

Beloved memories of growing up in Vallejo

By Kristin Delaplane

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'My father, Fred Fisch, was a tailor. He was born in Austria-Hungary, now a part of Poland, and he learned his trade over there.

"He had an aunt living in New York and when he was 17, she had him come over here.

"He worked back there and then he came out to Oakland and San Francisco.

"When he first came to Vallejo, he had a shop in Levee's basement.

"Then he had his own store at 311 Georgia St. My father made officers' uniforms and he had a men's furnishings store, too.

"My mother was born in Grass Valley. Her father worked in the mines, so they sort of moved around.

"When they came to Vallejo, he worked at Mare Island as a molder.

"My mother worked as a cashier at Levee's when she graduated from high school

"In 1911, my father built our house, the house I live in today.

"Before that we lived in a little house on Napa Street between Georgia and Virginia or York.

"My mother drew the floor plan for our house. She made the rooms big, because in the house on Napa Street she had to move all the furniture to do any cleaning.

"My family always had a big vegetable garden. My mother used to make her own (ketchup) and she canned tomatoes.

"And we had chickens. When we started going up to Lake Tahoe in 1918 or 1919, the chickens used to travel with us, so we had fresh eggs and chickens up there.

"We used to keep a couple of ducks, too. They would eat the bugs-aphids, snails and slugs. The chickens were good for a lot of the garbage.

"When we first started going to Tahoe, we stayed at a hotel. In later years, we camped. Then in about 1930 we built a cabin.

"In 1938, we built another one. In the beginning, it was dirt roads after you left Placerville. Two ruts for a road.

"It took us nine hours, eight hours driving and one hour for lunch.

"If a car was going downhill and it met a car going uphill, the car going down had to back up and find a turnout.

"They drove cattle and sheep up there, so you were likely to go through droves of sheep and cattle. The cowboys would always wave.

"We also used to go up to Lake County for vacations. We took the train from Vallejo to Calistoga.

"From there we'd take a horse-drawn stage to the Mountain Dell Hotel. One time it was raining. They had canvas drops over the side of the stage and there were chickens and everything in that stage.

"My first four years of elementary school, I went to Dewey School, which was at Maine and Alameda.

"It was just a four-room wooden structure set back from the street.

"There was a big boardwalk leading out to the street and the boards didn't come close together. Somebody was losing money down there all the time. We'd get a big long stick and a wad of gum and go after it.

"The schools always made a big to-do over Valentine's Day. We always had a big decorated box with all the frills.

"Everybody brought their cards to school and put them in the box.

"The cards were very different than they have today. We used to get them in boxes and we'd assemble them ourselves. Put the frilly lace on and so forth.

"We were all avid readers and there was a library on the corner of Virginia and Sacramento Streets.

"For Christmas, the Masons always had a big Christmas party for all the children of the Masons. That was the building at Marin and Virginia.

"It snowed one year. I must have been only 3 or 4. I got a pan of snow and we cooked

it on the stove.

"We had birthdays, but not every year because that was too much work.

"I can remember Circus Day. That was a big event.

"The circus came to town by train and the depot wasn't too far from our house.

"They'd unload the animals and while they were pitching their tents, they have a big parade downtown with the animals. They had elephants and all the wild animals.

"All the big name circuses come to town - Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey. They pitched their tents where McKinley School is over on Central Avenue. That was all barren fields then.

"My Dad owned the house next to ours. It had a big board fence in front and he'd let the circus people put up their signs there, but he made sure that in return we got passes and reserved seats to the show.

"The high school was built in 1923 and I graduated in 1928. It was out in the country then and was quite a long walk.

"There'd be a group of us and we picked up other people along the way. When I wasn't in school, during summer vacation and so forth, I'd help out in Dad's store a little.

"Dad and Mr. Higgins built the Fisch-Higgins Building and Dad had his store there and Higgins had his shoe store there.

"After Dad retired, a bakery opened up in there and then the Vallejo Dollar Store took over.

"When I was growing up, there was the Georgian Hotel on Georgia Street. The Astor House was on Virginia Street at Sacramento. It had quite a restaurant at one time.

"I remember the Italian food they served. There was Rose's Candy Store, a candy store and ice cream parlor. They made their own candy.

"There was Smith's Stationery and it was also a music store. I have an old Victrola we bought there, the second one they sold in Vallejo.

"The Elks Club bought the first one. When old Smith died, they took the music part out

of the store. Crowley's Department Store was a fun store to go through.

"Across from Crowley's was a store and underneath it was a theater. We also had the Hanlon Theater on Virginia Street and the Vallejo Theater.

"They always had Saturday matinees. It cost a dime to get in. My father liked movies so we used to go in the evenings too.

"There was a tiny store where they didn't make anything but women's hats. That was where West America Bank is now. It was originally Central Bank. Right there was a lodge and we used to take dancing lessons up there.

"There was a big grocery store on Marin Street: Mr. Bercu had the produce and Mr. Macheski was the butcher. We always bought our turkeys from him.

"In those days you bought fresh ones that were hanging up in the store. There was Winchell's Hardware Store at Georgia and Sonoma. One of our neighbors, Mr. Clark, was a plumber and he worked out of there.

"Cooper's Bazaar was on Georgia Street. That was quite a store to go into. It had a conglomeration of everything - one of those junky stores.

"Lower Georgia Street was where they had the gambling and all that, but they had some legitimate business there.

"In those days it wasn't so easy to get to San Francisco. We had to go by the ferryboat, as they didn't have any bridges.

"We always took the old Monticello Steamship to the city. It was a nice relaxing trip and they had a dining room, so you could eat.

"My father, being in business, he'd go down to the wholesale houses on Mission Street for all kinds of dry goods.

"We used to buy most of our dresses at the wholesale houses in San Francisco. I even remember going to the World's Fair and riding on a little train that went all over the place.

"In about 1927, they laid the last span on the Carquinez Bridge. School was let out and we all went out to the bridge, had a picnic there and watched them lower that last span.

"Before that, you had to wait for the ferry from to take you from Vallejo to Rodeo.

"The first car we had was called a Chummy Roadster. It was a Haymes. It belonged to a Navy officer who had been transferred here.

"It was sort of built like a truck. My father said he'd buy it, if my mother drove it. He never drove. He was of a rather nervous temperament, quickly excitable Jewish. After that car, my father bought only Cadillacs.

"I had my driver's license before I learned to drive. All you had to do was take the examination and you had a driver's license.

"In fact, I've never had to take a driving test driving car. At one time my license was good for life and then they revoked those.

"During World War II, we had a terrible winter. I was commuting to Marin County and I came home one day after this terrible rain and windstorm to find it had taken off roofs from the houses.

"When I was young, we lived near open fields and whenever they'd do any plowing after a rain, mushrooms would come up and we'd go pick them.

"I wouldn't do it now. They come up in my yard and they sure look like the mushrooms we used to pick, but I wouldn't do it.

"But we used to pick them and then cook a great big kettle of them and eat them over toast. Saute them in a little garlic and butter and make a meal of it.

"My father loved to go fishing. He used to go for striped bass.

"In those days you got great big ones. I remember our back porch being full of them.

"At some point they decided our high school graduating classes were getting too small for our reunions, so we grouped the classes together and had a Roaring '20s luncheon.

"It was for all the graduating classed from 1920 to 1929.

"We used to have a fence in front of this house. One Halloween a bunch of boys from south Vallejo came and hitched horse to it and pulled it down.

"We finally got rid of the fence altogether."

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