

# Pioneer Memories of the Santa Ana Valley

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## Volume III

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PIONEER MEMORIES  
OF THE  
SANTA ANA VALLEY  
VOLUME III

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Editors: Lenora Marchant Homyer  
Maureen McClintock Rischard

MY SANTA ANA HERITAGE

THE ROSS FAMILIES OF SANTA ANA

September 7, 1868, the Ross families came into the Santa Ana area. There were four covered wagons, each pulled by a six-horse team of Eastern plough horses. Three of the wagons had a cow tied to the back and my grandmother, Sarah Ross (wife of Josiah) had a cow and a heifer calf. Sarah and Joe had two small children. Elizabeth was five months and Uriah was about a year and a half.

Jacob R. Ross, patriarch of the group, had met with the Yorba boys in the fall of 1867 to discuss buying their shares in the Rancho de Santiago de Santa Ana when the District Court had settled the boundaries. He met with Prudencia, Vincente, Marcos and Ramundo Yorba and they agreed to meet him the next spring at Isaas Helman's store in Los Angeles to sign the deeds and to accept payment. There were no banks in Los Angeles at that time and Hellman was the forerunner of the escrow officials.

On May 28, 1868, Jacob R. Ross met with these parties and paid \$437.50 to each person for his share or expectancy in the rancho. These deeds were filed with T. D. Mott, County Recorder of Los Angeles, at that time.

Since only one day remained before

the opening of the first bank in Los Angeles, Jacob Ross stayed over in order to attend the opening of the banking house of Hellman and Telman and Co. He returned to Northern California to tell his family that he had found some land to buy.

September 12, 1868, the decree of the Seventeenth District Judicial Court awarded Jacob R. Ross his tract of land.

One of the first things that the families did upon arriving in the area was to put up rope corrals for the stock. Then they took the steel hoops off the schooner of Josiah and the canvas and went to Anaheim Landing to get lumber to build a shelter for Sarah and her small children. All the men pitched in to get it built before the rains came and to protect the small family from the fierce winds. This house was built of up-and-down boards with batten over the cracks. It was twenty by eighteen feet, and at first only had canvas over the windows and doors. There was much work to be done, and first, of course, a large space had to be cleared of brush and cactus and mustard. A fire break was ploughed around their camping area. Jacob, Sr., Elizabeth and Christiana lived in their wagon until later in 1869 when the men all helped to build a home for them at Twelfth and Bristol Streets. Samuel and Catherine lived in their covered wagon until 1870, getting their crops in first. Jacob, Jr. lived in his wagon and took his meals with other members of

the family until things were more settled.

Grandmother Sarah's house was on West Seventeenth Street at about where Towner Street is today. It was set back from the section line about 300 feet. There was a box well at the back door with a bucket and a dipper close by. There was a shed for the stock and a corral for the horses and her cow and calf.

The Indians in the area had campsites in Newport Beach area and on the Costa Mesa bluffs, Huntington Beach Palisades and in the Wintersburg District. They used to skirt the more populated town and ride their ponies to Grandma's back door to beg for "pan" on "fire sticks." She readily gave them biscuits, sometimes a little coffee and was friendly to them. They never came empty handed. Sometimes they would bring a young rabbit or a few quail and sometimes a wild duck.

Many times they would ride in on their horses and peek over the canvas. This frightened the children. The Indians were very curious. They would sometimes walk in the house without knocking and just sit and watch. Once an old Indian woman spit out some coffee Grandma had given her because she didn't have any sugar to put in it.

Samuel and Catherine, Jacob R. Ross, Sr. and Elizabeth and Christiana and Jacob, Jr. all lived in their wagons until the first crops had been planted. At first, they formed sort of a communal living style,

all helping to clear the land, plant, and take care of the stock. All the men had pitched in to build the house for Sarah.

They had to plough a large space around their camp because of the danger of fire; and, also, because of the prevalence of rattle snakes. At first, they also had to post a guard at night. The natives were resentful of the new settlers, and there were hundreds of loose cattle and wild mustags foraging the countryside.

There were wild grapes hanging from the oak and sycamore trees in the Orange County park area, and they made all-day trips to gather these to make vinegar and wine. Blackberries grew along the riverbed and were gathered for pies and jams. Wild game was plentiful and helped out on their food supply. Ducks and geese provided them with meat and feathers and down for pillows and feather beds. Thirty-nine acres of olives and almonds had been abandoned on the old Bacon ranch in San Juan Capistrano and were to be had for the picking. Some of the wild mustard stalks were large enough to use for firewood. The cactus had to be grubbed out and hauled off; it did not burn well. When the families went on all-day trips or longer distances, one wagon with the men in it was sent ahead to break a trail for the wagons following.

The first months were difficult for the settlers. People and animals suffered alike, the summers were hot and dry, and

there was no shade or refrigeration. Rabbits ate the crops; coyotes and hawks were a threat to the chickens. Grandma Sarah said that when they first arrived, there was "nothing but mustard and cactus as far as the eye could see."

The wide fire breaks which had been ploughed around the living area caused a problem of dust and dirt, especially when the winds blew. Cows gave very little milk.

During the summer of 1869 Sarah's little boy died, and Samuel's first-born son died of summer complaint. They were both buried on part of Jacob Jr.'s land at Eighth and Ross Streets. During the next few years, more bodies were buried there and it was soon called the cemetery. About 1875, Jacob Ross, Jr. deeded this two-acre plot to the Masons as a Masonic Cemetery. In 1877 and 1878, the city decided that it was too close to a growing city and had it moved to the Fairhaven address.

My grandmother, Sarah, had a small, sheet iron stove on which she did most of her cooking and a boiler that could be used over an outdoor fire. She had her large crock of running yeast which she had used all across the plains. She had two ten-gallon kegs for water and tin cups and pewter plated. They had brought dismantled tools, plow shares, shovel heads, axe heads, whet stones and assorted blacksmith equipment and extra harness fittings. The men quickly gathered wood to make new handles.

for these so that they could be used.

Wild pigs were prevalent and menaced the chickens. The Ross families dug trenches around the chicken corral and filled these ditches with a solution of lye which they called "high life," and when the pigs got their snouts into this, they left.

Once or twice a year Grandma and the girls went on all-day trips to the beach to gather "bean clams" which were not much bigger than a finger nail. The sands were covered with them and they shoveled these into sacks and pounded them into lime for the chicken yards.

In February of 1871 the small town of Santa Ana had one hundred and fifty residents. On October 29, 1869, Jacob R. Ross and Anna Chavez conveyed to Ward Bradford and William Spurgeon, 74.27 acres for \$594. On April 16, 1870, the two men divided this tract, Bradford taking the west forty acres. Spurgeon's plot for the town was filed December 13, 1870.

Most of the ranchers and farmers traded with Mr. L. Gilmacher on West Fourth Street because he would give them credit until their crops were harvested and sold.

In 1873, a traveling preacher conducted church services and a baptism on First Street where there was a shallow spot in the Santa Ana River. My grandmother,

Sarah Ross, and her daughter, age five years, were both baptized in the river. She said that it was a "great day of rejoicing." Many others were baptized.

Grandma said that there were many disappointments and much hardship, but that if "you turned your face to the sun, the shadows would fall behind."

In the spring of 1874, Jacob Ross, Jr. sold four acres at Hickey (Eighth) Street and Flower Streets to James L. Garnsey of Santa Clara, for a brick yard. Jacob said this land was not good for anything else because it backed up to the cemetery at Hickey and Ross. Columbus Tustin heard of the plan to build a brick yard and offered Mr. Garnsey five acres for free in Tustin if only Garnsey would build his brick yard there. Mr. Garnsey tried, but he couldn't get his money back from Mr. Ross, and so Santa Ana grew faster than Tustin because Mr. Garnsey brought nine families down from Santa Clara with him to work in his brick yard. Mr. Garnsey had paid \$100 per acre for the land.

In 1878, A. B. Chapman deeded the Galletin property on East Fairhaven to the Santa Ana Cemetery Company. After the new cemetery was laid out, the graves at Eighth and Ross were moved to the Pioneer section of the new cemetery.

In Rossville, Illinois, the town that Jacob R. Ross founded in 1857, he had left

much property. He had owned and operated the grist mill which was located about three miles outside of the town. The mill and some of his acreage he had sold to finance the trip for his sons and daughter to California. There was much bitterness in the East after the close of the Civil War and he was anxious to give his family a fresh start. Mr. Ross purchased the shares of Prudencia, Vincente, Marcos and Maria Jesus (wife of T. J. Sculley) for 3,500 reales each, \$437.50, a total of \$2,187.50.

In addition to the land purchased from the Yorba heirs, Jacob Ross, Sr. bought 192 acres from Glassell and Chapman. Later in October, Ross bought land awarded to Juan Yorba, Maria Ygnacio de Moreno and Rafael Gradios. Each of the Ross brothers chose their section of land to farm, and late in 1869 Jacob Ross, Sr. deeded these properties to them. These deeds are filed with the county recorder's office of Los Angeles.

Jacob, Jr.'s land consisted of property within the bounds of Ross at First over to Hickey Street west to Baker Street. Josiah and Sarah's boundaries were from Ross and Seventeenth Street, which was a section line, over to Hickey and West to Baker. Later, it was to run as far as the river, because Sarah bought some property with money she had earned teaching school in Rossville.

Samuel's farm was from Baker Street

at First over to Hickey and, thence, to the river. The river changed course so many times in the early days that sometimes they would gain four acres, and other years lose two or three. When the riverbed was finally established, the Ross families lost as much as twenty-one acres. When the land was acquired, the water rights were parcelled out with the land, and only transferable with the land at \$5 a share.

Grandpa's saddle horses were kept under lock and key so that they would have a mount when they had to go after horse thieves. Horse stealing was a great problem at the time. The local horses were of mustang variety and the large Eastern horses were much prized. Juan Diaz of Buerrel Point (Olive) collected so many rewards for stolen horses that the farmers finally went to his small adobe store and got him and brought him back to the livery stable at Fourth and Sycamore in Santa Ana and hung him from the rafters until he confessed that he had a partner, Ballestero, who hid the stolen horses on his ranch in the Santa Ana Canyon until the reward was offered. The horses were recovered and Diaz was convicted and spent three years in San Quentin.

The road to Anaheim wound through willows and cactus and brush many feet high; the ground was sandy and rocky. There was a river crossing at about where

the Santiago Creek met the Santa Ana River. There was some quick sand here, and it was only safe to cross when the river "was going good." The men drove the horses back and forth across this spot before taking the wagons across.

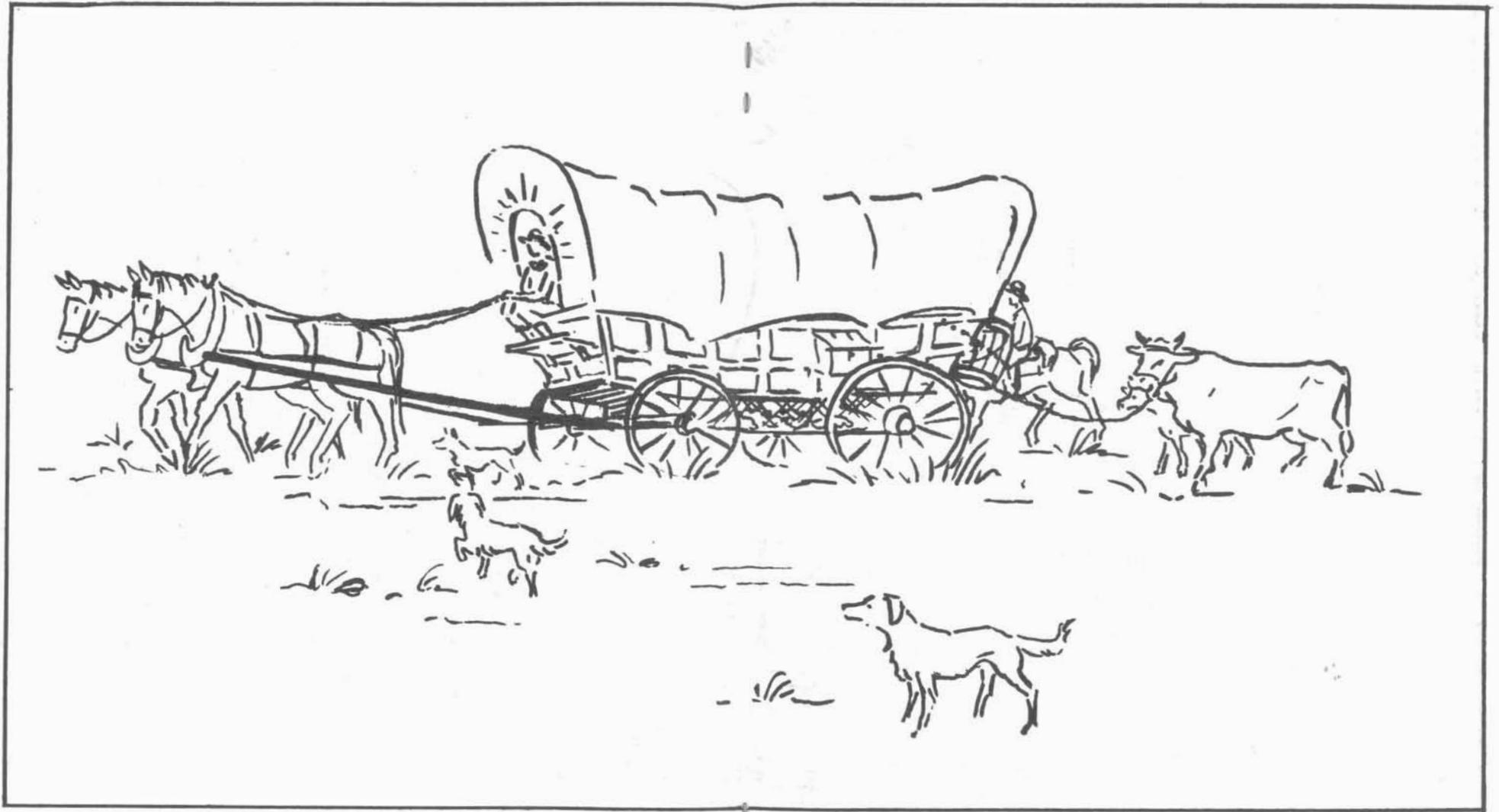
The trail to Anaheim Landing went out First Street (a section line) to Bolsa Chica and across the damp lands. The road from Anaheim to Anaheim Landing went through Buena Park and took longer.

The Mexicans and Spaniards who had sold the land were resentful and, for the most part, unfriendly. They would run their stock onto the newly planted fields of the farmers and made no attempt to keep them herded. There was a herd law of sorts, but they paid little attention to it. There were no fences, and boundaries were marked by cattle bones or large boulders. A poor grade of wild horses roamed the countryside. These mustangs were almost impossible to train and could not be used for farm work, they were of small frame and wiry, and could not be tamed to harness. Renegades stole the Eastern horses as often as they could. The Ross men posted a guard for their prized stock.

After warning the Mexicans and Spaniards repeatedly about letting their horses eat the crops, the Ross boys, Al Green and A. A. Vance loaded their shot guns with rock salt and lay in the furrowed fields for the mauraders. They just shot



COMMUNAL LIVING IN THE WAGONS  
BEFORE THE LOG CABINS WERE BUILT



SEPTEMBER &, 1868 - THE ROSS FAMILIES COME INTO THE SANTA ANA AREA

GRANDMA SARAH'S WAGON AS DEPICTED BY HER DESCENDANT, GLENN SWANN

COVER PICTURE - EDYTHE, THYRA and ELSA WILSON



DINNERTIME

Sketch by Glenn Swann, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Swann

along the sides of the ponies and this dehaired them in large stripes and proclaimed to all the land how they fed their horses. This stopped the foraging for a while.

In the 1870's the ranchers had a law of hospitality. Riders coming in from the north were free to go into Grandpa's corral and pick a fresh mount if he left a branded horse instead. If he was going on south, he picked a southern brand, or if he was returning north he picked a horse with a northern brand. This way the horse usually got back to his own ranch. But if he left an unbranded horse, or one that was known to be stolen, the farmers got together and formed a posse and went after the man. They thoroughly enjoyed this break from their hard farm work.

The houses were never locked and a passing rider was free to go into a house and fix himself a meal as long as he cleaned up afterward. If he left a mess, Uncle Dave said that they would go after him and bring him back and make him clean it up.

The first crops were barley, grain and oats and corn. The corn was dried and ground for corn meal in their coffee grinders. The shucks were shredded and used in mattresses. Grandma usually had two mattresses on each bed, and when company came, one mattress was used on the floor for the family; and the company was given the beds. Distances were usually a

half day or more and company usually stayed overnight.

Grandma said that the many dogs that had crossed the plains with them "had earned their victuals." The dogs would circle a snake and bark and circle and bark until they worked the snake back into the rocks. She felt much safer about the children when the dogs were around. They also warned of coyotes and wild pigs and, also, strangers.

During the clearing of the wildest brush, the horses hooves were wrapped with canvas strips to protect them from the rattle snakes and the cactus.

The first crops had quite a bit of mustard in them and they expected that the second crop would be much cleaner.

The danger of brush fires was so prevalent that they kept wash tubs of water handy with gunny sacks to dip and beat out the fires. For the first years they dipped their own candles, made their soap, used potato water for starching shirtwaists, turned inside out first.

Vegetables were wrapped and buried in root cellars. Tomatoes picked green and wrapped and put in crocks to keep. Sausage meat was fried in patties, salted and covered with home-rendered lard in large crocks. This would keep for three or four months. Beans, corn, and grain were the first crops. Ducks, geese and quail were plentiful, and there was no limit. Fish and abalone were abundant and wild game, also.

#### WHEN MAMA WAS A GIRL

Mama went to the old Central School on Church Street at Sycamore. Later, she went to the new red brick high school at Tenth and Main. She had a crush on one of her teachers, a Mr. Hahn. He must have been a botany teacher because she spent many hours collecting specimens for him.

Mama and her older sister, Olive, used to ride their bicycles out to Bolsa Chica to gather great big blue violets that grew in profusion in the damp lands. She would take bouquets of these blue violets to Mr. Hahn. Grandma Sarah, usually, would not let them go alone and would drive her one-seated top buggy along as they rode their bicycles, the buggy could only go so far in the swampy land, and they would park it and walk the rest of the way.

Mama said she can remember jumping from place to place to find dry footing for gathering the flowers which had long nine- and ten-inch stems. The ground used to shake underneath their weight as they went from island of peat to another. The road to Anaheim Landing wound around through the swamp at the end of First Street (Bolsa).

Mama's first date was with Charlie Wilmot, and Aunt Olive's date was

Gene McDonald. The boys had walked out to Seventeenth and Flower to see the girls and asked them if they could go to the dance in Peters Canyon. Grandma sent them out to the barn to see Uncle Dave, who acted as advisor and chaperone for the girls since Grandpa had passed away. Dave said it was all right as he was going, too, and going to take Mary McDonald. He used Grandma's horse and buggy.

Charlie Wilmot worked for a feed and grain store and did the deliveries. He had his own team of horses and two-seated wagon; the backseat was removable for deliveries. One of his horses was a sorrel and one was a white dray horse, and they were used to walking when they were pulling a load.

Charlie drove his team and took Olive and Gene and Mama out to the Ryan ranch in Peters Canyon. Mama said that the horses walked most of the way. The dance was in a large living and dining room combined. It lasted until two o'clock in the morning. They got back home just in time to fix some breakfast for Dave and send him off to work.

Grandma never let Mama and Aunt Olive go downtown because there used to be a saloon on every corner.

Olive started going with Guy Wilmot, and Mama was with Charlie Wilmot. They went to Newport Beach and the boys wanted

to show the girls how fast their horses would go, so they raced them and the harness fell off. Someone had cut the harness so that it would fall off at the first heavy strain. Guy grabbed the hind wheel and Charlie grabbed the back of the wagon, and they hung on and kept yelling, "whoa, whoa," until they got the horses to stop.

They played on the sand and gathered long strings of sea weed for jump ropes and to crack the whip at each other, and at passers by. The road to Newport was a trail close to Fairview. They always fixed a big picnic lunch and would go in wading and hunt for shells.

Another time, the boys took them to Fullerton for a 4th of July celebration. There was a parade, bands and firecrackers, sky rockets and a merry-go-round. They took their picnic lunch and stayed all day. Dresses for school were worn just above the shoe tops, but for a date the girls wore skirts or dresses with long dragging trains. They had to hold onto the dragging train with their right hand.

Other times, they had hay rides, just a hay wagon full of boys and girls with a lunch and a bucket of apples on the wagon. Sometimes they would ride to Pacific Beach, or up to McPherson or to Peters Canyon or the Picnic Grounds, Orange County park, and back again. Singing and laughing and cutting up generally and maybe a little sparking.

Charlie Wilnot started going with Minnie Teal and Mama was with Ed Wheeler, who had team of shetland ponies and a wicker two-seated rig which was always full of girls. Mama was riding on her bicycle with a group of other riders when she met Papa. He started sparking her and then she started to go with him. In September she ran away from home and married him.

#### WHEN I WAS A GIRL

When I was in the second grade at Jefferson School, Frances Simmons, later to be Mrs. Carl Lacy, said that she could make me some dimples like Margaret's (Wood), later Mrs. J. D. Price. So one recess Frances used the small end of a bolt to screw holes in both of my cheeks. I developed sores in my cheeks, but never did get any dimples. Mama was pretty mad.

We never really got our fill of oranges. Uncle George had an orchard, but he was pretty stingy with them. One time when I was coming home through the fields from Baker Street to Flower, I filled my gym bloomers full of his oranges to take to the little kids. There he was in the back yard with Mama discussing the irrigation water. Well, the elastic in one of the legs gave way so I sat down in the irrigation ditch (dry) until he left. He seemed to stay forever, but I expect he knew why. I felt like an old goose on a nest.

One day when the circus was coming to town, Mama discovered that one of us three girls had drank half a bottle of syrup of figs. She kept asking who did it, and no one said, so she said, "Never mind. I will find out anyway." At the circus she had to spend half the time taking Ede to the bathroom. That cured her of ever taking extra syrup of figs.

One summer at Grandma's our cousin, a boy three or four years older than us, used to make fun of us when we had to go to the outhouse back of the barn. We told Grandma and she didn't feel sorry for us at all. She said, "There are three of you, aren't there?" Well, the next time he teased us, one of us girls got in back of him and the other two started at him with sticks. We pushed him over and over in cockleburs. He had on a knicker wool suit. Aunt Belle said it was new. He was an only child.

Mama sent us to bed and Mama and Aunt Belle spent the evening picking burrs out of the suit. We felt he deserved it. Grandma didn't say anything.

We lived on the Irvine Ranch when I was nine and a half. We had to walk three and one-half miles to school and back every day. Our house was on the road to Laguna Beach and now is a part of the Lion Country Safari.

One morning when my sister and I had been fooling around checking on a dove's nest over in a bean field, we suddenly remembered school. We went back to the road and began to run a little and fast walk a little when an old cut-down Ford with two men in it stopped and asked if we wanted a ride. They looked like farmers with old beat-up felt hats and seemed safe enough.

We got in and sat in the backseat. There was straw or hay and an old crank on the floor. The minute we sat down we began to worry. The Sunday papers had carried lurid pictures and descriptions of a kidnapped and murdered boy.

And hadn't Papa told us never to take a ride with a stranger, or even to talk to anyone we didn't know. These men hadn't asked where we wanted to go, or anything. So we sat there with our hands on our knees and kept still as mice.

They were talking about dry bean farming and ploughing and stuff and drove right past the school house. By that time I just knew they were going to kidnap us.

I picked up the crank and got up on the backseat and came down on the driver's head with all my might. He slumped down over the wheel and his hat went down over his ears, and the other man grabbed the wheel and said, "What the Devil," and stopped the car just before the railroad tracks.

We jumped over the fender without opening the door and ran to school. We were only a little late.

At suppertime Papa asked us what we did all day and we said we went to school and did some chores at home. He just laughed and told Mama that he didn't have to worry about his girls. He said that a couple of his friends had tried to keep us from being late to school and that for thanks, we had tried to kill one of them.

During World War I, Papa worked at the Flour Mills at Third and Mortimer Streets in Santa Ana. He was foreman and, also, the machinist when they discovered weevils in a lot of the flour. Waste was terrible during wartime, so they dumped it into large vats and then ran it through a giant sieve and resacked it.

Papa brought about two hundred flour sacks home and Mama bleached them with a lye solution and boiling water and made our underwear out of them for years. Sometimes the logo of the mill did not bleach clear out, and other kids would make fun of us when they saw it.

#### THE SUNDAY RIDE

Papa had been sick for a long time, but this Sunday he said he felt like taking his family for a ride. We had a 1914 Ford touring car with a crank and a tool chest on the running board. He carried a bicycle pump, tire patches,

inner tube patches, boot for tire repair, canvas bucket for extra water for the radiator, oil can, and various other pliers and wrenches.

Papa drove us to Seal Beach where we watched the roller coaster for a while and then he bought us all an ice cream cone. We were on our way home when the back right tire blew out. The little kids started to cry, because they thought that we could not get back home.

We all got out of the car while Papa jacked it up and repaired the tire. He was beginning to feel sick and faint and said that he would have to get us home in a hurry.

Another Ford just in back of us blew out a tire, too, and that man did not have any tools, or anything to fix his with. He wanted to borrow ours and Papa said he would have to leave them with him, and he gave the man our address and brought us home.

Mama put him to bed and he fell into a deep sleep. The next day after work, the man came over with Papa's tools to return them. Papa was in a coma and he never knew that the man had returned his tools.

When Mama had objected to his loaning his tools, he said that the man "had a family, too, and he couldn't leave him out there in the sticks."

### JUST TO THE CORNER

Just to the corner as we used to say,  
I can go with you just part of the way.  
Just to the corner, the turn in the road  
Then you must carry your part of the load.

Just to the corner of life's busy street  
Just till I'm sure you're on steady feet.  
You've had the lessons, there's nothing  
to fear  
But to the corner, I'll walk with you,  
my dear.

Elsa

### CONSCIENCE

How do you put a conscience  
Into a little boy?  
How do you turn a mischief  
Into a pride and joy?

You often have to punish  
And many times console;  
Sometimes you are discouraged  
With your heavy mother role.

You listen to his troubles  
And you help him with a prayer  
Then one day you discover  
There is a conscience there.

Elsa

## EBELL MEMORIES

When I was about fourteen years old, I was invited to a dance at the Ebell Club. I don't remember who was my date, but during the evening we had to take off one shoe and the boy who got it was our partner for the next dance. Afterwards, we had refreshments in a big brown house on North Main Street in the 1400 block.

Dana, our daughter, belonged to Girls Ebell and enjoyed many activities with them and later joined Junior Ebell, and remained active with this organization while teaching sixth grade at Martin School.

While on a trip to South America in 1968, she suffered a blood clot on the brain and has been ill since.

Dale and Don both were members of the Promenade and Starlighters dance groups. Dale used to look forward to the Starlighters dances when he could make it home from Stanford. I would have to confirm his date and see about a corsage.

Once, when I was on the refreshment committee and a chaperone, I was pleased to see my young ruffian bow and ask a girl to dance. That would be Don. Late in the evening he asked me for a waltz, after which he said, "Mom, you are a good dancer, but you lead a little. Just a little, though."

Years later, our grandson, Kenneth Edwards also learned to dance with the Promenaders.