

# Roots in Ripon

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*Chuck Roots*

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## Shop Till You Drop

Yes, I know it's a hackneyed expression, but it was certainly true on this day. As I have mentioned in previous articles, my youngest daughter, Jenny Roots Sousa, owns a store in Turlock by the name of Rustic Roots. She opened for business nearly four years ago and has been very busy ever since.

Her particular expertise is painting used or antique furniture to give it the popular "vintage" look, or what is commonly called "shabby chic." Admittedly, I was a reluctant convert to this style, coming from the old school that says you don't paint wooden furniture: you sand it, stain it, then Verathane it. Bring out the beauty of the grain! That's the ticket! Ah, but that is not what is "in" today, or so I'm told.

Being retired now for three years, I have been working Jenny's store on Mondays. I make the 25-mile-drive to Turlock and spend the day greeting customers, helping answer questions, and finalizing the sales. It's loads of fun and keeps me entertained on a day when the golf course is closed. When I report for work each Monday, I see a different store because a number of the furniture pieces from the previous week are sold and gone, only to be replaced by recent additions.

With a constant turn-over of merchandise, Jenny must make buying trips to large flea market type places where she can select the items she wants to "re-create" with her unique artistic flair. On the first Sunday of each month there is a huge display of dealers' wares at the old Naval Station in Alameda. There are acres of ground covered with row upon row of various items that store owners and vendors, such as Jenny, can acquire the needed items for their store. Then on the second Sunday of the month, there is another huge sale up in Sacramento.

So, this past Sunday Jenny picked me up at 7:00am for the drive to Alameda in her pick-up truck. In anticipation of a long day of browsing through innumerable displays of wares under what promised to be a warm, sunny day, we were well equipped with coffee and water. The hour-plus drive into the East Bay of San Francisco (i.e., Oakland and Alameda) was uneventful. However, not having driven through this area in several years, both Jenny and I were shocked at how rundown the area had become. Homeless folks were everywhere living in abject squalor that reminded me of the many trashy areas I had witnessed throughout many third world countries. Add to that the ruination of the infrastructure made us feel that no roads or bridges in the Bay Area were safe. I have lived in or near the San Francisco Bay since 1969, yet this is the first time I felt that major population areas

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of the Bay were deteriorating to the point of total ruin. The state has not done the job of maintenance and upkeep of our primary means of travel. Hey! Sacramento! Wake up!

So, back to shopping at the flea market. We paid the required nominal fee to enter, then rented a couple of oversized grocery carts and began the up-and-down, and back-and-forth crisscrossing of the various merchants' stalls. Slowly at first, we bought a few items, but then, as we warmed to our purpose for being there, Jenny began to grab quite a few items so that after five hours we figured we had enough items to fill both the back of the pick-up and the extended cab. With a number of large furniture items, along with complimentary pieces that give the store its own charm, we began the challenge of packing all of this into the truck. With a fistful of bungee straps and rubber stretch cords, we began securing all of the pieces for the 70-mile drive back to the Valley. We were both ready to call it a day!

As we drove out of the parking area to head for the exit from the former naval base, I suggested that Jenny drive up the road that ran alongside the old aircraft hangers so I could point out the hanger of the squadron where I had served after returning from Vietnam. The squadron was VMA 133, made up of T-A4s, the "T" signifying "Training" aircraft. In fact, at the former main gate entrance is mounted for display purposes "Old 00" (referred to affectionately as "Double-Nuts"). Having been an aviation electrician, I served in Maintenance Control where all work done on any aircraft is assigned. Looking upon this now unkempt former military base, I sighed and thought, *"You know you're getting old when the airplanes you used to work on are now on static display!"*

Before driving off the island of Alameda, I asked Jenny if she'd like to see where I used to live. She readily said yes, so I pointed her toward the west side of the island and onto Central Avenue and the cottage I lived in for a year-and-a-half from January of '73 to August of '74. The rent on this cute little cottage was \$85/month back then. And as a sergeant E5 I was bringing in \$470/month which included BAQ (Basic Allowance for Quarters) and COMRATS (Commutated Rations). Sadly, the housing in the area is rather run down, but it was fun to show Jenny where I lived two years before I met her mother.

It was a fun day and a sheer delight to spend it with my daughter, sharing past memories and thoughts from a time that now seems so very long ago.

Yet I am blessed beyond measure and consider my life all joy, for the Lord has been so very good to me. To God be the glory!