

BABE AND MARIE GARBARINI

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(Marie)

...there was a Frank Clute in Volcano. My mother remembers him; he ran the St. George for a time.

(Were you born in Volcano?)

Yes. My mother was too. And my grandmother was born out in Rancheria. Our house in Volcano was right next to the old schoolhouse. It isn't there now though. I think my mother was born over by the Armory Hall. I went to school there too. They didn't have eight grades when I went there.

(What did they teach?)

They gave you a pretty thorough grounding in the basics. When I graduated you still had to take a county test in order to graduate. The same test was given throughout the county. And the year that I graduated there was an additional test you could take, and if you passed it you could teach school. I was fourteen years old at the time.

(Did most of the kids go on to high school?)

By the time I graduated they did.

(Where did you go to high school?)

I went to high at Amador. I graduated in 1925, and they started the bus service the year before I started. And my mother wouldn't let me go, so I went back to elementary school and took a post-graduate course. She just didn't want me to make that long drive every day. Thinking was different then.

(Were the roads paved then?)

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Oh yes, they were. That was 1925.

(When did Volcano get electricity?)

1932. And they didn't clear the roads of snow. I remember one time we were snowed in for a week. We couldn't get up the hill, and we had a week off. We had 20 inches of snow in down-town Volcano that year. They had more snow when I was a youngster than they do now.

(What did you do for entertainment?)

I remember we had a playhouse that we built out of old lumber. We fastened it onto the back of our woodshed. We called it our macaroni box. We also did lots of walking. And we played ball a lot. There wern't houses in front of where my mother lives, and that's where we played ball.

I can also remember when the first radio came to Volcano. The Grillo family had it. Jan van Thel helped them get the set. It was a crystal set. And Grandma Grillo, she was quite an elderly lady, she didn't believe it. She thought it was spooky that the noise came out of that box. We got a radio later; we wern't as affluent as the Grillos. By the time we got one the radios were pretty good.

(How big was Volcano when you were growing up?)

Very small. Smaller than it is now. That is, fewer people got their mail in Volcano. Down-town there ~~ann't~~ many more houses than there were then. A few new ones. The area across from my mother has built up. There used to be a couple of old barns there. And a big field that we played ball in; the schoolyard was not big enough to play ball in.

(What do you know about the cement company that tried to destroy Volcano?)

Not much. But we did have trouble with them when we sold the family ranch and tried to get a right of way from the county road into the property. The cement company owned a little strip or something. The land went from Pioneer Creek up to Pioneer. We just sold it a few years ago; there were 180 acres. Now it has been sub-devided and homes are going in.

(So your father was a rancher?)

He was a rancher and a barber. The shop was where the old assay office is. He had no electricity and had to use old hand-clippers.

(Was there any building in Volcano that was of particular interest to you?)

The old livery stable; that was fascinating. And there was a place they called the coffin house. That was next to the St. George Hotel. The livery stable was across from what was Grillo's Butcher Shop.

(Can you tell us something about Jackson and the Main Street when you were growing up.)

(Babe)

I grew up right downtown. Where the Argonaut Title Company is now. Jackson's reputation developed after prohibition. Up until the Volstead Act there were bars all over the place. When I was a kid, by actual count, there were 27 bars in the area. I'd get sent out for beer---they used to call it "fetch the growler". Kids could do it for their parents.

My dad used to have a blacksmith shop down on Water Street.

And right next door to it was a bar; it was called the Water Street Saloon. I'll show you a picture of it. ...here's the Saloon, and one the red light houses going up in smoke. And the people who were in the bar are outside watching the fire. Right behind the bar was a barn where the teamsters and the cow-folk could put their horses. Then there was a brisge that went over to the houses of ill-repute. (I see Jackson Lager Beer-5cents, in the picture.)

The beer was made by Strome(?), and that brewery was where the hamburger stand is now...as you go out of town it's on the left as you go up 88.

(Where was LaTang's Gas Works?)

That was right across on the hill. In later years they closed the gas works and took his plant and revamped it into another bordello. Here's another picture of what Main Street looked like in 1918/19. Our print shop was right there---where El Dorado is now. And in 1911/1912 Jackson's first street light s were put in. They were hung right over the middle of the street.

The Bank Club was right downstairs under us. Where the bookeeping office is now. And Safeway was in there where Sammy is now. The movie theater was in the parking lot, next to the savings company---this was about 1935.

And here's Woodbury's Store.

(Was that always a department store?)

No. It was built in the 30's...along about 32. It used to be a bar and a bocce alley. It was called the Last Chance. On your way out of town it was your last chance to get a drink.

Here is a picture of the old well that used to be up at the court house. The well is still there; it's covered with a plaque. This is the Chinese Hall downtown where Spinco is now.

(How come Jackson didn't turn into a Reno? Where did the gamblers come from?)

They came from all over. Like Sacramento. One incident I recall. I used to work nights, and at 12 o'clock I used to go out and get a bite to eat. I'd prowl around a little bit. And there was a place downtown called The Louvre. It was a joint, and was downstairs under what is now the Wells Fargo Bank. Oftentimes when I'd go down there, and it was quiet and the games were still going, I'd go into the game room and pick up the dice and shoot craps with the dealer. This dealer was called Highgrade Charlie. Charlie Bellini I believe was his name. Anyway, one Wednesday night I went down there and put a quarter on the line. And there was a hell of a crowd down there. I recognized some of the characters; they were members of the assembly and politicians from Sacramento. They were out on the town. So I walked over to the table and Charlie says to me, Big money tonight! So I backed away and I watched it, and sure enough, it was big money.

(Did they have trouble keeping the peace?)

No. But back in the bootlegging days there were a couple of murders around here. But this was more from the bootlegged liquor than the gambling. And it wasn't so much the bootlegging actually as it was the moonshining. They were operating stills all over the place. The fellow who runs the bottle shop down here; his father was killed. He was shot in a field, and they never found out who did it.

I was there and it scared the hell out of me too. I went out there with the sheriff, and in those days we only had one sheriff, one deputy and a constable in each supervisorial district. And there was a chief of police in each town. I don't know if Sutter Creek had a chief of police then or not. They had old Hound Dog Jack, didn't they? He was sort of a night watchman. Well, on this particular occasion, I happened to be up at the courthouse when the sheriff went out to investigate. They had an idea where the culprit had hidden. And the sheriff asked me if I would stand on the spot where the guy was killed. So I did; I was supposed to look out over the terrain. And here's why. There was some wood tiered up out in the field. And they thought the killer was hidden out behind this wood. When he shot him, that is. Then he went up over the hill and out to the road. So, I was supposed to tell the sheriff when I could see him. And the deputy was going to tell me when I got shot. Well, he did, and I looked out over there, and finally Sheriff Lucco appeared and I waved and he stopped. So he looked around up there and he found some tracks, but they never did catch up with the guy. They know he went up over the hill and down to where his car was parked but they didn't get him.

(How long was Lucco sheriff?)

Forty years.

(Was that Lucco?)

No, it was Lucot. Our daughter is married to his grandson.

(What about Love Hall. Is that where Sprouse-Reitz is now?)

Yeah. It was the center of entertainment...there was basketball, and they had dances. But they built Woodburys, and that was a dance hall too. It was upstairs. But Love's was opened as a skating rink.

They extended it to the rear and opened it as a rink. Then old Dave Curry, he moved to Stockton, the family got older, and they just closed it down. Then Sprouse came in. They had their first store up where Woodbury's is now.

(Was there a movie theater where the Bank of America is now?)

No, that was the Ford garage.

(Was there a Ratto Theater?)

Well, that was legitimate theater. You know where the Westerner is? That was the Rocco Building. In the good old days that was the Rocco Theater---this was long before I came along. That was where the travelling troupes would come in and perform.

The first time I ever went to a theater in Jackson it was a little movie house...you know where the El Dorado Savings is now? Well, that was in two parts. It later became The Amador Ledger, and on the other side there was a little nickleodeon. We'd pay a nickle, and go in and watch the movies. And in the same period Johnny Ratto who later built the building where ATI is now, was running Love Hall. And he put in a movie house in competition. This was down the street. The theater that was torn down last was right next to Placer Savings. That was going into the 50's. When they tore it down there was a squabble over the equipment. Mrs. Tam offered the stuff to anyone who could use it, but it ended up some place in Nevada.

(How did you become interested in the newspaper business?)

Do you want the story of my life? Well, my dad died in 1921. We didn't have a lot of money, and I did one thing and another for pocket money.

brother  
My ~~father~~ had gone to San Francisco and was working down there,  
and my sister was a schoolteacher. So mother and I were alone.  
So I was off on my way to school one day and the then owner of the  
Ledger flaged me down and asked if I'd like to go to work for him.  
Well, on my way home from school I stopped in there, and he handed me  
a broom! And I like to tell everyone that I started my career in  
journalism on a broom.

(Continued on the next tape---#21)