

## A QUEST TO SAVE NAN'S HOUSE

### "If These Walls Could Talk"

Story continued from January by Glenda Rankin

It looks as though this little white Victorian house on the corner of Rosedale Highway and Calloway will probably be accepted as an addition to Pioneer Village where it would join other historic Kern homes. In January, the Authority Board of the Kern County Museum voted to accept the house pending funding for moving and restoration expenses. More details will be known after the March 14<sup>th</sup> board meeting.

In the meantime, Dianne and I continue searching for more information on the history of our mother's house. So many pieces of the puzzle have been put in place. In 1930 the house was raised and rolled back on the property, and turned 90 degrees to face California Avenue thus changing the address from 1203 Chester Avenue. This made the Chester Avenue frontage property available for several businesses - Goodwin & Heynen Grocery, Walter McClain Meats, and Mrs. Anna Fleishauer's Beauty Shop. We still have more questions to be answered. For instance from 1948 to 1950 the Polk City Directory lists 1514 California Avenue, the house address, as the Estrada's Spanish Kitchen. We'd like to learn more about this. And we haven't discovered why the house was sold and moved from downtown Bakersfield to Rosedale in 1953. Was it because of the commercial value of the property, or did it have something to do with the 1952 earthquake?

We may never learn the answers to all our questions about the house, but we truly felt the "Walls Were Talking" on August 4<sup>th</sup> when we were fortunate enough to meet descendants of J.J. Lopez, the man who built the house in 1909.

I spoke with Barry Zoeller after a meeting at the Kern Valley Historical Society where he presented a program about Tejon Ranch. He suggested that I talk with Bonnie Kane of the Ridge Route Museum as she might have more information on J.J. Lopez. We hit the "JACKPOT"...Bonnie not only had a world of information about J.J. Lopez, she knew his family. She was so helpful and arranged a meeting with them. Dianne and I fell in love with Joe Davis, the grandson of J.J. Lopez. He actually grew up in this house 80 years ago. We met at Nancy and Bob Tinnin's home in Bakersfield. Nancy is Joe's daughter. She has fond memories of her grandmother, Margaret Pearl, who was J.J. and Mary's only child. We were so excited! Finally, we would learn more about the house. But our hopes fell flat for one brief moment when we first saw the photos of the house that Joe and Nancy showed us. It wasn't Nan's house — or was it? The closer we looked at the fine details, we realized it was truly one in the same. We knew for a fact it was Nan's house when 89-year-old Joe remembered the floor plan, room for room. He said, "You walk into a small entry hall, and off to the left is the parlor, to the right is the big bedroom, my grandfather and grandmother's room. You then enter the living area with the fireplace. The piano was here too." Nancy remembered that her great grandmother, Mary, had taught the Indian children at the Tejon Ranch to play the piano. "Through the next door is the dining room," continued Joe, "And straight ahead is the kitchen." There were more photos and stories. We just couldn't talk fast enough or ask enough questions. We wanted to hear it all, but we had to cut our visit short. Dianne and her friend Cathy Wiser had come from Southern California to attend the Teachers' Ag Seminar in Bakersfield, and there was a final dinner that evening. We told the Lopez family goodbye, but planned to meet at Nan's house the next week. Nancy had never seen her great grandparent's home, and she grew up in Bakersfield.

That memorable day was like stepping back in time. Joe walked through the house with one story after another. Di and I were in heaven (and we knew Nan was watching over from above, and was right there with us).

Once again, Di had traveled from Brea so we thought we'd kill three birds



Stacy Shepard interviews Joe Davis, as his daughter Nancy listens.



with one stone that day. We planned to first meet with Stacy Shepard and Henry Barrios from the Bakersfield Californian who needed some more information and photos for a story they planned to write about Nan and her house. Then later, Joe and Nancy were coming to see the house. And last, but not least, the folks from the Kern County Museum were scheduled to come out to check structural soundness and the general condition of the house. We thought we had allowed plenty of time



Joe Davis' reaction to seeing his childhood home 70 years later.



Young Joe Davis

for each group so their visits wouldn't overlap, but as usual, we talked too long, and eventually everybody was there visiting about this wonderful old house.

As Joe stood in the living area where the wooden fireplace mantle is (which our mother loved so much) he remembered with great enthusiasm how he and his brother Billy and his sister, Lucille, gathered around the warmth of the fire with their grandfather and listened to their favorite radio programs. Joe then smiled and said, "We'd bring in huge loads of wood and J.J. would pile it on. When the smoke billowed from the chimney, the fire department would often show up thinking the house was on fire!" Joe just laughed. The tour continued. "This was my room," Joe said, as he peeked into the back bedroom. Di and I smiled, and told him that was our room too. As Joe entered the small kitchen at the back of the house, he shook his head, and said, "Oh my, these are the same old cabinets!"

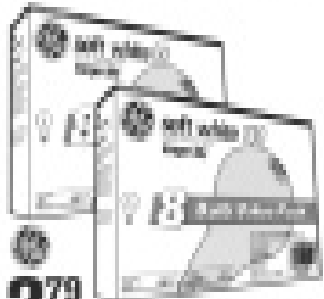
We learned one fact about the house that would have been a little disturbing to Nan. Since we had only seen black and white photos, we asked Joe what color the house was back then. With no hesitation, he said, "Orange with white trim." Well, our mom's least favorite color in the world was "orange" so we're hoping it was a soft Victorian pastel, and not a bright orange. The house will be restored to its original state, color and all.

We moved on to the "mystery rooms" off the back porch. One of them, Joe told us, was the pantry, and the other was a second bath room with a pull chain toilet. He said his grandfather would "wash up" in this one when he came in from work so he didn't have to walk through the house with his dirty boots (our version of a mud room).

As Nancy looked through the house she said, "I always wondered what

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## Nan's House Continued from page 31

I would do with the things my grandmother left for me, and why I had saved everything." Nancy said it was so apparent now. She hopes to donate several beautiful pieces of furniture that belonged to J.J. and Mary to be used in the house when it is moved to the museum.

As Di and I researched the history of the house, we felt a close connection – almost as though we were looking for “long lost” relatives. Interestingly enough, Joe Davis knew Raechel and Alice Rankin, and he had come up to the Basin on several occasions to parties at the Lightner-Rankin Ranch in the 1930s. I was so excited when Joe said he also knew Leroy Rankin, my father-in-law who passed away long before Bill and I married. Well, there is no blood relation between our family and the Lopez family, but we are “FAMILY” and we look forward to making new memories while working on the “Lopez-Hill House” project.



This old house brought us together!  
Dianne Sharman, Joe Davis, and Glenda Rankin

Recently, our dear friends, Mitchell and Diane Miller, met us at the house. Mitchell has been a carpenter for many years, and has a vast knowledge of this “period.” We loved learning more about the construction of the house, and we think we may have solved another mystery about the house, thanks to Mitchell. It always seemed strange to us that the kitchen walls had “outside siding” on them. After Mitchell looked at the old photos of the house, and the window construction on the outside, he thinks the kitchen may have been “screened-in” for the hot Bakersfield summers with a “shutter-like” covering for the window opening during the winter. It’s a never-ending puzzle, but we love the challenge it presents.



## Happy Valentine's Day!

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