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Attention: Helen MacCarthy

Enclosed please find an entry for the 2005 Historical Essay Contest, sponsored by the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County.

As per rules, I have included an essay of 3,270 words, in duplicate folders which has been word processed, double spaced. It contains a title page with my name, address and telephone number including my school and teachers name, an introduction page, a table of contents and a bibliography.

Sincerely,


Gloria Jabaut

A.

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**THE SAN JOSE HI-SPOT
A SPECIAL PLACE**

By Gloria Jabaut

The San Jose Hi-Spot
A Special Place

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INTRODUCTION

Santa Clara County, 1943; families waited for that next letter from the loved one overseas. The Philco radio in the living room blared news reports concerning the progress of the allies on Iwo Jima and in Germany. No one complained about the shortages and rationing during war time. Who had time to be too concerned about High school kids?

Teenagers in San Jose too young to join the armed services, too young to understand the war, blackouts or rationing had only one place to find refuge and have fun; The San Jose High Spot.

Located in the basement of the YWCA, on the corner of Second and San Antonio Streets, the first teen club in the area served students from the two public high schools and two parochial schools in San Jose at that time. The center also attracted young people from Gilroy to Centerville, which is now part of Fremont, California.

The Hi-Spot became the safe teen fun spot in the city due to the relentless advocacy of several prominent San Jose residents, a YWCA willing to take a risk and a volunteer advisor who made sure it became a success.

HISTORY

The Hi-Spot had its earliest beginnings in 1943. The military Draft in Santa Clara County called up young men faster than they could register at age eighteen for the Army. It wasn't unusual for a sixteen year old to lie about his age and enlist in the Navy or Marines before he reached draft age.

Elsie Ryan, an active volunteer at the YWCA and former teacher and principal of Pala Elementary School, convinced the Young Women's Christian Association Board of Directors of the need for a space for teens to socialize. Dr. P. Victor Peterson, a professor at San Jose State College had voiced his concern as well over the lack of recreation for teens in the county. A place that would be safe for boys and girls and one which parents would allow their young people to attend.

They had become increasingly alarmed at the number of young people, mostly boys, too young for the Army, congregating in the downtown area some times beyond their curfew. The High schools had curtailed many of their after school and extra curricular activities due to the war

effort. Gasoline was rationed as were other commodities which made it more difficult for teenagers to travel to other parts of the city and of the count

At the same time city officials became concerned over the increase in juvenile crime but they had no solution other than approve an expansion of the Juvenile Hall to be located on land at the edge of San Jose's city limits.

The YWCA Board of Directors pondered over the request for some time. The premises held upstairs sleeping facilities for young women attending San Jose State College three blocks away. The main floor, which was used as a reception area contained a few offices, a lounge area and a small library. The social hall or auditorium as it was referred to had a small stage mainly used for activities programmed by the Board or for their young boarder's activities. The basement of the building held a gymnasium, shower rooms and a pool which no longer could be used do to the need of extensive repairs.

The YWCA had very strict rules about the presence of boys in the building. Girls were called down to the main floor where they could entertain their men callers under the watchful eyes of a staff member.

Therefore, the thought of having young men, boys coming in and out of the YWCA did not appeal to many Board members.

Dr. Peterson along with Elsie Ryan rallied for the need of a place for teens to socialize.

Finally, after many hours of debate the Board of Directors reluctantly approved the use of the main floor auditorium for a Saturday night teen social on a temporary basis. With one condition, however, Elsie Ryan had to become the Director of the club and be responsible to, "Keep the kids in line," (as she often quoted.)

The Hi-Spot began as the "YWCA Teen Club." The teens held a dance Saturday evenings in the main floor social hall. As news of the club spread throughout the valley young people waited in the lounge of the building and outside in line to enter. It became apparent the hall could not contain the large crowds of teens and their contemporary music.

In 1944 just a few months after the teen club started a group of girls from the YWCA and Boys from the YMCA formed a committee and along with Mrs. Ryan again petitioned the Board to consider covering the pool in the

basement and converting it into a full gymnasium. The other rooms they suggested could be divided to give the teens a feeling of "their own" place with a lounge, canteen and game room. By this time, the Board had become overwhelmed at the reception of the teen club and its positive effect on the young people of San Jose and the surrounding area

The YWCA Board agreed to do some renovation to accommodate the club. They agreed to cover the pool. The board told the committee they could have the old shower rooms for the youth center if the teens would tear out the showers. When 60 boys and girls showed up in jeans the following Saturday ready to go to work, they convinced the YWCA of their earnestness.

They also agreed to provide a door from San Antonio Street into the basement area, thereby keeping the teens out of the main floor lobby. The club then had their own entrance where they could monitor the youth coming in and leaving the premises.

The renovation of converting the pool appeared to be so unusual an undertaking that later, in 1948 the San Jose Mercury Newspaper ran an article on the remodeling of the entire basement.

THE RENOVATION

A committee composed of teenagers who frequented the club helped with the renovation. With the help of a volunteer carpenter the youth built a canteen similar to the "soda shops" of the time. A white Formica counter balanced on a red tile base with edging of chrome, the scene was completed with six chrome bar stools finished in red Naugahyde. Behind the counter stood a refrigerator, covered in a popular soft drink poster and a large mirrored wall. Eight round bistro tables with chairs completed the canteen look.

The lounge area took on the appearance of a comfortable living room complete with bookshelves, sofas and two easy-chairs. Two library type desks sat in one corner while a Philco floor model radio sat in the other corner of the room. Donations of furniture came from people throughout the valley. The YWCA also donated some furniture and a public address system to be used in the enlarged gym for dances. An open area adjacent to the canteen was designated as the "game room" where six ping-pong tables

stood completely set-up by the committee. Shelving on a wall in the room held a variety of boxed table games.

Milton Lanyon's San Jose State college art class, including twenty-three students, did murals of high school scenes for the Hi-Spot walls. Represented were athletics of all kinds, the jalopy, the jitterbug and other familiar high school scenes. Walls and ceiling were repainted, and the boys and girls repainted the floors themselves.

Marie Wiley, YWCA Coordinator became the director of the Hi-Spot while Elsie Ryan continued to assume the responsibility of the Volunteer Advisor

A CLUB IS FORMED

A few months after the completion of the renovation a small contingent of teens appeared before the Board of Directors. They wanted to express their appreciation for the YWCA contribution to their teen club and at the same time they petitioned the Board for the name of the club to be changed to "The San Jose Hi-Spot." They persuaded the Board that the name change would entice more members to come to the "spot" as a place of refuge, safety and fun. A "home" that the teens could take pride in and call their own. Thus, in 1945 the club became officially named, The San Jose Hi-Spot or "The Hi-Spot as it became better known.

The Hi-Spot reopened its doors every Wednesday afternoon from three o'clock until ten, Fridays from seven to eleven-thirty and Saturday from seven o'clock until midnight.

Senior high school students from public and parochial schools flocked to the teen club. A Hi-Spot Council formed immediately with representatives from San Jose High School, Lincoln High School, Campbell, Bellarmine and Notre Dame High Schools.

The Council was eager to operate the Hi-Spot, as much as possible on their own. The YWCA gave the Hi-Spotters the space for their rooms, paid the salary of the director, and paid for utilities. Aside from that help the Hi-Spot became self-sufficient. The teens formulated their budget and balanced it yearly.

The Council compiled by-laws which they referred to as the rules and regulations of the Club. The Council agreed that the membership in the Hi-Spot should have a fee for those who could afford it the fee was set at one dollar per year. If a teen couldn't afford the fee a list of jobs became available for him to choose a two hour job to receive a membership card. The student could help sell sandwiches and soft drinks in the canteen or provide two hours of service in the cloak room some may elect to sweep up after a dance or wipe off tables.

Funds from the sale of the cards were used for dance decorations, replacement of worn or broken records and purchasing table games and books. Occassionally, a band could be hired for a special dance.

Membership cards were designed by Jerry Erich, Hi-Spot alumnus.

The membership card displayed the green and yellow logo of the Hi-Spot and stated basic rules quite simply: No smoking in the gym, no alcohol, no foul language and no fighting. No one will be admitted with the odor of alcohol on his person.

Posted rules at the door required a member to sign in when arriving and if the member left the Hi-Spot before closing he had to sign himself out with the time noted. A member could bring in a guest for a ten cent admission and with a proper identification.

Discipline problems were handled by the Council's judicial committee and kept strictly secret.

Mrs. Rose Hancock, an adult volunteer for the YWCA became a Saturday night chaperone at the Hi-Spot and helped to enforce the rules. Kindly, yet firm "Grandma" as she was referred to became a welcome additional volunteer to the center. Students in the Recreation and Leisure Studies Department at San Jose State College often appeared as chaperones or interns at the club. Robert Frost, a longtime Director for the San Jose Recreation Department, now retired, completed his internship at the Hi-Spot then became a welcomed volunteer.

THE FUN TIMES

The first Saturday night dance in the Hi-Spots new home, the reconverted gym, attracted 125 teens.

By 1946, the Friday and Saturday dances over flowed the gym a year-end report showed 5,234 teens as members.

Dancers jitter-bugged and fox-trotted to recordings featuring the latest big band artist Glenn Miller, Harry James and Artie Shaw to name a few. Vocalists like Rosemary Clooney, Dinah Shore and Teresa Brewer provided sing-alongs and foot tapping melodies for the teens.

Wednesday afternoon into early evening one could complete a homework assignment, play table games or ping-pong, dance or just socialize in the canteen or lounge area.

Sandwichs, soft drinks pie and cake slices could be purchased in the canteen for twenty-five cents. A large bowl of fruit sat on the counter at all times, HELP YOUR SELF, read the sign above the fruit bowl.

A suggestion box sat on the counter and members were encouraged to give their ideas for changes or improvements.

HI-SPOT SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

The Hi-Spot Council felt the need for an adult advisory committee to help them develop their leadership skills and find service learning opportunities.

In 1945 an adult advisory committee composed of Professor, P. Victor Peterson, Phd., Marion Wiley, YWCA counselor, Bradford Miller, art teacher, San Jose State College and Elsie Ryan, Hi-Spot Advisor, met with the teens in the youth council.

Hi-Spot members responded to giving community service in a variety of projects. They folded seals and stuffed envelopes for the Santa Clara County Tuberculosis Association for their annual Christmas Seals fundraiser.

In October, 1945 the Hi-Spot sponsored the first conference for youth centers ever given in the state and were host to leaders of these centers from all over Northern California.

Teens collected donations of chocolate bars during the Second World War. The bars were packaged and sent to members of the armed services.

After the war they continued to collect the candy bars yearly and sent them to European school children.

During the Korean War the students collected mittens for Korean children displaced by the war.

Admission to the Hi-Spot's annual Christmas Ball included a can of food for the Salvation Army food baskets distributed to needy families in the area.

Local hospitals and convalescent homes in the county called the Hi-Spot to set a date for the teen carolers' trop to entertain their patients during the holiday season. The carolers traveled through the county during their Christmas vacation to entertain in the various medical facilities.

The teen council started looking for more opportunities to showcase the Hi-Spot and show the community what their organization was doing to justify the support it had received from community at large.

Jerry Concklin, Hi-Spot member and Elsie Ryan, Advisor approached her husband, Robert Ryan, city Editor of the San Jose Mercury Herald, to request space in the Sunday Paper for a Hi-Spot column.

Jerry Concklin wrote the first, "Hi-Spot Happenings" column which appeared every Sunday with a student's by-line.

The success of the column prompted work on a quarterly newsletter, The Highlight, which was sent to teen members and to the community.

The editorial staff included an Editor, assistant editor, business manager, photographer, alumnus advisor and the Hi-Spot Advisor. Four reporters completed the staff. Advertisement in the newsletter paid for the printing and the mailing. Every issue included a "Special Thanks" column to those in the community who were supporters of the club or who had donated items or volunteer time to the club.

The club was receiving more publicity when they were featured in state and national magazines concerning their phenomenal growth and their self governing style.

Barbara Duffy, Hi-Spot member, approached George Snell, owner of radio station KEEN, located on the top floor of the Hotel De Anza. She requested public service time for news of interest to teenagers in the Santa Clara Valley.

At first reluctant, Snell feared there couldn't be enough information to fill a fifteen minute spot; he relented and agreed to give the Hi-Spot fifteen minutes on Saturday Morning. The program, "Teen News", debuted in 1946.

The newspaper column and quarterly newsletter and the radio show gave opportunities to many students over the years to hone their communication skills. It also provided direct lines to the community to keep them connected to the teens proving that the Hi-Spot members enjoyed their dancing and Ping-Pong, a natural attraction, but that they were also interested in giving service, and learning skills which could be used in their future.

THE TELEVISION ERA

Council members voted in early 1948 to purchase a television set for the lounge area. Since so few homes at the time had a television set the council felt it could enhance membership recruiting. Accordingly, they planned an entire year of fundraising.

A rummage sale kicked off the year and netted a profit of sixty dollars and fifty cents. A television time sheet was posted in the canteen for members to work at volunteer jobs around the Hi-Spot and for the YWCA building. The growing dollar amount in October 1948 came to one hundred and seventy one dollars. Allied Radio and Electronics Company of San José, suppliers of the set, agreed to a no cost installation if three boys helped with the set up. In November teens planned a special Television Dance. Sonny Claremont, well known band leader, donated the services of his band for the event. More than 500 hundred teenagers crowded the dance floor to do the "Bunny Hop" and the "Hucklebuck" while many more lined West San Fernando Street waiting to be admitted.

A talent show, "Kids on Parade", in February 1949 on the stage of the YWCA's auditorium concluded the fundraising efforts of the club totaling seven hundred twenty-five dollars and forty three cents.

On April eleventh, nineteen forty nine, a sixteen inch, black and white, General Electric television set appeared in the Hi-Spot lounge. The teens celebrated in their fundraising efforts.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

Leadership development among the Hi-Spot members became an on-going focus of the staff and of the student council.

One example came as Hi-Spot members were invited to attend a yearly Teen Conference at Asilomar in Monterey County. The Young Women's Christian Association of California sponsored the event which featured workshops, student panels and brain storming sessions concerning issues of interest to teenagers. Career planning, delinquency prevention and dating issues became popular presentations by experts in the fields of psychology, education and social services.

The staff also planned social activities for the conferences including dances, a talent show and hot dog roast on the beach.

The conference created an event for teens to exchange ideas and meet young people from Redding California in the North to San Diego in the south.

In June 1950 the first California State Governor's Conference on Children and Youth was held in Sacramento California. Gloria Silva, Abraham Lincoln High School Senior, and Hi-Spot Council president received an invitation from Governor Earl Warren to attend the conference as a representative of the teen population of Santa Clara County along with Leona Lawrence from the YWCA. Gloria served as a panelist on a workshop titled, "The model Teen Club", and a photograph of her at the conference appeared in the San Jose Mercury News, September 1949.

Following the conference the Hi-Spot Council prepared a series of workshops to be held in the 1950-1951 school year for interested members. The series included; Student Leadership, Parliamentary Procedures, organizing and event planning. The adult presenters were paired with a student counter part and worked together to prepare their workshop and evaluate the results.

MEMORIES

Though many of the individuals who attended the Hi-Spot between the forties and sixties are senior citizens today, memories of that special time are still vivid.

Major Joe Burroughs, Retired, United States Airforce, from Newport Beach California remembers attending one of the Asilomar conferences as a delegate from his San Diego youth club. He met one of the San Jose Hi-Spot's Council officers and eventually was invited to spend a weekend in San Jose to take part in a study concerning the success of the San Jose club.

"I took a lot of ideas back to our club and enjoyed the experience. Matter of fact, I almost became engaged to one of the girls I met in San Jose. We corresponded for some time; when I joined the Air Force we lost track of one another".

John Albert attended San Jose High School before entering the Navy in 1947. One of his most vivid memories of the Hi-Spot came in a recollection of a 1945 Ping-Pong tournament sponsored by the Hi-Spot for all local teens.

"Kids came out of the woodwork to sign up for the tournament at the Hi-Spot. It lasted for two nights. Me and another guy from Gilroy finally won the tournament. We had our names put on a plaque and it hung in the game area for quite some time."

Gladys Schoennauer, a Santa Cruz resident, remembers attending the Hi-Spot as a student at Campbell High School in the late forties. "I think my greatest joy of the teen club was meeting so many kids from other high schools. I was really excited when I became the vice-president of the council in 1949."

Ray Salazar, an East San Jose resident and a San Jose High School graduate in 1948 was a star football player. However, he describes himself modestly as "just an all-round 'jock' while in high school. He spoke of how the athletes from Lincoln high School and San Jose high School palled around and enjoyed the Hi-Spot.

"We were all good friends except when we got on the playing field. Unfortunately, we don't find that kind of commadre among the athletes today. I can remember the dance contest we had once a month at the Hi-Spot." He laughed,

I'll tell you my partner and I could really "cut a rug" of course we won a lot of those contests."

That reminded Joan MacLindsey, a 1951 graduate of Pacific Grove High School, now living in Westminster, California of the weekends she spent with her cousin Louise in San Jose. Louise attended Lincoln High School and she and Joan were regulars at the club.

Joan recalled the time Nat King Cole, who was appearing at the San Jose Civic Auditorium, came to visit the Hi-Spot.

"He played the old piano in the gym and sang his newest recorded song, 'Mona Lisa'. After playing for awhile he signed autographs in the canteen. It was quite an evening."

Other stars appeared at the Hi-Spot at the insistence and prodding of Elsie Ryan. Red Skelton entertained the members in 1947 after appearing at the Civic Auditorium for a fundraiser for St.Leo's Church in San Jose, He brought along a few programs from that appearance to hand out to Hi-Spot members with his famous signature "I dood it, Red Skelton"

On a warm summer evening in 1949 Tony Bennett stopped by the Hi-Spot to sing a couple of his songs after appearing at the San Jose Italian Gardens Club. These entertainers were warmly received by teens who would not have had an opportunity to see these stars perform.

Many former Hi-Spot members merely remember having a good time or playing ping-pong. Some like Lou Lansford a Willow Glen resident and graduate of Lincoln High School remembers the Hi-Spot as, "A place my folks felt was safe for me to attend and I loved to go too so I could just dance the night away."

Perhaps, Kathryn Oliver, A Lincoln High School graduate, and a Cambrian resident, expresses' the essence of the Hi-Spot best, "I remember the ability of everyone at the Hi-Spot to get along so well. Yes, we all had our own school spirit but at the Hi-Spot we put that on one side, we were just friends. There was no bullying or harassment, no discrimination because of your color, school affiliation or about the clothes you wore. If someone didn't know how to dance there was always somebody else willing to teach.

During the 1960's changes happened throughout the world. The Santa Clara County started losing orchards to subdivisions more schools were being built for the growing population. Changes were happening at the Hi-Spot as well.

Esther (Martinez) Sainz attended the "new" Andrew Hill High School in the Santa Teresa area. She pictured the Hi-Spot with an interesting comment, "I went to school with mainly Asian and Anglo kids, most of us lived on ranches in South San Jose. When I went to the Hi-Spot I started seeing more kids who looked like me; they were Hispanic too. The Hi-Spot crowd was friendly to everyone, I could even speak Spanish if I wanted to which we couldn't do at school. It was a rare place my folks would allow me to go but they knew it was well chaperoned and safe. It was the only place in San Jose where you could do the "Texas Hop" like we saw on American Bandstand."

During this period of time, more teen clubs opened throughout the county, and many attempted to model after the Hi-Spot.

Though other directors assumed the responsibility of Hi-Spot Director, Elsie Ryan continued in her position of volunteer advisor to the club. In two instances she was called upon to act as an interim director until one could be found.

Over the years Elsie Ryan, Hi-Spot Advisor, had been recognized by the State of California and the Young Women's Christian Association for her work with teenagers. The San Jose City Council named her Volunteer of the Year in 1963. Elsie Knobble Ryan beloved Hi-Spot Advisor passed away in 1998 at the age of 102; she left many of her, "Hi-Spot kids" a legacy of treasured memories.

MY GIFT

My fondest memory of the Hi-Spot goes back to November 1950; I call it my 'Hi-Spot gift'. The fall dance party opened the school year. Red, Yellow and brown paper autumn leaves decorated the walls of the gym, fat orange pumpkins stood in corners against tall dried corn stalks. A seventy-eight recording of Frank Sinatra's' rendition of "September Song" filled the room.

A tall, lanky sailor, with wavy black hair and deep set blue eyes, shyly made his way through the crowd and asked me to dance. We danced exclusively with each other most of that night and we have been dancing ever since. That chance meeting became a lasting "gift" to me from the Hi-Spot and one which has kept on giving for fifty three years.

The YWCA building was sold to the San Jose Redevelopment Agency in the early 1970's. the "Y" that San Jose had known for over sixty-eight years was demolished to make room for progress. Though the Young Women's Christian Association built another facility in San Jose, the Hi-Spot

was buried in the rubble after almost thirty years of serving teens in the county.

Though I have covered a short time of history of the Hi-Spot, mainly the earliest, formative period, the impact of the Hi-Spot on teens appears to have been the same. We may have a variety of memories, attended in different years and from schools representing many areas we all seem to agree

On the importance of that special place at that time.

We were all recipients of many "gifts" from the Hi-Spot; fun, friends, opportunitites and the loving nonjudgmental advisor Elsie Ryan.

Yes, we were fortunate to recall the really good times we had as members of the first teen club in San Jose, The San Jose Hi Spot...that special place.

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Bob Johnson

San Jose YWCA
Archives

Robyn Peterson
Director of Administration

An extra special "thank you" to the following for
their interview time and their special recollections.

Major Joe Burroughs, Retired USAF Newport Beach, California

Mr. John Albert, Retired, Rio Vista, California

Mr. Ray Salazar, Retired USMC, San Jose, California

Ms. Gladys (Pohlman) Schoennauer, Santa Cruz, California

Mrs. Joan Mac Lindsey, Westminster, California

Mrs. Kathryn (Sorissi) Oliver, San Jose, California

Ms. Esther (Martinez) Sainz, San Jose, California

Many of the other remembrances were from my own diary as a
young student at Lincoln High School and a member of the
Hi-Spot. Gloria (Silva) Jabaut