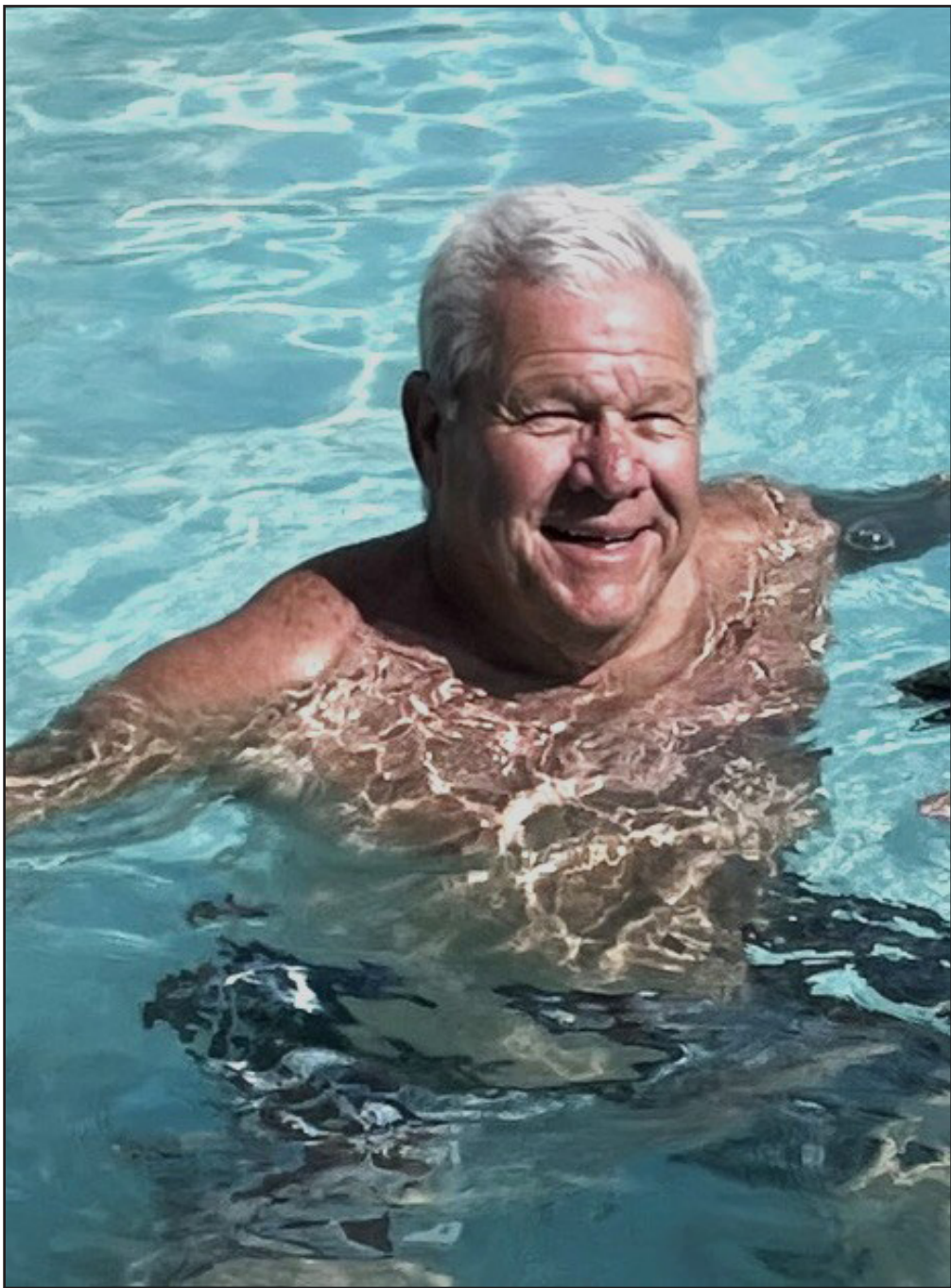




Serving our community for over 35 years!
Alta Dutch Flat Gold Run
COMMUNITY

Volume 36 – No. 4 PUBLISHED BY THE DUTCH FLAT COMMUNITY CENTER WITH MEMBER SUPPORT Winter 2025

**Beloved Community Stalwart
Mike Mutto
1955 - 2025**



By The Mutto Family

Michael George Mutto was born to George and Eleanor Mutto as the oldest of three brothers Steven, Kevin, and Gregory, in San Bruno, California on August 13, 1955. Michael passed away on November 28, 2025, at 70 years young. He graduated in 1971 from Crestmoor High School and moved to Alta, California in the late 80's. Mike married Kathleen Ann Mutto on May 6, 1995 after his divorce from Gina Elsass in 1990. He had three beautiful daughters, Vincenza Louise Mutto, Natalie Marie Buford, and Alexandra Eleanor Mutto to whom he was the most loving and supportive father. He was also a proud grandpa of Ashton Ocean Alawad and Lenore Antionette Alawad. He was a jack-of-all-trades, working in construction, as an electrician, and retiring as an Inspector. He took pride in serving his local Alta and Dutch Flat community, loved woodworking, fishing, and was an avid San Francisco Giants and 49ers fan. He was the lead contractor in the restoration of the Dutch Flat Hotel and took pride in leading the charge of reviving, restoring, and managing the Dutch Flat Pool. Mike was simply a great guy, husband, father, brother, son, grandfather, uncle and friend. He touched the hearts of everyone he met and will forever be loved and missed.

By Mike's Cherished Friends

It is with deep sadness that we learned of the passing of Mike Mutto last month. Mike was widely recognized for his commitment to the Dutch Flat Swimming Pool and our community. Mike was appointed to the Pool Board in 2015 and from that time on, he never looked back. In the early days, Mike was responsible for the installation of a new septic system at the Pool and later construction of new filters for the pool filtration system. He became the Pool Board President in 2019 where his vision for the Pool and upgrades grew. All these projects required the need for funding, so Mike as well as his wife Kathy, initiated the return of the Annual Dutch Flat Swimming Pool Barbecue with live music, community spirit, and all the trimmings. The Annual Barbecue sells out every year and is widely recognized as our community's premiere event of the Summer. During the Summer, day-to-day service calls for the Pool kept Mike busy whether scrambling to make sure there was adequate lifeguard staffing, to proper operation of the Pool filtration system, he made sure the Pool ran smoothly. Mike supported the lifeguards as well by supplying plenty of first aid equipment, drinking water, comfortable seating and shade. When there were calls by the lifeguards for assistance, he

A celebration of life will be held at the Hidden Gold Ranch, located at 653 Garrett Road in Gold Run, from noon to 4pm on January 10th

was the first to arrive. Mike was responsible for providing all the Pool chairs, lounges and acquiring unused picnic tables from the County. In the upper barbecue area, he also built the outdoor kitchen, and the barbecue utensil table. Volunteering at the Pool didn't end after Labor Day weekend, Mike spent the Fall preparing the Pool for Winterization. During the Winter, while activities slowed down at the Pool, Mike spent this time focusing on lifeguard recruitment and Spring projects. With the need to bring the Pool's public restrooms up to date and into compliance with handicap accessibility requirements, Mike was instrumental in developing the building plans and working with Placer County to obtain grant funding for the project. His multiple connections with friends in the trades enabled project construction to continue forward without delay. Mike was the face of the Swimming Pool and a supporter of our community. He was always big on hiring locals for jobs around the area and at the Pool. When I had a project around my house, he always said "hire this person, he's good and a local." Mike was also known for helping those in need. He recently assisted a local in getting a driver's license and funding for the repair of a vehicle to drive. In 2003, Mike was the lead contractor responsible for the top-to-bottom restoration of the Dutch Flat Hotel bringing back the western, Victorian charm of its day. Mike was very proud of the work they accomplished on the project including a new state of the art septic system for the Hotel. Just this year, Mike was responsible for coordinating and installing sod on the new volleyball court, constructing a new horseshoe pit and adding a new filtered, chilled water bottle filling station at the Pool. Mike was always focused on the next project. He was in the process of initiating plans to resurface the Pool and the Pool deck next year. Mike dedicated countless hours and weekends at the Pool. Without his vision, drive, and love for our community pool, none of the improvements would have been possible. Mike truly embodied the spirit of volunteerism. His dedication and hard work at the Pool will allow generations of families to enjoy a true gem of our community. Our deepest sympathies are with Mike's family. He will be greatly missed.

Mike dedicated himself to helping others, driven by selflessness and a desire to make a positive impact.

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**Notes from a Small
School: Happenings
at Alta-Dutch Flat
School**

By Shana Brown

We share the sadness of our community on the loss of Mike Mutto, our Alta-Dutch Flat School Board Trustee, Kathy Mutto's husband. While she serves on the board, Mike was always a huge supporter of Alta-Dutch Flat School and the children in our area. He will be sorely missed for his positive attitude and his infectious enthusiasm for life. This lovely weather has allowed us a little more time to work on facilities before winterizing our campus. Like many folks in our area, we've had some trees down from our bad winters several years ago. Our Director of Maintenance, Brian Mavricz, worked with Cameron Myers of CalFire to secure a Fire Mitigation permit for us. The entire permit process took over a year! Luckily, we secured our permit and the weather has cooperated enough to allow CalFire crews to work cutting back overgrown trees and shrubs. They have dedicated almost a month of their time on our property and we are looking pretty ship-shape around here. We have had volunteers from Bayside Church in Auburn on our campus as well, spearheaded by Ed Snider. We are working to create a one-mile walking path on our property which would be open to all members of the community. Stay tuned for information about that opening! Despite our warm weather, our students are anxiously awaiting visits from St. Nick. We stage an annual holiday show where every student performs. There are few things better than hearing kindergartners belting out Jingle Bells at the top of their lungs from down the hallway. It is always a magical night as we all crowd into the gymnasium to watch our students and to set the mood for the holiday season. This time of year is a flurry of Candy Gram sales, and holiday crafts, and spirit days, as well as an extended visit from our own Buddy the Elf who travels throughout the school causing all types of mischief. On the last day of school, already declared a traditional Pajama Day, dads from our Parents' Club will be making pancakes for all our students to send us off to winter vacation in style. All our staff feels so fortunate to be a part of memory-making for our students and to be included in our family and our community well wishes for all of us. Wishing everyone a very Merry Christmas, a happy 2026, and, of course, a restful Winter Vacation.



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Views expressed in letters, guest opinion pieces and other contributions do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Dutch Flat Community Center, or its Board.

This newspaper is published quarterly and distributed to Dutch Flat Community Center members and to residents of the Center’s service area from Gold Run to Emigrant Gap in Placer County, California.

We welcome contributions from readers. Submission deadline for the next issue: **March 10, 2026.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The Attic: Thursdays, 10 am - 1 pm.

Dutch Flat Community Center Board of Directors Meeting: 2nd Mondays, 6:00 pm. Location varies. Contact Laura Glassco, 916-778-8308.

Dutch Flat Community Center Potluck: 3rd Thursdays. 6:00 pm. Bring a place setting, your own drink, and a dish to share.

Dutch Flat Seventh Day Adventist: Dinner and Bible Study, Wednesday, 6 pm, free and open to all. Sabbath, Saturday, 3:30 pm. Children’s Church same time and place. 936 Stockton Street. Contact 831-710-7712 or 860-367-2689.

Dutch Flat United Methodist Church Pancake Breakfast: 2nd Saturdays, 8:00 am -10:00 am.

Dutch Flat United Methodist Church Arts & Crafts: Thursdays, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. All are welcome. Learn something new!

Dutch Flat United Methodist Church: Worship Service, Sundays, 11:00 am. Fellowship lunch following service. Contact: 916-847-8477.

Golden Drift Historical Society Board Meeting: 1st Monday of February, April, June, August, October and December, 7 pm. Golden Drift Museum, Main Street. Contact Sarah Fugate, 530-210-5085.

Pioneer Union Church, Gold Run: Worship Service, Sundays, 10 am.

Placer County Library Mobile Service: See Page 5.

Sierra First Baptist Church, Alta: Sunday School, 9 am. Worship Service, Sundays, 10:30 am. 33990 Alta Bonny Nook Rd., Alta. Contact 530-389-2168.

Sierra First Baptist Church Bible Study: Mondays, 8:30 am.

Sierra First Baptist Church Community Lunch: Mondays, 11:30 am - 12:30 pm. Free.

Sierra First Baptist Church Food Pantry: Thursdays, 10 am - 12 pm.

A message from the DFCC President

By Doug Hughs

Happy Holidays to everyone out there in our wonderful community. May this issue find you all in good health and ready to take on the new year. I would first like to introduce our new Board of Directors for 2025-2026:

Doug Hughs, President
Laura Glassco, Vice President
Ernie Bullard, Treasurer
Karen Charles, Recording Secretary
Mike Bell, At Large
Shana Brown, At Large
Diane Ewing, At Large
Deb Harris, At Large
John Ortega, At Large
Bob Pfister, At Large
Shelley Willsmore, At Large

I’ve taken over this Presidential role from, Laura Glassco, someone who has held the position for three consecutive years and has done an incredible job in improving our physical building and leading the charge to carry out our many fundraising events throughout the year in a fun and profitable manner. New exterior paint, improved front yard landscaping and gravel throughout, as well as major roof repairs to name a few of the improvements. We’ve also added the additional Oktoberfest fundraiser event which has been a big hit. She had help from all of us in accomplishing these tasks but someone needed to ‘steer the ship’ and Laura filled the role of captain better than anyone! I have some big shoes to fill and will do my best. Thankfully this Board is second to none which will make my job all the easier. Thank you, Laura, for your many years of service as Board President!!!

The Community Center just wrapped up hosting our 2nd Annual Free Chili Dinner which coincided with the 2nd Annual Festival of Lights Parade and what a big success it

was! Many thanks to all of you who brought your special chili recipe and to all of those that generously donated money at the event. Not to mention our crew that planned the parade and installed all the amazing decorations and lights. Great job everyone!!! It takes a community and we certainly have one that steps up when needed.

In regard to building improvements, we are currently painting the entire interior of the building, upstairs and downstairs. We are also looking to address the very annoying sound echoing problem in our main gathering room that hosts our potlucks. Several solutions are presently being considered by the Board and a decision will be made very soon.

Our annual membership drive will soon be underway. If you don’t receive a letter in the mail, please contact us. You can also use the form below to submit your 2026 Membership. Your contribution will support this organization and keep our building standing tall and proud.

Our next scheduled potlucks this winter will be January 15th, February 19th and March 19th. Come on out and see our newly painted room! Hope to see everyone there.



Photo by Madison Murray

Become a Member of the Dutch Flat Community Center!

Dutch Flat Community Center Membership Form
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Welcome Home-The Forgotten Soldiers of the Vietnam War

By Rodney Hoover

Months after graduating high school in 1970, I was behind an M60 machine gun in the door of a Huey Gun Ship by the name of Excalibur. We were patrolling the DMZ. We wore flak jackets and sat on our helmets in case bullets came up through the unarmored air frame floor. We carried M60 machine guns in both side doors. As Crew Chief, I rode on the right side with another Door Gunner on the left. We also carried a 19 tube 2.75” rocket launcher on each side, along with a 40MM Grenade Launcher up front that could fire 225 grenades per minute. Some of the Hueys also carried, on each side, a 5.56 mm Rotary Mini-gun that would each fire 2400 rounds a minute. We could put an M16 size bullet into every square foot of a football size field. You might think this was Vietnam? It wasn’t!

I was in a nearly forgotten place in the middle of a combined combat operation with soldiers from the 2d Infantry “Indian Head” Division and the 7th Air Calvary. When I received my orders in 1971, Vietnam was on the nightly news. As a door gunner, I expected to go to Nam. This was the first of two wrong assumptions. First, I didn’t get sent to Vietnam. The second was the assumption that the combat where I was being sent was smaller and “less deadly”. WRONG! Dead is Dead!

Our mission was patrolling the DMZ between North and South Korea. Part of my job as door gunner/crew chief meant I spent much of my time hanging out the door while we hovered a few feet above ground in a cloud of Agent Orange contaminated dust.

Agent Orange in South Korea? Agent Orange (AO), is well know as the highly toxic chemical defoliant that was widely sprayed to clear dense Vietnamese jungles. What is less well known about Agent Orange is that it was used and stored in other places besides Vietnam. S Korea used it from 1966-1971. AO did a good job of clearing vegetation. The problem is that Agent Orange is made with Dioxin, a highly toxic chemical, especially if inhaled.

For the past 50 + years, US and S Korean soldiers stationed near the DMZ have reported mysterious and unexplainable illnesses. Originally, the military’s official claim was that Agent Orange was only used in the US 2nd Infantry Division. That has been disproved. An estimated 150,000 troops in ten infantry divisions may have been exposed to Agent Orange while working on or near the Korean DMZ.

Because of many illnesses amongst veterans, both the US and S Korea have finally admitted that exposure to Agent Orange is linked to many severe health problems that manifest years later.

Sounds good eh? At least we’re getting there. In 2011 the US military announced that if a veteran served in or near the Korean DMZ between Sept 1,1967 and Aug 31, 1971,

they are presumed to have contacted Agent Orange. Cool, but since Agent Orange is known to stay in the soil for 50+ years, what happened Aug 31st 1971? Did it magically disappear? What about the poor GI’s that arrived Sept. 1st of 1971? Or the GI’s that buried 250 leaking barrels at Camp Carrol, South Korea in 1978?

Now for the “rest of the story.”

I graduated High School in June of 1970 and received my Draft Lottery Number of 37 out of 365. My induction followed in the early fall of the same year. I scored high enough on my aptitude test that the recruiter suggested I, “sign up for a 3rd year for a guaranteed school.” Well, I did, and signed up for Aircraft Maintenance on the Delayed Entry Plan.



I reported to Fort Ord, California in Feb.1971 for Basic Training. The PT wasn’t a problem because in high school I competed in Track and Field, so in basic training I ran a 5 Minute Mile in full combat gear, boots, backpack and carrying an M16 Rifle. I also qualified expert with the M16.

My next duty station for AIT (Advanced Individual Training), Aircraft Maintenance, turned out to be Huey Helicopter Repair & Door Gunner School. We joked that the life expectancy of a Huey Door Gunner was 15 seconds in a Vietnam hot LZ (landing zone).

I finished 1st in my class and qualified expert with the M60 7.62mm Machine Gun from the door of a Huey. I was in class 217 to go through Door Gunner School that year and all classes before me went to Vietnam. My class was split up and half went to Germany and my half went to South Korea. One of America’s most well kept secrets.

I arrived at Camp Stanton, S. Korea, Aug 31st, 1971, and was assigned to the US Army 2nd Infantry (Indian Head). Camp Stanton was our smallest, and at only 13 miles from the DMZ, the closest US base to the DMZ. We had 12 Huey UH1 Gunships, 2 Huey Cobra Gunships, a couple of OH58 Kiowa Light Observation Helicopters and one fixed wing observation aircraft.

I immediately began flying as Crew Chief patrolling the DMZ. One of our jobs was finding and marking unexploded ordnance. Our “high tech” marking method was to fill up baseball sized paper bags with lime, carry them onto the chopper in a 5 gallon bucket, and using our arms developed by playing America’s favorite pastime, we would throw the bags and they would burst on impact when thrown, marking unexploded

ordnance. All this while hovering only a few feet above ground in a rotor-wash cloud of what I would find out decades later was Agent Orange contaminated dust. And then, as if hours of inhaling toxic dust wasn’t enough, after returning to base I would blow out the air filters with compressed air.

You wonder how much all that toxic dust affected me? Like I said earlier, in basic training, I ran a 5-minute mile. After returning to the states, I was lucky to run 50 yards. I complained to many doctors about shortness of breath, odd feelings in my chest and dizzy spells.

Over the next 54 years I was diagnosed incorrectly with Emphysema, COPD, Asthma, allergies and anxiety, along with several other unexplained illnesses. In 2017, upon hearing for the first time that Agent Orange was used on the Korean DMZ, I filed for the Agent Orange Registry, hoping to get some answers. Cool eh? I might finally get some help from the VA. WRONG!! My Claim Was Denied!!! I was told there was no evidence in my discharge papers that I ever served on an airfield in Korea anytime or anywhere! What? I knew I had been there!

It wasn’t until 2025 that I discovered the problem. There was a typo on my discharge paperwork!! My discharge paper showed an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) of 57N20 which does not exist anywhere in the Army. My actual MOS was a 67N20 UH1 Helicopter Repairman. No one said a word about the typo. They just denied my claims.

And then!!! In mid July 2025 I had a near fatal massive Atrial Fibrillation attack which resulted in a very successful double Catheter Heart Ablation. I know God is in control of my life. He tells us to thank Him in all situations. And as in many God controlled situations, there is irony in this one. As a result of me almost dying, the error on my record was discovered, corrected and updated to show all the airbases that I had served at and verified that I served on the Korean DMZ.

It finally looks like after 54 years I will finally be rated as an Agent Orange Victim. Thank you Lord for a heart attack??

I arrived in Korea on the last day of the arbitrary “presumptive time of exposure.” (Sept 1 1967-August 31st 1971)

I never fired a shot in anger. BUT “Agent Orange Killed me in Korea, I just haven’t Died Yet.”

I am an American Patriot. I fly the Red White and Blue and love this country. There is no better place in the world. I would do it all over again without any reservation. And I would still put back on the uniform and serve if my country needed me.

“Still I’ll Gladly Stand Up Next To You And Defend Her Still Today.

There Ain’t No Doubt, I Love This Land. God Bless The U.S.A.”

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Volunteers Clean Historic Dutch Flat Public Cemetery During Gold Trail Chapter Day of Service



DAR volunteers: (L-R) Karen Hermsmier, Cordelia Min, Eli Connins, Darla Arndt, and Mary Sayles

By Darla Arndt

Under bright autumn skies on October 18, more than fifty volunteers gathered at the historic Old Dutch Flat Cemetery for a large-scale Day of Service led by the Gold Trail Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR). The group worked together to restore, clean, and document 150 historic headstones, including that of William Alonzo Miller, the great-great-grandfather of one participating member.

A total of **58 volunteers** participated in the event, including 19 students and 12 teachers and parents from Granite Bay, Roseville, and Whitney High Schools. Additional youth support came from Trail Life Troop 19, the John Adams Academy Honors Club, and the Young Men’s Service League of Roseville.

Twenty-three Gold Trail Chapter members and three members of the Emigrant Trail Chapter joined forces to coordinate the large effort.

DAR volunteers guided small student groups, teaching them how to safely clear leaves, remove fallen branches, pull weeds and saplings, and properly scrub and clean the fragile 19th-century markers. Volunteers also replaced Veterans’ flags, pausing at

each grave to offer thanks for their service. Retired flags were gathered for appropriate retirement at a future date.

By day’s end, volunteers had successfully cleaned **135 headstones** and uncovered **two markers** that had previously been buried and undocumented.

The event brought together youth, families, and community members in a shared effort to honor local history. “It was a wonderful day filled with hard work and respect for those who have passed before us,” organizers said, noting that the project reflects the DAR’s mission of Historic Preservation, Education, and Patriotism.

The Gold Trail Chapter’s Historic Preservation Committee continues its work to compile and verify all available records of Dutch Flat interments. Their goal is to update “Find a Grave” and create a **digitized master database** to be housed on the Golden Drift Museum website. The committee is targeting **2026** for the release of this comprehensive “Master List” and its supporting research documents—providing future genealogists and families with an accurate, accessible resource to follow and preserve their family histories.



Gold Trail Vice Regent, Susan Geerts, and 2nd Vice Regent, Darla Arndt, event organizer



Gold Trail member, Lori Coble



Gold Trail Chaplin and Retired US Marine, Sheila Gery

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February 5 & 19

March 5 & 19

April 2, 16, & 30

May 14

Book Club in Dutch Flat

January 22 - *James* by Percival Everett

February 19 - *The Little Old Lady Who Broke All the Rules* by C. Ingelman-Sundberg

March 19 - *Lands of Lost Borders* by Kate Harris

April 16 - *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus

May 14 - *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See

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Dutch Christmas

By Sarah Fugate



On December 7, the Dutch Flat Hotel hosted an afternoon of holiday magic, featuring Santa and Mrs. Claus, a small vendor court and horse-drawn carriage rides through town. A new holiday tradition has begun.







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Full Circle: A love letter to Dutch Flat

By Patrick Bell

My story began with my parents – as all such stories begin. My father grew up on a ranch near Oroville, and was one of those people who could build or fix just about anything back in the day. Consequently, he worked lots of different jobs in lots of different places. I was used to moving as he followed available work, but nothing prepared me for our move from Northern California to the LA area in 1952. Those were the boom years for housing in SoCal, and during the time we lived there - 1952 to 1956 – I lost track of how many places we lived. The short list was Monterey Park, Downey, Lynwood, South Gate, Glenwood, Altadena and Pasadena, sometimes in multiple locations in those suburban cities. His driver (literally) was how much time he spent commuting to work; more than about 10 minutes and we moved. I never stayed in the same school for more than a couple of months back then, until our third or fourth move in the third grade, when my mother said “Enough,” and enrolled me in a Catholic school for the rest of that year. We still moved, but my mom drove me to school all year. By fourth grade we were semi-stable in Altadena and Pasadena so I moved to another parish for that year, the first time I spent an entire year in one school. At the end of that year, my parents divorced. Dad paid no child support or alimony and my mother had never held a job, so we moved to Dutch Flat, where my maternal grandmother, Clara Mullen, had a summer home.

I remember distinctly standing in the driveway of the rock house on Main Street across from the hearse house, looking around at the town, much of which I could see from that spot. I remember the quiet (no traffic), the trees (it was June), the absence of sidewalks and a commercial district, the *ruralness* of it all. I was about to turn 10 that summer, and I had very few memories of my hectic life up to that point. For some reason or other, I came to myself in that time and place. It was like my consciousness came on line suddenly and started recording memories at an unprecedented rate. I didn’t know it then, but on reflection several years later, I realized that the years I lived in Dutch Flat (1956-1962) represented much, much more than stability. I finally belonged somewhere; Dutch Flat was my home in a way I didn’t even recognize until we moved away seven years later.

It still is. Here I had the same friends, saw the same people, went to the same store, got

my first library card, walked every inch of the diggings for miles around with the first dogs I ever owned, spent every day in summer in flip-flops and a swimsuit, walking to the pool and back and carousing with the “summer kids” until late at night.

I actually had two separate lives during the year: the one during the regular school year with my best friend, Denny Supinger, attending the one-room school house where we graduated in 1960 – a fabulous experience I’ll recount in a future article; and my summertime life. When the town transformed with the influx of people from the Bay Area spending the summer in their cabins. I saw very little of Denny and my school friends for three months of the year, hanging out instead with the McShanes, the McClatchys, the Johnsons, the Reioux clan, and others lost to memory.

Patrick Bell is now an At-Large member of the Golden Drift Historical Society Board of Directors

With Labor Day, we all went back to our regular lives, our regular friends, and our regular activities. All very different rituals and contacts. I picked up with Denny as if we’d been away for a weekend. We never talked about what we did apart from one another in those long summer days.

I just returned to school and fishing and hunting (I terrorized squirrels and birds with my .22, and caught a few fish every now and then. Denny was the real sportsman, and remains so to this day.) A couple of times we built model ships that we set alight at the gravel pit and sank with gunfire, re-enacting some sort of juvenile version of WW2. We both split wood and stacked cords of oak that never seemed to end for the fireplace and woodstoves that heated our houses. When it snowed, there was a driveway to clear so my mom could get to work at DeWitt State Hospital (she got training as a Psych Tech there with her friend Margaret Doolin (Mrs. Flaxel’s daughter), who was also a single mom. Sometimes a storm would close the roads and she’d stay over at the hospital, so I’d make dinner for my brother and get him up for school the next day.

When I graduated from DF Elementary, my mother had talked somebody into an anonymous donation so that I could go to a “good school,” in this case Christian Brothers in Sacramento where I was a boarding

student (I have my suspicions who the donor was but do not actually know). I lasted a year and a half until I had to come home, lonely, a little depressed, and no longer the A student I started out as. After that, Mom talked a hospital friend into putting me up in Auburn so I could continue at the second-best school – Placer Union HS. By the time I finished my sophomore year there, Governor Ronald Reagan announced the closure of most of the psychiatric hospitals run by the state, and DeWitt was on the list, so in 1963 my mom transferred to Stockton where the state hospital was staying open longer, and she got another job at San Joaquin General Hospital. My brother and I finished our schooling in Stockton. I went to Delta College, then Sac State, and finally got a job working in hospitals, married and raised our sons in the valley. The early going in those years was tough because I missed Dutch Flat terribly, and never really regained that sense of belonging I had experienced there until many years later.

Fast forward to my second marriage and visits to my old home for Fourth of July parades every few years, where unfortunately I made no real connections. After I retired, I started bringing close friends and family up to Dutch Flat to do tours of what my life was like here. On one visit, I walked into the hotel with my wife and a couple of cousins, and got into a conversation with Heidi Suter that eventually led me to reconnect with my first girlfriend – Debby McClatchy – and had a discussion with her about the museum. Long story short, I’m now the newest museum board member, and am making plans to buy plots in the cemetery for a longer stay in town than I had ever considered.

When people ask me where I grew up, I always said “Dutch Flat,” then went on to describe much of what I’ve related here – usually ending the story with, “I had a Tom Sawyer boyhood.” I suspect that the people who left town over these last many years, only to return, whether they grew up here or were “summer kids,” have many similar stories with very different details, but they all come back to Dutch Flat (or Alta or Gold Run) as home. (I hope to write some of those stories in the future.)

I couldn’t be happier to have come full circle. It’s good to be back home, even though I sleep every night 60 miles – and 60 years – away in the valley.



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The “City of San Francisco” and the Great Snowstorm of 1952

By Debby McClatchy

My family was celebrating Christmas in Dutch Flat in 1951, and the snow became so deep we had to climb out the windows above the kitchen sink to exit our cabin. Us kids built a fort in the front yard under the drifts, complete with hollowed out rooms and corridors. It was great fun. But not for others. In January a group of passengers had a much worse experience in that snow.

In the 1950s a favorite way to travel, for those with means, was by the luxurious steam liner trains. One such train was “The City of San Francisco”. Inaugurated in 1936, it completed numerous round trips per month from Chicago to Oakland. By 1951 its power had been converted from steam to diesel. Leaving Chicago on Friday, January 11th, 1952, it was expected to arrive in Oakland at 9am on the following Sunday. On board were 236 passengers and crew. Some of the passengers were delegates to the upcoming Democratic Convention in San Francisco, and some were military en route to the Korean War. Many others were elderly. The railroad had often declared that so potent were their modern equipment, snowsheds, and work crews, that closure of the Sierra rails posed no real threat. Previously, a normal accumulation of snow would be 200-450 feet, although winters in the 1880s and 1890s had twice reached almost 800 feet. During the winter of 1860, when Theodore Judah and Dutch Flat’s Dr. Strong rode a reconnaissance trip up to the summit, the snowfall was unseasonably light. Neither of them realized how devastating it could become. The winter of 1866-67, when most work on the railroad had to be halted, was a wake-up call. Now, as the winter of 1951-52 progressed, it became apparent that there was a big problem, as storm after storm filled the right-of-way as soon as it was cleared. Avalanches were common between Truckee and Emigrant Gap.

Snow started to fall heavily by the time the train reached Reno. It was delayed there and again at the snow shed in Norden. Meanwhile, the two PG&E line crews of the Drum Division, who were stationed in Alta, were working storm damage near Soda Springs and Rainbow. California road crews were desperately trying to keep Hwy 40 open, fighting eighty mile per hour winds and blizzard conditions. The railroad was using a rotary plow to clear ahead of the “City of San Francisco”. Unfortunately, it couldn’t keep up with the storm, and drifting snow and snow slides onto the tracks finally stopped both the train and the plow. They had reached Smart Ridge near Yuba Gap, but could go no further. It was 12:15pm on Sunday, January 13th.

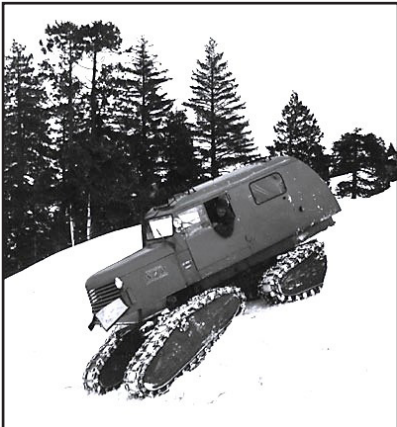
No one was worried at first. This had happened many times before, and usually passengers were only inconvenienced for a few hours.

There were three major rescue attempts on the first day by the Southern Pacific



Stranded passengers on the “City of San Francisco” in 1952

Railroad, and all failed. More plows were sent, but they soon froze in place. One was buried by an avalanche that also killed the driver. Winds were now up to 110 miles an hour and visibility was zero. Hwy 40 was closed between Auburn and Donner Lake and would remain closed for twenty-eight days.



On the second day, Monday, the PG&E line crew at Rainbow was asked to give assistance. They set out on their Sno-Cat with supplies. Meanwhile, a ski patrol was also trying to do the same. But the snow was too deep and they both were stopped a quarter mile from the train. A small amount of food was then packed in on snowshoes. Local residents slaughtered their pigs and chickens, and a volunteer crew of skiers, college students staying in Soda Springs, took the meat to the train. The chefs were creative with this and what they had on board; people were hungry, but not starving. A doctor was able to travel in by dog sled.

The passengers now had no heat or light. The engines never ran out of fuel, but they did run out of water, and steam was needed for heat. The train was almost completely covered with snow, and it was like living in a long, dark cave. There was only a small wood-burning stove in the diner, and anything that would burn was used to keep it going. Towels, napkins, curtains, and bedding were used to wrap exposed extremities. Luckily, there were five nurses among the stranded, and this greatly helped as six passengers suffered non-fatal heart attacks. The 30 man crew, engineers, porters, brakemen, conductors, chefs, etc., showed unselfish concern and devotion to duty, in the finest railroad tradition. This helped to keep up morale and hope. Passengers were heard singing: “I’ve Been Working on the

Railroad” and “California, Here I Come”. Liquor was not banned. A broken coupling seeped out monoxide gas, and sixty people were overcome. Even though the train was freezing, windows had to be broken out to dissipate the fumes. There was no water to drink or for sanitation. They tried shoveling snow into the tender, but it was so cold it would not melt. The storm decreased a bit, and passengers tried to leave on foot, but were unsuccessful.

People were practical and inventive. The doctor used gin from the lounge car bar to sterilize his equipment. Really sick people were quarantined, as there was a fear of respiratory infections. Smoking was discouraged. People were asked to remain in their seats to minimize injury. Those passengers with compartments gave them over to families. All children, the youngest six months old, were fed and coddled. Everyone cooperated and no one became hysterical. A morphine addict was isolated away from the group.

The U.S. Army tried to use their “weasels”, ten wheel Arctic vehicles, but they were useless in the wet “cement” of the California snow. A photographer from “Life Magazine” tried to stowaway on one of them, but was found and evicted. A helicopter tried to reach the train, but winds were too strong.

On the third day the road crews started to dig out a path to the train, 500 feet long by five feet wide through ten feet of snow. When completed, it finally allowed supplies to be brought in by the Sno-Cat and men on snowshoes.

On the fourth day, the Southern Pacific was able to clear the tracks to Emigrant Gap and the road crews opened a stretch of Hwy 40 near the path to the train. The storm abated briefly. All passengers, crew, and baggage were finally evacuated, women and children first. The baggage included five bags of paper currency, worth over a million dollars, going to the U.S. Mint in San Francisco. Every automobile, truck, and tractor in the area met them as they reached Hwy 40, and all were transported to the warmth and safety of the Nyack Lodge. A lavish supper of steaks and turkeys was provided. After resting at the lodge, the passengers were loaded onto a rescue Pullman train to complete their journey. Another storm was moving in, and everyone



wanted to be on their way. The efforts of the PG&E crew were led by Jay Gold. Without his leadership, the whole rescue attempt might not have been successful. He never gave up, and, consequently, literally worked himself to death. After all the passengers were safe, he died of a massive heart attack, complicated by pneumonia. Along with other heroes of the rescue, he was honored at the State Centennial Celebration in Auburn that October, receiving the PG&E’s highest award, the John A. Britton Gold Medal. The “City of San Francisco” was still stuck in the snow and railroad workers were stuck in Reno and Sparks. Owners of the Nugget and Harold’s Club Casinos provided food and lodging until they could return to work. Then a crew of 300 men began to manually shovel snow off the tracks and sheds. Finally, the rotary plows were able to get to the train, helped by bulldozers. Cranes removed the wrecked plows. Luckily the weather remained clear for a while. The crew then shoveled out the train, top, sides, and underneath. By this time there were 2500 westbound and 700 eastbound loads of freight waiting to continue. Finally, on January 19th, the train was freed and removed.

Sitting snug earlier in our snow fort we naively celebrated the harsh winter, never imagining the suffering it would later cause to hundreds of stranded passengers and crew on the “City of San Francisco”.



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