

## Susan Sperry – A Moraga Life

By Becky Kim

**B**ack in the day when trains were running through Moraga and horse back riding over the barren hills was a mode of transportation, a young girl roamed the ranch on the property of her father. An active member of the community since she was a mere child, Susan Sperry has settled her roots deeply in Moraga.

Following in the footsteps of her older sister Joan, Sperry attended school in Lafayette and graduated from Acalanes High School in 1962. Unlike today, where students sip their Starbucks and cruise around town, life in Moraga back in the 1960s included attending dances in the Old Veteran's hall, helping out on the farm, and riding horses.

The 1966 Cal graduate had her heart set on Berkeley from the beginning, and pursued a degree in design and art history. During her senior year of college, she met her first love, Jay Johnson, a native of Colorado. The two sweethearts shared a passion for ranching and moved back to Moraga where Sperry bore two children, both of whom grew up in the same tight-knit community.

Even though Sperry did not actively use the degrees she earned in college, she began to teach for the Moraga school district in 1969. "My roots are firmly planted in Moraga having been raised here. Therefore, I felt I understood this community, its students and parents, demands and resources. Here is where I wanted to raise my own family and sink my energy and resources," added Sperry.

Inevitably the teacher salary was not the plus side of the job, but nevertheless, it was the dream of impacting children and the passion for teaching that led Sperry to teach fifth graders at Los Perales for 14 years before transferring to Joaquin Moraga when Los Perales closed in 1983. She bounced around in different subjects, teaching Special Ed for 10 years, and branching out to teach classes of all grades in English, Journalism, Yearbook, and Drama.

Many students and parents are familiar with the program "Skills for Success", started by Sperry after she noticed many students were struggling in school because of the lack of organization and knowledge in how to study. Sperry would leave her doors open at lunch and after school for those students who took a particular interest in organizing themselves. Sooner or later, she was titled as "communication facilitator" for the young girls at JM who were in need of talking to an older figure. Whether it was about finding their identity or questions about the female body, the girls appreciated Sperry because of her willingness to listen with an open ear.

Finding completion in her life after teaching for 37 years in the Moraga District and after successfully raising a close family, Sperry decided to retire. Living in her rural utopia with her second husband,

Sam Sperry (after her first husband fell ill to cancer in 1986), she was able to attend to other tasks that were left behind with a working schedule.

Sperry continued, "In retirement, I have the freedom from the demands of the school schedule which allows me the time and energy for my 93-year-old father, 16-month-old grandson, daughters, husband, and the community organizations which I value. I now have the leisure time to pursue my passion for gardening."

Those in retirement can relate that life after work is still a busy task. Sperry continues to give back to the community by attending town meetings, being the president of the Moraga Historical Society, and occasionally substituting at local schools. She has influenced the lives of many students throughout her teaching and will continue to be heavily involved in the community of Moraga.

Becky Kim is a feature writer and a member of the Campo Class of 2007.



Susan Sperry

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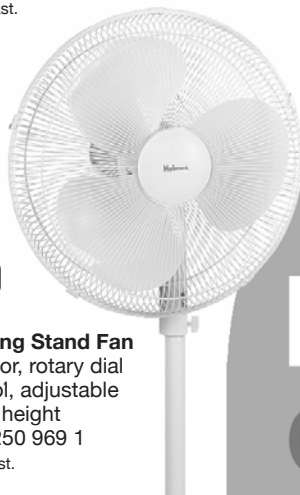
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