

NEWS

Claudia Sternbach, May 3, 2009:

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My friend Nora is quite aware of my addiction to books. In the 25 years that we have known each other, we have loaned books back and forth, gifted each other with books, and for more than a decade been in the same book club where we discuss fiction and nonfiction of all kinds.

Celebrating a birthday recently, I was not surprised when she handed me a brightly wrapped package that contained a new book. But I was curious. What had she picked out? Would it interest me? Had I read it already?

Nora had chosen well. And I have been getting very little work done ever since. I have been captivated by “Blossoms into Gold,” by Donna F. Mekis and Kathryn Mekis Miller. It is the true story of the Croatians of the Pajaro Valley. Or, as historian Sandy Lydon calls them in his introduction, the apple people.

Sandy, when trying to piece together his own history of the area, would ask about some of the family names such as Franich or Marinovich. Residents of the farming community responded with that lyrical description. They were the apple people, Croatians who came from the Dalmatian Coast. And the Mekis sisters, whose grandparents made the journey, decided it was time to tell their story.

We are so blessed to live here along the shore of the Monterey Bay. There is no end to the impressive scenery, the breathtaking vistas. We have craggy mountain ranges, rocky shores, verdant forests and rich farmland. But equally important are the people who have created lives here. Generation after generation, serving as caretakers for the land, giving spirit to this place. And I am endlessly fascinated by that. How humans contribute to the landscape, what they have created, what legacy they leave. Marking their footprints in the sand.

I am deep into my new book. It is filled with a history with which I was unfamiliar. And I don't even have to use my imagination when trying to picture these families from years past. The book is filled with photographs. It's like peeking into an old family album.

The next time I head south, drive past the farms, through the orchards, watch the new crops begin to come in, enjoy the bounty of the harvest, I will have a new appreciation for it all, knowing just a little more about the place I call home.

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