



WHEN MY FAMILY MOVED TO MORGAN HILL

by Beth Wyman



We had been in Saratoga for ten years. We moved there from Walnut Creek when my husband was offered a much better job with IBM at their new, prestigious headquarters in San Jose. We had a brand new - 1960 - 3 bedroom, 2-bath house on a third of an acre for which we paid \$20,000. Our relatives were envious. However, in about 1968 or so, we were officially informed that a busy freeway - Highway 85 - would soon be replacing the huge apricot orchard we loved so much just behind our back fence. There had been no disclosure about this at the time of the sale! Also, there were lots of new housing tracts popping up as farmers realized the increased value of their land. And following the tracts were shopping centers and new roads. Little did we know that Highway 85 in Saratoga would not get built until 20 years later - in 1990. And the German family who bought our Casa Blanca Lane house in 1970 stayed there until 2014 and sold it for almost a million.

My husband, Don Wyman, was born and raised on a remote farm in South Dakota and I was born on a 160 acre wheat farm in rural Kansas. Don's family had moved to San Diego to be near relatives, and my family relocated to San Diego County when I was 7 years old. So, Don and I met at San Diego State University when he was living with his parents and studying for a Math degree. I was living at home and had not yet declared a major. Since we both had rural "roots" we thought about getting out of town and started looking. I was particularly drawn to the nearby Santa Cruz mountains but quickly decided that I did not want my children, then 10 and 12 - to learn to drive on Highway 17!

So, we moved our search south to the Morgan Hill area - and close to IBM. Also, an IBM friend who lived in the Uvas Valley had been bragging about the brand new Nob Hill Store in Morgan Hill, so I don't remember that we ever looked any further after we found 2 acres of former orchard with a historic 1902 house on Llagas Road. We made an offer of \$40,000 in 1970 which, at the time, was a little beyond our financial capability - but we managed.

Both of our children loved the place. They had separate bedrooms upstairs and plenty of roaming space. We hung long swings from the massive branches of a 100-year-old Valley Oak and there was even a swimming pool! It was (and still is) a fun place for family gatherings and Thanksgiving. Shortly afterward there was also a horse and, soon, close neighborhood friends: Jeff with Mark Madson who will soon retire from his EMF business on Depot Street, and Barbara with Toni Julian whose business address is on Joleen Way. Jeff and Mark remain best friends and Toni and Barb were very close until the very end when my beautiful daughter passed away in 2007 with pancreatic cancer.

We had only been in Morgan Hill a few years when we received, what we derisively chose to call our "DEAR LUCKY HOMEOWNER" letter from the City of Morgan Hill advising us that we would have the superb opportunity to connect to the city sewer because a "developer" was planning to build 17 new homes just up the street.

This is the moment that we became active citizens of Morgan Hill. Although we hardly knew any of our 40 or so neighbors, we caucused everyone living along Llagas Road and discovered that NOBODY wanted 17 new homes or more cars on our street and that NOBODY wanted to connect to the city sewer. The City was in shock. How could we refuse such a magnificent offer? But we did. And the young developer of the 17 already approved homes hired a guy - one guy -to dig the half mile long stretch for the sewer connection on Hale Avenue. When we looked at a zoning map of Llagas Valley we discovered that the existing city council, led by a Llagas Valley neighbor, our Mayor, had zoned the entire Llagas Valley for 4 homes per acre! We were shocked.

And remember that this was way before computers - we had a neighbor who worked at Lockheed and had a secretary who was willing to run off flyers for him with up-to-date information about city plans, so we formed a group and stormed the City Council meetings from that time on - for at least two years - to make demands. The first thing we wanted was for the entire Llagas Valley to be down zoned. The Council was shocked. City staff was shocked. And our demands went unheard for a very long time - at least a year. But we kept showing up and I became our spokesperson. I would approach the bench and respectfully ask - for the umpteenth time - that the Llagas

Valley be down-zoned. The Mayor, a woman attorney, would never fail to ask, "Mrs. Wyman, How long have you lived in Morgan Hill?" As if that mattered.

I guess we finally wore her down and the Council finally asked the staff to "look into this request." And looking into it meant that we had to attend every Council meeting for yet another year. Of course, this was exhausting and hard on relationships. Finally, after about two years from the first request the City Council came up with an alternative zoning plan. There would be four homes per acre at the bottom of the Valley and gradually increasing up the hill from 1 acre to 2 acre to 5 acre zoning. The City didn't like it. We didn't like it. But we felt it was the best we could do at that time. Besides, we were already involved in other issues. One of them was saving El Toro mountain from the 25 homes that had already been approved on the face of the mountain along with connecting roads, driveways, garages, power lines, water lines and of course, sewers. WHAT!!! A few of the lots had even been specified for council members! The lonely home that you see today just below the city water tank is the sole remaining evidence of that project. It belongs to the original homeowners and had already been approved and they had begun building. We used CEQA (CA Environmental Quality Act) for the first time in Morgan Hill to file a lawsuit against the City and eventually won a CA Supreme Court decision which stopped the project. We think the City did not know about CEQA. My husband and I mortgaged our property for \$5,000 for the attorney and court costs.

After that there was the city sewer overflowing (for which Gilroy had control) and the schools on double sessions plus a zillion Real Estate offices lining Monterey Street. All which, suddenly became "our" issues. So, we formed Citizens for Orderly Residential Development (CORD). It was never ending. I just wanted to return to being a mom. But that was not to be. Even after the Council was defeated, they continued their pro-growth agenda, so once again we walked the streets, door-to-door to get signatures for a Growth Control Ordinance which was on the ballot in 1977 as Measure E and was overwhelmingly successful and which remains part of the City's Plan today.

After that there was a city election coming up in 1978 with the same-old, same-old candidates so we, the Save El Toro/Growth Control group decided we needed to have our own candidates with Neil Heiman and Beth Wyman. Heiman-Wyman sounded good. And, although we were all really TIRED, we walked all of the precincts yet again and we won, yet again. Little did we know what was to come!