

*PART TEN*

*HOME SWEET HOME*

## THE OLD BARN CHURCH

When I was a little girl, a kind neighbor lady, Betty Graham picked me up and took me to church every Sunday along with her daughter Janie. I loved being with them, but the most hope I got out of church was that the minister would soon get to the joke which meant he was nearly to the end of the sermon and I could get out of there. My days in the sun were more important to me at that age.

When I was about 13 the McKenny's invited me to their church. This church was a sharp contrast to the downtown Fair Oaks church with its wood paneled walls and velvet pews. The church my friends took me to was in one of George Parnell's old dairy barns on the corner of Fair Oaks Boulevard and Greenback Lane.

George had started a little Bible Church with a small group of folksy people from the area. They were meeting in his barn. I love to tell the story this way because everyone pictures milking stalls, straw and hay, flies and wet piles of manure and it gives me great pleasure. Actually, the barn was the milk processing barn and was made of sterile, white washed concrete up about six feet and then clean white paneled walls with sunny windows along the morning side. It was furnished with old burgandy velvet lounge seats, worn and telling of years in a movie theater. The piano was a honky-tonk affair, carved and ornate. It could still belt out a toe tapping, "Amazing Grace." The pulpit was not too unusual, but the communion table was made of two tables, the top of one and the bottom of another covered with dozens of coats of thick mahogany varnish. On top of the table each Sunday was a bouquet made by one of the ladies on the flower committee. I used to think the bouquets represented the spirit of the lady who brought it. Some bouquets would be a tiny stingy arrangement poked down into a vase too small. Someone else would pick whole limbs of blooming almonds or flowering tree. It was always interesting to watch them wilt, as the morning went on, from the heat of the old coal oil stove at the back of the room.

Originally, sweet kind soft spoken George Parnell was the pastor. By the time I came they had a full time man, Linus who was uneducated and still a little rough around the edges. He was a navy man before becoming our pastor. He could yell louder in this little cement room than anyone before or since. He preached Hell fire and damnation and folks came forward often before the sermon was over "to do business with the Lord". He preached abstinence from just about everything known to mankind. He put a real fear of God into us teenagers.

In spite of Linus, we had the most wonderful church family I have ever known. The teenagers put on a program for the adults every Sunday evening. We sang solos or played our school band instruments. The boys got to preach

or lead in a Bible quiz. Most evenings we would have what was called a sword drill. A sword drill was when everyone would hold their Bible over their head and the leader would call out a Bible verse. The first person who found it had to stand to their feet and read it. The adult audience was generous with their praise and encouragement to us youngsters.

Our young people's leader was Edith Brown, she was with us for Sunday School, Wednesday night Prayer Meeting, Young People's on Sunday evening and was available to us any other time we needed to talk to her.

Every couple of weeks the adults would sponsor a party for us kids on a weekend. We had some of the most fun parties I can ever remember in my lifetime. One of the best remembered is one time when we blind folded Pastor Ryan. He stood at the door of the church every Sunday morning as we left and shook our hand and had some kind word for us. We wanted to see if he could identify us by shaking our hands. You guessed it, he got every single one of us right. Sure made believers out of us kids. One winter evening we had a taffy pull at Parnell's. We had this team ping pong game where you had to blow the ping pong ball over a line on the center of the table. We were having a really good time already when one of the adults blew his false teeth out onto the table. I didn't think we would ever stop laughing.

Our group of teenagers really enjoyed being together. One the things we did was take several cars full of kids and go to Youth for Christ in downtown Sacramento on Saturday nights. On the way home we would stop at Doc's on Folsom Boulevard and order everything we wanted and then take up an "offering" to pay for it. Only once did we come up short and then that was only by a penny.

We met in the San Juan High School Library every school day morning for prayer with kids from other churches. Every Wednesday noon we had a Bible Club sponsored by Miss Cale, Mr. Hoag and Mrs. Carrick. I would suppose if my age would let me make any conclusion it would be this. Kids enjoy being together in large groups. Be it good or bad they are going to migrate to what interests them. I am thankful for my "God's Gang" when I was a teenager.



## MRS. RYAN'S CHESS PIE

One unbaked pie shell

1 1/2 cups of sugar

2 tablespoons vinegar

4 eggs

1 cube butter

1 tablespoon flour

1 tablespoon cornmeal

Cream the sugar and butter. Add eggs one at a time beating well. Add other ingredients and stir well. Pour into unbaked pie shell and bake at 350° until it tests done in the middle, about like a pumpkin pie.

(I make this pie substituting the juice and rind of one lemon for the vinegar. It is incredible!)



Mrs. Ryan was the wife of the Reverend Jesse Ryan, an old retired Methodist minister who came to Fair Oaks and for a short time had the little Fair Oaks Bible Church that met in the cow barn on the corner of Fair Oaks Boulevard and Greenback Lane. Mrs. Ryan made this pie for every potluck. The story was that in the early days when they pastored in Texas those were about the only ingredients she had for a pie.

## HARD ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN

We were driving through Utah on a desert highway when we came to a scenic area called the Hard Rock Candy Mountain. A tune came through my head from somewhere down memory lane. As I looked at the scene ahead of mountains made of pink and lavender I went back years to vision I had of another Hard Rock Candy Mountain.

It happened the Christmas before I was married. It was an enchanted time. I had my first fine job. Michael was home from cadets. All the world was mine.

Christmas that year as usual was at my grandparents ranch. My grandfather was very old by then and terribly crippled with arthritis. For some reason he had decided to build a log store on his ranch. He could notch the logs for Grama and the teenage children to lift, stacking in place. When he finished the log store he invited everyone he knew for Christmas Eve.

Michael went downtown Fair Oaks and asked everyone if they knew an Italian person who could tell him how to make real Italian Ravioli. Bless her heart, I don't know her name; but, every year for 40 years we have made her ravioli. It is not a recipe that can be easily written down. We worked all day filling and sealing the wonderful little fat pillows with spinach, cheese, sausage, bread crumbs and seasoning. We borrowed Uncle Roberts "toe pick" kettle and made a sauce of chunky tomatoes, big pieces of onion, celery and tiny button mushrooms. We seasoned and tasted until it was just right.

Everyone arrived before dark at the log store. With them came armloads of food; canning kettles and boiling kettles filled with fat chicken noodles, spaghetti and of course our ravioli. There were Wonder Bread trays filled with Parker House Rolls and Cinnamon buns. There were big salads everywhere. Heirloom dishes had a yearly outing filled with fancy cookies and candies.

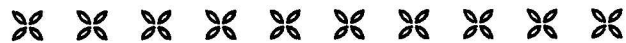
Santa always came before we were finished eating. Those were prosperous years for our families, so Santa brought bicycles and wagons. The first dolls with hair were the delight of every little girl. I was the bride to be that year. There were sheets and pillow cases embroidered for my "hope chest".

The most memorable part of the evening was my grandfather's jug band. His friends were all about as old as he was. Real "Old Timers", many of them played washboards, jugs, saws, anything that would make a noise. Along with them were the usual harmonica, fiddle and an accordian. They played Christmas Carols, Hill Billy, Western and Irish tunes.

It was a truly awesome sight to see this menagerie of old white headed men go into total animation as they tried to outdo each other, louder and more toe tapping. Their whole bodies seemed to become part of the music.

They started playing an adaption of an old hobo hymn, sung by Burl Ives, "Big Rock Candy Mountain". As they sang faster and faster, and louder and louder of "the buzzing of the bees in the lemonade trees in the Big Rock Candy Mountain". My imagination ran completely away with me.

That was the last wonderful Christmas of my childhood. That was the last wonderful Christmas with my grandfather. My Grandfather Kennedy who made the day so special for all of his family. I know that where ever it is that grandfathers fly away to, Christmas must be the most special day of the year.



## THE THREE BEARS

In March of 1963, my husband, Captain Michael R. McKenny was killed in the crash of his F-102 Jet Fighter Plane in Germany.

A week later I came back to my home town of Fair Oaks. I can still remember coming home to the ranch in the middle of the night. As the Air Force limousine slowly drove up the long dirt driveway into my parents ranch I felt the first peace in my heart in all those days.

It was late at night, the almonds were in bloom and their white petals were drifting like snow to the ground. The orchard that my grandfather had planted in 1906 was a solid mass of blooming yellow mustard. As we drove along through the orchard I had the first thoughts that I could go on. Fair Oaks embraced me again that night.

My story is not of grief, but of a small home town and of the wonderful people who live here and care. Just a few days after we returned home, our daughter had her fifth birthday. One of her gifts was a huge brown teddy bear my sister and her husband bought at Larry Smart's Western Auto Store in downtown Fair Oaks.

Every time I see that bear I think, "Oh, sweet bear, you know so much." The story the bear would tell is this: With the birthday in mind my sister bought just the one bear. The next morning when the San Juan Record came out, Larry Smart read of the aircraft accident. Larry called my sister and said, "You know, that bear has a brother and he has cried all night. He is lonely and wants his brother. Could you come and get him?" So that day the second bear came to our house for the three year old little sister. When the baby had his birthday the next October the third bear came to live at our house.

Such kindness is never forgotten.



## **THE OLD SANTA SUIT**

**S**anta must have went off to ever, ever land with Grandmother the year she died, for I never saw him again.

My childhood days were made so beautiful by the old "Santy Claus" who came every year on Christmas Eve. The tradition began with my Kennedy grandparents when their children were just babies. Someone lovingly sewed a red suit of old wool scraps and trimmed it with soft white rabbit fur. Every year we would hear him coming up the drive with sleigh bells ringing and tiny little red lights blinking. We never did quite see all the reindeer and the sleigh because of the glistening light in the house behind us. As we opened the door he would burst in with a huge bag of toys. How exciting it was because he sure knew what had been on our list and whether we had been bad or good.

One year the older cousins decided they did not believe any more and somehow he found out! When he came in all he had was a bag full of willow switches. Oh my, they were so sorry. They really did believe! Well, if they really did believe maybe he had some extra toys in the sleigh.

**S**anta grew with us, always changing weight and voice. No one seemed too concerned. Sometimes he spoke with a Brooklyn accent, kind of like Uncle Percy. Once he had on my dad's old wedding shoes. The last time I saw him he had the gawky body of a sixteen year old. The suit was moth eaten and soiled, fur shedding and leather showing. The gauze mask was peeling and the pink was almost gone from his cheeks. The huge suit hung like on a skeleton and the young fellow who had drawn the lot shook as he passed out the gifts with a Spanish accent.

I think today of all the adventures that suit has had. It missed being burned up in a house fire because it was over at my Aunt Monie's for mending. Some young nephews thought it would be real funny to put it on and go surprise their sister who was having a slumber party. The boys were the ones who were surprised. Just as they jumped through the sliding glass door and yelled, "Ho, Ho, Ho!" the elastic broke and the pants fell straight to the floor. The old suit was used at the Fair Oaks Post Office and the Farmer's Free Market to bring a lot of joy to other children. I think the worst thing he ever did was go out and try to rob a gas station. Some cousins were bribed by some hoodlums to use it for a disguise for robbery. It must have built in goodness because the hoodlum who was wearing it got scared and ran off through a grape vineyard, tearing it and falling into the mud as he ran.

When Grandmother died the suit was found and given to my sister. When she opened the box it was moth eaten, torn and dirty. This year she lovingly repaired it, washed it and replaced all the soft fur. It lays in a fresh new box now waiting to give another generation of children great happiness.



## Julie's Sugar Crinkles

1 1/2 cups sugar  
1/2 cups shortening  
1/2 cups margerine or butter  
3 eggs well beaten  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1/2 teaspoon lemon extract  
1/2 teaspoon orange extract  
2 1/2 cups flour  
1 teaspoon soda  
1 teaspoon cream of tartar

Cream with mixer the sugar and the shortening. Add well beaten eggs, then flavorings. Add dry ingredients that have been sifted together. Chill. Roll in small balls and then roll in a mixture of sugar and finely grated orange rind. Bake at 350° on a lightly greased cookie sheet about ten minutes or until lightly browned and do not fall when touched in center.



## PINK COTTON STOCKINGS

A trim ankle clad in thick long pink cotton stockings stepped from the train. Julia Forrest coming from the high Rocky Mountains of Colorado to the little town of Fair Oaks.

Those long pink stockings were a time piece in the life of my dear friend. During my childhood, still pink and shapely they marched off into the sky on the old reel clothesline that stretched out to the barn.

The longer years of her middle age she walked to town for groceries and home again with stocking sagging and laden with dust as she came back again up Sunset Avenue. So many times as I was driving down the hill I would see her out in front of her house hoeing. She would have on a gingham dress, starched white apron, big cotton sun bonnet and those heavy cotton stockings, no matter how hot the day. A memory remains of the aging Julia coming from the barn with a bucket of milk, her stockings full of burrs and straw.

Through the years I visited her while she sat in her little rocking chair. We talked as she carefully worked at mending the basket of stockings beside her chair. I sat in the straight dining room chair. Her husband, Frank sat in his big brown leather chair. We were a Norman Rockwell scene in the sagging old glass of the picture window.

The last time I visited her Frank had been gone for a long time. She sat like a tiny doll in his big chair. I got to sit in the rocking chair. She sat jabbing at the senseless old stockings with a needle and thread of whatever color she could find. Her hands were knobby and gnarled with age and years of hard work. The light from the sagging window was of little help to the waxen eyes. Often the darning would slip away into uselessness. She would continue to stitch the long puckered gashes by rote. Beside her in a basket lay a lifetime of pink cotton stockings. The blush of youth gone they lay worn and twisted like tired old serpents waiting the familiar hands of their mistress.

She left them there and went for a pair of golden slippers.



## HOME AGAIN - UP SUNSET AVENUE

I often turn at Smith's corner, where long ago the cement wall invited many a weary traveler to stop and set a spell under the giant oak trees. I let my mind go back fifty years or more. I see the tunnel of olive trees that shaded Sunset Avenue. I picture how Singh's little orchard of fine fruit trees looked in the hollow before the hill where the long row of palms grew. I smile as I pass old Stephanie's driveway. I take a deep breath as I go down the hill and remember the cool draw, with the sweet smelling willows that grew along the spring fed creek that flowed there. Here on the left is Julia's. I always see her in a gingham dress with a starched white apron hoeing in her garden. Memories are precious of Frank, a giant of a man, sitting in his big leather chair by the window always smiling and offering a hearty welcome to us children. I see my Grandfather Vincent sitting in his chair pining for his sweet wife, Elizabeth. I feel the warmth of his arms as he held me as a tiny child and know that he adored me. Out in the yard is Uncle Earl sneezing and yelling, "Damn it." There is the bank where the big orange poppies grew. (I still wonder if it was really against the law to pick just one?) I see Henry Kroeger walking in his big rubber boots so intent on turning off a faucet. On the hill I see Grace Wasgatt in her window always watching. I turn up the driveway and stop under the apricot tree where the Easter Bunny was sitting. The haunting smell of my Dad's pipe fills the air.

Home again, such treasured memories.



the graft. To look at the ghostly blackened orchard and see the bark peeling was difficult to do. My dad was patient. He waited and sure enough, the next year out came new shoots. He hired a neighbor, a Japanese man, named Mr. Arase to prune our trees. Mr. Arase was a fine orchardist and knew exactly how to bring the trees back into shape and production.

In later years we burned huge smudge pots to keep the trees from freezing and protect the crops. We had an alarm that would go off when the temperature reached freezing. An orange tree can take about two hours at 28°. During some of those early freezes it went down to freezing and stayed freezing day and night.

Those first years of the citrus industry in Fair Oaks were utopia. In 1910 they shipped 128 box cars of oranges from Fair Oaks. My dad remembered ox and horse drawn wagons bringing huge loads of oranges into the packing houses in downtown Fair Oaks. Winters were rainy in those days and the huge wagon wheels churned mud clear up to their hubs.

As I was growing up our family picked and sold the fruit at our home and at the Farmers Free Market in Sacramento. By the time I was ten I could carry an orange picking bag which hung around the neck and under the arm. Up the ladder we would go with 20 to 40 pounds of oranges on our side. The oranges were carefully cut from the limb and you better not let Daddy find one pulled off in your box! An orange picking clipper was a tiny thing that fit into the palm of your hand and was strapped across your knuckles so that your hand was free to hold on to the ladder or pull a limb to you to pick.

We had a machine that consisted of simple rollers spaced at different widths that sorted the oranges quickly into boxes of several sizes. The oranges were then sold by the dozen, 25¢ to 60¢ depending upon the size. A full box of oranges weighing 40 pounds sold for \$4.00.

The orchards were our entire living as I was growing up. We kept the orchard weed free and pruned all those years. Only once did my dad have any trouble with an orange tree. When he was old he fell the full length of an 18 foot ladder from the top of one of the trees. A fireman happened to come along to say hello to him and found him there. The man carried him to the road and got help. My dad spent most of his last year in bed with a broken leg. He relished all the love and attention it brought him.

The land was sold when he died. I watched as they grabbed the trees with huge machines and threw them into trucks to haul away down Sunset Avenue. My ancestors were in a fury. I have never since seen such a windstorm in Fair Oaks as there was that day. The wind was blowing dirt, leaves and tree limbs all over Fair Oaks as the trees were taken away.

The trees were long lasting and faithful friends.