

Judy Walgren on Camp Davis

By Judy Walgren

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The first time my family visited Camp Davis was in 1972. My father loaded up our Ford station wagon, stuffed my brother, sister and me in the back, and he and my mother navigated the 12-hour drive from North Texas to the outskirts of the Mora Valley, to a remote area outside of a tiny village, Rociada.

We had just moved from the vibrant college town, Iowa City, Iowa, to Richardson, Texas, a suburb north of Dallas, known for the good schools and encroaching urban sprawl. I was not adjusting well to the switch from living in an academic, tight-knit community to a city where everyone had air conditioning and no one had a front porch they actually used.

The Davis family lived down the street

and we quickly made friends. They told my parents about this fantastic retreat their family had owned and operated for decades high in the Sangre de Christos Mountains in Northern New Mexico. The photos showed three main buildings surrounded by the snow-covered Gascon peak on one side and gifted with a view of the majestic Hermit's Peak on the other. In between sat the fields of long grass filled with wild flowers where children could run wild. Last, but not least, Camp Davis offered a much-needed break from the intense heat that bakes bodies and brains during the long summers in Texas.

There were horseback rides along trails on the surrounding properties, multi-day backpacking trips with my father along Skyline trail and hikes up Hermit's Peak during amazing (and dangerous) lighten-

ing storms. Many nights were spent in the Rec Hall playing dominoes with the camp's patron, Coach Davis. And the food - home cooking like everyone remembers from his or her childhood. Mexican night was a tradition that I could not wait for; the local cooks who worked in the kitchen at Camp would annually prepare a spread for the adoring families. We would dream all year about returning to their chili rellenos and blue enchiladas bathed in red chili.

There is a trout pond where my father taught me to catch and clean fish, the shooting range where he helped me gain my sharp shooter medal, the overnight fishing trips high up in the mountains where I learned to fly fish and would wake up to a herd of elk surrounding my tiny tent. I took my first photograph at Camp Davis - a snapshot of Hermit's Peak.

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These are the memories I have played over and over in my mind, like Super 8 movies with the added smell of pine needles and horses intermingled with the visuals. I can only hope that I can give my son experiences like these - ones that he will fall back on in happy and hard times as he goes through his life.

For years, I was too busy or too far away to come back to Camp Davis on my family's

annual trip. I moved to Taos in 2000, partially to reclaim a part of myself that I had lost along the way in Somalia and beyond. I would come down to for a meal at first, then an overnight, moving onto staying for a few days. When I moved to Denver in 2004, I was still close enough to drop down for a visit easily.

Flash forward to 2012 and Theo and I are at Camp Davis for his third year and the fortieth year since my first visit. My mother still comes with my sister and her two daughters. My father had a heart attack years earlier and can no longer make the trip.

Theo is learning to ride horses and I am teaching him to cast at the trout pond. He has not taken to cleaning the fish, but I will give him until nine before I lay down the law. He shot his first arrow into the target

parked on a hay bale this summer. He walks barefoot in the creek with his new friends. He talks about his favorite horse Spot in his sleep at night.

Things around Camp Davis have changed, too. New owners have scooped up the land around Camp where we once rode horses. A movie star has put up a security camera at the end of the dirt road. But our Camp Davis is still run by members of the family, now Kelly (Davis) and Bennett Murphy, who are dedicated to keeping this tradition alive for my son and many others, a gift whose worth cannot be measured.

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To submit work to be considered for Framework contact Judy Walgren at jwalgren@schronicle.com.

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