

DETWILER MCKAIG FAMILY STORY

A COLORFUL PART OF EARLY CARLSBAD HISTORY

Recently this family donated to the Carlsbad Historical Society the photographic collection of Donald Detwiler, a prominent commercial photographer during the 1940's and later years. His son-in-law, John McKaig came to town and began cutting hair in 1947 after serving in the military during WWII. His grandson, John McKaig II is still cutting hair on State Street.

Don Detwiler was a talented photographer working from his studio on State Street. He took all the photos of cadets at the Army Navy Academy. He likely took photos of Carlsbad Lancers also after the high school was built in 1957. Oceanside was also his business territory..His wife,, Ester could write in old English script and printed the cadet names under each photo.

The family,originally from Michigan and Escondido, had arrived in 1937; when Carlsbad's population was 3000. Their future son-in-law arrived 10 years later; town was then 6700 pop. Their daughter, Janet, caught the eye of this barber as he worked. She walked her dog regularly by his barber shop. John and Janet dated and frequently parked in the Carlsbad Highlands area overlooking the lagoon. Later they put down payment \$450 for a lot, paid it off, and built their home there on Skyline Drive. The couple were married in the all glass church in Portuguese Bend, known as the Wayfarers Chapel in San Pedro, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The day of the wedding they arrived late and the gate was closed. The gateman approached and asked "Are you friends of the bride or the groom? Neither one" John yelled. "We are the main event!" They raised three children: Linda Louise, Lisa Ann and John Allan II.

When Janet was pregnant with the first baby, John did a lot of bragging about its sex. "Of course it was going to be a boy" was his statement. He actually made a large poster in his window: 'HE'S COMING'. The Fire Chief challenged him about that statement. When Linda Louise was born,

three days later his friends tied him to his barber chair and cut off his hair. He called his wife before going home and said “Honey don’t have another baby, but I’m coming home without any hair. Boy it was cold walking home that night.”

This man John McKaig later to be known as “Johnny the Barber” became very involved in this small town of Carlsbad during its formative years. He was well suited to observe the goings on about town from his front window view of his barber shop on Grand ave. He contributed much to the growth and development of the culture and character of this sleepy little town. He was vitally involved in its history.

Impressive list of service --Carlsbad organizations

- Chamber of Commerce board - member 40 years
- Parks and Rec. Commissioner -4 years -- chairman 3 years
- Rotary Club member ---8 years board member
- Housing Appeals Board—chairman 2 years
- Volunteer fireman—4 years treasurer
- Boys and Girls Club board – 10 years – 2 yrs. President
- Little League Board – 2 years treasurer
- Pony League Board -- 1 year treasurer
- Spring Holidays Parade – chairman 2 years

As park and Rec. chairman, Johnny challenged the City Council decision to cut down a very large Euc tree lining a main street. –A citizen had complained that the tree was unsafe; council finally said OK-- cut down the tree; Parks and Rec. Board said “No way”--- we will all resign if tree cut; expert called to check on health of tree; said tree OK; huge tree was saved from demolition; Council backed down. In future years the Parks and Rec. commission saved other specimen Euc. trees from being removed.

Johnny was not only a tree “hugger” but a tree planter. In 1959 he was the leader in getting trees planted along State Street, along Monroe by the new high school, as well as planting all the trees around Chase Field. He dug all the holes and planted all the trees at the baseball field. On other openings, he donated trees to Eternal Hills cemetery, airport and at various locations in town.

While a volunteer fireman Johnny was instrumental in getting a miniature fire truck converted from a Crosby truck which he would drive at local parades. He would turn on the siren and entertain the crowds. Also the volunteer firemen cut two jeeps in half and welded them together so the vehicle had two fronts—ie two steering wheels and drivers. They were the clean-up crew dressed up as street sweepers following after horse and camel units and were very popular in parades. Later when the city bought the first white fire truck in the county, Johnny and the Chief drove the new truck from New York to Carlsbad. It was Johnny's first trip east of the Colorado River.

As a barber he provided haircuts and shaves when needed in persons homes. He gave free haircuts on customers birthday and called them to remind them. Also he went to funeral homes and provided free services for the deceased. In one situation, the deceased as a customer never allowed Johnny to cut his bushy eyebrows. He would say, "Leave them alone." Johnny retorted, "For your final hair cut called the Goodby Haircut, I will cut them." This man died shortly and his wife asked that he trim her husbands's hair in the mortuary. When he was about to begin cutting he noticed a note written in faltering handwriting and pinned on his suit. It said: "Johnny, remember leave the eyebrows alone. I always enjoyed you, but I could never get in the last word. I just did. Thanks, Ed". The eyebrows were left alone.

Johnny was a prankster, as were his friends. One time to reciprocate, he dropped off an old appliance in the middle of a driveway at nighttime. Later he picked it up in his truck and took it to the dump.

As stated earlier Johnny the Barber was very involved in the earlier growth of Carlsbad. With his outgoing personality he was a very colorful figure. Activities include: constructing the city seal and mosaic located in the Council chambers, mosaic at Carlsbad High School (Lancer image on a horse), beach cleanups, organizing drag boat races on the lagoon, and he carved many Tiki's out of palm stumps placed around town. He was on the search committee for locating the Carlsbad Raceway Drag Strip out on the Palomar Airport Road area.

Finally, Johnny wrote his version of Carlsbad History in his book

CARLS AIN'T HALF BAD in 1997 which he self published. It is most interesting reading with his humorous style of story telling about all the “goings on” in this sleepy little town of Carlsbad in earlier times of its history.

Below are listed some of the awards and recognitions he received over his forty years as a local barber:

- Man of the Year Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce 1964
- Citizen of the Day Oceanside Blade Tribune 1972
- Boys and Girls Club Medallion 1965
- City of Carlsbad Resolution 1975
- State of California Resolution 1962
Assemblyman Bob Frazee sponsored
- Carlsbad Historical Society Proclamation 1992

The third generation of this family, John Allan II, was born in Dr. Freiberger's office on Elm Ave (now CB Village Drive) as was his sister Lisa Ann. He went to cosmetology school to be a Hair Stylist. He worked for many years at Garcia's Barber Shop on State Street, but now has a different location. It's at 2673 State St. named --- The Stylist Hair Studio . Having been born right in town, he feels right at home working in his new location. He birthplace is not far from his shop.

Editor's note: John II was a student of mine at Carlsbad High and has been my barber for years- He's Excellent. He does eyebrows, ears and possibly legs like his dad who attracted some teen girls to shave legs in earlier years. Additionally I began hearing about his dad as Johnny the Barber from my-father-in-law, Allan Kelly, after marrying Lucia Kelly in 1956. Allan got his haircuts from Johnny as I did also. Son John II gave my father in law his last haircut before entering a senior facility. Also Dr. Freiberger was my family doctor.

Enjoy your reading!

Marvin Sippel