

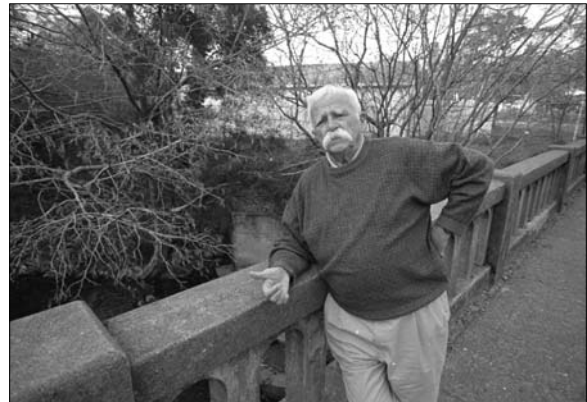
Lavaroni Recalls Summers on San Anselmo Creek

by Ann Thomas

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Chuck Lavaroni's father's family moved from San Francisco to his grandmother's farm in Marin in 1906 when their home was destroyed in the earthquake. At the Lavaroni farm, near the intersection of Elm and Scenic Avenues in San Anselmo, they raised cows, chickens, pigs and vegetables, and eventually opened the family-owned Lavaroni Brothers Market (later became Center Market), at the intersection of Saunders and San Anselmo Avenues. The store was in the area known as Yolanda Station, where, as a schoolboy, Chuck caught the train to attend Tam High in Mill Valley. The shopping area around Yolanda Station at that time had four grocery stores, one candy store and two butcher shops, he recalls. Many of the buildings are still there today, now mostly in use as offices.

Chuck was born on Hampton Avenue in 1926, a stone's throw from his present home on Alderney Road, downhill from Faudé Park. As a boy, he enjoyed swimming at two places along the creek: one in a pool under the bridge on Saunders Avenue near Drake High, another where a tributary he knew as Cordone Creek connected with the main waterway east of Saunders. Cordone (Sleepy Hollow Creek) came through the Drake High campus and is now partially channelized. The Drake High School property at that time was owned by the Cordone family who maintained a market garden on the site, and sold produce from a truck long after the Lavaroni property was developed with housing. The Cordone children were among his playmates.



Chuck Lavaroni at the Saunders Avenue bridge

He didn't have the patience to do much fishing, he said, but his friends caught what he believes were freshwater bass. His single fondest memory of San Anselmo Creek was "learning how to spit between my teeth" from the Saunders Avenue bridge. He was taught the ancient art on a warm summer day by a relative called Uncle Pauly. One of the attractions of the area along Cordone Creek were blackberries (blackberry bushes are still abundant on the north side of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in this area). One summer he and some friends decided to go into business selling blackberries they had picked, going door-to-door. The early venture lasted just a day. "The blackberries were all squashed by the time we got ready to sell them."

Chuck Lavaroni's memories of boyhood summers along San Anselmo Creek recall a more relaxed time than the one in which we live today. San Anselmo Creek and its tributaries and swimming holes were "a wonderful part of growing up in this part of the world and a safe place to play," he said. "Basically it was a place to play games like hide and seek, to skip rocks and catch polliwogs, a place to imagine, dream and create."

He sees a difference in how he and his friends interacted with their creeks and how youngsters play today. For one thing, the water was more accessible because there were fewer buildings and almost no fences. More than that, "this was a safe place and the function of the creek was "to be a play area." The difference, he said, is not so much a change in the creek as a change in the way children live.

Along with good times along the creek, there was also the excitement of occasional floods. "My folks would drive down to Kentfield," he recalled, "and we would stand and watch the people getting out of their cars and rowing to their houses (in Granton Park)." During winter storms he helped his father and his brother sandbag their store to keep it dry.

The lifelong San Anselmo resident attended Red Hill School (later called Isabel Cook), Tam High, San Francisco State (for a degree in teaching education), and UC Berkeley for graduate work. After a teaching stint in Novato he became principal at Red Hill, taught education at Dominican College and consulted to the Tam Union's Education Task Force. Chuck and his wife Barbara have three grown children, two of whom are

also educators and live in Marin. Now retired he keeps up a full schedule that includes playing sax and clarinet with the Swing Society, a group that plays for local events

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