

Our Home in the Alabama Hills ...

Early in the spring of 1941

This was a special place that we all came to love!

By Rena Beth Moore-Smith

We decided to “take to the hills,” to get away from all the blackouts and the war restrictions. We moved to a ranch in the Alabama Hills, three miles out of Lone Pine, for three years – or longer? We had been living on our farm near Torrance, California, off and on during the winter months, but all summers – June through September – we spent at Whitney Portal. Sometimes [*we stayed in*] Lone Pine while Dad worked with the Mt. Whitney Pack Trains, and this particular summer, mainly out of the Carroll Creek Pack Station. My brother, Lynwood, age seventeen this year, would also be helping with whatever came up.

Our ranch in the Alabama’s was a twenty-acre valley walled in on all sides with immense high rock formations, with only one little road out or in at the lower east end, plus an old Indian trail that meandered through the rocky wall on the south end and ended up in Tuttle Creek Canyon.



The Alabama Hills and Mt. Whitney

Inside these rugged walls was a pasture, a barn of sorts, two wonderful natural springs of pure cold water, one forming a 30 x 30 rock-in pool, the other under a great leaning rock, under which it was shady and cool all summer. Two snug cabins, an orchard of peaches, cherry, apricot and fig trees, plus an acre of grapes – three varieties. It was a valley of dreams come true. The children were off to explore the place, and were delighted with it.

We had a dog, Soopy, and two cats.

There was no electricity or indoor plumbing, so it would be very primitive living. We used kerosene lamps and cooked on a wood burning stove with a wonderful oven. Living there on the ranch was like in the old frontier days, no conveniences at all; but, it was all that we wanted it to be, and we love it. During one lazy summer day, the boys built a sturdy raft for the pool. Even the cats and the puppy loved it here, and from all the happy shouts and shrills of laughter, it was for sure the children did too! Beth’s little friend, Myrna Del Hewitt and cousin, Betty Jo Lasky, from Lone Pine, were also duly impressed – and were the [*boat’s*] first passengers. It certainly became a popular past time through the warm summer days, [*so it was*] no problem knowing where the children were.

Later in the summer Beth and Willis helped with canning fruit, and Beth became our reliable bread maker! While I was busy hand washing and ironing, with irons to rotate, heated on the stove, and keeping the two cabins in condition.

The main cabin had two rooms and a walk in pantry. We spent leisure [*time*] sitting around the big table eating snacks and listening to our wind-up Victrola, playing our many old records of various types.

In the other cabin there were cots that the older boys slept in, a couple of easy chairs, a table, a lamp, books and a piano (an old one, but not too tin-panny)! We enjoyed it, as did our friends. In July, Bob had his 15th birthday and we had a special cake. Willis had one in August for his 7th [*birthday*]. On Willis' 7th birthday, Uncle Frank and Aunt Julia drove up to the valley with a birthday package which they gave to Beth. We were all perplexed while Beth opened it to find a pair of white patent slippers and a dress. She was delighted, but laughed – “It’s not my birthday! It’s Willis.” After an intense moment, everyone broke into laughter and Uncle Frank gave Willis a five-dollar bill and Beth got to keep the slippers and dress.

The boys, Bobby and Georgie, spent much time in Lone Pine doing chores and helping Uncle Frank with his feed store and Aunt Julia with the chickens she raised for selling. They also had many friends and relatives around town as we all had. Many of our friends and family visited our Alabama Ranch for leisurely times, lunches and swimming. It was a charming life.

We lived here on the ranch for three years, just three miles out of Lone Pine. We walked to school, some days in the snow.

There were two times that I remember when a friendly cowboy and a group came thru our land – later realizing he was Hopalong Cassidy. I remember Willis went with them on the movie shots. I heard Willis ask, “Can I take my dog?” to which mother answered, “No.” I really didn’t realize just who the cowboy was until later years. The later years here on the ranch, Lynwood worked with Dad during the summers with odd jobs at the Carroll Creek Station, while Dad worked as a Guide for the Mt. Whitney Packtrains.

One summer Lynwood was asked by Ted Cook to follow the old phone wire trail from Carroll Creek to Golden Trout Camp – nine miles into primitive country – replacing the old [*wire*] with the new phone wiring, all by himself, at age 17. [*He rode*] a skittish horse with the new wiring and was to bring back the old wiring. It was a new challenge, but he followed through coming back with a smile on his face.

The next year, in February, at age 18, Lynwood was drafted into the Army. Boot-camp never phased him. He became a paratrooper with the 11th Airborne serving in the South Pacific.



The Alabama Hills and Sierra Nevada

NOTE: Items in italics are the webmaster’s clarifications.