

CHAPTER XIX



As I start this chapter it is Mother's Day 1999 and my thoughts go to Harker Family Mothers past and present. Our mother died on December 5, 1954 of stomach cancer after a long time of suffering. A nurse was hired to care for her at home during the day and after her death we found a lot of her jewelry and other valuables missing and assume the nurse made off with them as Pop was away at work all day. Mother was buried in the San Gabriel Cemetery, where her first child and her mother and father lay, along with other of her relatives and friends. A few years later Pop married a single lady who lived next door and whose name was Dorothy. They had a church wedding in June and I gave Pop away at the ceremony.

Pop and Dorothy continued to occupy the family home in Alhambra for a number of years and then moved to Leisure World in Laguna Hills. At Leisure World he joined the Inventor's Club where he invented a pair of self illuminating eye glasses for reading along with some other gadgets of questionable commercial value. He was also captain of the Laguna Hills Shuffle Board team which played in tournaments all over Southern California. Pop died in 1988 at the age of 101 years, was cremated at his request and his urn was also buried in the San Gabriel Cemetery next to our mother.

Just 39 days before starting this chapter my brother Bud died after a fairly short bout with cancer in his esophagus and upper stomach. Fortunately he did

not suffer long and passed away peacefully. At his request, he was cremated and his wife Charlotte, daughter Carol, son Larry and I scattered his ashes on the ocean off San Diego on April 30, 1999. The loss of my brother leaves me the sole surviving male Harker of my generation in our family. The Harker name will be carried on, however, through our sons and grandsons, i.e.; Rich Harker, Jim Harker and his son Brenden and Larry Harker and his son Eric. I have sort of jumped ahead of myself in the telling of this tale, but the above events weighed heavily on my mind and I wanted to get them out of the way so I could continue this writing in a more orderly fashion.

In 1976, after fighting the freeway traffic for some 24 years I decided to take advantage of the early retirement plan offered at Hughes Aircraft and hung it up in June of 1976. There were two important elements of our lives during the period of the 50's, 60's and 70's during which time we owned several boats and an airplane. Since these "Toys" involved a lot of experiences worth telling about I have chosen to cover them as epilogues to this book in order to avoid a lot of confusion. You will find them at the end of this book under the titles, "The Boating Years" and "The Flying Years." We had bought the airplane, a two-place low wing craft called an Ercoupe in July of 1967 after selling our last boat.

Virginia and I enjoyed weekend flights to new places for lunch or breakfast from the El Monte Airport where our plane was based. One of these trips took us to a new master planned development about to get under way near Temecula to be called Rancho California. We found it to be an attractive place with a great potential. After Evelyn and I were married we drove to Rancho California with the kids to see the place as I had told her a lot about it. We both thought it would be a neat place to live in our retirement which, at that time, was somewhere off in the future and the more we thought about it the more convinced we became that it

was the place we wanted to spend our retirement years.

We bit the bullet in 1974 when we purchased a three acre Avocado Grove in Glenoak Hills, a residential/agricultural area east of Temecula. We spent our weekends down there with the kids. While I went out to work on the grove, Evelyn and the kids spent their time in the Rancho Inn Motel on the edge of a small lake where they could fish and play. Our property was very hilly and had a graded pad for a home on top of the hill. We engaged an Orange County Architect to design a house which we planned to build on the site and in the meantime purchased an adjoining three acre parcel planted with Avocado trees.

Following my retirement from Hughes in June 1976 we put our home in Temple City on the market and sold it for \$63,000 a nice profit over the original cost. We then moved to Temecula and set up house-keeping in a two story condominium where we lived for the next six months and made a lot of new friends. During that time I spent my days working on the grove and expanding the worm operation which I set up on the building pad. Before we got around to building our dream home we had an opportunity to sell the property to an Orange County Orthodontist for double the amount we had invested in it. With the proceeds from that sale we bought a six and one half acre Grapefruit grove just a short distance away and also in Glenoak Hills. It had a 3,100 sq. ft. single story house, a large barn, corral and a sizeable pond.

We then moved from the condo to the house on the citrus grove and I set the worm operation up in the barn. The boys got into the FFA and started raising steers, a goat and a couple of pigs. The place also had a chicken pen and we got a rooster and several laying hens. It was great having fresh eggs for breakfast along with pink Grapefruit picked off our own trees. We bought a small one story condo for Evelyn's mother who moved to Temecula with us. She lived there until she developed Alzheimer's disease at which time we sold her

condo and moved her up to live with us in the big house on the grapefruit grove where she stayed until her death.

After the first year we had a swimming pool built on the place from which we got a lot of enjoyment and exercise and where we did a lot of entertaining. The large home was a great party place. The livestock kept our freezer full of good pork and beef and we all ate very well. Fresh produce was available at a fruit and vegetable stand not far away.

It was while living on the citrus grove that we had two Japanese girls staying with us for awhile. They were exchange students from Japan and one was the daughter of a farmer and the other girl's father ran a junk yard in Kobe. They were both sweet kids and I taught them to play pool at which they both became quite adept. We hated to see them go when they left for home.

We had both led such active lives while in Arcadia and Temple City that we vowed to become uninvolved in Temecula. While on the City Council I also served on the LA County Sanitation District Board and on the Transportation Committee of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), and president of the San Gabriel Valley Pilot's Association that was credited with saving the El Monte Airport from destruction by developers who wanted the land for a low income housing project. We were both involved in a lot of the Chamber of Commerce projects and programs.

Within two weeks our vow was broken. The Chamber of Commerce in Temecula held a meeting in the clubhouse at the condos we had moved into just two weeks before. Curiosity got the best of us and we attended the meeting to see what it was all about. It seemed they needed a name for the Chamber and spent all evening arguing about what it should be. Remember, at that time the area was called Rancho California, but the town was Temecula. They finally settled on the name "Temecula Valley Chamber of Commerce," and we

contributed to the input expressing our views. Before the meeting was over they had signed us up as members. Thus began the road to our greater involvement than ever before.

My kids were all grown and out on their own at the time we moved, but most of Evelyn's kids decided to follow us to the promised land. Jeanne and her first husband along with her son John moved to Temecula. Georgia and her first husband and son Eric moved to an area just outside of Temecula. Robert and his first wife moved to the adjoining community of Murrieta and Don also moved to Temecula and later married the recent widow of a fellow he worked for that was killed in a tractor accident.

I kept busy taking care of the ranch, the worm farm and our vending machine business, but Evelyn fast became bored with the inactivity and opened a public relations and marketing firm with a lady friend and neighbor who also lived in the condos. The business was named "The Three Marketeers" and immediately began getting accounts. Jeanne and her husband opened a quick print business in an office next to The Three Marketeers, Don got a job as a tow truck driver and Robert hired out as a gardener. Georgia's husband went to work as an auto mechanic. Sandra stayed in the San Gabriel Valley.

By the end of the first year we were also members of the Temecula Town Association and became very active in that organization. At the time they had no headquarters and held their meetings in a local restaurant, "The Swing Inn." The Town Association owned a long strip of land that had been donated to them by the developers of Rancho California. It was along the old right of way of the Santa Fe Railroad. The Association decided to erect a building on the land that they could use as a meeting place and I became member of a four man crew that built a 3,600 sq. ft. metal building with a concrete floor over two weekends. In order to avoid a lot of problems with the county we built the structure un-

der a permit for a barn and it soon became affectionately known as the "Tin Barn."

While The Three Marketeers was in business it was moved to larger quarters and we began publishing a slick magazine called "County Life" to which I edited and contributed a lot of articles. I joined the Rancho California Lions Club and Evelyn joined the Lioness Club. I was also a charter member of the Temecula Moose Lodge. By this time we were busier than we had ever been back in Temple City and these were supposed to be our retirement years.

Several times during my working years I had been called for jury service but never had a chance to actually serve. I received two summons while working at Vultee Aircraft and the Company got me excused both times. Later at Hughes Aircraft I was again summoned twice for duty at the Superior Court. One time the Company got me excused and the second time I almost made it but the defense attorney had me excused due to my having been an LA County Reserve Deputy Sheriff. It was not until after our arrival in Temecula that I finally got to serve on a jury and the circumstances were a bit unusual.

Three weeks after we had settled in the condo I was out at the trash bin emptying some waste baskets when I was startled by a man clearing his throat behind me. When I turned around I saw a fellow standing there in something that looked like a boy scout uniform. He said good morning, then introduced himself as Sam Hicks the local constable and asked what I would be doing the following Friday morning. When I replied, "Nothing", he said he wanted me to serve on a jury at the local Three Lakes Courthouse and to report for duty at 9:00 a.m. It turned out that Sam and his wife Kelly lived in the condo across the street from us and Evelyn had already met them. Sam's daughter was president of the Chamber of Commerce and local postmaster. We had met her during the aforementioned Chamber meeting in the condo club house.

I reported for duty at the appointed hour on Friday morning and along with eleven other jurors was sworn in. Except for myself, all the others were friends of Sam and long time residents of Temecula. I was the new kid on the block. The presiding judge was Bill Bailey who was both a young judge and comedian. Sam read the charges and we went to work. The case involved two kids from Orange County who were in their early twenties and were falcon fanciers. They had brought their birds to the area to work them out along the Murrieta Creek that runs through Temecula. One of the falcons killed a Cinnamon Teal duck out of season and the kids made the mistake of putting the duck in their car. They were caught by a game warden and charges filed. We the jury deliberated for about 45 minutes and decided to fine each of the kids \$10 along with a restraining order prohibiting their ever bringing their falcons to Temecula again.

Sam and I soon became good friends and he began writing articles for our magazine "County Life," Sam was born and raised in Jackson Hole, Wyoming and in his early years worked the family cattle in summer and winter. Later he began a career as a guide for hunters. It was during this time that he met Earl Stanley Gardner, author of the Perry Mason books. In 1937 Gardner bought a ranch in Temecula and lived there while writing his books. A short time later Gardner brought Sam and his family to Temecula to work as manager of the Gardner Ranch. As bulldozers began leveling the Temecula countryside in 1967 as preparation for the Rancho California development, Sam and some other cohorts decided it was time to document the early history of Temecula before it was lost in antiquity.

With this in mind a group made up of Sam, Bill Cox, Al Newhart and Tom Hudson began publishing a little quarterly magazine called "The High Country." The publication was an immediate success and soon had a distribution of over 6,000 subscribers, including such prestigious entities as the Smithsonian Institute, the

Huntington Library and most of the universities and colleges in the continental U.S. There were also a number of overseas subscribers. I soon became fascinated with the history of the area as I had visited it with my dad in the early twenties to take part in some cattle drives from a ranch in Murrieta to the Temecula slaughter house. As a result I began writing stories for The High Country. During my years at Hughes Aircraft I had authored a number of articles for technical trade magazines and along with my weekly columns in the Temple City Times had developed an acceptable writing skill.

Sam, who was also the last constable in Riverside County, took his own life with a gunshot to his temple in 1979. Bill Cox became fascinated with pyramids and took off for Egypt and Al Newhart faded from the scene. Sam's daughter Nancy and I, along with Tom Hudson, managed to keep the magazine going and I continued writing stories for the publication. In 1982 Tom Hudson, at the age of 86 and with failing eyesight, also took his own life by gunshot to the head. After Tom's death, Nancy and I kept the thing going for another year and then she turned it all over to me. I continued to publish the magazine until 1985 when I had to stop due to lack of time. I now have a small business of selling back issues to collectors.

In 1981 I was given the position of Executive Director of the Temecula Valley Chamber of Commerce and began building up the membership which was 69 when I took over, of which only 20 were current on their dues. In 1986 the membership had reached 679, all current with their dues. At that time I left as General Manager of the Chamber to go into another new line of business. Evelyn and I bought Rancho Travel, the original travel agency in Temecula. The next year I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Chamber and served two years as treasurer. Evelyn had sold The Three Marketeers and the County Life magazine to a couple of young fellows who soon failed in the business.

Three years later, after having enjoyed a lot of family trips and cruises, we sold the travel agency and I took over as General Manager of the Temecula Town Association which position I held for the next five years. In 1985 I was appointed to the Riverside County Aviation Commission and the Airport Land Use Commission and served eight years as chairman of both commissions. During that time the new French Valley Airport was established in Temecula.

For three years, from 1977 to 1980, Evelyn and I published a local weekly newspaper named "The Rancho news." It had a large circulation, not only in Temecula but was also mailed to subscribers in many other states. It was also sold through news racks and local stores.

My position was Managing Editor and Evelyn was Publisher and Circulation Manager. We had three employees as well as several contributing writers and used our kids to help out from time to time. I had my own editorial page with which I had a lot of fun and used to express my opinions on many matters of local concern.

We ended up selling the paper to the riverside Press-Enterprise which still publishes it.

While serving as General Manager of the Town Association, I also hosted a monthly half-hour television program titled, "Temecula Talks," which was sponsored by local businesses. Format of the show was informal interviews with local dignitaries, long-time residents, business people, city officials and representatives of various non-profit organizations. The show covered local history, upcoming events and in-depth discussions of issues affecting the local community such as elections, traffic problems, fun raising events, and special holiday activities. The show ran uninterrupted for three years and my name and face became well known in the local area.



Evelyn and me after we moved to Temecula.