

Summer All Year

Not until you move to California....

Not until you stay through the long, rainy winter....

Not until you could scream for a dry day....

Not until then are you acquainted with the real California. Outlanders from the Midwest making the Disney pilgrimage of the smoggy summer really believe the sun shines behind that smog all year long. They recognize not the rain seen on the national weather map in the smog; snowed-in comfort of their Midwestern bastions. California remains the dream-land of sunshine.

Dreams of sunshine and work to be had all year round called the Romero family to California in the summer of '57. Dreams came true the summer of '57. Construction was booming. The canneries were hiring workers to take care of the monumental fruit harvest. Why, anyone who wants to work can get a job, thought Nick Romero when he came out ahead to line up a job and a place to live. Fortunately there were friends here already situated who were glad to have him and help him get started.

Starting out was easy. Within two weeks Nick had a job as a laborer on a construction gang and an old Model A pickup to drive to work. (He had quickly found out that California living demanded personal transportation.) In another month He had rented a decent little house in a nice part of town, and the rest of the family came west to join him. Rose soon had sporadic work in a cannery and the two oldest children, Mary and Tillie, had some excellent prospects for good office jobs. As fall drew near the family felt more and more at home, furnishing the little house with second hand furniture; for really, they had never had anything else. But the second hand television set was the treasure of the three younger children: they



had never had one before because reception was so bad on the wind-swept Nebraska plains. Now they spent hours of the long California summer days in front of the black and white pictures, catching up on several years in just a short time. Soon it would be starting school and making friends and not much time for television.

The old TV set didn't work very well when the first few droplets of the winter's first rain fell in early October; so Nick and Rose didn't watch much television when they were laid off their jobs as the rains came in earnest. It was a rather humiliating experience, the first time they had to go to the Unemployment Office and apply for their unemployment checks. But it turned out that you always saw all your friends from work there, and it soon got to be a regular routine. Although the cannery shut down, Nick still got a couple of days work once in a while digging ditches for a contractor. Thank God for a strong back, thought Nick. Thank God the kids have jobs, thought Rose.

The rain never seemed to stop that winter. The children walked to school in the rain. Mary and Tillie drove the new-old Studebaker to work in the rain. Nick drove the Model A, the roof leaking, to the Unemployment Office in the rain. Rose probably was the most unhappy with the rain after her unemployment checks ran out and she was stuck at home for the most part. The little house got smaller with every successive day of rain and the TV was like the sun -- it never shone with any regularity all winter long. The long winter--would it ever end? In some ways, the Romeros thought, this was worse than getting snowed in. If we could only go outside and work instead of sitting here in the darkened bar drinking beers, thought the anxious workers. If only they wouldn't spend money drinking beer, thought their anxious wives. The hills got greener and greener and the Romero cupboards got barer and barer.



Around Easter time in the spring of '58, the sun broke out of the clouds to dry the grass and kiss the buds on the fruit trees. The family had made it through their first California winter. As with all things, it didn't seem so bad looking back on it. Now there was enough money to get the television set fixed and to put a couple of pounds of ground beef in the grocery basket along with the usual litany of necessities: flour, sugar, lard, and beans; don't forget the beans. Thank God for beans, thought Rose. Thank God for sunshine, thought Nick. Thank God for ground beef and television, thought the kids.

The kids.....the Romeros never talked much about it, but that's what the move to California was all about. Opportunities for the kids, that's what pulling up roots, leaving the grandparents, friends, and pets was all about. That's why they ended up in California with little more than several cardboard boxes full of clothes. Through the rainy veil of that first winter, they could see the future clearly. Here in this land of sunshine, there was a future for each of the five offspring. Here, they weren't expected to fail. Here, they didn't have to live in a certain part of town. Here, they could use the swimming pool in town. Here, a name like Romero was just another Spanish-or-Italian-or-Portuguese name which did not require a background check. Here, for the first time, the kids could be free to be whatever they thought they might want to be.

Jesus Romero, that's me, saddled with a name that's a throw-back to standard Catholic. Jesus Romero, college graduate, that's me. The Jesus I could have done without; the Romero got me here and the Romero I'll pass along. Maybe someday some kids will need it.