

SCH Alumni

Annie Dutra

Annie was born on April 23, 1898 on the Indinia Ranch near Marysville, the youngest of seven children. Shortly after moving to Benicia, things got rough for Annie's family. Her father passed away and her mother, who spoke only Portuguese, could not care for her children.

Judge Dutra, a local official, was familiar with the family and their plight. One by one, he brought each of the children to the Sacramento Children's Home, making many long trips in his horse-drawn carriage. Annie was the last of the children to arrive. It was 1907 and Annie was just nine years old.

Annie lived in one of the original cottages and remembers that each had its own garden and a little flock of chickens for eggs. The Home's barnyard also had a horse and some cows. Breakfast was most often cornmeal mush and for dinner it was bread with syrup and milk. Like all the residential children, Annie had a job in the cottage. Hers was to make all the beds.

Like many of the girls who lived at "the Orphanage" at the turn of the century, Annie was taught to become a domestic. At age 13, she left for a housekeeping job with a Sacramento family. As was common at the time, Annie's education ended at the fifth grade. Her dream of piano lessons never materialized.

During World War I, Annie met and married. She and her husband built a house in Sacramento where they raised three children and took great delight in their 12 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren.

Wally Parks

A game of marbles was Wally Parks' favorite pastime during his stay at the Sacramento Children's Home. "You start out by laggin' to see who gets the first shot," Wally explained. "You draw a line and pitch your marble as close to that line as possible. The one who comes closest makes a circle in the dirt. Everybody throws their worst marbles in the circle and tries his best to hit everyone else's out of the ring with what we call a stealie."

Wally was eight years old when he came to live at the Sacramento Children's Home in 1921. Hit by hard times, Wally's mother struggled to raise her six children and eight stepchildren in a small, cramped house. "There was no welfare back then," said Wally.

When Wally arrived with three of his brothers and two sisters, more than 100 children lived in the dormitories and cottages, and another 24 babies lived in the Stork's Nest. The children were under the supervision of 16 housemothers and the Brother System—older children were responsible for supervising one younger child.

Wally remembers that chores were a big part of the daily routine. “We did everything: cleaned dorms, washed laundry, tended gardens and picked fruit. Saturday was mop and wax day.” Wally’s favorite chore was hitching the horse to the wagon for grocery delivery. After picking up items from the on-campus store, Wally and a few other boys would deliver them to all 12 cottages.

Sunday, the cherished day off, was a day for fun with trips to Joyland in Oak Park, watching baseball games or visiting the zoo. Occasionally, one of the boys got permission from the housemothers to take a girl to a matinee at the Hippedrome Theater (now the Crest Theater.)

Wally recalls that the boy/girl rules were strict. “No co-ed games and no hanky-panky. During free time, the housemothers were stationed like policemen up and down the yard. We couldn’t even hold hands,” he said with a smirk.

After leaving the Home at age 15, Wally went to work a Bercut Richards Packing, a local cannery. He worked there for 43 years, retiring as a foreman. He credits the Home for instilling in him the value of hard work and respect for others. He married and had two children, and lived just blocks from the Home.

In 1990, SCH began a renovation project. Wally asked staff member Paul Blankenship to keep his eye peeled for a bag of marbles. “I hid the darn things on a ledge in the boiler room so my buddies couldn’t snatch ‘em,” said Wally. The bag fell off the ledge.

During the renovation, lo and behold, the marbles turned up. For 64 years, they had worked their way down into the dirt floor behind the old boiler. Imagine Wally’s surprise when Paul called to ask him to identify the 50 glass spheres. “I had the best marble collection in the Home,” said Wally, “and now I can prove it!”

Tena Murray

Tena still puts peeled potatoes in cold water overnight before she cooks them. “That way they won’t turn brown,” she said. Tena learned this method of cooking potatoes when she lived at the Sacramento Children’s Home almost 65 years ago.

“At the Home, we learned cleanliness from the top of our heads to our feet,” she recalled. “All the girls were taught to be good homemakers.”

Tena arrived at SCH in 1938 when she was just two years old. Her mother passed away and her father was not able to care for a toddler. During the 12 years she lived at the Home, her three brothers arrived and departed at various times. During the Depression, it was not unusual for parents who simply could not care for their children to drop off them off at the Home. When Dad or Mom found a job, they would take the children home again.

Tena thought living with so many other children was great. “We were just like a family,” she said. “Oh, we fought like siblings sometimes. I still send a Christmas card to one of the friends from my group.”

The staff—then and now—had a significant impact on the residents. Tena recalls one of her caretakers, Mrs. Lyons. She was a beautiful, sweet lady who would hold the girls in her lap and rock them to sleep. “She went away one day and I remember crying every night and thinking ‘where’s my mommy?’”

Another staff member Tena remembers well was the very strict woman who caught her and her friends sneaking back in after going to the movie. “She snored so loud that she didn’t hear us leave. But two other girls tattled on us before we got back.”

After leaving the Home at age 14, Tena lived in a few foster homes and worked as a nurse’s assistant. Eventually, she married and moved to Stockton. Tena has one daughter whom she calls her “best friend.”

Muggsy

Since 1990, the Sacramento Children’s Home has included an Animal Therapy program. Muggsy was one of our regular visitors. This Boston Terrier, and her owner, volunteered for individual and group therapy, and participated in special activities. Muggsy had an infinite repertoire of talents and love, and formed bonds with many of the residential children. Brian, a 12-year-old resident, had an especially close friendship with the little dog.

Brian had a tumultuous adjustment period when he first arrived at the Sacramento Children’s Home. Brian, like many of our residents, had been uprooted numerous times and rebelled at new surroundings. Muggsy made the transition smoother. It’s much easier to warm up to a cuddly, small dog than to strange adults. Muggsy helped Brian lower his defenses and begin to trust.

After 18 months, Brian was ready for another transition—being reunited with his mother. Like many residents, Brian reacted to the upcoming change by regressing into anger. During one softball game, Brian got into a fight with another boy. Brian ended up with a bloody nose that was possibly broken.

Brian was too upset to allow anyone near him to check his nose. Brian’s counselor went in search of Muggsy. “When we first saw Brian, seven staff were on one side of the room and Brian was huddled on the floor facing the wall,” said Muggsy’s owner. “The situation was so intense that I was actually concerned for Muggsy’s safety, but I decided to trust the bond she held with Brian.”

Muggsy gently placed her paw on Brian’s right arm and kept it there for quite a while. At first, Brian didn’t move a muscle. Then, slowly, he reached over to Muggsy with his left hand and placed it over her paw. Muggsy inched closer until she was in Brian’s lap. He wrapped both arms around her and whispered, “Careful Muggs...my nose hurts.” As if

she understood, Muggsy gently licked his ear. Brian finally allowed himself to be examined and when he returned to his cottage, Muggsy trotted beside him.

Muggsy retired from our program several years ago, and Brian went on to a happy life with his mother. Our residents continue to enjoy the company of many other animals who help them understand unconditional love.