each time I used it. I couldn't understand this at all but I followed their instructions. Starting that evening, we began having mashed potatoes every night for dinner. I never thought anything of it. One night as we were sitting at the dinner table, I took up a fork full of potatoes and noticed something sticking out of them. I said, "*There's something in my potatoes!*" I started picking with my fork through the rest of the potatoes on my plate and this *something* was all through them.

Mom and Dad looked at each other, not saying a word. "*What's in my potatoes?*" I demanded. They then had to explain to me that the doctor had told them to tear up cotton and put it in my mashed potatoes to help coat the pin and give me protection as it worked its way through me. "*What do you mean, work it's way through me?*" which took another explanation. Then I understood exactly why I wasn't to flush the toilet after using it and why I had to let my parents know I had used it. Believe it or not, Dad put that same pin in my Valentine Card. I said, "*This isn't the pin I swallowed! The one I swallowed was pretty. This one is all rusty and ugly!*" I often felt that God punished me for hiding the pin from mom Lojo and not asking her if I could have it. Even though Dolores gave it to me, I felt it was like stealing because mom Lojo didn't know about it.

I don't know how old Mary was at the time, but one Mother's Day she sheepishly gave Mother a card she had just made for her. Mother read it and burst into laughter. It read:

Butterflies hover  
Over my mother  
Tell her that  
I dearly love her.  
P.S. Tell her I broke her green bowl!

The Fourth of July was always a big day and night for us. Dad would take us to Lake Merritt in Oakland where we would spread out a couple of blankets and have something to eat. As Patty and I anxiously waited for it to get dark enough for the fireworks to start, we would play and run around the area on the lawn. The wait was always well worth it. The fire works were beautiful as they shot out over the lake, reflecting in the water. What a sight that was! Now they do the fireworks at Jack London Square, so families are no longer able to enjoy the evening in the park before the fireworks display.

Our Thanksgiving was much like everyone else's: nothing remarkable, but there was always lots to eat with many family members there. Sometimes friends also joined us. Other times we spent Thanksgiving with the Overstalls or the Zumwalts.

Christmas! Christmas was a very special time of year for us. During the Christmas season, Dad would take us to our favorite lookout above Berkeley where we could look down the hill to see the Christmas trees all lit up in the windows of the houses below. It was breathtaking. He also took us to Oakland to see the mechanical Christmas scenes in the store windows. I loved watching them (this is another thing I wonder if they still have) and naturally we would go see Santa to tell him what we wanted for Christmas. Santa always had a big fireplace with a chimney next to his chair. Santa would call up the chimney telling the elf if he had a boy or girl on his lap, give the age, and say that we had been good. Then someone would drop a small present down the chimney for us.

Mother liked to tell the story of a time Jerry was small and she had taken him to see Santa, who asked Jerry if he had been a good boy. Jerry thought about it for a minute, knowing Santa was supposed to know the answer to this question. He then looked Santa square in the face and said frankly, "*Not all the time.*" Santa called up the chimney "*Send down two presents. We have an honest boy here.*"

Through the years Dad loved to tell the story of how he was looking for the new slippers he had gotten for Christmas the day before. He was sure he had left them in their box by the tree. Not being able to find them, he called his family to the front room and started questioning them. After a bit Mary said, "*You know something, Daddy? I was just sitting here and (she got up acting out what she was talking about) I saw those slippers get up out of their box, they walked across the floor, up the fireplace, and walked right down into the fire.*" In other words, Mary was telling our father she had thrown his new slippers into the fireplace and burned

them up. Why? Who knows! For no reason at all, I guess. Dad didn't get mad at her because she was just a little thing at the time but he did give her a talking to. He would laughingly tell the story.

Several weeks before the big day, Mother would spend a lot of time in the kitchen making candy to give as gifts for our relatives and friends. She made chocolate fudge, divinity, panocha and my very favorite, peanut butter fudge (panocha fudge is made with light brown sugar). Jerry did all the beating for her and we girls shelled the nuts and chopped them. Mom then took charge of the cooking, dropping a little bit of the candy into a cup of cold water to see if it would form a tiny ball. When it did, it meant the candy was ready to pour on the buttered tin candy sheets, where it would harden.

Some years on Christmas Eve we had dinner at the Zumwalts. But the ones that stand out to me are the ones we spent at home. Mother had a traditional meal she always served on Christmas Eve: Spanish spaghetti and mashed potato salad. We would go to Riscons for a while after dinner. They would give us our gifts and we would give Earl Jr. his. Then came my favorite time of the evening. That was in our own home. Before going to bed, we would gather around the piano while Mom played Christmas carols and we would sing. After the singing, I sat on the floor by Dad watching him as he would roll up newspapers into a cone shape, pin them together with straight pins, and then fill them with popcorn he had popped in the fireplace. We would then sit in front of the crackling fire enjoying Dad's treat as he read us a Christmas story.

When bedtime came, Patty and I could hardly sleep. We would lie there whispering to each other until we finally drifted off. In the morning, we could hear Dad get up and come down the stairs. We would listen as he crinkled up newspaper for the fireplace and put logs on them. Patty and I would be lying in bed anxiously waiting. We could hardly contain ourselves waiting for Dad's call, whispering to one another, starting the day as we had ended it the night before. When the front room got warm enough, Dad would then get Mother downstairs to get her settled in her chair with a cup of coffee before calling us in. We would all be in our robes as we went to the front room to go through our stockings and open our gifts. Our stockings from Santa were usually stuffed with an orange, nuts, hard Christmas candy, candy canes, crayons, jacks, etc. Sometimes a comic book would be rolled up and placed inside.

My family had a tough time financially for many of our younger years so we didn't get many material things for Christmas, but we never seemed

to notice. We didn't know any better and the warmth of our family love was enough to sustain us. I was as excited over my little dab of things as I would have been if they were expensive gifts. As long as I got a coloring book, paints, crayons, and paper dolls, I was happy. A book was often our main gift. My parents encouraged reading from the moment we learned how and always made sure we had books. To this day, I look upon a book as a friend that is to be treated with tender, loving care. As soon as we were through opening our gifts, I would run to the Lojo's house, taking my coloring book and paints with me. There Liz and I would spend a good part of the morning sitting at a long narrow table against their front room wall, painting or coloring in our coloring books.

As I said, it amazed me what Mother could do in the kitchen regardless of her illness. Besides what I have already mentioned, some of the things she was particularly good at cooking were round steak, pot roast, stew (she made gravy out of the broth), meat loaf, bean loaf and a mean pot of baked beans. Daddy's specialty was the mashed potato salad.

# Chapter 15

SOMETIMES Mary would dig a hole in the ground next to our house, clear the grass away from around it, gather some kindling and make a small fire. When the coals were hot enough, she buried potatoes in them to cook. Naturally, the skin of the potatoes got very black. When the potatoes were ready, Mary raked them out of the coals and let them cool enough to handle. Then we peeled off their skins with our fingers and sprinkled them with salt. No potato ever tasted better, grit and all.

Another thing we loved to do was to put gobs of butter all over the top of Shredded Wheat Biscuits and heat them in the oven until the butter melted through and the biscuits were slightly toasted. Today, whenever I eat Triscuit crackers, these memories return because they taste so similar.



*Neva and Patty in a quiet moment*

Patty and I were very close, but we did have our share of fights. One of those times stands out to me in particular, even though I can't remember what brought it on. I was mad at Patty about something and chasing her around the house trying to hit her. Mother was getting dinner on the table and telling us to settle down. She had just put a big pot of baked beans on the table (which, of course, had taken hours to cook). I was chasing Patty around the table and since I couldn't reach her with my arm, I thought I would give my foot a try. I kicked at her, and my shoe flew off

and landed right in the middle of the baked beans. Needless to say I was in deep trouble. I can't remember what Mother did about the beans, but times were hard in those days. I imagine she must have tried to spoon out the beans where the shoe landed so we could eat the rest. (I still have the crock-pot Mom used for cooking beans.)

About 1938, Patty and I were roller-skating when Mother decided she wanted to try out our skates. Naturally we three girls tried to talk her out of it, but she insisted she was going to do it. As she was putting on the skates, Mary said, *"Let's get our pillows. Then if Mother starts to fall we can throw them under her."* We frantically ran into the house, grabbed the pillows from our beds, and rushed back outside, chasing after Mother (who was headed for Fairmont by this time). Fairmont has a decent slope to it and as she was skating down, we were running along with one on each side of her and one in back, pillows in hand ready to throw under her if she started to fall. She didn't skate very far and luckily she didn't fall. The four of us must have made quite a sight. Patty and I often skated down the middle of this wide street. To go to the five and dime store, we skated along Pomona to Fairmont, down Fairmont to San Pablo, and then to the store. Luckily traffic was light in those days. When I was in El Cerrito in 2003, it bothered me to even walk across Fairmont Avenue.

In 1939, the Worlds Fair opened on February 17th at Treasure Island. Treasure Island was at the mid-point of the Bay Bridge, between San Francisco and Oakland, and the Fair was called "The Golden Gate Exposition". As with the Bay Bridge, we had watched it being constructed from Albany Hill with our picnic lunch and we excitedly waited for the opening. The first time we went the whole family went together. What a sight it was! Especially at nighttime, with all the buildings lit up in beautiful colors and searchlights of different colors shining back and forth in the sky. The thing that stands out to me the most when I was there with my parents was the Billy Roads Aquacade. It was breathtaking! Even a child my age could appreciate the beauty of it.

I had seen Esther Williams do this type of swimming many times in the movies and there she was, swinging on a trapeze, diving into the water and swimming. I couldn't believe I was seeing her in person. And then wonder of wonders, I heard a Tarzan yell. Those ten year-old-eyes and ears were watching and listening as Tarzan, Johnny Weissmuller, in person, swung through the air and yell as he dove into the water. I dearly loved Tarzan movies and I was thrilled to actually be sitting there, seeing

him in person. This outing and our outing to see the movie Walt Disney's *Snow White* are the two most memorable family outings that I remember.

As far as Patty and I can remember, our parents only went to the Worlds Fair with us that once. The rest of the time we went alone (This is something that parents wouldn't dare let their children aged ten and thirteen do nowadays, especially in the San Francisco area). I don't remember how often we went, but it was quite a few times. We caught the bus on the corner of Pomona and Fairmont, rode the bus up Colusa to Solano Avenue, and then, near the Oaks Theater, caught the Red Train that went to the fairgrounds. We walked all over the place, going into every building we could, seeing everything we could see. Some of the buildings we weren't able to go into because they were for adults only.

They even had televisions, all lined up in a building. There was a camera outside and a man was interviewing people, asking them what they thought of the fair. Patty told me to go out and see if I could get where I could wave at her. When I did, the man saw me and asked me how I liked the fair and if I was having fun. So I guess you could say I was one of the first people to be on TV. I went back into the building and Patty went out to wave at me, but the man wasn't there. Our days at the fair were a thrilling time for us, better than all the carnivals put together in a lifetime. What's funny is that of all the things I must have seen and done there, one of the few things that stands out in my memory is seeing a man walking around in a Planter's Peanut costume. What a thing to remember! We were allowed to stay late enough to see the lights come on. Then we had to leave right away to come home.

Entering one door we found ourselves in a theater with a stage show in progress. There was a wall behind the last row that was only waist high to an adult and we stood there watching the show. The stage had a beautiful set with pretty colored lights and there was a beautiful lady in a fake tree. We couldn't believe what our young eyes were viewing up on that stage, for...the beautiful lady was completely naked. We knew we should leave right away, but we were not able to tear ourselves away from the wonder of what she was doing with her body. We stood there fascinated as the music played and she started winding her body around the tree, working her way down it head first like a snake would.

As it turned out though, it was the very end of the show. We then hustled ourselves out the door we came in before anyone saw us. When we exited the building there was a policeman by the door who wasn't there when we went in. He must have left his post for a minute. I don't

know what he thought when he saw us, but he didn't say a word. We noticed a long line toward the front of the building and realized it was something you had to pay in order to see. What show had we wandered into? Sally Rand's show! I excitedly told Mother and Dad about the beautiful lady who came down a tree like a snake. And ended with, "And guess what! *She didn't have any clothes on.*" Mother said, "What?" I said, "Only between her legs!"

I loved going to Lake Temescal in Oakland, next to the junction of today's Highways 24 and 13. It opened to the public in 1936. Very close to the lake, there was a tunnel where one highway went under another one. The beach was on one side of the tunnel; a person could sit in the sand on the beach and lean their back against the wall of the tunnel. It has been many years since I went there, but for some reason leaning against that wall stands out in my mind. It seems to me that it fascinated me to be on the beach with that tunnel. I would go there with Clair Sullivan, one of Jerry's girlfriends.

In 1939 when Jerry was nineteen he went to see the movie, *Gulliver's Travels*. When he came home that night, he could hardly stop talking about that movie. I was surprised that my big brother could love a cartoon so much. I don't remember when I saw it, but it also became one of my favorites. (Years later, in the 80's, I came across the video of *Gulliver's Travels*. I got one for Jerry and one for me. When I went to a family reunion, I handed him the video. He looked at the cover and said, "I'll be damned! Where the hell did you find this?")

In March of 1939, Daddy was still commuting back and forth to his IRS office in Modesto and only able to be home on weekends. I can't remember how long he worked there, but it seemed forever to me. I missed him terribly. I was thrilled when I got to go spend a few days with him. It was one of my prizes from my work chart. During his working hours I would sit at a table near his desk and color in a coloring book. I loved being with my father, watching the other workers coming up and asking him questions.

As young as I was, I knew my father was an important man in his job. Before I went there, while Mother was helping me pack, she said, "Now Neva honey, I don't want you to keep asking your father for nickels and quarters," and she gave me some change to put in my little purse. The first time Dad took me to lunch, after we finished eating I proceeded to dump out my change all over the table to pay for my own lunch, which he assured me I didn't need to do. When we went to leave, I noticed the

money on the table Dad had left for a tip. I picked it up and said, “*Hey, Daddy! You forgot this!*” Dad laughingly told the story to Mother when he brought me home.

One of the few times our family went out to a fancy restaurant I remember having a hard time deciding what I wanted for dessert. After a bit I said, “*Oh, I guess I’ll have assorted pie*”. Every one started laughing, including the waitress; they then explained to me what *assorted pie* was.

There were so many things Patty and I enjoyed doing together. One of our favorite fun things was to play with paper dolls. In those days, the funnies section of the Sunday newspaper had part of a page with paper dolls. We anxiously waited each week for Sunday to arrive so we could see what they looked like. It was always the first thing we looked for. There would be quite a few outfits and some of the dresses were beautiful. At times we would trace around the body of the dolls and make our own clothes for them. These were stored with many of our other favorite things in the basement of our home. I feel the newspapers made a mistake when they stopped including paper dolls with the funnies. It was such a great thing for little girls to look forward to on Sundays.

# Chapter 16

*J*UST two houses north of our home at 375 Pomona lived my good friends the Lojos. I was four in 1932 when we moved in. The Lojos had two daughters: Elizabeth (later called Liz), age three; and Dolores (called Norie because her sister couldn't say Dolores), age two. Elizabeth and I were buddies right away and I soon became close to the whole family. Later two more children came along, first Andrew (Sonny) and then Rosemary (Rose).

Through the years whenever I was visiting and some other visitors happened to be there, mom Lojo loved to tell them how when Liz and I were very young, three and four respectively, she would hear Liz calling out the window, "*Girl friend, girl friend! Come play with me.*" Then Liz would come in to her and say, "*Mother, girl friend won't play with me.*" It wasn't that I didn't want to play with her, but a good deal of the time I had places to go and things to do. I had places that needed exploring or had already been explored and needed to be revisited. I was very independent and adventurous, even at that young age. Usually I was with Patty, but many times she would be doing her own thing and I would explore all by myself.



Liz was not allowed to wander away from home the way I was, her mother being more capable of keeping an eye on her. But Liz and I still spent many hours together, usually at her house; more so as we became older. She had asthma at a very young age and for a time they thought she had tuber-

*Liz and Neva, ages 3 and 4*

culosis. She had to spend many months at a place called Sunshine Camp. I would go with the Lojos when they went to visit her, but Dolores and I couldn't go inside. We could only talk to her through the window. Dolores and I would play outside until her folks were through with their visit. Liz was my mother's first piano student. I can still see them sitting at Mother's piano together.

Dolores loved to watch my father work in his garden and he loved having her there. She had a winning smile that lit up her whole face and a personality that captured everybody. Between our house and the next door neighbor's house, Dad had a long Iris bed that went from the front sidewalk all the way back to the rear of the house. He was working in his bed of irises one day and Dolores was with him. He asked her, "*Dolores, what nationality are you?*" She said, "*I'm half Irish. I'm half Spanish. And I'm half Catholic.*" Then she said, "*You know Mr. Calvert, my father and my mother sure do like you.*" "*They do? How do you know this, Dolores?*" "*Because last night when I was in bed I heard my father tell my mother, 'I sure do like those Calverts. They mind their own damn business.'*" These were two of Dad's favorite stories and he told them often.

Sonny was a cute little boy. He was my little pal. One thing that stands out "big time" to me about Sonny is that when he was just a little kid, maybe around six or seven, he had some kind of problem with one of his ears. Mom Lojo had to squirt something in his ear to clean it out and all this goop would drain out of it. It hurt him quite a bit, but he was a brave little guy. He had a narrow bed against the dining room wall and there were pictures of baseball players all over the wall at the side of his bed.

Rosemary was a darling little baby and was still a baby when my family left El Cerrito. Even so, she always remembered me whenever I went back for a visit, gave me lots of hugs and kisses, and followed me around. I was always like a member of their household. (During the summer of 2003, she invited me to her home for a visit. It was while I was there that I decided to write this story and completed the first draft of it while she was at work).

I was at the Lojo's house as much as my own. They were my second family. Dad Lojo often said I looked more like one of his kids than they did. They took after the Irish side, with light hair and light skin, where I was almost as dark as an Indian with dark hair. He called me Blackie Lojo. They took me almost every place they went that would be fun for me. Dad Lojo worked for Standard Oil Company and they often took me

to Standard Oil's Rod and Gun Club to spend the day swimming. It was for family members only and Dad Lojo would sneak me in under a blanket on the floor of the car. I also went on some camping trips with them. One place where we went camping was Marsh Creek. I loved every minute of my time spent with them. When it comes to outings, I did this with them more often than with my family because of Mother's illness and Dad's out-of-town work.

I think the reasons they took me everywhere with them was because my father was gone from home so much, my mother was a semi-invalid, and they wanted me to be able to do these things. But beyond that, also because they loved me as they would have loved an adopted daughter.

I often spent the night with Liz and Norie. Their bedroom door opened out into the kitchen. Mom Lojo cleaned her kitchen



*Elizabeth, RoseMary, Dolores & Sonny Lojo*

in the evenings after everyone was in bed and there was no more traipsing in and out of the house. Once we girls were in the bedroom, she would start filling a bucket in order to mop the floor. I could hear her movements as she went about her task. This was something she did every evening since Dad Lojo had goats, chickens and rabbits in their backyard and it was natural that *things* would get tracked in the house. We girls laid there talking and giggling, telling each other stories. The bathroom was between Liz and Norie's bedroom and Mom and Dad Lojo's bedroom. There was a door entering each. We talked in low tones as Dad Lojo went to bed early since his long work hours meant he needed to get a good night's sleep. I would hear Mom Lojo pattering around in the kitchen for quite awhile before she herself retired.

In a letter Dad Lojo had written to me in 1961 he said, *“Pa and Mom still think of their adopted girl often and we are always glad to hear from you and see you when you come this way. We thank God that you remember us, even if I did chase you when you were a kid. We all still remember you as a big-hearted girl when Elizabeth was sick and you used to keep us company going to see her. Neva, those are things a person does not forget. The same as your folks who were some of the best neighbors we have had.”* In 1963, he wrote, *“Dad and Mom look on you as another daughter who has shown us her love and friendship which we appreciate.”*

Two of Elizabeth’s cousins, Johnny and Pete, often came to visit the Lojo family. Johnny was around my age and Pete was about Patty’s age. Patty and I use to peek out the curtains at Pete when he was in front of our house. We thought he was so good-looking. I don’t remember Johnny so much from those days, but he turned out to be even better looking than Pete.

I had two other dear friends in El Cerrito that I have never forgotten and have thought about often through the years. They are Amy Hill and Sharon Marks. They lived on Ramona, the next street east from Pomona. I walked through the field across from us to reach their homes. They lived next door to each other and their back doors faced our house. We often got together to play jacks or mademoiselle and to read funny books.

Mademoiselle was a game played with a tennis ball by throwing it against a wall. It could be played in the house on rainy days. Just as with jacks, where there were many different ways of picking up the jacks, mademoiselle had many ways to throw the ball - right handed, left handed, under a leg, etc. It was a popular game. There were always many girls lined up along the walls at school throwing a ball against the wall, while others played jacks, hop scotch, jump rope, or played with the paddle ball. Liz Lojo didn’t go to Harding Grammar School. She went to a Catholic school, so Amy and Sharon were my best friends at elementary school. I have often wondered where they are now and what their lives turned out to be like. It is a shame that we lost touch with each other after my family moved out of El Cerrito.

# Chapter 17

Of course during the Depression years there was little residential tract development in El Cerrito. In 1939 the only new subdivision was what they called the Fairmont Tract. It was on the north side of Fairmont Avenue, between Colusa and Ashbury Avenues. This was part of the area across Fairmont Avenue from our house and right on top of the old polo field.

On Monday, February 26, 1940, the creek across the street from us flooded. Our basement was full of water. Patty and I were devastated. That was our playroom and all our scrapbooks, comic books, paper dolls, etc. were in it. Mother had some things stored there too and our school pictures were among them. Needless to say, everything was ruined. We still haven't gotten over the loss of our treasures that we would have carried through the years and handed down to our children, especially our school pictures. We have talked about this loss from time to time. I can't imagine how traumatic it is for people who lose their home and everything in it.

Our neighbors next door, between our house and the Lojo's, were the Dillons. The flood caused their front yard to cave in. Their house was built over the enclosed culvert for the creek and when the culvert caved in, their porch and front yard went with it. Part of the living room was just hanging, half the furniture gone. The mother Christine, her little daughter Patty, their new baby, and Christine's sister spent four days with us because it was too dangerous for them to stay in their house. Christine's husband Matt stayed in their house to look after things. They soon found a rental on Pomona on the far side of Albany High School. When it was safe enough to go back into their house, Patty helped Chris-

tine pack while Mary and I took care of little Patty and the baby. Dad and Jerry helped Matt move into the rental.

The Lojo's back yard also caved in during the flood. There was a huge hole and some of their chicken coops were washed away. In fact, they lost most of the chickens they raised. They also had rabbits, but I think their cages survived the cave-in. It was big news in all the local newspapers. I would love to have those clippings.



*The damage at the Lojo's*

The “only” damage our house sustained was the flooded basement. Dad got a hand pump for our basement to get rid of the water. Every day when I got home from school, I would start pumping some of the water out. We all took turns at it. I can't remember how long it took, but it must have been a very long time. Our basement was the full size of the house except the garage and the water was above my knees. Daddy and Jerry had a lot of mud to clean out of the basement after the water was gone and Dad had to replace the washing machine.

Dad Lojo's chickens and rabbits were well known around the neighborhood. When I was in El Cerrito in 2003, I was talking to Phil Playle, who has the barbershop on Fairmont Avenue near Sunset View Cemetery. He was looking at my binder showing pictures of El Cerrito as it was many years ago. He was thrilled with them. He had never seen the hills without a house on them. Phil asked, “*Did you know The Rabbit Man?*” I said, “*Do you mean Mr. Lojo?*” I told him Mr. Lojo was like a second father to me and turned in my binder to the pictures I had of Dad Lojo. Phil said, “*Yah! That's him alright.*” I got a kick out of him calling Dad Lojo “The Rabbit Man”. So did Rose when I told her. One of the Lojo's neighbors who has lived in the house next door for some years now said his children also called Dad Lojo The Rabbit Man when they were small children.

Mary and Patty attended Christian Endeavor (C.E.), a Christian youth group, located at Colusa Circle. One of the other girls in the group was named Patricia Donnelly. She and Mary were on the C.E. basketball team and they were selling donuts to raise money for the team. One day Mary and Patricia came to our house and were coming up the front stairs just as the front door flew open. I came tearing down the steps with Jerry

in hot pursuit of me. I had done something that upset him and he was trying to catch me to give my behind a swat. Patricia's first impression of my handsome brother was not a good one. She was horrified and immediately disliked him. Patricia was an only child and therefore she had never encountered sibling spats. She lived in El Cerrito and attended Albany High School. She worked at the MacFarland's Candy Store in Berkeley.

Patricia had a friend, Hal Falk, who was also a friend of Jerry's. Hal approached her one day, saying that Jerry Calvert would like to date her and asked if she would like to go out on a double date. She was puzzled by this because she and Jerry hadn't said two words to each other and because she was much younger than he was. While she was 16, Jerry was 21. She decided to go out with him anyway. They went horse back-riding. She then realized Jerry wasn't such a bad guy after all, was a lot of fun, and she could tell he thought the world of his kid sister.

One day when she came out of school, she noticed Jerry parked in his beautiful new turquoise convertible in front of the school. One of the girls she knew was draped all over his car, which bothered her. When she got near, Jerry got out and opened the door for her, helping her into the car. She was thrilled. Their second date was riding around in his pride and joy.

On January 14, 1941, Jerry started working at Bethlehem Steel. That December World War II started and Jerry quit work to join the paratroopers. When Jerry went into the service, he and Patricia began corresponding with each other often. They soon fell in love and were married March 16, 1945 during one of Jerry's furloughs. In spite of my brother's death in 1997, Patricia continues to actively enjoy life. She has gone hang gliding, rafting, and even parachuted from a plane during her twilight years. She is still an attractive woman and I can't help but smile when I say "twilight years" in connection with her. I don't think she has experienced them yet ... only by numbers.

When El Cerrito finally got its own high school in September of 1940, Patty was beginning her first year of high school and was one of the first to go to school there. At this time Patty had a boyfriend named Hugh Kiser. I felt very close to Hugh, he always treated me like a kid sister. He would invite me along now and then when he and Patty went to the movies. Even though Patty and I were close, it didn't always please her to have her younger sister hanging around on her dates. I only remember Hugh getting mad at me one time. It was after we had moved

from El Cerrito and Patty and I had returned for a visit. I was thirteen or fourteen at the time. Hugh lived near the top of Albany Hill. I had gone to the Albany Theater to see a movie. They had walked me there and Hugh informed me I was not to leave until they came to pick me up. Near the end of the movie, a man sitting next to me had gotten out of line with me. I was worried that if I changed my seat he would follow. I was very frightened.

Since the movie was almost over, I decided to leave the theater instead of going to another seat and watching the rest of the movie. I knew Patty and Hugh would be coming after me soon, so I decided to leave the theater instead of waiting for them to come back for me. I was afraid that if I waited, the man would come out and find me there alone and I guess I was too stupid to go to the manager. As I hurried toward Hugh's place, I saw him and my sister coming down the hill to meet me. When they saw me running and heard me crying, they ran as fast as they could toward me. I sobbed in Hugh's arms telling him what had happened. Even while he was consoling me, he really got after me for leaving the theater.

On June 2, 1941, Patty, Hugh, and I, went to Lake Anza to swim. It was in Wildcat Canyon above Berkeley. We went on Hugh's bike and it was five or six miles mostly up hill. I rode on the tandem and Patty rode on the handlebars. On our way back, we were traveling down Vassar Avenue. It was steep and had a divider that ran between the lanes. As we were heading down hill, a car started up the wrong side of the divider. Hugh slammed on his brakes and the chain broke. He yelled, "I have to turn into the curb. Be ready!"



*Patty with Hugh Kiser*

I may have been knocked out for only a few seconds, if at all. The first thing I remember seeing was Patty lying unconscious, her head and shoulders on the sidewalk and her lower half on the embankment. Hugh was rolling down the hill with blood all over his face. The bike was only a few inches from my head, bent and twisted. A man was running across

the street from his home. I got scared and started screaming. His wife had called an ambulance. After the ambulance arrived and determined that I was okay, the man took me to his home and talked to his wife a few minutes. We didn't have a phone, so they called Mr. D. at the store and asked him to tell my folks what had happened, that Patty and Hugh were on their way to the Berkeley Hospital, and that I would be following soon.

The police came and took me to the Berkeley Hospital in a police car. As we walked through the entrance to the emergency room, I saw Patty, still unconscious, sitting on a table against a wall. The doctor was bandaging her head while a nurse held her up. I was scared and wanted to stay with my sister, but the officer took me to a room and asked me all kinds of questions. Then a nurse took me in where Patty was. She was in bed with her head all bandaged up, still unconscious. I sat in a chair across from the foot of her bed. I was so worried about my sister I could hardly take my eyes off her. There were some folding doors at one end of the room that were open. My attention was drawn there and Hugh was lying on a table. They were stitching his head. Even though he was unconscious, he would moan now and then and put his hand up to his head. The nurse would slap it down and yell at him, telling him to keep his hand down. It seemed like forever before I heard Mom and Dad's voices outside our room.

I started to get up, but a nurse pushed me down saying, "*You stay put!*" Even at that age I didn't let people push me around. I said, "*That's my mother and father!*", getting back up, pushing past her, and running out of the room crying into their arms. They still didn't know what had happened or if any of us had been killed. Everything came spilling out of me: the accident; how Patty was sitting on the table unconscious; and Hugh's hand being slapped. They immediately got Patty released and took both of us home. Hugh's father picked him up the next day.

When my parents tried to change Patty's bandage the next day, they found that the doctor hadn't even pushed her hair back out of the way. There was hair under a big scab that had formed on her forehead. They had to cut her hair loose from around the scab. Patty was unconscious a week and Hugh was unconscious for two weeks. Patty was in my parents bed part of the time and I had been helping take care of her, keeping a cold compress on her face and forehead. She came to when I was in the process of doing this and said, "*Hand me the rag. . . bag.*" She smiled at her joke and I knew my big sister was going to be all right. Somehow

she must have known what I had been doing as she came in and out of consciousness. She missed the last month of her school year, but her close friends came to see her often.

In 1989, Hugh had recently lost his wife and stopped to visit with me while going through Fresno. We were talking about the accident and he informed me that he never did hear what really happened. I got the account I had written soon after the incident and read it to him. Hugh said he didn't remember any of it, not the car, or anything else.

Patty was still recuperating from the accident when we found out that Dad would be transferred. He was to be Chief Deputy of the Internal Revenue Service in Merced, California. We moved to Merced on June 21, 1941, soon after my birthday, which was the 16<sup>th</sup>. I had just gotten into my teens. We left El Cerrito reluctantly, shedding many tears for the friends we were leaving behind. We did not know what adventures would lay ahead. We would be making new friends and building new memories of friends and another home that we would grow to love as we did the one we had just left behind.

Because of the accident, Patty was not able to say goodbye to all her friends. Hugh was still bedridden, coming in and out of consciousness. It was hard for her to leave him in that condition. I hated leaving my friends (especially the Lojo's and Sharon and Amy) and the town where I had lived in all my life.

In 1947, the Lojo's took me on a vacation to Mirabel Park at the Russian River for my high school graduation present. I stayed with them at their home for most of that summer. This family added many happy memories to my life. We have been life long friends, keeping in touch, and seeing each other now and then through the years. Mom and Dad Lojo and Dolores are no longer with us, but they are always in my heart. They will always have a place in my mind that is reserved for loved ones who have gone on ahead. I like to think of my father still working in his garden, with Dolores as a little girl watching him, chatting away, visiting with him as he works.

When I was visiting the Lojo's during the summer of 1947, Liz's cousin Johnny came to visit the family. He had turned out to be a very good-looking young man. He had dark, curly hair, but it was his teasing smile that melted my young heart. And he had a personality that wouldn't quit. We were quite taken with each other. He came over to the Lojo's often while I was there and had me over to his folks' house for dinner one night. While there he took me to the Paramount Theater in Oakland

to see a movie. We became close and after I went back home to Fresno, we started corresponding with each other. He would come to Fresno to spend the weekend with our family. We talked of marriage, but he wanted me to become a Catholic. We might have married if I had been willing to convert because I cared a lot for him. He died in 1980.

Many times through the years, the small town of El Cerrito would creep back into my memory bank and all those happy memories come flooding back, working like a kaleidoscope in my mind, getting all mixed up together. The memories bring a smile to my face and tears to my eyes, remembering years that were and can never be again. Oh my! If only that little house on Pomona Avenue could talk, what stories it would tell of the family that once lived there bringing love and warmth to every nook and corner in the house.

## Friends during our days in El Cerrito

**Donald Lewis** - Donald is the only boy I can remember in my earliest school years. In kindergarten or the first grade I had my first childhood crush on Donny. I don't remember him being in Harding School for very many years.

**Lodema Russell** - She was Mother's school chum in Kansas. She moved to Fresno, California and became a teacher at Roosevelt High School in Fresno. My sisters and I called her "Aunt" Lodema. She had two daughters, Jeanie (Patty's age), and Elouise (Mary's age). Jeanie and Patty and Mary and *Elouise* became friends. Elouise and Jerry also dated for awhile. I can remember how bad I would feel when they would come to visit and the four girls would go someplace. I would ask Aunt Lodema why she didn't have another daughter my age. One time Aunt Lodema and her girls were spending the weekend and I had gone to bed with an awful toothache. Aunt Lodema was on her way to bed and heard me crying. She came in to see why. After I told her how badly my tooth hurt, she crawled in bed with me and held me in her arms until I fell asleep.

**The Overstalls** - They were friends of my parents and came to visit quite often. They lived on Stockton Avenue. Their house had a long closed-in porch with windows all along the front and it faced the bay. I can remember sitting in that room coloring at a table in front of one of the windows. Now and then I would look out at the bay and see the Golden Gate Bridge. The Overstalls were very English. One time while Mrs. Overstall was visiting with Mother, Mother said damn for some reason (Mother never said bad words.) She then looked at Mrs. Overstall and apologized. Mrs. Overstall said in her very English accent, "*That's all right, Eva. Nothing makes a person feel better than to say a good round damn now and then.*"

**Ted & Carolyn Prosser** - Ted and Dad were in the American Legion together and became friends. They lived in the house where Aunt Daisy once lived, next door to where I was born. They had one child, a boy. We called him Junior. He loved bugs and snakes and kept them in their garage and laundry room. Mrs. Prosser was crippled and she had a high bar stool with a round seat that she sat on and moved around the house on. She would rock it from side to side making it move in "walking" fashion from room to room. She would sit on it to do the dishes, then at times walk her stool into the living room in order to play her piano. She would slide off the stool onto her piano bench. I would watch her do the

dishes going from place to place in her kitchen, not understanding how she was able to make that stool do that.

Mr. Prosser's father lived in a huge tent near Albany High School and the park. He had everything he needed in it, even a cook stove. He kept it heated with a pot-bellied wood stove. I remember how hot it usually was in there. The floor was made of wooden planks. Many times



*At Uncle Big and Hilder's wedding in 1933, standing left to right: Al & Jo Hawkins, The Karl Dahlens, (Cousin) Tommy and Frances MacDonald, Ted Prosser, Ethel Turos, Laura Dahlen, Lois Ross, Urban Dahlen, Hilder's mother; (On the ground): Uncle Little Brick & Mary, Hillder & Uncle Big Brick, Mrs. Prosser, Mom & Dad*

when I lived on Pomona and went to the playground, I would go by his tent to visit and sometimes he would fix lunch for me. I loved visiting with him, but sometimes he had it much too hot in his tent. He and my sister Mary used to play tennis together in the court that was connected to the Harding School grounds.

**Starks** - They were friends of my parents. I spent a few days with them at a house they had at Half Moon Bay. They had three daughters, Frances, Winifred and Paula. Frances married my cousin, Tommy McDonald, Aunt Daisy's son. Winifred and Patty became close friends. Patty spent much time at their home, up the hill by the Overstalls. Winifred had a small playhouse in her back yard. She had grown-up dresses that were given to her by her older sisters. Patty and Winifred loved to dress up in them and pretend they were glamorous movie stars.

**Al & Jo Hawkins** - They were two especially close friends of my parents. They lived for a short time in back of the Prossers in what was

once the chicken house for Aunt Daisy's chickens. It had been fixed up comfortably and they lived in it until they could find work and move to a nice home. They had two children, George and Mabel. Mrs. Hawkins was a hairdresser. I don't remember what kind of work Mr. Hawkins did. They moved into our home at 375 Pomona for a while. I don't know how soon they moved into our house after we moved, or whether they were the first family to live there after us. They remained friends of my parents all their lives. Living close to the Lojos, George Hawkins and Sonny became friends. Sonny said they didn't stay in our house for long. Mrs. Hawkins did Patty's hair when Patty got married in 1946.

**Dick Pryde** - He and Daddy had a business together on San Pablo Avenue, The Pastime.

**Bill Gay** - I don't remember much about Bill Gay except that he was around our home from time to time. I believe he was a friend of Tommy McDonald. My cousin Betty, Tommy's sister, said she had quite a crush on him. She said he was at their home almost every Sunday.

**Dr. Whitworth** - He was Mother's doctor, giving her the treatments for her arthritis. He hired her for a short time to do his office work and answer his phone, in order to help pay for her treatments. They became friends and he often visited us at our home at 375 Pomona.

**Howard, Zerelda & Jackie Mackey** - Patty and Howard were friends and I liked Jackie. I remember him as a cute little boy with a big smile. They lived across the street from the tennis courts by Harding School. Patty and I used to go to their house to listen to *Jack Armstrong* and *Little Orphan Annie* on the radio.

**Cecil and Gwen Griffith** - Gwen was Patty's friend. I had a crush on Cecil. When Cecil was in his teens, while coming home on a motorcycle he hit a small rock that threw the cycle off balance. He hit the wall of a bridge and was killed. Patty and their cousin, George Griffith, became close. She was fourteen and he was sixteen. He and his parents lived in Sacramento, but they spent the summers in Dunsmuir (near Mount Shasta). Patty and Gwen went by train to spend a week of vacation with them one summer. George was killed in World War II on his first mission while flying with the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Patty kept her friendship with his parents until they died. At times in their later years they spent Christmas with our family.

**Walt Young** - Walt was a friend of Sonny Lojo. They are still in touch and see each other quite often. Walt's family moved to the neighborhood after we moved to Merced and the first time I saw him was when he was

around 13, a few years younger than me. At times when I would go to visit the Lojos Walt would come around. In fact, he and his wife were there during this last visit when I was doing this writing. They, Sonny, Rose and I had a great time talking about “The Good Old Days”. Walt and his wife travel all over the world.

### Candy I Remember

**Black Cow** - It was a huge taffy sucker with chocolate around it. (In a way today’s Sugar Daddy reminds me of the taffy part of the sucker). It was about 5 inches long, 3 inches wide, and a half inch thick. It cost a nickel and lasted most of the day. One time I got one during lunchtime at Mr. D’s. I had it in my desk and during class I could “hear” that sucker calling to me. So I thought I would sneak a quick bite. Well, a Black Cow is something you don’t take a quick bite of. The teacher noticed my head down at my desk and knew I had to be up to something. “NEVA!” I couldn’t get my darn teeth unstuck from that sucker. “NEVA!” I raised my head and there was that stupid sucker sticking out of my mouth glued to my teeth. The classroom erupted with laughter. I never tried to sneak a bite of anything after that.

**Beebe Bats** - These were suckers of different flavors: lemon, strawberry, banana, chocolate, and a white one whose flavor I can’t remember. They were about 4 inches long, an inch wide and half an inch thick. (Today’s “Now and Later” brand of candy chews has the same type of candy.)

**Three Musketeers** - The Three Musketeers Candy Bar was much different than what is on the market today. It had three separate pieces. One was chocolate, one was vanilla, and one was strawberry.

**Peppermint Cigarettes** - They came in a box that looked like a cigarette box and were peppermint. The tip of the white cigarette was pink to represent a lit cigarette.

*I forget the name of this sucker but it was molasses.* They weren’t wrapped. They had chocolate around them and the stick was a licorice root that you could chew on. It lasted most of the day. The only place we could get them was in the little store next to the Oaks Theater. We three girls can’t remember what it was called. Maybe it was a specialty of the store and didn’t even have a name.

There were also *round gumdrops* with little round hard candies around it. The gum drop was on a long rubber band, I can’t remember

why. The *Neccos*, *Milk Duds*, and *Barrels* were all bigger than the ones we have today. And of course we had the *jawbreakers*. My favorites were the hot ones, which were red, then the licorice ones.

**Honey Comb** - It had the texture of a malt ball and was covered with chocolate. It was the same shape and size as a *Snickers Bar*. And naturally, we liked the long running *Hershey Chocolate Bar*. All candy bars were much bigger than what is sold now.

Kids nowadays would be in awe of a candy counter like the one Mr. D had. It was a long glass counter with four tiers that held all kinds of penny and nickel candy and gum. For a nickel we could get almost a full small bag of candy.

### Old Time Radio Programs We Listened To

**The Lone Ranger** - Dad sat in a high-backed chair and would put on quite a show as he bounced on the seat of the chair, held his hands out as though holding the reins of a horse, and yelled, “*Hi-yo Silver*” as he rode his trusty “horse”. This always got a big laugh from his three daughters.

**Sherlock Holmes** - The night we listened to the episode of *The Hounds of the Baskervills*, Patty had a friend over to hear it with us. The program scared him so much that Jerry and Patty had to walk him home when it was over.

**(Other radio shows)** - *I Love A Mystery*, *The Shadow*, *The Green Hornet*, *Inner Sanctum Mystery*, *Mr. Keen: Tracer of Lost Persons*, *Terry & the Pirates*, *Jack Armstrong*, *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, *Chandu the Magician*, *Lux Radio Theater*, *Little Orphan Annie*, *First Nighter*, *The Cisco Kid*, *Superman*, *Dick Tracy*, *Major Bowes Amateur Hour*, *Queen for A Day*, *Kate Smith Hour*, *Art Linkletter*, *Jack Benny*, *Bob Hope Show*, *Abbott & Costello*, *Baby Snooks*, *The Aldrich Family*, *Fibber Magee & Molly*, *Burns & Allen*, *George Burns & Gracie Allen*, *Lum & Abner*, *Amos & Andy*, *One Man’s Family*, *Ma Perkins*, *Pretty Kitty Kelly*, *Young Widder Brown*, *Portia Faces Life*, *Life Can Be Beautiful*, *The Guiding Light*, *Young Dr. Malone*, *Helen Trent*, *Pepper Young’s Family*, *Back Stage Wife*, *Stella Dallas*, *Lorenzo Jones*, *When a Girl Marries*, *Light of the World*, *A Right to Happiness*, *Just Plain Bill*, *Our Gal Sunday*, *Double or Nothing*, *House Party*, *What’s the Name of That Tune?*, *Bride & Groom* and *Winner Take All*.

### Poems for Reminiscing

It's pleasant to remember the days of "way back when" . . . To reminisce and dream and bring them back again . . . The happy golden hours of days of long ago . . . Hold a place within our hearts reflecting a warm glow . . . The mirror of the mind and the heart keeps all our memories dear . . . That we may see the past again and have it always near. . . . .

By: La Verne P Larson

The family is like a book . . . The children are the leaves . . . The parents are the cover, that . . . Protective beauty gives . . . At first the pages of the book . . . Are blank and purely fair . . . But time soon writes memories . . . And paints pictures there . . . Love is the little golden clasp . . . That bindeth up the trust . . . Oh, break it not lest all the leaves . . . Shall scatter and be lost.

(Unknown)

Remember is a lovely word,  
And telescopes the years.  
When sliding on time's avenue  
Memory appears  
To bring to life for inner eyes  
The pages of the past,  
Where tears and joys have merged to form  
Rainbows that will last.

By: Patricia Clafford

Family ties are precious things woven through the years.  
Of memories of togetherness . . .Of laughter, love and tears.  
Family ties are cherished things gorged in childhood days.  
By love of parents, deep and true, and sweet familiar ways.  
Family ties are treasured things, and far though we may roam  
The tender bonds with those we love, still pull our hearts toward  
home.

(unknown)

### The Rude Family tree

Dr. Thomas Jefferson Rude + 1. Sarah Luella Rice

Lila Elizabeth "Dolly" + Charles S. Hoyland

Sarah Luella "Betty" + French McDonald

Thomas "Tom" Walter

Elizabeth "Betty" Ann + Louis "Louie" Uelmen

Mary Madeline + Earl Benjamin Jester

Patricia "Patty"

Jamona June "Jimmie"

Dr. Thomas Jefferson Rude + 2. Mary Ann Gentry Rude

Nola Belle

Myra May + Attorney Leonard Porter Brooks

Martin Gentry + Adele Gage Olmstead

Charles "Chuck"

Robert

Mary "Louise"

Theodore "Theo" Roosevelt

Eleanor "June" + Robert "Bob" Birdshall Lashley

Margaret Pamela "Pam" + Bruce Eric Eisenman

Joseph Eric

Jeffrey David

Daniel Robert

Willard Paul

Patty

Robert

Eva Margaret + Harold Tucker Calvert

Harold Gerard "Jerry" + Patricia Leslie Donnelly

Richard Eugene

Mary Rachel + Joseph "Joe" Charles Akers

Patricia "Patty" Margaret + Raymond "Ray" Eldon Nieland

Neva Sonia + Marion Lee Hicks

Neva "Leona"

Linda Sue

Sharon May

Richard

### The Calvert Family tree

Francis Easley Calvert + Louisa Rachel Tucker  
Harold Tucker + Eve Margaret Rude  
Harold Gerard "Jerry" + Patricia Leslie Donnelly  
Richard Eugene  
Mary Rachel + Joseph "Joe" Charles Akers  
Patricia "Patty" Margaret + Raymond "Ray" Eldon Nieland  
Neva Sonia + Marion Lee Hicks  
Neva "Leona"  
Linda Sue  
Sharon May  
Ruby Ann + Paul Lee Roy Johnson  
Opal Elizabeth "Betty"  
Beryl Oleta "Billie" + Charles G. Crockett  
Ester "Joan"  
Charles "Richard"  
Carol  
Robert Berwin "Big Brick" + Hilder Dahlen  
Horace Penn "Little Brick" + Mary Ann Stevenson  
Mary Ann "Dian"  
Steven Berwin  
Sylvia "Sue"

## Harem Scarem in El Cerrito

Who would have thought that a certain sweet, elderly lady in the congregation of our church could actually be a latent John Steinbeck or William Saroyan? Not since reading Saroyan's *Collection of Short Stories* have I so enjoyed a 1920's and Depression years portrait of America as the one Neva Carpenter has so vividly brought to life in her written pictorial childhood memoirs, *Harem Scarem*. Reading Neva's memories makes one feel as if the events are happening for the first time to both the reader and the author. Neva didn't just write an autobiographical account of her life. She painted a picture to be imprinted in all of our memories, allowing each of us to actually own a little bit of her childhood experiences as if they were our own.

What makes the book exceptional is Neva's expansion of the narrative to include an omniscient account of all the book's prime characters, for example, the time her father lost his wallet. The reader experiences the events of Neva's life not only through Neva's eyes, but also through the eyes of her loved ones. This lets us gain an even more intimate understanding of the events that shaped her life. Neva's memories are pure genius; a testament to a family's struggles with life, hardship, and illness, all to be overcome by the great power of love that her family had for life and for each other.

- Christine Greaves

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