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*Tattered Tidbits: Alpine Historical Society*

**TOM HILL'S MEMORIES OF ALPINE**

Like many other Alpine pioneer families, the Hills came to Alpine in search of a climate that would suit their young son, Tom. After an extensive search in both Arizona and California, they found Alpine air was just what young Tom needed to alleviate his asthma. Looking for a place to buy, the Hills happened upon a "For Sale" sign one Sunday in 1926 and soon negotiated to buy the parcel from Robert Foss. It was just what the Hills were looking for. They bought it and promptly got to work planting a fruit orchard on the 40-acre parcel. Over 200 fruit trees were planted: apricots, peaches, plums, and all sorts of citrus. Their home was built in 1928 on Robles Grande Road, just off of Tavern Road. It was here that Tom and Flora Hill raised their children, Tom Jr. and Zelma Rae, known to all as Tootsie.

The Hills expected to make a living from farming; however, they soon found that the lack of water made it impossible for their orchard to provide enough income. Tom, Sr. opened a garage and service station in the center of Alpine and this provided their primary source of support.

In a "Voices of Alpine" interview in 2002, Tom Jr. told of his memories of growing up in this rural community. When asked by Vikki Coffey, narrator of the interview, what the youngsters in Alpine did for fun, Tom replied, "Chores. In the evenings we got to do homework and I had chores to do... There would be trees to clean and we'd work on that until supper time. We'd get time off sometimes, of course. The kids would come over to our place sometimes and swim in the reservoir..." The reservoir was on the highest point of the ranch and was used to irrigate the fruit trees.

Tom described how he was responsible for tending his mother's garden—she canned all the vegetables from that garden—and how he cared for the cows, horses, and chickens. Tom also told how he drove the tractor when he was seven years old. The wheels had no tires, and the ride was bumpy, "It was very rocky," he said, "when you hit a rock it would go 'bang, bang, bang'. You'd have to push the clutch in real quick."

Tom's recollections of school in Alpine centered on his teacher—Hazel Hohanshelt. He was in the first grade the first year she taught. When she saw Tom years later she called him her "very first student" as she hugged him. There were small windows at the top of the schoolroom—with no glass in them. Birds flew through the openings and built nests. Rather than remove them, Mrs. Hohanshelt used this as a learning tool—the beauty of nature. Her dog, Patches, was a grammar teacher. Patches would come to the classroom and Mrs. Hohanshelt would say, "Lie down, Patches." No response from the dog. The teacher would look at the class and they would chant, "Lie down, Patches," and the dog would immediately do as told. He remembers that Mrs. Hohanshelt would play with the children on the playground. Tom said, "I give her a lot of credit." For Tom, this was a declaration of love.

Tom joined the Merchant Marine during World War II and served in the Pacific. He chose the Merchant Marine on the advice of his father who served in the Navy. Tom Sr.'s reasoning?

Better food and you can get out whenever you want! After his service, Tom returned to Alpine and lived here for the remainder of his life.

When Tom Sr. died, Tom Jr.'s mother Flora began to sell off the 40-acre parcel, 10-acres at a time, in order to support herself. When she sold the last 10-acre parcel and the home, she bought a smaller home near her son on White Oak Drive. White Oak Drive is a family affair—Tom's first wife Neda and his second wife Ann still live on that street. Tom passed away in 2009, but those who were lucky enough to know him remember a quiet, gentle, easy going man who loved Alpine, his family, and his friends. He is missed.

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Tom Hill Jr. on a surveying job in Laguna Mountains – circa 1947. From collection of Ann Hill.