



*A Rollicking Trip with
Famous and Fascinating People*

Santa Ynez Valley Secrets

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Pat Murphy

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PART I

High
Times
in the Valley



*Who tore the clothes
off an Elvis Presley
impersonator?*

(A.G.)

CHAPTER 6

Santa Ynez Ramblings

TODAY IN THE VILLAGE of Santa Ynez, standing in the street in front of the post office visiting with friends would be very risky. Traffic has increased, and now, there is a three-minute rush hour when stores close. At night, a few lonely cars crouch in front of the coffee house. A couple of new restaurants are testing the water and some antique shops display elderly merchandise. Unique stores are starting to appear.

The Red Barn is still going strong. Lloyd and Tim Borkman have been feeding folks there for 38 years. For a while, there was a sneaking suspicion that the Borkmans felt that changing the menu would be a sign of weakness. Eventually, they added some new entrees and the fact is that the Red Barn has always been the place where locals have gathered.

Charlie and Paula Greenwald's Burger Barn, planted with umbrellas and flowers, draws celebrities, cowboys and local folks. At the Longhorn Cafe, Ray Beaulieu pioneered ostrich burgers for the more adventurous eater.

The Maverick has long been the "wildlife" refuge. It has a new dance hall, new management and has its own unique ambiance. There, one can hear tales of colorful characters from the past.

Al Spaulding started marching around with a gleam in his eye and a hammer in his hand. Slowly, the little buildings that formerly held Steve's Wheel and Tire and Don and Susan Hanson's Land and Livestock Co. were transformed into a new restaurant with al fresco dining.

Al's Santa Ynez Feed and Milling has been a long-time fixture in town and so it seemed a marvelous idea to name the restaurant Santa Ynez Feed and Grill.

This tiny western town is so harmonious, it seems strange to think of its wild and woolly heritage. Not too long ago, the notorious bandit, Joaquin Murrieta, terrorized the area, killing a friendly Indian and his family before fleeing to his hideout in the Tulare area.

However, the law was hot on his trail and eventually killed Murrietta and his side-kick, Three Fingers Jack. To prove it, they decapitated him and brought Murrietta's head, along with Jack's hand with three fingers, back to the authorities.



Tucked into the center of town is the little Santa Cota Market, which sprung into reincarnation when Ben and Nicole Pena bought it in 1986. Ben, a multi-talented gentleman, worked night and day, meticulously renovating the ancient building. Ben and Nicole made a winning combination. She is full of energy and creativity and, in addition to the grocery store, she installed a flower business and delicatessen. When Nicole was growing up in the village of Crouay, in Normandy, France, her parents, Jean and Jeanne Guillemette, lived above their combination cafe/store and gasoline station. For a time, the Penas, with their son Christopher, did the same, for the days started very early for them.

"The fresh-flower delivery started at dawn," recalled Nicole, "by then my three employees and I were in the kitchen preparing the deli food which was fresh every day."

At 8:30 A.M., the back door would fly open and the crew from the post office marched in. Their tastebuds were trembling in anticipation of the fragrant hot coffee and flaky fresh-baked croissants awaiting them. "Shirley Breiner, Bill Clark, Beth Morrison, Carl Rio and Gail Packard would be watching the hands of the clock until it was time to go over," said Alice Pruitt.

The old store became a beehive of activity and it was fun to come into town. Pickup trucks pulled up and parked and were joined by a Rolls and a Mercedes or two, as people discovered the friendly atmosphere. Seated in the deli, in animated conversation, one could find writers, artists, horsetrainers, wine-makers, celebrities, or just kids spending a few pennies for candy. Tourists from L.A. ogled the cowboys, and Mexican field workers came in to cash their checks. French black-pearl magnate, Jean-Claude Brouillet, would stop by to speak French with Nicole. The phone rang constantly and local business people would stagger out, loaded down with lunch orders for their staff.

"At the end of the day, we would stand on the sidewalk and wave at our friends as they went by," said Nicole, with a satisfied smile. In 1993, the Penas sold the market and moved the flower shop to Madera street.



In 1955, the Postmistress was Ruth Pratt: "Up until that time, the office of Postmaster was a political appointment," related Ruth. "Dwight D. Eisenhower signed my appointment after I had completed all the tests. My clerks were Doris Meese and Madelyn Wilson.

"When we arrived one morning, there was the most terrible stench in the post office. We hunted around and finally found it was coming from a package

SANTA YNEZ RAMBLINGS

that had been shipped to a local man, who had a trout and duck farm. The fertile duck eggs had been shipped from Washington state in an egg crate but most were broken and rotting. We rushed them outside, set them on the curb and phoned the postal customer to retrieve his package right away.

From time to time, the town has been chosen as a film location. In the '70s, a film company decided to use the post office in a scene. They blocked off access to the building, without bothering to get official permission. Later that afternoon, when local ranchers arrived to pick up the day's mail, a haughty Hollywood assistant forbade them to approach the building. Now this was viewed as not only an outrage but down right un-American. "What do you mean we can't pick up our mail?" they shouted. "This is our town, not yours!" Fists began to fly...the post office was liberated.



"Years ago, the local airport used to have breakfast fly-ins. Sometimes 30 to 40 planes would arrive," reported Flossie Jensen. "One time, they hired a stunt flyer, whose assistant hung on the edge of the wing during the flight. It was unseasonably cold that day and the man borrowed my sweater to wear as he clung to the wing. As they flew down the river bed, many of the town's people didn't realize it was a stunt and panic ensued." Was that Flossie hanging from the wing of an airplane?

Many regarded druggist Leonard Parsons as the Red Baron of our valley's skies. It was reported that he was quite a dare-devil flyer, roaring over the villages so low that families would climb on their roofs to hold down their shingles.

A page in Santa Ynez's crime record: One night, deputies were called to a house near the Indian reservation. A woman demanded that Nako Gomez be arrested. It seemed that he had promised to give her a roll of linoleum for her house, in return for a roll in the hay. But afterwards, refused to keep his promise. "When deputies George Boverson and Vic Alves arrived to settle the dispute, they were astounded to see a bear coming towards them. It turned out to be the husky, linoleum-impaired woman who had a head of very long, wild hair."



In 1961, the Santa Ynez Valley Historical Society Museum was established through the lengthy efforts of Bob and Ellen Gleason, Grace Lyons and Jeanette Davidson. It had only two rooms but, over the years, was expanded to seven. Later, we gained the Park-Janeway Carriage House. A courtyard was built in memory of Mary Davidge and an arbor in memory of Ellen Scheldt and Lolita Herdman. One room is dedicated to the local Chumash Indian tribe, whose nearby reservation is the smallest in the U.S. The museum curator is Lars Mortensen, who has undertaken his job with great enthusiasm.



Lance Brown, Frank Scott and President Ronald Reagan

“From the time I was a kid, we’d attend brandings at Burley Beard’s ranch,” recalled Lance. “All the neighboring ranch kids would be there with their parents: the Chamberlins, Lutons, Greggs, Marty Begg and Chipper Orton. Some of the best ropers in the valley helped us learn to rope steers.”

Sometimes, the Sedgwick children would come to the brandings at their own Rancho La Laguna de San Francisco. They were playmates of Lance’s before they became famous; author Jean Stein wrote a book, *Edie*, which chronicled their strange family life.

“Edie was close to my age and I remember that she was pretty shiny,” said Lance with a grin. “She had a certain flare and charisma and had a naturally theatrical look about her. She really turned a lot of heads. I remember her sitting on the corral fence taking photos.”

She was the seventh child of Duke and Alice Sedgwick. In her twenties she became one of the in-crowd at Andy Warhol’s Factory and a star of his underground movies. Her life ended under tragic, drug-related circumstances, in Santa Barbara.

Being in a prominent family had its perks and Lance often hobnobbed with people of renown. “I remember when we were asked to bring some of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay from our vineyard to a party at San Marcos Ranch for President Reagan and his press corps,” said Lance. “Bob Herdman and his staff put on a big New York strip barbecue and I was pouring the wine.

M Y S T E R Y S T A R S

“The president’s helicopter arrived and he was brought over to where our wines were on display. I asked if he would prefer red or white wine. He replied, ‘I’d like some of that Chardonnay.’ As I handed him the glass of wine, I said, ‘From one Ranchero to another and may you enjoy.’ Reagan smiled and said, ‘What camp are you in?’ I replied, ‘Picadores’ and I knew he was in the camp called ‘Adolfo.’ He loved visiting the Rancheros and was just a great guy.”

Another celebrity guest of the Rancheros was James Garner, a friend of T. Hayer. “He’s an unpretentious guy and charmed everyone with his jokes and funny stories,” said Lance. “One year, he was invited to award the graduation certificates for the first-year members, which are called ‘Mavericks.’ Here was TV’s ‘Maverick’ presenting these hard-won awards!”

One day when Lance was picking up his mail at the tiny Los Olivos post office, Liz Kyle mentioned that Michael Jackson needed a ranch manager for his Neverland ranch. Knowing this ranch well, he went over to inquire and was hired the next day.

“I thought I was being hired to run a 2,700 acre ranch but it turned out that I was also managing thirteen departments and a hot bed of back-stabbing employees. Jealousy ran rampant. I started having weekly staff meetings and things began to straighten out.

“It was interesting that I would see Jackson around the grounds but had never met him,” said Lance. “Finally, I was ushered into his presence. I told him about my background, but it was not until I started talking about my children that he actually made eye-contact with me. He is a very shy person, but he truly loves children. Over the time that I worked for him, I saw the many wonderful things he did for them and how happy he made them. He was especially devoted to helping the handicapped and terminally ill. They forgot their problems when they saw the beautiful gardens, amusement park, two-story arcade, theater and the zoo. He often entertained the employees’ children. My own kids had wonderful times there. In many ways, he was like a 14-year-old boy in a 36-year-old man’s body.

“When we talked, I could see what great creativity and imagination he had. But like so many talented people, he is a unique kind of a person. I’ll be honest with you, he is definitely different; but in many ways, he is a wonderful man and he certainly has done a lot for this valley.”

Jackson is a night person. The famous King Ludwig of Bavaria delighted in taking moonlight excursions through the woods in a gilded sleigh, to become inspired with ideas for creating his castles. Jackson, too, loved to tour the grounds in the wee hours, in his personal golfcart. He once remarked to Lance that he did his best creative work between midnight and 8 A.M.

Although Neverland has an extraordinary security system and topnotch security personnel, intruders never seem to give up on impromptu visits. “As far as I know we never had a life-threatening situation,” stated Lance. “One deranged man claimed he had been sent by God to talk to Michael about saving the world, but it was usually fans or tourists—especially German and Japanese tour-



Photo by Christine

About the Author

Patricia Patterson Murphy is a journalist who wrote the column “Woolgathering” for the *Santa Ynez Valley News* and the *Santa Barbara News–Press*. She is now the valley’s society correspondent for the *Santa Barbara News–Press*. Her monthly columns have appeared in *Countryside* magazine, and stories and articles have been published in national publications in England, Germany and America. She is an alumna of USC and has been a resident of the Santa Ynez Valley for thirty years.