

In Memory
Dorothy Tudder Wright
December 14, 1920 – October 29, 2012



Dorothy Tudder Wright, born in Eugene, Oregon on Dec. 14, 1920 to Grover Cleveland Tudder and Sarah Adele (Johnson) Tudder, came to California as a baby and grew up in Oakland. She was active at Roosevelt High School, editor of the newspaper, *The Roosevelt Crimson*, and attended the University of California, Berkeley until the attack on Pearl Harbor.

During World War II Dorothy worked for Standard Oil Co. as assistant Personnel Manager and then as Personnel Manager in charge of hiring women for the Richmond Refinery, to replace the men called for military duty. She also married her high school sweetheart, Martin Wright, who became an officer on a naval minesweeper.

At the conclusion of the war, Dorothy and Martin purchased 150 acres at the eastern foot of Mt. Diablo and operated a resort business, Curry Creek Park, which had originally been created by Martin's grandparents Sylvester and Louise Olofson, who moved to Curry Canyon in 1896 and started Curry Creek Park in 1925. This involved picnicking and swimming for groups as well as being open to the public. Within six years, they had five children including a set of twins, Claudia, Diana, Cindy, Tom and Judy. Dorothy and Martin ran the business for 38 years until 1979, and rented permanent mobile homes and cottages.

Besides charitable volunteer work, Dorothy earned a real estate license and worked as a salesman for ten years in the 1980's and 90's. She played flute for 35 years as a member of the Diablo Light Opera orchestra, the Contra Costa Musical Theatre orchestra, other chamber music groups and solo performances.

Martin passed away in 1999. In 2001 Dorothy sold the family's remaining 76 acres to Save Mount Diablo, a local conservation organization, with life estate which allowed her to live on the property for the remainder of her life. On October 12, 2008 a historical monument to the Olofsons and Wrights was dedicated at the top of the property overlooking Curry Canyon. Known as the family "Gathering Place," ashes of four generations have been spread there.

Dorothy's daughters Judy Wright (deceased 1993), Diana Jo Barr (deceased 2001), husband Martin Wright (deceased 1999) and sister Sarah Eleanor (deceased 2009) preceded her. She is survived by daughter Claudia Dell Phippen, Bethel Island & granddaughter Lea Marie Lasater, Concord; daughter Diana's sons, grandsons Eric Valverde, Brentwood & Jamey Robison, Beaverton, OR and great-granddaughters Joanna & Jaelynn Robison; daughter Cindy Lou Wright, Susanville & son Tom Wright, Clyde. With the help of her loving friend and caregiver, Ken Arentz, Dorothy passed away at home on October 29, 2012.



An event celebrating Dorothy's life will be held at Wright Canyon on Sunday, November 18, 2012, at 2:00 pm, 4390 Morgan Territory Road, Clayton, CA 94517. Please r.s.v.p. to smdinfo@SaveMountDiablo.org or call (925) 947-3535. A private family ceremony will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, the family would appreciate donations to Save Mount Diablo (www.savemountdiablo.org), hospice, or a charity of your choice.

Information in this obituary was provided by Claudia Phippen, Eric Valverde, Tom Wright, Seth Adams, Dick Heron, Anne Homan, and Craig Rideau.

Spring 2001 Diablo Watch

Wright Canyon, Curry Canyon

Talking To The Stars, Saying Goodnight To Relatives

\$640,000 Deal Signed

In December a year ago, Dorothy Wright called Save Mount Diablo. She wanted to sell her property, near the mouth of Curry Canyon, to add to Mt. Diablo State Park. Her husband Martin had died several months earlier and her kids did not want to live on the property. Her health was not good but she wanted to continue living at home.

In a recent appeal SMD founder Mary Bowerman mentioned the property but, because the deal wasn't complete, called it 'No-Name Canyon'. We can now announce that in January we signed an option deal with Dorothy, \$640,000 for seventy-six acre Wright Canyon.

The deal requires an immediate payment of \$30,000 and another \$50,000 in six months. The terms are favorable and in exchange, if Save Mount successfully acquires the property, a life estate agreement will allow Dorothy to live out her life on the property. The Wright and Olofson families will be allowed continuing access to 'the Gathering Place', a family monument high up between Wright and Curry canyons.

We will need your help to raise the funds.

Dorothy Wright

Normally we would start by telling you about this wonderful place. For us, the seventy-six acre Wright property is really all about Dorothy. Much of the following is taken from her stories about the Olofsons, Wrights and Curry Creek Park, a picnic grounds the family ran from 1925 to 1938, and from 1946 to 1979.

Dorothy had said she was seventy-nine, but she looked much younger at our first meeting. We were greeted at the barn by her two black Labradors Polly and Tippy, tails a wagging, and she had coffee waiting. Large valley oaks shade her modest home, crowded with memories and lit up by a beautiful stained glass image of the mountain.

Out sliding glass doors a small creek threads fallen oak leaves on the bottom of a wonderful swimming pool; it was gradually built around the creek over years. The creek is routed around the pool in summer. We talked for a while and then Dorothy took us for a ride and the dogs for a run.

What a ride it was! We had known about the Wright property forever—how could we not? Curry Canyon is one of the two biggest unprotected canyons on Mt. Diablo proper. The State had acquired upper Curry years earlier but the canyon mouth along Morgan Territory road had been subdivided into smaller parcels and a trailer park.

Every once in a while we would hear, 'the Wrights are thinking about selling.' In 1999 when Save Mount Diablo bought the Silva Ranch in upper Riggs Canyon, we would climb near the top of Windy Point. Looking over into Curry, we would focus on the big wooded knoll beyond.

Its slopes rise from the canyon and road to a saddle that climbs onto a neighboring private property, and up to North Peak. It's a small parcel but key—and Dorothy knew it. "I want the public to continue be able to ride and walk up to the mountain, and my property will allow it," she said. "I want Morgan Territory's rural nature to remain."

She drove us up the blue oak and bay wooded stream canyon, past a dammed pond which is home to California red-legged frogs, and to the top of the knoll. On another stormy day we passed a group of six deer and, on yet another day, found a torpid Alameda whipsnake under a sheet of corrugated siding.

Groups of large oaks frame a 360 degree view—you can see both peaks of the mountain across a pastoral scene straight out of Eden, cattle grazing up the slopes. Blackhawk Ridge and Knobcone Point are visible beyond Curry Canyon.

To the south and east are Windy Point, Highland Ridge and all of Morgan Territory. Clayton Ranch is close at hand a few miles to the north. Near a loop in the road, there is a stone monument and a small cross, in memory of four different generations of Olofsons and Wrights. Sounds bucolic, right?

Then Dorothy started downhill, the dogs running ahead. She delights in popping the jeep gears before the steep part, following the roads Martin built as they drop into Curry Canyon before winding back to the house.

Working with a landowner who wants her property preserved for the public is a great place to start. Over the next year we found out that Dorothy Wright was exceptional in other ways. She'd already had the property appraised, her estate was in order and she was willing to set a reasonable price in exchange for continuing to live at home.

Save Mount Diablo's Board and staff have toured the property repeatedly, the negotiation was a pleasure and we've all become good friends as we talked about land values and heard family stories.

The Olofsons Homesteaded Above Mitchell Canyon

Anne Homan will soon publish *The Morning Side Of Mount Diablo, an illustrated account of the San Francisco Bay Area's historic Morgan Territory Road*. We have benefited from and paraphrased her work, including interviews with Martin Wright in 1997 and 1998, along with our own conversations with Dorothy.

From around 1925 until 1938 Sylvester and Louise Olofson operated a picnic grounds on their property along Curry creek. Families arrived on weekends and in the summer and Sylvester rode his horse two miles from his house down to collect 25 cents from each group.

Sylvester's dad J. Peter Olofson had left Sweden at age 14 to work on ships, arriving in San Francisco about three years later in 1848. He had married Clarissa Marsh by 1857 (no relation to Dr. John Marsh or Marsh Creek) and Sylvester was born in 1867.

The next years found the family homesteading in the Mitchell Canyon area, for which they received the patent in 1892. They're remembered today in the name of Olofson Ridge near Tenderfoot Flat. Eventually Peter and Clarissa moved to a cottage in Clayton.

Because of health problems related to Sylvester's work as a newspaper printer, in December 1895 he and his brother Alfred bought land along Curry Creek. Sylvester and wife Louise Fake Olofson moved there to farm and ranch. A one bedroom cabin was enlarged with the lumber from the Nortonville schoolhouse, bought for \$50.

In Homan's book, daughter Edith Olofson Wright, the mother of Martin Wright, is quoted, [The schoolhouse] "was torn down and rebuilt and we had a nice home with running water in a sink and drain boards and pantry—three bedrooms—a living room—a big kitchen and a porch all across the front with a cellar under the kitchen and living room.'...Plants were suspended from roof rafters along the porch. A stand outside held a basin of water and towels for the males to wash up..."

Curry Creek Park

By 1925 Curry Creek Park was opened. According to Dorothy, "People would come from Walnut Creek to picnic, hike and camp and Martin's grandpa would come down on Saturdays and charge them two bits a car, his only real source of cash during the Depression. Then he put in a small swimming pool in 1933, and started charging a little more for swimming. They built a little cabin closer to the road where Grandpa and Grandma would spend the summer months to generate a little income."

Martin Wright loved his grandparents' place; each year his parents sent him from Oakland to spend his summers there. According to Homan, "Martin slept with his grandfather in a big double bed on the porch. Sylvester slept there, winter and summer, his whole life on the ranch...On Sunday mornings while they still lay in bed, his grandfather sang old songs to him. At night before they turned in, they walked down to the creek edge, and Sylvester talked aloud to the stars, saying goodnight to deceased relatives, especially remembering his daughter Adella."

The Park was well used until 1938 when Sylvester suffered a stroke and then closed the picnic grounds. He died in 1941 and the remaining 110 acres were put on the market.

Martin and Dorothy had met at Roosevelt High School in East Oakland. He was Class President and she was editor in chief of the newspaper, *The Roosevelt Crimson*. They started dating and Dorothy remembers always having to compete with the ranch for his attention, as he'd go out on weekends to help his grandparents.

Neither could afford to go to college at first, so they both worked to save money. He went to Cal Davis in 1939, Dorothy started at Cal Berkeley in 1940. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, Martin joined the Navy. They got married secretly since it was against the rules during his officer training. He went overseas to the South Pacific. Dorothy worked for the telephone company and eventually became Personnel Manager over Women at Standard Oil in Richmond.

Martin returned in December 1945, as Dorothy's job was winding down. Meanwhile, the 110 acre Curry Creek Park property was still for sale. Martin loved the property and he and Dorothy decided to buy it and run the picnic business themselves.

They borrowed money from everyone they could. Several banks turned them down but eventually they got a loan and paid \$20,000 to buy the property. They moved to Morgan Territory in 1946 to a little two room shack with no insulation or toilet facilities. Dorothy had never cooked on a wood stove before and their bathroom was the rest room at the picnic area.

They reopened Curry Creek Park in Spring 1946. Dorothy was pregnant with the first of five kids in six years. In 1952 when the twins, Thomas and Judy, were born Westinghouse ran a promotion for people having twins, and Dorothy won a washer, dryer and a year's supply of Gerber baby food. That year, she remembers, "the whole family ate omelets of minced beef baby food."

Martin worked for the County then other agencies, coming home to build their house and improve the Park. Dorothy fronted the operation, bought supplies, made sandwiches and hot dogs, took money, and did cleanup. "The dressing rooms were already there, a few tables, lovely country through the canyon for half a mile with the creek running through it, places where people could picnic. Not much else." said Dorothy, who later became well known as the pool lifeguard.

"We had no cash at all and were building the house literally one board at a time. Martin started with a wheel barrow and a shovel making picnic areas and building rock walls. He loved working for himself. We built picnic tables as we could afford it." Because they had no money, they took the kids camping at State Parks for vacations.

They had an unusual visitor. "When Martin and I first reopened Curry Creek Park, Mary Bowerman showed up and asked 'what are your plans for the property?'" In 1944 Mary had published *The Flowering Plants and Ferns of Mount Diablo, California*. Twenty-five years later she co-founded Save Mount Diablo. "She was talking about us donating it, when we were just starting to buy it. We thought she was crazy, but she'd show up every few years and ask again, and then she'd talk about nature, the future, the mountain, then five or six years later she'd show up again." At age 80, Dorothy says "I realize now what a neat thing it is to have your priorities in something that will last longer, into perpetuity."

The picnic area opened each year at Easter, with a couple of hundred visitors, 20 cents a person, 25 cents for a car, and closed in mid October. All those first years they had to borrow money from Martin's mother to buy supplies for the Park store. They'd clear the loan by July 4th and then be in the black. In later years, on the biggest day of the year there would be as many as a thousand people, in up to six big groups.

"The family groups were great and we tried to avoid trouble. In the sixties drug problems were getting started, people would come in looking for trouble. So we began selling season memberships to forty families or so, mostly from Clayton, at \$5 a child and \$30-40 for a family. They gave a family the right to come in and use the Park for picnicking and swimming except on reserved days."

Around 1948 Martin and the three uncles put up a one bedroom pre-fab house of about 800 square feet and some porches, for grandma Louise Olofson. When she died, the Wright's bought her 40 acres and a little other acreage. Dorothy's house is now at the same site, where Wright Canyon drops to meet Morgan Territory Road, just north of the mouth of Curry Canyon.

"When Martin's mother was young, they'd hike to the top of the mountain with picnic lunches, once he did it barefooted," said Dorothy. "We always had Thanksgiving here, and we would eat dessert first while the turkey was cooking then go for a hike, sometimes up the mountain. At least once a year we would have the 'Hike to the Mountain' to the top of the main peak, especially when there was snow, a family thing, little and big kids, with a big pot of clam chowder waiting at home. Martin's mom Edith hiked to the top when she was 74. We would do lots of Spring hikes."

Finally, with the kids grown and gone, in 1979 they closed Curry Creek Park to the public while continuing operation of a trailer park. Much of the Curry Canyon acreage was eventually sold. Dorothy and Martin continued living at the bottom of Wright Canyon.

‘The Gathering Place’

On the knoll above Wright Canyon is ‘the Gathering Place’. In 1982 Judy’s boyfriend Chris was killed in a tragic accident. Judy took his ashes and scattered them near the property’s high point where he’d have the best view.

After that they decided it was an ideal spot. Louise, Sylvester and their daughter Della Olofson’s ashes, were in a Columbarium in Piedmont, so in 1983 they brought them there. Dorothy’s son Tom thought a monument would be a good idea, Martin made a cross and they constructed it in 1983, along with a plaque from the Columbarium.

The family was up at ‘the Gathering Place’ a lot, taking the dogs on runs, and would make pilgrimages on special days. Other family members’ ashes, including those of Martin’s mother Edith and Judy, were scattered there and Martin made extra plaques. Family pets have been buried nearby, “but they don’t get a plaque.”

Martin died in September 1999 at age 79, a week before the Wrights 57th wedding anniversary. Although we had never met, he and his sense of humor live on in every conversation with Dorothy. He’s at the Gathering Place and she visits nearly every day, running the dogs for their exercise. Three months after he died, sixty-five years after Mary Bowerman first asked the Wrights what their plans for their property were, Dorothy called Save Mount Diablo.

“I didn’t want our property to go to private owners who wouldn’t care about its history. When I stand out my front door or swim I look out and see that huge house built on top of the hill across the road. I don’t want them on mine, I want it to stay rural and natural,” she said.

In addition to Dorothy’s life estate and continued residence, Save Mount Diablo’s acquisition of the Wright property will include ongoing access to ‘the Gathering Place’ for the Wright and Olofson families.