

## Don Jacobus, Fire Survivor Long-time Resident Remembers

My family had lived on Vicente Road since early 30's. There were half the number of homes as there are today. There were roads above this area, perhaps built by the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) which had provided jobs and education to young men after WWI, but I am not exactly sure. Anyhow, those are the same roads that still exist today, narrow and winding. They had been given names and reached to the top of the ridges. They been had built to the known size specifications of cars at that time. So there they were, all these roads, winding up the hillsides, with no houses built on them, yet.

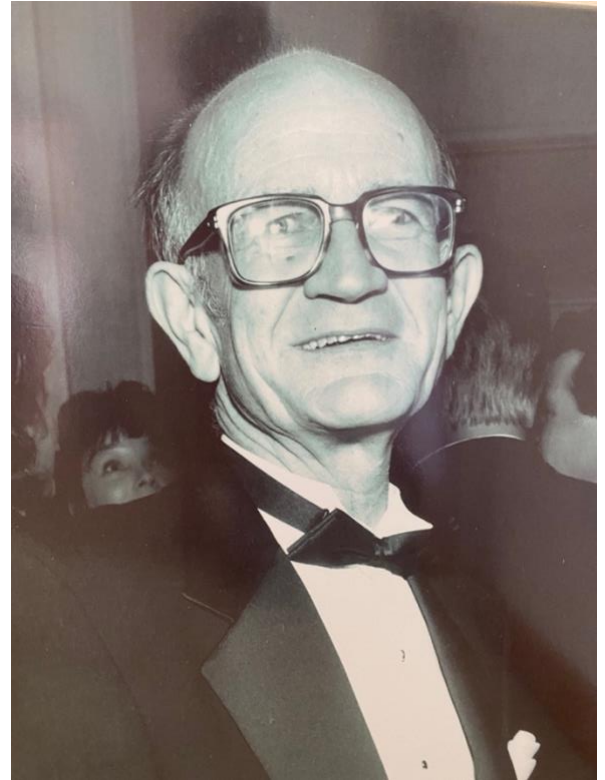
My family had found a beautiful location on one of those roads to build a new family home on Willard Place. In 1936 we moved in. We were the only house in the area with the closest neighbors being  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile away, as "the crow flies".

Since we were the only house in the area the post office would not deliver mail to us. We had to go collect it down on Vicente Road in a mailbox just for our home. In those days it was no problem for my brother or me to hike down and back.

We had an unobstructed view of the Bay. Being so removed from neighbors my brother and I played drums and trumpet on our porch with no worries of bothering anyone. We watched the Golden Gate Bridge being built as well as the Oakland Bay Bridge. Soon the car ferries were a thing of the past since the bridges made the crossing faster and easier.

Now with the new bridge connection between San Francisco and Oakland, we saw more homes being built below and in the hills. For some it was a desirable destination to avoid the summer fog in SF and enjoy the warmer climate in Oakland. For others, exploring on a Sunday drive through the hills, families came to enjoy hikes, picnics, and nature. The new bridge gave easier access to my office in San Francisco. I was a principal in a small financial planning firm in addition to being an insurance broker serving the Bay Area.

Living at home on Willard Place, the proximity to the Berkeley Tennis Club (BTC) was perfect. I had become a member a long time ago where I spent most of my free time. I was extremely active in the Tennis Club being on the Board of Directors and serving as President of the Club several times. As an avid tennis player, I participated in most all the tournaments. On October 21, 1991, there was a luncheon scheduled at the BTC after the finals. Even though I had been in the tournament I luckily decided to not attend the lunch and headed up the hill home. It was a terribly windy day and by the time I reached Vicente to Westview Dr I noticed small fires from the embers that were barely evident as they lightly rained down. Looking uphill I was shocked to see smoke billowing above the hilltop and evidence of the fire above the hilltop as well.



There was no question in my mind that I needed to reach home, get my mother, and leave the area as soon as possible. Since we had a fireproof safe, I did not try to take any papers or valuables. When descending the hill, we did not see any firemen or police. Where were they?

We went to Alameda where my nephew lived. I immediately put my mind to contacting our original architect Adolph Rosekrans since I knew the house was most likely gone. I wanted to make sure I had his full attention because I did not want a day lost rebuilding and returning to our beloved location. I wanted to start the next day! Oakland gave us a schedule of when the lot would be cleaned of asbestos and other carcinogens. Well, everything moved at a slower pace than I wanted. By the time Oakland scheduled cleanup for our property our contractor, recommended by John Papps (a friend at BTC) had already finished cleaning the property and could apply for a permit.

We rebuilt the same Mediterranean style home on the same footprint as the original home. The house was completed January 1993. Faster than most.

The fireproof safe had failed us. The stamp collection and family documents and photos were all lost having not survived the heat inside the "fireproof" safe! I also lost the many many tournament trophies I had won over the years.

My mother eventually had to go into a care facility; she was never able to return home. I was sorry for that as well as the loss of all the family photographs and the memories those images can bring.

The neighborhood has grown up around us since then. It is often disconcerting that many people who live here now do not realize the total devastation that happened to so many.