

ANECDOTES
OF A
SANTA CLARA COUNTY
NATIVE DAUGHTER
BORN EASTER SUNDAY
MARCH 31, 1907

BY

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I REMEMBER

My father's parents started from Illinois in a covered wagon to come to Santa Clara Valley. He was then the baby of the family but so much tragedy occurred on the way that he was 9 years old when they arrived in 1874.

My mother came with her mother and family by train to Santa Clara Valley at age 9 in 1894.

I was about 10 years old when Santa Clara County had the big influenza epidemic. Many of our neighbors died and although we had had colds we all survived as our Pop had his way of keeping us healthy. He had an old "Doctor Book"; in olden times these sometimes were considered like a "Family Bible".

In the olden days people would store their valuables in large new barrels which they would put in storage. So, when the big earthquake came to San Francisco and San Jose, many people lost their lives and consequently many barrels were never claimed thus being sold to the public. My Pop had bought one and the "Doctor Book" was one of the items in it. He would go to our druggist with what he had copied out of that old book and our druggist would make up these messes for him and home he would come to cure us.

The druggist was amazed at what he mixed up but always did it for my father. My Pop was an old timer and he really dosed us with the most awful tasting things at times! Most times there would be a big argument between our Mom and Pop and I can hear her as if it were today - "You are going to kill them some day with those messes". But we downed everything! And then one day I thought he had killed me! I had a bad case of tonsillitis and although we had a good family doctor who came to your home in those days, he wasn't helping me. My Pop fixed a funnel from writing paper and filled it with a powder. "Wow, open your mouth and I am going to blow this powder into your throat, it won't hurt and it smells nice". So I opened my mouth and oh - oh - oh - that powder

covered my entire mouth and throat so thick I could not breathe! No way could I even utter a sound or cry and I so wanted to cry, I knew I was dying! Mama was right! Poor Mama screamed, "I told you, now you've killed poor little Easter" and ran for water soon I could barely breathe. Poor Pop had tears in his eyes for what he had done but it really had helped me, they both agreed. I can still go through all that again at times if I think about it!

That didn't stop Pop, every spring in he would come with a huge bottle of celery, beef and iron, our spring tonic -- tasted horrible! And Mama would line us up, my sister, my brother and me, every Saturday night for a dose of Licorice Powders! Ugh, how I hated that, sick or not we had to take it!

Back to the influenza epidemic - finally the City decided we could all go to school for half a day but we had to wear cloth masks around our nose and mouth - we hated that. Then my Aunt gave us some "asafetida". My Mom put a piece the size of a quarter in a small piece of gauze and we pinned it to the top of our petticoat (yes, "petticoat", today it would be our "slip"!). Oh, how it smelt! Like garlic, onions and every bad smelling thing; dark brown color and like the clay children play with today. You couldn't hide the smell and we at times were made fun of but we did NOT get the influenza! Also, we always were very healthy children due to Pop, I wonder! Papa when he believed in something, you couldn't change him.

About this time I think, one day we had a terrible wind storm while I was at school. Our street was one of those where the huge telephone poles carried all the high voltage electricity from Alviso to San Jose. A utility man had to walk all that distance to check these particular poles. He was our friend and would stop for a cup of coffee at times. He took us one day in a car to the big metal buildings in Alviso where he lived and we saw all

the wires, etc.

Well, the windstorm blew down three huge poles on our street (one block long). Two poles fell in empty lots but the one in front of our two-story home fell on our roof and crushed it in. It was like fireworks as all that voltage flashed and crackled, you could hear it all over our house. There were wires all over our street also. My Mom and little sister managed to get out the back door with flashes above their heads! Our house made the front page of the MERCURY HERALD!

No one was really hurt and only damage to our home. Lawyers came to see us about suing as the PG&E only gave my Pop \$100, not near enough to fix the damage! But my Pop said "I'm always going to have gas and electricity and I sure don't want the PG&E to be my enemy!"

Not many people had cars when I was small, more horses and street cars. As we lived only seven blocks from town (no shopping malls) our pleasure was to go to a theater every Saturday night. Every Saturday night, if we were old enough, we had to blacken our own high-top button shoes. Everyone had one pair so as you can guess we all went out the door smelling like a bottle of shoe blackening, except my Mom who had lovely blonde-colored high-top button shoes. She smelled like perfume, how I envied her.

We loved the old HIPPODROME on First Street and LIBERTY on Market Street, the better theaters. But one week, not having enough money, my Pop said, "Why not go to the old GARLIC OPERA? (I think it was called the LYRIC and only 5¢!) But my Mom says, "No, absolutely no!" But we children begged so off we go, never having been there before, we were real happy about it! It was across the street from the JOSE THEATER which was a little higher class - only 15¢!

We entered one small room, the chairs were wood, the kind that folds up,

and the noise! Wooden floor, no carpet, and so we sat (in those days you were not allowed to eat in a theater!)

A man came in and sat down on a piano stool like my Mom's and the piano looked like hers also. He started to play and then a big noise, the picture came on very close to us as we sat in front row. People were coming in and their shoes were loud as the show picture began only in those days it was the "silent pictures" only printed on each picture of what they said. We saw Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin that day. We enjoyed it very much but the noise in that little room was terrific -- coughing, clearing throats, shuffling feet, (shoes were real leather and thick soles in those days) and moving chairs! As we had never had garlic in our home we children didn't know what smelled so awful!

Soon my Mom was whispering, "let's get out, I can't stand it, please"! Well, my Pop whispered back "a little longer, the children are enjoying themselves". That was the last time we ever went to the GARLIC OPERA! Many times we went to the JOE which was much better.

On the way home we were given 5¢ to spend at the old popcorn wagon that was always parked on the corner of First and Santa Clara Streets. You could smell that popcorn at least half a block before you got to it. Those wonderful old theater days. If my Pop had a good week, we would go to an ice cream parlor or a tamale parlor. The ice cream parlor had wrought-iron chairs and small tables -- smelled so, so good! The tamale parlor had the largest tamales you ever saw - would they be ashamed of our tiny little ones in our stores now-a-days! We usually - the children, that is - chose the ice cream parlor and then our walk home with our popcorn. When we came to Market and Santa Clara Streets, our Pop would let us stop and gaze at that beautiful Tower lit up with electricity.

One time there was an acrobat that climbed it and did stunts.

Now we were on our way home down Santa Clara Street to our Pop's paint store, our home was in back of it. My brother had pockets in his long overcoat but we girls didn't so he would let us put our cold hands in his pockets and watch the moon for one o'clock without stumbling (all those little memories stay with you).

My 5th grade room in school was upstairs at Longfellow School. One day I was looking out the window, I could just see the top of our huge Electric Tower. While I stared at it, it simply disappeared! I could not believe it, wanted to tell the teacher but knew she probably would not believe me!

When I arrived home from school that afternoon, my Mom told me the Electric Tower had fallen to the ground from the windstorm! Then I knew that was the minute it had disappeared from my view!

OUR FIRST CAR

Married at 18 years of age to my wonderful husband, it was now nearing the end of the Depression and our third year of marriage and a new baby son. We had never owned a car, usually borrowing my Pop's little truck, taking the street car or on our own feet pushing the baby carriage.

We lived in a very nice neighborhood, mostly old retired folks. Older homes but all nicely kept up including such a friendly retired minister.

Finally my husband found work at a hardwood floor company and now we could plan for a car of our own. One night my husband came rushing into the house all smiles, he had found the perfect car for us! "Guess what, it is in perfect condition for only \$25.00!"

I was doubtful - I argued that that was a little too cheap! So we argued for awhile. "Yes, he agreed, it was cheap but it had a perfect motor, good top, etc. We could pay cash!" And that made me agree. He went back after supper to buy our very own first car!

He soon arrived home and it was then very dark and I rushed out to meet him. I took one look and all I did was gasp and gasp, I couldn't say a word! "What is it?" I asked at last. "It is a Model T Touring Car with a perfect motor, perfect cloth top, windshield, four good tires and even a spare tire, but no side curtains. Isn't it great?"

All that came out of my mouth was - "Take it back - take it back - get our \$25.00 back!" and I began to cry! "What ails you, woman, this is a great car and a bargain, I won't take it back!" After swallowing my sobs, I finally told him - "can't you see, it is one cake of rust! It isn't black, no color only rust and more rust; the entire body, fenders, everything on that blasted car!" "What is the matter with you, can't you see?"

Then he stood a ways off, flashed the flashlight all over it and then glared at me. "Well, doesn't look too good!" "You going to take it bank?" "No, I'm not, it's a good car and if that is all that bothers you, I'll fix it - - a bit of rust!" "A bit, a bit! It is nothing but a cake of rust with a motor!" "I won't be seen in it, also take it back before daylight, don't want the neighbors to see this rusty piece of junk in our driveway!" "I'm go- into the house while you drive that piece of rust back where it came from!"

He left and then came back driving the car! I ran out, he stood smiling at me! "Don't say a word, come here!" He slowly opened a bag with a can of paint and one for rust! Drove into the garage, closed the door and I left him.

Hours later he called me. There stood a pretty, shiny, black car and clean top! I was amazed! Looked great, I told him to drive it out front of the garage so neighbors could see our pretty car!

Next day we had many compliments on our new car! I was at last happy with our first car!

A neighbor boy (16 years old) fell in love with it so we traded even for his coupe with a rumble seat later on. My Mom declared "now that you have a 'Mother-in-law' seat, can I have a ride?", and she did!

Those "rumble seats" were known as a "Mother-in-law" seat if you old timers still remember?

TENDERFOOT

Both my husband I were city raised, we finally had a chance to buy an house in the country. Everything being new to us, each day was a mystery, light, frightening and work!

Oil Heater: Check, do not run out of oil! Butane: Check or no meal. y times ran out of both! We put on another coat, etc.

Everytime I watered the vegetable garden, knew the well would run dry! ted faucet before I went to bed for water!

First night we moved in, opened bedroom window, room full of Yellow ket bees!

Scatter-fed the chickens and huge rooster chased us back to gate! Gathered eggs and more eggs till no more room for eggs; started giving them away.

Decided one acre was full of weeds so destroyed them -- they were an alfa hay field to feed our cow! Valuable!

We pruned our walnut trees; no, you shouldn't, they were size of marbles! money from them was to pay our taxes!

Septic tank, a mystery! When electricity went off, no bathroom water, let, etc! My wash was only quarter done and baby's diapers! And son had estinal flu! Had to go to Morgan Hill gas station! You save water in jugs emergencies!

Fuse burns out on water pump - go down immediately, put in a new fuse ther it is daylight or midnight; will burn up motor if you don't! I did it h flashlight when husband was sick.

We could hear moutain lions roaring at night on the hill in back of us. killed in chicken yard next door!

Our cow was a mystery to us. We never did fully understand her except she was smarter than we were! When you went down to feed her, you should remember to check where she was. I didn't at times and just as I did remember her, I felt something fuzzy on my neck! That darn cow had her head on my shoulder! She liked to chase you and play but I didn't know how to play with a cow so I ran around a tree with her after me! Ran to the barn, shut door, she turned the knob with her horns, door flew open, I slammed it in her face and ran out the back door, put one leg through fence to next field and electric fence shocked me! Did it ever hurt! Now, should I put other leg through and shock it or bring back same leg to get shocked again? Here comes the cow! I was on the other side with two burns and both legs hurting and a badly torn dress from barbed wire! That darn cow!

Was nothing to see her with a wire hat when grazing -- from the chicken's water pan!

We really loved her, had so much cream used it entirely instead of milk to cook with; whipped cream, hot cakes, m-m-m!

SOLDIER BOYS

Now we were "old timers" as ranchers in a small way. The boom of growth, malls and population had not started as yet in Morgan Hill. So this morning, I had decided to drive to San Jose on a "shopping spree".

My Falcon was a pretty blue car and I happened to be dressed in a blue dress to match it. Still slender and a natural blonde had compliments many times that I did not look like a "Grandma"; I was in a happy frame of mind.

It was a lovely day, only three lanes on the old Monterey Highway in those years. I knew at this time of day there would be very little traffic, in fact I was the only car on my side and few others any where. Suddenly I came upon Army trucks (1955) parked off the highway and soldiers everywhere! Then a thought struck me, maybe these soldiers were on their way to be shipped out to the Vietnam War! Tears came, they looked so young; I felt I knew them as a flash of memory came to me of my tear-eyed 17 year old son leaving us for Guam in World War II.

I slowed down, those young faces were so sad looking; no smiles, no roughing each other up. How could I, little me, get them to smile and laugh for a minute to forget where they were probably going? I couldn't bear this terrible feeling I was having. I had to do something! Then with a smile it came to me! I knew what to do, of course, I knew what to do. Haven't I usually known what to do in an emergency and to me this was an "emergency"!

I pushed my horn button down, stepped hard on the gas, I laughed, I shouted as I raced down that highway! And a "miracle" happened! They left the trucks, they ran to the edge of the highway and I could see their smiles and open mouths yelling and their waving hands at me! What excited me more at the time, there were miles and miles still of trucks and soldiers! Before I even came to them, they were out on the edge of the highway waiting, shouting and waving their hands! My horn still blowing, waving my hand off and on, smiling till the end of miles

and miles of that troop of boyis soldiers! I then realized they couldn't see me well enough to see that I was a "grandma" but would only remember a little blue Falcon, a little blonde dressed in blue, waving at them, giving them a send-off maybe to the Vietnam War!

I was so happy they couldn't see through my smile, the tears in my eyes for many of those young boys would not come back. As I waved and looked at the last group, a delightful smile and a feeling struck deep in my heart: me, a little grandma, had seen and known an entire troop of soldiers who had waved and smiled at me and only me. Now I am a Great-Grandma close to 85 years old and here I sit in a pretty green rocking chair I had given to my husban on our 50th wedding anniversary.

I am alone in this old house and it will be 100 years old in four more years, falling to pieces like me. Both of us with memories. Many times I take that wonderful trip once again in my little blue Falcon car, dressed in blue, honking my horn and seeing all those waving hands and smiling faces as I sit here alone and dream.

My little family, dear husband and both my beloved sons and a dear daughter-in-law are waiting up there somewhere and smiling I know as I write this little story from my heart.