



Nicasio Historical Society

Fall 2022

Letter from the President

OUR BOOKS

During the ten months since our latest book *Nicasio's Oldtimers, Newcomers & Remarkable Guests* was released, we have sold well over 150 copies! It certainly exceeded our expectations due to what we thought was its limited local appeal.

It remains available for purchase at the Rancho Nicasio Store along with Dewey's history of Nicasio book, *Nicasio, the Historic Valley at the Center of Marin*, Joe McNeil's walking tour of Nicasio Town Square, *Around the Square*, plus our NHS hats. The first two books mentioned above are also available at The Nicasio Cheese Company.



LET'S CELEBRATE

Our Board has been busy planning and preparing for a Gala 20th Anniversary event coming in 2023. We are creating a slideshow presentation from our impressive photograph archives depicting Nicasio's rich history. We will pair this presentation with live narration excerpted from our copious collection of in-person interviews. We are looking forward to this event and we will keep you posted as our plans develop.

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

Earlier this year we voted to donate the sum of \$5000 to the Nicasio School Foundation Enrichment Program. We also awarded an outstanding Nicasio student athlete a soccer scholarship which enabled him to participate on a travel soccer team. The support of our local students is an important aspect of our many endeavors.

Interview of Dan Breaux

Conducted in July 2022

By Amy Morse, Arden Wood & Sue Loar



Photo by Peter Breaux

In July, Arden Wood, Sue Loar and Amy Morse spent a pleasant summer afternoon in

Arden's garden interviewing Dan Breaux, longtime Nicasio resident, farrier, blacksmith and artist.

Dan's heritage is "Cajun", a vibrant Louisianian culture which includes lively music and delicious cuisine. His grandparents were from Louisiana and spoke French. Dan's parents were also born in Louisiana, but they raised Dan and his five siblings in the San Fernando Valley in southern California.

Dan's mother was an accomplished seamstress and kept him and their family well-dressed. His father, who saw active duty in the Philippines during his service years in WWII, was a barber and then later went into the liquor business to support his large family. The Valley was a wonderful place to grow up during the 1950s and early 1960's. Horses were scattered throughout this agricultural valley and Dan spent much of his time in the outdoors where he remembers picking apricots and plums. Often, on Saturday mornings, Dan and his horse-owning friends would gather around the TV to watch early Westerns featuring Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. His favorite cowboy was the Cisco Kid. As an 8-year-old, Dan really identified with the Cisco Kid and believed he looked a lot like the Kid! Often in the evening Dan's family would gather to watch such shows as "Gunsmoke", "Have Gun Will Travel" and "Rawhide". Cowboys, Westerns and having friends with horses fostered Dan's early appreciation for the cowboy life. Some of his fondest memories were cantering along on the soft and newly plowed citrus orchards bounded by eucalyptus trees and riding high up into the Santa Monica Mountains escaping into the cooler weather and where one could glimpse the Pacific Ocean. It could be very hot and smoggy in the summer, so his family would head to Zuma Beach in Malibu and although they weren't wealthy, they also had

a much-appreciated backyard pool in which to cool off.

Dan went to local Catholic schools all the way through high school and although academics weren't his favorite, he did love the early art classes in grade school where he enjoyed drawing and painting. Dan and his siblings are now all artists and/or musicians!

While Dan was attending Pierce College in Woodland Hills, CA, he worked several jobs, including a stint as a bellhop at the Hilton. Pierce College was historically an agricultural institution with an industrial arts program. This was Dan's first exposure to welding and fusing metals. He also took architectural history classes which influenced his later interest in sculpture. After Pierce College, he attended CSU Northridge. He received his degree in Geography and continued for a year of graduate school. Dan still loves maps and exploring the geography of West Marin.

While in college, Dan enlisted in the California Air National Guard Reserves as a crash fireman in the branch called "Crash/Fire/Rescue". This was during the Vietnam War. He trained with the Reserves one weekend a month and was thankful he wasn't ever deployed overseas. One of his fellow reservists was the cowboy actor Sam Elliott. Dan remembers him as a good-natured guy, just starting out in his acting career.

After college, Dan and his girlfriend headed north in his VW bus. They had friends in the Bay Area, but eventually made their way to southwest Washington State. The lush green landscape and cooler temperatures were intoxicating after the dry, hot climate of southern California. Dan worked many odd jobs such as picking berries and working on construction sites while living at the base of Mt. St. Helens (where no one told him that the volcano was still active. Luckily Dan had moved before it blew its top in 1981!)



Photo by Peter Breaux

Although Dan had a good and prosperous time in Washington, when he was about 30 years old and missing his good friends in Santa Rosa, he moved to a ranch in Windsor. It was a small, sleepy town just the way he liked it.

It was during his time at the Windsor ranch that he met a farrier, Mel Fisher. A farrier is a craftsman who trims hooves and shoes horses. Dan began working for Mel and he realized that he was good at shoeing and he really enjoyed the work.

One day Dan saw an ad in the Press Democrat looking for someone to help on a horse ranch in exchange for housing. That ranch was the "Running K Ranch" on Old Rancheria Road in Nicasio. Dan loved the property at first sight and began working and living at the ranch. He also worked at Toby's Feed Barn and shadowed and worked with veteran and local farrier, Hobie Wright. Dan built up his farrier trade around West Marin over the course of 30 years and had a large client list of up to 30 horses in need of shoeing.

Dan has many fond memories of the relationships he developed with the multitude of horses that he trimmed and shod over the years. Working with horses is a partnership, and as the farrier and horse spend time together, they become more comfortable with each other and the job

becomes a real collaboration. Dan's calm demeanor helps to relax the horses so that they stand quietly and patiently while he goes about his work. Horses are quick learners and they soon come to recognize the sound of Dan's truck pulling into the ranch. The horse understands that here is someone who is going to handle them with respect. Dan takes pleasure in talking to the horses while going about his work. One day when he was shoeing at Kim and Debie Stuart's ranch, their other farrier, Morris Fitzpatrick, was shoeing Debie's big black Friesian horse. Dan listened as Morris yakked it up the whole time he was working. Dan thought "yeah, why not? good idea", and incorporated the practice of talking to the horses while working on their hooves.

On the Running K Ranch there was lots of leftover ranching debris, such as T-posts, rebar, barbed wire and old iron roofing. Dan utilized this old metal to construct a workshop to house a coal-fired forge which he used to fabricate steel items such as hinges, racks, gates and tools. This is what a blacksmith does: works with heated iron, using a hammer and anvil to bend and change the shape of the metal to fashion tools and other useful articles. Dan's skill in making these functional objects and all his years as a farrier have evolved into his passion for creating artistic sculptures using iron, steel, stone and bone. Dan has always been inspired by large metal sculptures found in public spaces and his understanding of the different metals and how they can be cut, formed and joined has suffused his artistic endeavors.

Dan lived at the Running K property for 25 years, through five different owners, and raised his beautiful daughter, Jazmin, on the ranch where she was born. Jaz attended Nicasio School, Drake High School, CSU Long Beach and now is married and working in Truckee, CA as a social work administrator. Dan is very proud of Jaz and she has warm

memories of her heritage and rural upbringing. They both have a deep love for Nicasio.

Dan can often be found in his studio in Nicasio creating art sculptures, useful objects and commissioned pieces.



Photo by Leonardo Ferri