

PART NINE

SUMMER TIME - HARVEST TIME

THE SUMMER VACATION

When I was a child it was war time. There was not the time, nor the gas, or the extra money to go on a vacation as we know it now days. My vacations were to my grandparents ranch in Loomis. There were activities that could keep a gaggle of kids busy all day long on a ranch covering a square mile. Out of 20 grandchildren there were about 12 of us who were nearly the same age. We ran freely over the hills of the ranch all day long with only the admonitions to watch out for rattlesnakes to slow us down. Grama had killed 17 rattlesnakes that first summer. There were several creeks running the full length of the land. Other than a small dairy barn, pig pens, the orchard and the garden, the land was wild.

Long days were spent playing in the Miner's Ravine Creek. We had an old row boat that we took on long voyages to no where. Down the creek we would go, some rowing, some poling and the rest of us frantically baling out the water that came in the bottom. We were always shipwrecked. As the boat sank we would all fall out into the waist deep water and crawl to shore laughing and screaming. Then we would pull our boat up on shore and the water would drain out and we could go on.

One time my grandfather went somewhere and got a whole load of rubber inner tubes. It took quite a while, but we pumped them up with an old bicycle pump and put them in the horse trough to see where they leaked. Then we patched them with camel glue. We built a raft with them by tying them together and then tied boards on top with the thought we could live on it in the creek. It was quite large so it took all of us to carry it the half mile to the creek. But alas, it was too big for the creek, so we turned it over and when the tires heated we had a warm bed to lay on when we came out from swimming in the shaded creek.

Everyday we went to the packing sheds in Loomis and got the big cattle truck piled full of over ripe plums, the ambrosia that was not shipped to the markets in the East. Sitting in the back of the truck with plums squishing up through our toes and around our little bodies we ate all the good ones we could see. By the time we were out of Loomis we were standing up throwing plums at every mailbox, bus house and fence post. We could see our Grampa Kennedy laughing in the big side mirrors that were welded on pipes to stick way out on each side. When by chance I still meet my grandfather on memory lane he is always laughing.

Lunch was a special time each day. We could eat in a new place everyday and we were very creative about it. It was nearly always the same thing, corn cut off the cob floating in freshly churned butter. There was always soft store bought bread with plum preserves. Ice cold skimmed milk was in abundance. Sometimes for supper, if we had been up to reservoir fishing we would have a

big platter piled with round sun perch fried crispy in bacon drippings and cornmeal.

Grampa had a wood shop and we were allowed to play in there. Outside there were piles of mill end boards from the lumber mills in Loomis. We dug through old junk piles on the ranch and found wheels and parts for the most elaborate soap box derby type cars. Some even had brakes made out of a stick that could be rubbed against the wheel. There was a driveway that went from the top of the hill by the pig pens down to Horseshoe Bar Road, a run that was nearly a city block long. We would pretend we were racing our cars, have wrecks, skin our knees and cry. It was all right because then we could be the most special with Grama for a minute and get some love, a bandage and some red medicine.

We were pretty clean everyday with swimming for hours so we were only bathed on Saturday night. Water was heated and the old tub was filled and one at a time, we were scrubbed within an inch of our lives. As each was finished an older cousin with a needle and a jar of ST37 checked us for blisters, splinters, thorns and ticks. It was wise to be quiet about it because if you fussed she dug deeper with the needle. Somehow part of this ritual was to wet our feet and have us stand on the stained wood by the back door to see if we were flat footed. Somehow, I grew up with the greatest fear that I would somehow go flat footed from one Saturday to the next.

Probably one of the most exciting things to happen on one of these summer vacations at the ranch was the forest fire that burned most of Loomis from Newcastle to the river. The fire roared towards the ranch and there was no way to get out nor would my grandparents have left their home. The old Jersey bull fell in love with the fire engine and followed it for days. Finally, exhausted the bull came swaggering up the driveway. One terrifying night I was sleeping on a lawn swing with my sister. The fires were red on the hills all around us. Little animals and deer came crashing through the yard beside us.

Most summer nights were enchanted. My grandparents had just a tiny one bedroom shack of an old wooden house. It was hot and dry there in the summertime so it was a good time to sleep outside. Grampa and Grama had a big bed up on a platform and in a row beside them were a dozen or more old army cots that we children slept on. Tired little children, we would get in our beds. Grampa liked to play his harmonica and sing Irish and Hillbilly songs. Sometimes he would tell us a story or fall out of bed and go stumbling around. It was not very long before the giggling stopped and the stars in the darkened sky were like sparklers above us. As the night set in the heat of the day rose up taking with it the sweet smell of the willows along one of the little creeks. Somewhere you could hear the muffled cowbell as the old milk cow chewed her cud. Pigs grunted and complained as they shuffled for a more comfortable spot. A deer crashed through the brush and little animals made endless scurryings to the creek. On the hill a lonely coyote moaned a sweet love song. Crickets and katydids challenged each other in imitating the dreaded rattlesnake that

slithered through the darkness. I would lay there safe, snuggling a warm dusty little kitten, as the cool dew of the night lulled me to sleep. Only to be woke again by a guinea hen in the big oak tree screaming, "Look out!, Look out!"

Every year when school started the teacher would ask us to write a report about what we had done that summer vacation. I always thought, "Oh bother, I didn't do anything this summer."

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THE SNIPE HUNT

"What do the simple folk do?" You would be surprised! I don't think there ever was a city cousin who did not get taken on the snipe hunt.

Snipes you know are a long legged bird that only comes out at night. They are easy to catch and very good to eat. They are caught by sitting in the almond orchard back by Guy Camden's draw with gunny sacks held open while the bigger kids beat the brush to chase them out.

Now that you have the idea of what to do, you pick the darkest night and you sit them right up next to Camden's draw with its tangle of wild blackberries surrounding a minnow pond, past which ran a trickling creek. Craggy willows scratched and pointed at the sky. They had been warned that they must sit perfectly still because of the snakes and the "horny toads" running around squirting blood out of their eyes. Also, there had been an Indian sweat house right there where many native Indians had come to worship and surely their spirits walked in the night.

I remember the last snipe hunt. We had left Tommy and Katherine sitting, clutching their bags. Us big kids went off and smooched until we got bored with that and went over to my older sister's house to see if she had anything good to eat. After a nice visit with her we walked around the orange orchard and came through the darkness towards the youngsters, first making snake noises, then ghostly Indian noises, and finally beating the brush, making huge bird noises. Soon we fell into a fit of hysterical laughing and whooping.

The little kids didn't think it was fun at all.



GRANDPA

What I remember most about Grandpa's fruit ranch are the summers when I was a young girl. Grandpa would come out on the porch wearing only his summer shorts, pull on his high boots up his brown legs and set his safari hat on his slippery brown head. The grandchildren knew instantly he was going out to change the irrigation pipes in the orange orchard.

We skipped down the hot dusty road behind Grandpa's big footsteps. We darted in and out behind the orange trees, sometimes hiding inside the cool house like trees to escape from the hot summer sun that blistered our bare feet. Grandpa would slop out into the mud to move the big pipes after turning the sprinklers off. We slogged out into the mud and stomped until we were wallowing in a pool of mud. It was cool and slippery as it squished through our toes and up to our knees.

By this time Grandpa had the big pipes moved. The sprinkler was again raining cool drops. We would run through the sprinklers to rinse off the brown wet earth. Grandpa would then sweep us up onto his big brown shoulders and carry us back up the hot, dusty, dirt road to the house.

-by Michelle Goller



The Birthday Party

My Grandfather Kennedy's birthday was one holiday most remembered by my family. Coming early in the spring, it was always the ideal time for a huge family picnic. As he grew older, neighbors and friends from up and down every road came to help the old man celebrate.

Whitney Kennedy was a master at barbequing a whole beef or lamb in a pit in the ground filled with hot coals. Family came bringing the salads, beans, and breads to go with it.

The cakes were most remembered. Every year it had to be one better. Once there was a replica of the corral on his ranch filled with horses, complete with little melted chocolate chips. I think the most terrible cake was one that had firecrackers hidden amongst the 70 some candles which blew the cake up and made all the children cry. One year my sisters baked for days and made a complete train with all the various box cars, flatcars, oil tankers, and cabooses. The cake was eighteen feet long.

There was one cake that to this day makes me admire my grandfather's good sportsmanship. That year, at the house where we lived on Sunset Avenue, the real cake was hid in the hall closet. My mother made him a cake of a large cardboard box with an alarm clock set to go off underneath it. The cake was frosted with the most beautiful divinity icing made of whipped Ivory Snow washing soap!

I was just a little girl, but I had been allowed to be in on the secret. You can imagine a seven year old watching as her grandfather came by that cake and took a swipe of the icing long before dinner. I remember thinking to myself as I looked at his unchanging face that maybe it wasn't so. Out the door he went without a word. The cake sat in front of him all during dinner and the Big Ben went off at precisely the right time. Oh, what a wonderful surprise. Grandfather jumped and made all the right sorts of faces. Everyone laughed and the children all squealed with delight.

I learned a lesson on sportsmanship that day that has lasted a lifetime.



THE PLAYHOUSE

Birthdays in our family were very special days with much discussion of inviting friends and family. The special birthday person got to choose their favorite food and be in on the excitement of the day.

One year when I was old enough to be very concerned, it appeared that my family had forgotten my birthday. For days before not a word was mentioned about it.

I can remember now standing on the front lawn being very forlorn because it was by then obvious that nothing was going to happen. I heard my dad's truck coming down the hill on Sunset Avenue from our ranch up on Kenneth. Maybe he would give me a little sympathy.

When he turned in the driveway I could see that on his flat bed truck was a large stack of boards. They were all painted white and green. He stopped under the apricot tree and the family came outside. In just minutes they raised a doll house that was in sections ready to fasten together. It was twelve foot square and tall enough for an adult to stand up in. It had a fine porch and the windows were made of isinglass with little green grids in it.

All the children of the family played in the playhouse for thirty years. It stayed with the ranch when everyone moved away.

I have a sweet letter from Julia in which she says, "It was for you that your father made the playhouse."



★★★Fair Oaks Fourth of July★★★

On the Fourth of July we took the family and a picnic and went to the river. Our picnic was ruined when someone saw a plastic bag that had gotten caught on a snag in the rapids and thought someone had drowned. Our holiday was suddenly invaded by ambulances, fire engines, sheriffs cars, Highway Patrol directing traffic, news helicopters circling, a photographer struggling to get his lens out of his vest while he was running, and gawkers along the waters edge.

My thoughts went back to the days when I was a child and everyone in Fair Oaks went down to the river for the day. Our family came from every direction with all the aunts, uncles and grandparents in their old cars.

To get to the river in those days you went across the old bridge and took a sharp left and went down the steep one lane dirt road through face powder-grade dust. If you were lucky there was not a car coming up, because if there was, he had already taken a run at it and you, the car coming down, had to put your car in reverse and back up to the top of the hill and wait until he was up the hill. There would always be a polite salute and you were free to try and go down again.

That was not the scary part. Alongside this road and back under the shelter of the old bridge were endless huts made of old scrap metal, cardboard, wood, even willow branches and canvas in which lived the homeless of the 1940's. Old people, migrants, a society of reprobates.

As soon as you passed there you took a fast run over a sandy landing and then crunched along in your car over the round river rock that rolled and parted as you went along. Down through the pungent smelling willows to hunt a small cove that no one had found yet. We would hunt a shallow area where we could drive the car to the water's edge and tie the small children to the car bumpers with ropes so they could play in the water and not wander off.

The American River in those days before the dam at Folsom was a lazy greenish river in the summer and full of wonderful swimming holes, a few rapids for the adventuresome and little shallows full of darting baby fish and soft sand for the little tykes to play in.

We would take hot dogs to roast on fresh cut willow branches, and cold watermelons we packed in tubs of ice from the ice machine in downtown Fair Oaks. Our family then consisted of forty to fifty people when we got together for a holiday.

Everyone relaxed, visited, swam, ate and counted on safety in numbers. I was about five that Fourth of July when I looked over and saw my three year

old cousin, Patty Rae floating down the river, just her brown ringlets floating on top of the water, not yet saturated, hailed our attention. The adults saw her at the same time. I was speechless. I don't think I can ever remember such total silence. My father was the first to get to her. I don't think anyone even breathed as he carried her to the shore and laid her in the old way, face down on the warm rocks. My father a skinny, hairy man in his old moth eaten bathing suit with a string hanging out of the bottom and a string hanging out of the top, knelt over the little child and gently pressed on her back in the old way. Time and motion stood still in those anxious moments. I have no idea how long until the little one let out a gag, a gurgle, a gasp and then a squall like she had just been born.

In those days there was no rescue squad to call. There was only a volunteer fire department in Fair Oaks and only one sheriff in all of Sacramento County. It was not until 1949 that the Fair Oaks Fire Department was sufficiently organized that on the Fourth of July they sent my Uncle John Vincent down to the river with a fire truck and a small motor boat to stand by. He recalls pulling eleven people from the river in his years of sitting there waiting.

And so. . . we can be thankful for the modern conveniences we have to come to our rescue when we need them.

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THE OLIVE HOUSE

I spent a whole summer when I was a child painting an olive house. My dad mixed up an olive barrel clear to the top with white wash and us children were allowed to spend days painting the old olive house.

The olive house was a building in which my folks cured thousands of gallons of olives every year for sale directly to the consumer. It was a sprawling shed with cement floor that drained out into a draw below our house. It was filled with huge oak barrels with olives in different stages of being "pickled."

Most history stories deal with the large packing sheds that pickled, canned and shipped olives. My family found that they could make a major part of their income from a small olive grove if they cured the olives themselves. The income from the crop was two to three times what it would have been had they taken them to the cannery. My father, Walter Vincent went into partnership with my grandfather, W.W. Kennedy and the two of them produced nearly three thousand gallons of olives every year.

There were strict county laws in those days that called for inspection of the olive houses and prorated the crops only in that they could not be canned. The olives were carried to market in large crocks and dipped with a ladle into white waxed cartons. Most of our crop was sold at home or at the market owned by the farmers of Sacramento County, the Farmers Free Market.

During the Great Depression our family did quite well by selling olives on the street corners in Sacramento for a dollar a gallon. Sometimes my mother would drive the car and my grandfather would go door to door.

I remember picking olives. The olives that are used for pickling were picked from the tree ripe, but not bruised or fallen like the oil olives which were knocked from the trees with poles. The olives were carefully picked and put into boxes to be taken in to cure. It was a slow tedious job. They were picked in the late summer, early fall cold damp weather, standing for hours up on an eighteen foot wood ladder. They were then brought in and rinsed in the boxes and then poured into barrels where they were "cut" with a lye solution. When the lye was checked out by cutting several olives with a pocket knife they were put back into the boxes and allowed to darken for black olives. Ripe olives were not allowed to air. Then both were rinsed with running water until all the taste of lye was out of them. They were then salted and allowed to cure in the salt brine until ready to sell. This took about three weeks.

One of my most well remembered treats after school was a pocketfull of these pickled olives in an old denim jacket to eat while I walked up Sunset Avenue to get the cow and bring her home to the barn for the night.

THE SALESMAN

My Grandfather Kennedy was a wonderful, funny man, bald with a ring of curls around his ears. He had the biggest nose you ever saw. One day he was driving over the H Street Bridge and hit a bump. He bounced up and hit the metal bow in the top of his car and broke his nose beyond repair. It made him seem even funnier when he got in a mischievous mood.

During the depression he and my mother would go door to door selling olives in Sacramento. My mother would drive the car slowly along the curb and he would go up and knock on the door. Early in the day he would do well and sell olives at every house.

Later in the day he would get silly. When the lady of the house would open the door he would be standing there feigning to pick his nose and scratch his backside. My mother would then know it was time to take him home.



TRACTORS

How many tractors have you seen around Fair Oaks lately? I would guess not many.

In some of my historical research I have been aware of how many pictures of tractors there are. It would seem that a tractor may well have been as important in the lives of our forefathers as are our new cars are to us.

I would suppose that after farming with horse and plow or a mule and plow, a tractor was quite a remarkable invention. I found my Dad on a tractor in a picture that may have been taken in the early 1930's. In the family albums with the new babies and additions to the house were pictures of almost all of the tractors that we had on our ranch.

I think the tractor with the most personality was the John Deere. A sprightly thing, with big high wheels in the back and painted green like a bug, it sped about the orchard saying "john pop, john pop, john pop"

There was the gray Fordson that purred as it went along through the rows of fruit trees turning the soft earth. I remember this tractor best, not so much the tractor as the long hours of riding on my dad's lap as he plowed. Often my mother would be gone all day to the market where we sold our crops. I would ride on his lap until I got sleepy and then he would lay me in a box under one of the big Bing cherry trees and I would sleep away as the purr of the tractor sang the lullaby.

Probably the best lullaby I can remember was Henry Kroeger's big yellow caterpillar tractor. He would get out on a summer morning and disc his orchard as the sun was coming up. It was almost like being rocked in a cradle to hear the change in tone of the big "Cat" as it shifted up and down the hills and slowed on the corners. RRRRrrrrrrrrr,RRRRrrrrrrrr. The squeaking of the treads sounded like an old war tank that had reached the peaceful valley.

Our last tractor was a big orange Case. It had huge fenders that our children rode on as they lived this joy with Grandfather. They pretended they were on a huge lumbering elephant as they crashed through the same orchards that the passage of time had grown to be a thick luscious jungle, almost meeting from row to row.

I think our favorite tractor story is of my little nephew. He would hear Grampa tractoring across from the Earl Legette School and he would go to his teacher and tell her that he had to go home; his grandfather needed him to help on the farm. Dear Lady. I know she did not believe him, but she always let him go. School would keep, but tractors, the ranch and Grampa will never pass this way again.

SAILOR STROUD

Sailor Ralph Stroud was one of the most famous all time baseball pitchers. In the early 1900's he played for the Detroit Tigers, New York Giants, and Seattle. He played with our Sacramento Solons until his retirement here in Sacramento area.

Ralph and his wife, Catherine were good friends of our family. They loved to come and visit us on our ranch most especially on a weekday when we were doing the farm work.

Ralph continued to come to the ranch to visit up into his old age. He would drive his brindle colored Plymouth Coupe carefully up Sunset Avenue with his dog, Pal. My mother would get him a big canvas director's chair and he would sit in the orchard where we were picking fruit and watch us work.

One of the things I most admired about my mother was her goodness to her friends and kindness to them when they became very old. One day I watched as she cut a large branch from one of our big Bing Cherry trees, carried it over, and laid it on the old gentleman's lap. How happy it made him to sit there and pick the beautiful ripe fruit from the limb.

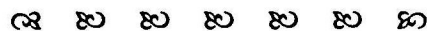
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AUNT LEONA'S CHESS PIE

- 1 Cube butter
- 1 Cup sugar
- 2 Eggs
- A pinch of salt
- 1 Teaspoon vanilla
- 1 Cup ground raisins
- 1 Cup ground walnuts

Cream butter, sugar and salt. Add unbeaten eggs one at a time. Beat well. Stir in ground nuts, raisins and vanilla. Put one large tablespoon in cupcake tins lined with unbaked pie crust. Bake in a moderate oven until done.

(I would suggest 350° for about 20 minutes.)



Aunt Leona was Earl Vincent's sweet wife. Earl Vincent is well remembered in Fair Oaks for his farming and tractor work. He often worked up the land for small farmers who did not need to keep a tractor of their own. The remarkable thing about this is that Earl used to have terrible sneezing allergies that were punctuated with "damn-it". So when he ran his tractor he wore a huge pair of aviator goggles and a bandana tied over his face. Later on he wore a whole gas mask. This was quite a sight to see.

This was Aunt Leona's holiday speciality.

HARVESTING ALMONDS

The almond harvest came at the end of summer about the time of the State Fair. The almond orchards had bloomed in February and March. I still mark the coming of my springtime by looking on February 12 for the first almond blossoms. Sometimes this has meant a trip around Fair Oaks to find a warm sunny slope where the trees had just a little more light and warmth.

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of harvesting almonds is our dog, Critter. The orchards were worked up with the tractor and then dragged level. A long wooden sled was pulled through the almond orchard with the tractor. Attached to this sled were huge canvas "sheets" that were rolled out in under the trees to catch the nuts as they were knocked to the ground with long thin eucalyptus poles or heavy rubber mauls. This is where the dog came along behind the sled. As soon as the men began hitting the trees with the poles she would run, growl and bark, and threaten to bite them for hitting Grampa's trees. How they would laugh and chatter in Spanish when they were cleaning the sheets. They would throw the extra broken twigs and limbs off with the leaves. Critter would fetch the limbs and bring them back to them until she was exhausted and they would just laugh and laugh.

The nuts, after they had been knocked, were taken to a huller where they were shook loose from their hulls. Earlier we hired high school girls and women to sort the nuts. They spent weeks gossiping and sorting the nuts under the cool sheds. Later the huller sorted the nuts in its process.

The nuts were then dried on huge platforms in the sun. What fun we children had on the platforms. We made up elaborate plays and dance recitals. Often the doctor would prescribe laying on one in the sun for some illness. But, for those few short weeks of the year the almonds were spread out on them to dry.

The drying almonds were always threatened by a summer storm coming up unexpectedly. It was always a flurry of excitement to see the adults bagging almonds when a drop of rain warned of a downpour coming. I remember one time my folks were out of town and it began to rain. Todd Arase, our neighbor, came hurrying in his truck. He went straight down to the almond platforms and covered them with tarps. If the golden shelled almonds got wet, the shell turned dark black and ruined them.

We belonged to the Almond Growers Association in Sacramento. We trucked huge burlap bags full of nuts down to their plant and unloaded them. That was the last we had to do. Several times during the year a check would come in the mail. The almonds were a good money making crop.

THE STATE FAIR

We always knew it was time for school to start and that summer was over when Aunt Sadie and her son Walter Henry would come to Fair Oaks to stay while the California State Fair was on. It was so terrible. We would see them drive up and all of us children would run and hide out for as long as we could get away with it.

The thing that was so terrible was the yearly kisses! Aunt Sadie was a dwarf of a woman who wore black lace up shoes with big chunky heels, a black dress that hung to the floor in many layers of capes and collars, and black hat with netting on it. The hat was stuck to her head with long pins that I had imagined went into her scalp and back out at another place. If there was body under that dress I never could have guessed it except for the little white face with thin blue lips and the wisp of white hair that was twisted into a miniscule bun. Walter was almost as fearsome. He drove a fine new car every year which every day was dusted and waxed, even the tires. He combed his hair over from the top of one ear to the top of the other ear and somehow it stayed there in little lines no matter what he did. He was an old bachelor and we knew he hated us all, even though we had to all line up for the kisses.

Everyday they would get up and go to the old fair grounds out on Stockton Boulevard and spend the day. The old fair had personality. Pink stucco buildings in an early California Spanish style. Exhibits were competitive and most extraordinary. My folks always sent exhibits for the competition and won big blue ribbons.

My memories of the fair are very every day ordinary, every year the same thing. I would like to share with you my sister Wanda's memories of the Fair.

My two older sisters, Wanda and Laura are about ten years older than I am so they often got to go more places than I did. One of the places they remember best is going to the State Fair. Our Grandfather Kennedy would go down there every year with his big truck and shovel the manure from the stables and bring it home. He used it to fertilize his 50 acre grapefruit farm in Carmichael.

On one of the days that he went, my mother would dress my sisters up in their cutest dresses and they would go with Grampa in the big truck early in the morning. Everyone knew "Kennedy" so the girls could run the fairgrounds and see all the exhibits. There was plenty of time for the two little girls to see the county building with the beautiful fruits and vegetables, crops from every county in the state competing against each other for the best display. Then they would wonder at the hall of flowers where they saw such things as orchids that you only saw at fair time. They loved the animals and would look for Grampa along the way.

The fairway was the best part of all. Everyone looked for Whitney Kennedy's granddaughters and gave them free rides. The big Ferris wheel was the favorite. In those days you could see all over Sacramento. The food stands coaxed them to try each tasty treat with cotton candy being the most remembered. By afternoon they would end up at the stadium watching the horse races and waiting for Grampa to come find them. Late in the afternoon he would gather them up and head for home with two tired, but happy little girls.

When the end of August comes I always remember almonds drying in the sun, always the unfailing unexpected rain on them, the adults rushing to get them bagged up with much profanity, the awful yearly kissing, the California State Fair and then - school starts.



FRIED ALMONDS

When my dad came back from the almond huller he would always bring with him a burlap sack with several pounds of almond meats in it. He would carry it into the house and make fried almonds.

Place almonds in boiling water until skins come off when pressed. Cool under running water. When cooled slip skins off between fingers. Pat almonds dry.

Heat quite a bit of butter in a cast iron skillet. Add almonds and saute carefully and slowly, turning often until light brown. Salt to taste.

FIRE!

FIRE! I do not suppose there could have been a more terrifying word in the early days of Fair Oaks.

My Kennedy Grandparents had a home at 8260 Sunset Avenue in the early 1900's. When the word fire was announced everyone panicked. The first person to grab something and run for the door was the person who picked up the ironing board. They ran with it in their arms crosswise at the door. Immediately behind that person came someone pushing the piano. It was lucky anyone got out alive and nothing was saved. The pages from a Bible that had come with ancestors to the colonies wafted up with the draft and drifted as far as Greenback Lane. In those days the nearest fire department was in Roseville. They came post-haste with horse and wagon. When they finally arrived my grandfather asked them to just chop up the few remaining big beams and help him finish burning it up clean.

I can imagine this scene was repeated many times in wood frame homes, with wood cooking and heating stoves. Many times to fight a fire was to just try to get valuables and people out of the building. About the only fire fighting device, and pretty hopeless it was, the bucket brigade of men and women passing buckets of water down a line. Pouring the buckets of water through a hole in the roof on the fire.

When I was a child, old enough to remember, they were still fighting grass fires on the bald spot with gunny sacks. The women took the bags down and wet them in the river. The men on the fire line would swat at the fire with the wet bags as it came towards them. Some fires on the bluffs lasted for days. I seem to recall it exciting and a real social event for a child. Everyone was there. We had sandwiches and fruit, and they all thought I was cute.

The wet burlap bags, the bucket brigades, and the fire axes were supplemented with about eight water tanks that were carried on the men's backs. An affair about like you would spray your fruit trees with. These were put into service in about 1935.

About the same time an official volunteer fire department was formed. The center of their efforts was the fire whistle which stood in the yard of the Irrigation District Office and could alert the whole community at once. When the whistle blew, everyone who had a phone could pick up the receiver and the telephone operator in downtown Fair Oaks would be on the line to tell people where the fire was. Also at this time they fitted a trailer with some fire fighting equipment and the often needed first aid supplies. Everyone in the volunteer group had a trailer hitch that would fit this trailer. Whoever got there first would hook up the trailer and take off with it. Others would follow in a caravan to the fire.

In one of my historical references I see that in 1938 the community chipped in \$250 and bought a 1932 Model B Ford pickup. To this pickup, which was painted red, they added a water tank, a pump, extra hose, most likely garden hoses, and the first aid supplies. This little tiny red fire truck ran and made all the dogs howl until 1945.

My dad liked to tell how everyone would come to a fire with their garden hose and hook them to every available faucet in the neighborhood. Later they installed fire hydrants every half mile or so. The farmers would mark a color on their surface irrigation pipe which would be brought to a fire and hooked up to bring water in volume. After the fire was over, and I probably do mean, when the fire was over, each farmer would gather up his color of pipe and take it home.

One of the things I would not omit from this story is how the little girls were all in love with the fireman. The first volunteer chief was Adolph Heim, a bachelor at that time and a perfect cross between a cowboy and a fireman. He was the hero of a little five year old who was always brought along to sit on a box and told to stay there. Forty years later when my mother came to the door to tell me he had died, we stood with our arms around each other and wept.

About the time Adolph retired in 1946 the fire department had really been updated. There had been purchased a 1939 Mack Truck with a 500 gallon a minute pump. In 1948 they purchased an old army weapons carrier and fitted it with grass fire fighting equipment. The truck was painted with aluminum colored paint, probably with a paint brush since it was a lumpy, runny paint job.

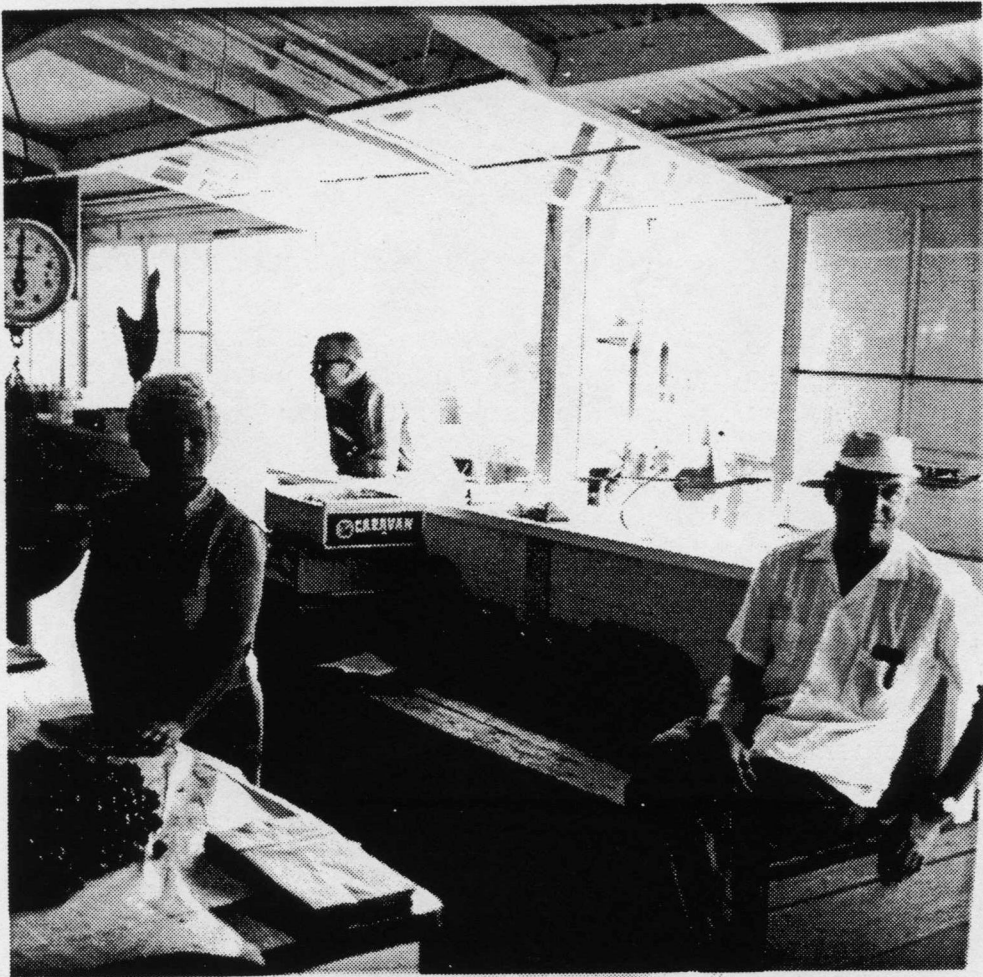
Adolph was succeeded by George Payne as Fire Chief. When I was still a little girl, George Payne was about ten feet tall (at least I thought so). He was also one of my heroes. How surprised I was a few years ago to be standing next to him at the vegetable counter at Bel Air Market and to see that we were the same height!

My other fireman hero was my father's brother, John Vincent. John lived at the new firehouse that was built in Fair Oaks in 1948. I am almost certain that John was one of the first fireman who lived at the firehouse full time.

John had dropped by our house on a day in June of 1955, my Wedding Day, the fire whistle blew and the fire brigade came past us up Sunset Avenue with their assortment of red trucks. Following behind like always was the parade of those in the community who could leave their job and come to help.

As I stood there in the yard, where my grandfather's house had burned down so many years before, watching the procession go by, I was not sure if I wanted to go get married or go to the fire and just sit on a box and watch.





Wanda Vincent, Ed Fox, Walter Vincent at the Farmers Free Market in Sacramento



Wanda with grandchildren Michelle, Lauryl and Marcus.



Walter Vincent picking peaches on his ranch about 1970.



Wanda Vincent packing peaches on the ranch about 1970.