

# Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

## Dutro's Barbershop

According to the 1920 census, Daniel J. Dutro emigrated from the Azorean island of Faial in 1884, when he was about six years old. His father, Joseph, had recently died, and his mother, Helen Marciel Dutro, brought her children to the United States. For whatever reason, Daniel and his siblings were placed in an orphanage and scattered to different locations, Daniel ending up in San Francisco. Daniel's wife, Josephine Gomes, was born in Half Moon Bay; her parents had also come from the Azores. Daniel began working as an apprentice barber in 1897, lathering customers, combing hair, and sharpening razors. But the Spanish-American War interfered, and he went through basic training in the Army; Spain capitulated just before his outfit was to ship out. He then worked as a barber in a number of places, including five years in San Francisco.

In 1914 Daniel had a barber shop briefly in Livermore; he also married Josie during this time. They returned to Livermore in 1916, and Dutro and a partner bought the Pioneer Shaving Parlor. It was located at 2216 First Street, on the north side just a few doors down from The Hub, the well-known saloon on the northwest corner of First and Livermore. Renamed Dutro's Barber Shop, it became a local institution. Its walls, filled with old photographs, maps, and oddments, were a history gallery of Livermore. Three generations of Dutros were owners: Daniel Dutro, 1914-1946; son Danny, 1946-1972; grandson John, 1972-1978.

The back of the shop near the Hub had a bathtub, and ranch workers would often wear the same clothes through the work week, come into town and buy a new set, then arrive at the barber shop—not only for a shave and haircut, but also for a bath. Then they would put on their new duds and go out on the town. John recalled that his grandfather wore a visor with a green see-through bill when he was working, and he especially loved dealing with people. Although not a large man, he had large, strong hands. Sometimes after giving a haircut he would also massage the customer's neck.

His son, Daniel "Danny" D. Dutro, born in July 1916, attended local schools—St Michael's and Livermore High. He volunteered for the Army in World War II and served as a combat engineer in the Philippines and New Guinea. A pipeline that he was working on blew up, and he was burned severely on the lower part of his body but survived with the help of the new wonder drug penicillin. When he returned to Livermore after his recovery, he bought the business from his father and moved the shop down the street to 2080 First. His father died in 1954, cutting hair almost up to the day he died.

Danny had met Mary Valjean "Jean" Hickey of San Francisco when she came to stay with the Frank Gardella family here. They married just before Danny went into the Army. They had two sons, Dave and John. After his graduation from Livermore High, Dave went on to San Jose State and eventually became a business manager. John, after his graduation, chose to follow in his grandfather's and father's footsteps and become a barber. Before he could finish barber school, however, the Vietnam War interfered. He served for a year in Vietnam—1966-1967—but was fortunate to be on the supply end and not on the battle lines. When he returned home, he finished barber school. John loved working next to his dad, who liked to tell stories. John could lean down and whisper in his customer's ear which story was coming next. In the 1940s and 1950s "the shop was so popular, there were many Saturday mornings that the 20 numbers on the waiting board were gone as soon as the door swung open." Customers came not only for a haircut, but for local news and entertainment.

Danny belonged to the Livermore Fire Department, at that time made up of volunteers, and when the siren on top of the firehouse sounded, Danny took off. "He dropped whatever he was doing—it didn't matter who was in the chair at the time with a half haircut, a half shave. They either waited for him to come back or let another barber finish the job." According to reporter Tim Hunt, Danny was the "sidewalk barber." He didn't need the fire siren to leave a customer. "Danny spent as much time talking on the sidewalk, cordless clippers in hand, as he did cutting hair in the shop. 'He'd be cutting someone's hair and would tear out the door to talk to somebody. He'd do it a dozen times a day. The guy in the chair would take a deep breath, sigh and look at us. We'd laugh,' barber Norm Volponi said." Danny retired in 1970 and left the barber shop; for variety he worked at several other jobs in Livermore: salesman for Groth Brothers, house painting. John laughed, "His hobbies were work." John's parents both died of cancer, Jean in 1963 and Danny in 1993.

For many years the barber shop employed three barbers plus the Dutros, but then, John said, "the Beatles happened." Long hair was in. The barber crew by necessity became smaller. John began taking classes at Las Positas College on his GI Bill and was hired by Jack Baird for the Livermore Fire Department in 1976. He sold the shop in 1978. Subsequent owners kept the Dutro name.

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