

Diablo Honors.....

John & Nina Dickerson

By Maryann Cella

"Dun' Roamin" proclaims the rustic wooden sign marking the upper Alameda Diablo entrance to Nina and John Dickerson's two-acre, pastoral Diablo estate. A half century ago, the newly-wedded couple found their dream home and horse property nestled among heritage oaks and across a bridge over Dan Cook Creek.

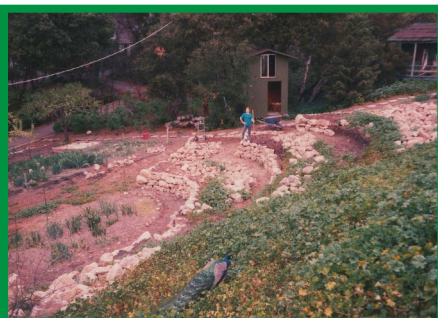
Although the Dickersons inherited the sign, which was carved by a Mt. Diablo State Park ranger, it seems to aptly summarize their fifty happy years there.



Nina's appreciation for Diablo's natural beauty reflects her idyllic childhood spent with her brother and sister roaming her family's 400-acre, award-winning walnut and Bartlett pear farm in Walnut Creek. Her great-grandfather Hubert Howe Bancroft had started the farm in the 1880s. Bancroft was a famous historian and publisher whose huge personal library of American-West-related books became the nucleus of the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley.

Living on a large farm allowed Nina's parents to nurture her love for animals. By age 11, she had her own horse. Nina's mother, Ruth Bancroft, had a passion for landscape architecture and horticulture; her xeric garden, begun in the 1950s and featuring cactus, succulents, and drought-tolerant plants, became the first garden in the United States to be preserved by The Garden Conservancy. The Ruth Bancroft Garden opened to the public in 1992, and became a nonprofit in 1994, where Nina sits on the Board of Directors.

Nina headed to the east coast for college, graduating from Wellesley College in Massachusetts with a degree in Spanish around the same time the bulk of her family's farm was being sold for housing development. Armed with her degree, Nina spent the next couple of years traveling and working in various European countries while perfecting her Spanish and German. Subsequently, she added Italian to her language proficiencies.

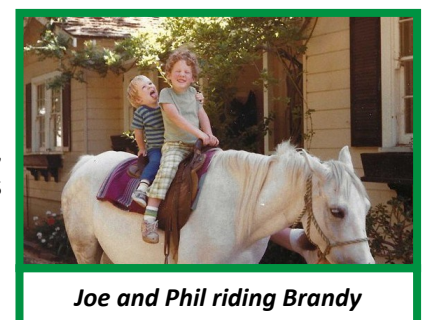


Returning to her hometown, Nina secured a job at the Contra Costa County Welfare Department. It was there that she met co-worker John Dickerson and not long after they were married.

John's father worked for the U.S. Army, and his job necessitated that John, his sister, brother, and parents live in various towns far from Dun' Roamin, including John's birthplace, Berea, Kentucky, several Ohio towns, and Germany. John graduated from Miami University of Ohio. Before completing his thesis for his Master's degree in archeology at Southern Illinois University, he concluded that there were no jobs in his field. At that point, Nina says the "lore of California" attracted John and he headed west. Happily, the Golden State lived up to his expectations and he decided to make it his home, first

working in the County Welfare Department, and then pursuing a successful career in carpentry.

Over the years, John used his carpentry skills to construct several additions and improvements to Dun' Roamin. Meanwhile, Nina was busy raising their sons, Phillip William and Joseph Bancroft Dickerson, and tending to the horses, peafowl, chickens, dalmatians, and cats that eventually called Dun' Roamin home. The boys attended the three local public schools, swam on the Diablo Country Club team, and in general enjoyed the freedom and fun typical of children growing up in Diablo decades ago. Sadly, Joseph is now deceased. Phillip resides with his wife in Arizona.





Joe, Nina, Phil and John

The Dickerson menagerie currently includes one horse, one peahen, 30 chickens, one dalmatian----their fifth!---named “Chaw Chaw”, (Vietnamese for “dog-dog”), and cats Kissa (Finnish for “cat”) and Meo (Vietnamese for “cat”).

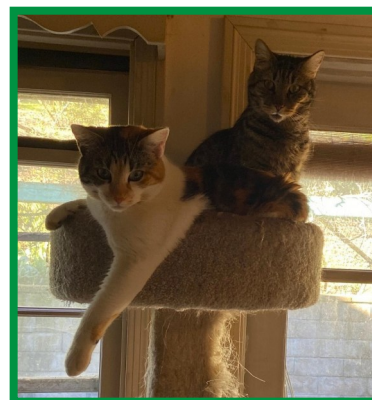
Nina is a true Renaissance woman. In addition to caring for their animals and her Ruth Bancroft Garden Board service, Nina also is on the Board of the Festival Opera, which every year mounts one fully-staged opera and two operas in parks (Walnut Creek and Orinda), and a recital series. Her opera board service reflects a love of opera fostered by her parents, who were longtime season ticket holders to the San Francisco Opera, a

tradition Nina continues to this day. Her knowledge of German and Italian brings an extra dimension to her appreciation of the art form.

Using her equine knowledge and skill, Nina supports local equestrian pursuits as a Board member of the Equestrian Center of Walnut Creek, which maintains two riding arenas in Walnut Creek’s Heather Farm Park. Amazingly, she also finds time to do elaborate beadwork, crafting unique necklaces and other jewelry items for herself, family, friends, and worthy causes, and is a member of a bi-weekly German language book club.

Since his retirement, John keeps busy with projects at Dun’ Roamin, taking care of their animals, and as Nina smilingly puts it, “keeping everything running smoothly.”

Over their fifty years in Diablo, Nina and John have seen many changes to our community. They are saddened at the loss of many mature trees, some of the charming older homes, and the horsey culture that formerly abounded. Nina recalls as particularly memorable the decades-ago brunch horseback rides up Dan Cook Creek, through Rock City, and ending at Barbeque Terrace. Nonetheless, Nina and John feel that Dun’ Roamin remains their “little oasis” within Diablo and they are particularly thankful for having Mary Fairman as their wonderful longtime neighbor.



We wish Nina, John and their menagerie many more decades of happiness in their beloved Diablo!

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