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HELEN THOMPSON DREYFUS Reminiscences of the James Alden Thompson Family

Interviewed by Carla Ehat and Anne Kent,
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Edited by Marilyn L. Geary

Helen Thompson Dreyfus, niece of the author Kathleen Norris, recalls the personalities and dynamics of the close-knit Thompson family, their Mill Valley family home called Treehaven, and summers at La Estancia, the Norris' ranch in Saratoga. You can read more about this big Irish family in James Thompson's Scenes of My Childhood, in Helen Thompson Dreyfus' memoir Always Afternoon, and in Kathleen Norris' memoir The Family Gathering.



Joseph, Margaret, Kathleen, Jim, Teresa, Fred
in Mill Valley, 1901

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You may also enjoy reading the complete [transcription](#) of this oral history interview.

My great-grandmother was an Irish woman named Kathleen O'Keefe, who lived in Cork, Ireland. Her brothers made a match for her with an American sea captain, and she married him. He went right off to sea as soon as they were married in Ireland. She came out to meet him in what was then known as the Sandwich Islands in Hawaii, but by the time she got to Hawaii, he had vanished. His ship was presumably lost, and nobody ever knew what became of him. Although my great-grandmother was young and a country Irish woman, she was a strong-minded girl. She wrote the Pope and asked that since the marriage had never been consummated, could she have a lesser period of time to presume death? Eventually, about a year later, if you can imagine such a long

while, she got a letter allowing her to marry within three and a half years instead of seven. She also wrote Lloyd's of London who said they had no record whatsoever as what had become of the ship, so she was fairly in the clear.

My great-grandfather had been, more or less, I think, sent to the Hawaiian Islands to get him out of the way, because he was kind of wild. He auctioned off the cargo of ships when they arrived in Honolulu. In those days there weren't shops. The ships would come in, and he would say, "Here's yard goods," or pots and pans or whatever. He was a very witty auctioneer. We were always told that he died acting as a second in a duel, but we've always suspected that he was probably acting as a first. By that time they had two children, my grandfather and his sister, my great Aunt Kitty.

My great grandmother decided that there were altogether too many Protestants in the Hawaiian Islands. As you know, it was mostly settled by Methodist Missionaries, and that was no place to bring up children, because they might marry Protestants! And so she took them off to Ireland. By ship to China and then overland across Russia. Imagine! Well, this was about the middle of the last century, 1850, somewhere along in there. She got the family all home to Ireland and then didn't want to stay in Ireland and went back to Hawaii by ship with two little kids. I believe it was on that trip that they were storm-strayed and the biscuits all had weevils in them. When the children complained, their mother said, "Well, if you won't eat them with the candle, I'll blow the candle out, and you can eat them in the dark."

But then she didn't say in Hawaii. She came to San Francisco and ran a boarding house for many years, very successfully. She was really a very strong-minded woman. She did all her own shopping. She went down to the market every day with big baskets and sent the baskets home by Chinese boys to the boarding house. I remember being told that she said to one boarder, "If you stir your coffee, Mr. Johnson, you don't have to put so much sugar in it."

The strong women in those days just did it and didn't think they were so remarkable either. I mean I don't think that Kathleen O'Keefe Thompson thought it was terribly astonishing that she crossed the Pacific a couple of times, crossed Russia in the middle ighties. I mean she didn't go around boasting about it at all, you know. That was just what she did to get the kids home to Ireland. Do you know they used to send their laundry to China in those days from the Hawaiian Islands? Imagine how much laundry you'd have to have to be able to do that, because it would be three months before you got it bac.



Josephine Moroney

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James Alden Thompson, the son, grew up and married Josephine Moroney, whose family came across the plains and settled in Marysville. There were thirteen children in that family. I don't think they were all born before they came across the plains. They were supposed to be in the same party that the Donner party was in, but the Donner party went off to the south and the party that the Thompson's were in came on through to Oregon and then down to Marysville.

Another little story about my grandfather which I've always loved was that, of course, he was raised as a child in Hawaii and later when he had two children of his own, he had taken my Aunt Kay and my Uncle Joe to the World's Fair. This must have been in about 1895. At the World's Fair, there was a village of Hawaiians that somebody had imported. You know, one of those dreadful things. And the poor things! The person who had imported them had died, and nobody else spoke Hawaiian in the whole of San Francisco. They were starving to death. They were helpless, because they didn't speak English. My grandfather, walking by with his two children, said a few kindly words in Hawaiian, and they all burst into tears and came and flung their arms around him. Because he spoke Hawaiian, he became the patron of that little Hawaiian village for the rest of the Fair.

My grandfather came to Marin County, Mill Valley, and he built his home in 1891. The original lot sale in Mill Valley was in 1890, and they bought property at that time and then built and moved their family over. At that time, my grandfather and grandmother built the house in Mill Valley which was known as Treehaven. It is still there, what is now 123 Molino Avenue. They raised their children there. My aunt was then eleven by the time they built that house, so they had their family all started by then. I don't know where they had lived in San Francisco.

They went to the little school in Mill Valley. There were six children in the Thompson family, or four of school age. They had to wait until there were nine children of school age in Mill Valley before there could be a school. So the Coffin family finally moved in with four children and that jumped them over the mark. There was a little tiny school down just off Throckmorton Avenue and then not long after that the school on Summit Avenue was built, which was the Summit Avenue school.

My grandmother kept a journal. The youngest uncle, Jimmy Thompson, wrote a book later called *Scenes of My Childhood*. He used her journal considerably as his data bank. That is certainly out of date. There was a period in San Francisco when certain families would have private printings, maybe two hundred copies, of the story of their family, but we were never in that lofty a financial position, I don't think.

Joseph

Joseph Sexton Thompson was the oldest. He was named after his father, obviously. Then Kathleen Thompson, Teresa Thompson, and Frederick Thompson (my father), and then Margaret Thompson and James.

My grandfather worked at the Bank of California all his life, but he didn't last terribly long. I don't think he lived to see the the new century. He and my grandmother both died within a month of each other in about 1898. They always said he died of a broken heart, and I wouldn't be surprised. His wife died at Thanksgiving, and he died at Christmas. It really ruined those holidays for the family for the rest of their lives. So they left six kids, the oldest, Joseph, about nineteen.

They all were about a year and a half apart, quite a real good Irish Catholic family, six kids and the little spinster sister, my grandfather's sister Kitty Thompson, who never married. She was kind of the chaperone for the family. They moved to the city. They had to get jobs in the city. My father got a job as a night watchman in a warehouse, and his shoes had such big holes in them that he used to take lots and lots of cardboard and cut out soles that he kept fitting into them to keep his feet dry. My father was thirteen when they moved to San Francisco.

After their parents died, the family stuck together in an apartment somewhere in San Francisco. There was a great family loyalty and support. Everything centered around the family. But the result of the whole thing was that none of them had a higher education. Joe was already working, I guess, at the time his father died. My father never went through fifth grade, and none of the family ever got out of grammar school. But it was one of those families that does a lot of reading. There was a lot of sitting around the fire at night, reading aloud and discussing things, memorizing poetry. So they all were all regarded as educated people, where none of them were learned in the normal sense. Dad was the authority on Shakespeare at the Bohemian Club, and I don't think most of them knew he never went through fifth grade.

Kathleen

The first thing Kathleen ever wrote was a book called *Mother*. She was just seventeen or so when her mother died. A few years later she wrote this book, and she sent it to a number of publishing houses and was turned down by all of them. And I'm quite sure, although I don't think I've ever heard this specifically, that my Uncle Cigi, Charles G. Norris, whom she later married, Frank Norris' brother, was a dynamo, and I'm sure that he took her over. Once she married him, she never had any trouble

selling any of her books, and she wrote something like sixty. He did all the dealing for her and made sure that it got the right kind of advertising. Mr. Bigelow of *Good Housekeeping* magazine told me once that her name on the cover of *Good Housekeeping* magazine would sell fifty thousand of his magazines.



Treehaven, 1897

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She wrote very straight books about nice decent girls that almost go wrong and then just come around. She was extremely witty, and she could be very, very sharp and very, very critical, always in a devastatingly funny way. She was the kind of person that Noel Coward loved to be with, because they just sparked each other on. Terribly funny. It's hard to recreate that kind of humor.

She was a big woman with a big Roman nose and thick curly dark hair. As she got older she got better looking. As a girl she was homely. Really, she had this big nose and big bust and very slender hands and feet. This story was in the book, but I'll tell it. She was complaining once about being homely. Everybody else was prettier. Her father said, "Katie, the prettiest girl in the room has only got a twenty minute lead on you." And that was really true. By the end of twenty minutes, nobody would be listening to the prettiest girl in the room, and everybody would be talking to Aunt Kay. As she got older, that all came into focus. It's alright for a woman of fifty to have a large bust and a large Roman nose. It just isn't very pretty on a seventeen year old. She was a striking woman, bright blue eyes, and she had that Irish realism among other things. One of her sayings was, "People say I shouldn't speak ill of the dead." She said, "Keep peace with the living, speak ill of the dead." Very useful sometimes.

When Cigi married her, he said, “Well now, Kathleen. I love you dearly, and we’re going to be married, but I don’t want to marry your goddam family.” The poor man, he never got out from under that family to his dying day. They had a place in Saratoga for the whole family. They went every summer, for the whole summer. There were fifteen or twenty nieces and nephews around all summer long. Brothers and sisters and brothers’ wives. And Cigi ran the whole family, too, lending money to this one and making a contact for that one. He was a remarkable man, Charles Norris.

Kathleen married him at an early age. She was writing society notes for one of the San Francisco papers when she met him as a reporter at a party where he was a guest. He was at a much higher social level. He was entranced by her from the moment he saw her, and he wore her down.

Charles Norris was a Californian. They went to New York, and he worked for Scribner’s for a number of years and possibly she did too. I really never knew him until the last summer of World War I when they had a great big place in Mount Holly, New Jersey. Charles Norris was at Fort Dix, and they took this big old marvelous Victorian house out in the country near Mount Holly and invited all the family, of course. So Fred and his wife and his two kids came, and Teresa and her husband and her three kids came and Markie and her husband and two kids came, and there were about four maids of all types of race: one black, one Irish, one German, and it was such a marvelous summer. This great big house and big barn but full of relatives and children and poor Uncle Cigi.



Kathleen Norris, 1925

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My father use to tease Uncle Cigi by calling him Charlie, so I’d always heard him referred to as Uncle Charlie. When I first got out of the car, and I said, “Hello Uncle Charlie,” he said, “Goddamit. Don’t call me Charlie.”

They lived in Port Washington. Aunt Kay had another baby that died. They adopted an older boy who was a son of the maid or somebody who lived with them most of their lives. Her sister Teresa moved out to Port Washington with her family too, so there was another family scene.

Aunt Kay had a son, who is four or five years younger than I am. He’s Doctor Frank Norris in San Francisco. Kathleen lived to be pretty close to ninety. First they moved out in the summers to Saratoga, and then they built a house when their son got up to be college age and he was going to Stanford. They built a big house in Palo Alto that Claire Boothe Luce later bought a very nice house. Then after my uncle died, Aunt Kay moved to San Francisco. Uncle Charlie died about seven years before she did. She moved then to San Francisco to the house up on Twin Peaks and lived there for a few years. Then when she was beginning to get pretty old, she went into St. Mary’s Hospital and finally moved to her son’s house out on Pacific Avenue and died there.

I don’t believe Teresa assisted my Aunt Kay in her writing. I don’t think Aunt Kay needed that kind of assistance. Her writing just flowed. The editor of *Good Housekeeping* magazine told me once he had been sitting in her room while she was typing, working. He was talking to my uncle, and she was writing. One of the children came in and said to Aunt Kay that nobody could find a swimming

suit for somebody or something. She got up and went right out of the room. While she was out of the room, the editor of the *Good Housekeeping*, whose name I now forget, went over and looked at her typewriter. She had started a word that began with “wh,” and when she came back in the room,

she just sat right down and finished it and went on. She didn’t look a bit and think what have I been saying. She knew that she had “which” started, and she just went on and finished it.



Kathleen and Charles

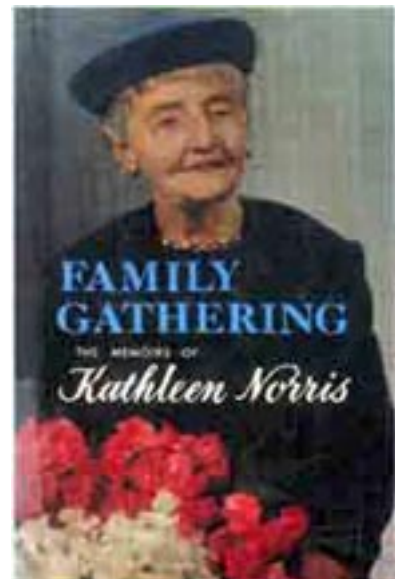
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By the time I knew her, she used the typewriter. She may have started by hand. I guess she probably did. She was a morning writer; the the whole life of the household went on in and out. The kittens were born, and the kids brought them in, and children brought their fights in, and she settled them. Uncle Cigi, on the other hand, was a “don’t bother me writer.” He went up to a special cabin about a quarter of a mile away and worked terribly hard all morning. And he worked just nine to twelve. She worked only in the mornings as far as I can ever remember, but she did

a lot of other things too while she was working. Nobody ever thought that they shouldn’t bother Aunt Kay. She published very close to the end. She wrote right along. It was as easy as talking to her.

Aunt Kay was a very easy grownup to be close to because she liked kids. She was funny, and she didn’t make a lot of rules. She just went along the way I’m painted because it was so much more fun to go that way. She didn’t have to make rules. She had fourteen nieces and nephews, I think. None of us had very interesting pursuits. She just hoped we would do well. But she herself had a great many pursuits. She spoke up and down the nation for the Volstead Act for the ratification of the Prohibition Amendment. She was an ardent platform speaker for peace and spoke for peace organizations anywhere.

The interesting thing about her in relation to the Prohibition Amendment was that she was all out for Prohibition. She had seen one of her uncle's become an alcoholic. All the while she was out for Prohibition and all during Prohibition when she was strongly for it, my uncle was a dedicated drinker. He was a gentlemanly drinker, but he’d never thought of having a dinner without having liquor. Aunt Kay would sit there with all of us drinking, not, I suppose, the little children, but with her husband drinking, and wine and a lot of conversation and cocktails. Then she’d go off and make a speech about the Volstead Act. And neither



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of them ever suggested to each other that one or the other should stop whatever it was they were doing.

Well, I'll tell you a kind of a funny little story about Kathleen. She spoke at a Community Chest luncheon in San Francisco one time and invited all of the cousins to come and hear her. We had a table, and it was a very pleasant luncheon. Aunt Kay was an unrealistic woman in some ways, and she said that thanks to the Community Chest, there was really no poverty left in America anymore. She said, "Even destitution in America isn't as bad as it is in some places." One of my great darling cousins was sitting right across the table from me, Teresa's oldest child. I said I thought destitution was a word like zero, and my cousin Rosie took a pencil and paper and started writing right away. A minute later, she handed across the table a paper that said:

There is poverty in London.
There is poverty in Rome.
But we have democratic destitution
here at home.
There is misery in South Hampton,
And they make no retribution.
But we are happy, proud and gay,
We raise our banners high and say,
'We're happy in the American way
With American destitution.

And she did that in a minute.

Another thing about Aunt Kathleen, speaking of writing poetry in a minute, she developed a habit of going to that silver store in San Francisco, Shreeve's, and ordering a very pretty silver bowl and then standing there at the counter and saying, "Let's see. That child's name is Richard," and writing charming poems that were then engraved around that silver bowl. And everybody who has those silver bowls just treasures them. At one time I tried to collect all of them to make a present to her. I couldn't get them all. There were just too many, but they were delightful bowls, and each one was tailored to the child. To Markie Thompson, to this daughter on her bowl, she said:

Well-mannered children and sedate,
May eat from off a china plate,
But for a child as wild as you,
This useful silver bowl must do.

Teresa

Teresa was a wonderful woman. Among other things she had total recall. She could remember pretty near anything she'd ever read, exactly. But she also wanted to become a nun, and she became a



Kathleen Norris looks over script at "Pickfair" with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford

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Little Sister of the Poor when she got along to be, I suppose, about 23 or so. I don't know exactly when. She became very sick and had to leave the Little Sisters of the Poor, and then she decided she would become a Carmelite in London, so she went off to London to become a Carmelite Nun.

She really was an extremely devout young woman, but life with the Carmelites was just too much. For instance, she said one day to one of the superior nuns how much she liked the nice big, black buns that they got for lunch. They never had them again, because you're not supposed to like buns. You should spend your time liking cheeses, but not buns. She said at one time there was a little weed growing in the courtyard where they exercised. They'd admire it as they went by it. The girls all loved that little weed, but none of them ever mentioned that they loved that little weed because they knew it would be torn up.

My aunt had a rather large handwriting, and she wrote pages of letters to her sister. The Carmelites would only let her have one page. All the rest of the pages were thrown away. So she reduced her handwriting to a perfectly beautiful little copperplate handwriting. If you've ever seen her handwriting, it's beautiful, but it's tiny, so she could get pages into one page. Carmelites don't put Thompsons down very easily.

Well, finally this became too difficult. My Aunt Teresa in her novice's habit went to the Mother Superior and said that she didn't feel that she had a true vocation and she wanted to leave. The Mother Superior said, "Very well, Sister. If you want to leave, you may leave now. Right now. This minute. If you don't want to leave now, you will stay, but if you want to leave, leave now." And Aunt Teresa in her novice's habit got up and walked out of the room into the streets of London without a penny to her name.

Of course, I won't say that she wasn't quite as brave as I said because she did know that the family knew a family that lived in London, but she didn't know where they lived or where she was. She had no money. She found the family, and they were all away, but the housekeeper of the family wired my Aunt Kay. The cable just said, "Teresa Out." This well-to-do family in London, another big Irish family like ours, probably shipped her home.

She came home, and she worked at Paul Elder's. She was fascinated being around books. Teresa met William Rose Benet at Paul Elder's, and that was another romance. But they were not married very long. She died. She was not a child when she met him. She died in the flu year 1918-19, leaving three children and a widower. Two of the children are in this area. Her oldest boy is James Benet, whom you may have seen on News Room. He was sort of the education specialist on News Room, when there was still a News Room. Her daughter Rosemary married a young man named Dawson many years ago, and she lives in San Francisco. Those two both live in San Francisco. The youngest daughter died of a cerebral hemorrhage about ten years ago. Her marriage was short because of her early demise. She was married about six years or so.



James Alden Thompson with Teresa, Jim, Kathleen, Margaret, 1898
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Frederick (Helen's Father)

Frederick was the businessman of the family. He was raised in Mill Valley until the parents died, and then they went to the city. The earliest story I really know about him was that his father came home from the city once and passing the cigar store, which was in front of the pool hall, he stopped to buy a cigar. He looked over the counter and saw his eleven year old son playing pool. He said, "Freddie, where do you get the money to play pool?" And Fred said, "Well, the thing is, Dad, I play for the house." He was so good by that time. He went on playing pool and billiards and poker and supported the family sometimes in this way. He became a very successful businessman in his later years, and I'm sure that it was partly due to a very down-to-earth experience as a small boy. But that was one of the reasons he quit school, because he was playing pool.

My mother's name was Helen Meigs, and my father met her brother first. They both lived in a boarding house in San Francisco, and then Mother lived in Santa Barbara. My father came to visit, and they fell in love and married. That was slightly romantic. They were attracted to each other. I



Josephine Thompson gazes up at her children. Left to right: Joseph, Jim, Fred, Teresa, Kathleen and Margaret, c. 1893

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I guess they were already engaged when he went to El Paso and came down with diphtheria. Mother went out to nurse him in a convent or a religious institution of some kind, and then her mother went out and then they got married. They were married in the hospital there. That lasted quite a while. I have a younger brother named David.

Mother and Dad lived in Mill Valley most of their married life. There were a few times out for Dad's business affairs. Mother fit in to the family very well. The in-laws all fit in very well. Aunt Kay was a great one for gathering people in. She could say savage things about people, behind their backs or to their faces, but it didn't destroy the relationships somehow. We all would say terrible things about each other.

Margaret

We always called Margaret "Markie." She married a young man named Hartigan who wound up as an Admiral in the Navy, and she had two children. They lived in Peking in a compound with something like fifty servants at one time. They had chit boys, a hired person who only carried your messages around. She always traveled with several cats and several dogs. She was a great beauty, and she was

also a darling and funny woman. But not only were the children intrigued with her, practically every man she ever met was intrigued with her, because she was just so darling and lovely and pretty and funny. Then they lived for several years in Rio. He would be sent places with the Navy, so that her daughter still has a slight Portuguese accent, you know, that sort of international accent that some people have. It's quite an accent. For many, many years Bunga would use expressions that were really Portuguese in flavor.

Hartigan was a Naval attache in Peking and, I guess, in Rio, and then he later had the *Relief*, the hospital ship *Relief*. I remember going to a nice party he gave on that ship once, and my great aunt, my grandmother's sister Mary Moroney, who was an odd one too, said, "Now this is the sort of place I'd like to live." We were on the *Relief* out in the middle of San Francisco Bay. "Flags and bunting," she'd say. Really, who wouldn't, you know? She was one of the family characters, and I know nobody ever talked about her. She was a fine concert pianist and an absolute fat head.

Her name was Mary Moroney, and she later married a man named Thompson. For instance, Chaliapin admired her playing, so he asked her to accompany him while he practiced. She did for a month, and then she sent him a bill for "coaching." Chaliapin crossed out "coaching" and wrote "accompanying" and sent her her check. Then she crossed out "accompanying" and wrote in "coaching" and sent him back his check, and that was the last she ever heard of Chaliapin. Can you imagine being such a fool? But then she was the one that thought she'd like to live in sunshine, flags, and bunting.

My Aunt Kay was driving her down from the Fairmont one day and went into a frightful skid and skidded about half a block sideways. My Aunt Mary said, "Kathleen, what is skidding?" She thought she might would like to find out what "skidding" was. This might be it. But she was far from screaming, "Kathleen what is skidding?"

Admiral Hartigan died some years ago, fifteen years or so, and Margaret died only a couple of years ago. She was one of the younger ones. She died in a absolutely entrancing little tiny house in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. It had at one time been part of the Thomas Jefferson Estate, and she had restored it into sort of a mint condition. She did that, and she must have restored at least six houses in Georgetown. She belonged to one of the very first middle class families to move out to Georgetown way back at the time of World War I, when it was mostly darling old brick houses that were gone down to the working class and black population. She being an ingenious, young, impoverished Navy wife, bought one of these old houses, which was called the Gun Barrel House because the front fence was made of Civil War gun barrels. She just made it into a showplace, and then people begun buying and doing that to other houses in Georgetown. But she was one of the first, way, way in the vanguard.

I remember her saying that walking to church one terrible snowy morning, she had to walk past a group of men that were standing on the corner, all very rough-looking, working class men. She kind of nerved herself to go past them, and as she went past them, she heard one of them say, "I was up walking that little kid the whole night long." Nothing to be afraid of in this group of men. She never was afraid of her neighbors again.

James

James was the baby, and therefore he was the one who was closest to our age. We all just adored him because he was terribly, terribly funny. He was just a darlingly funny man. Just as an example, at the Saratoga Ranch, there was a lovely redwood grove, and we had breakfast there in the mornings. There were big tables and a beautiful outdoor barbecue. One morning Aunt Kay said, "My, it's a lovely hot Sunday. What can we do that would be exciting for the kids today?" and Uncle Jimmy said, "Put an alligator in the pool." That was the kind of funny that he was, and we adored it.

James wrote his reminiscences of the whole family when they were children in Mill Valley in his book *Scenes of my Childhood*. My grandparents built Treehaven in Mill Valley in 1891. After their parents died, I believe the children sold Treehaven and then they must have bought it back. They sold it just after their father died when they had no money. Then they must have bought it back, because later my Uncle Joe lived there with his wife and child and then my Uncle Jimmy lived there for a number of years. I just ran across a reference the other day to the fact that they had sold it for twenty three hundred dollars. Jimmy Thompson finally sold it to some people named Theiss, who live there now.

James Thompson worked all his working life for his older brother Joseph, who had a thing called the Federal Electrical Manufacturing Company. It manufactured switch gear. As I say, James was the Treasurer. But he no more belonged in that business.

He wrote a book with great pains about Count Rumford, who was a sort of a peripheral relative somewhere. He should have written really, Jimmy, but he didn't get started at it young enough, and he married quite young. The family married him off sort of, because he was down in Panama having a lovely time. I don't know what he was doing, but he was working. They decided that he should marry and married him off to a kind of driving Irish Catholic girl named Margaret Carrigan of the Dunn and Carrigan and Hayden family. They had three beautiful daughters and had a perfectly happy life, but he had to support the family. I guess that was all he could do.



Jim, Kathleen, Joe, Mark, Fred, at La Estancia, 1925

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All the brothers were different. Joe was a happy, inventor kind. He told me he never invented anything, but he put things together in ways they hadn't been put. The result was he had many patents and was very successful, but he was no businessman. My father was a very good businessman.

Jimmy shouldn't have been in business at all. He was totally lost and didn't like it. He should have been, I don't know what, maybe a writer. He tried all his life to write.

It was a family of six grownups, and they all had children. There aren't many families that have six kids anymore, but those that do are very close. I know one family with six children, and they're in and out of each other's lives a great deal.

La Estancia

We considered the Saratoga ranch heaven on earth. It was an old prune ranch, so that there were still a good many prune trees. The Norris' took over the house, and then they built cottages all around for the overflow of guests. It was called La Estancia, The Place, The Ranch Place. It had a gigantic croquet lawn with lights and with one of the first remote control music situations I've ever heard. You could play the records from the redwood trees at the foot of the lawn. It had a tennis court and a pool. It had this grove where we ate, and eventually every family had their own cabin. There would be Markie's cabin and Frank's cabin and the boys' cabin.

Uncle Cigi made rules. You must be in for breakfast at eight o'clock in the morning. And in order to insure that, he would put extraordinarily loud band music or something on the phonograph and blast it over the entire area. One morning I woke up to this frightful noise. He had gotten somewhere a crowd record of an angry mob, and it sounded as if they were on our very heels.

On time for meals, that was absolute, and that was about the only real rule I should say that we had. When we were up at the grove, we ate a great many meals there as years went by. We all worked at it. We either did dishes, or we chopped lettuce or whatever, but Uncle Cigi and Aunt Kay supported the whole thing. They had a cook and a butler and a good many gardeners and a couple of maids and all kinds of staff. My Uncle Cigi was an organizer. I can still see him in the hot, hot sunshine counting the laundry on Monday before it was sent out: six hundred and forty two napkins or whatever. The laundry room was a giant room. It was a wonderful place; the whole family.

There were no horses. There were some donkeys, but nobody paid much attention. The great thing about it was that everybody played. Everybody did everything. If we played sardines at night, everybody played sardines at night, hid in the dark, from the little kids to the old. And if we were doing charades, everybody was doing charades, so that there was never any feelings that there was an age gap at all in that family. It wouldn't have occurred to any of us that Aunt Kay or the baby weren't just as useful in a charades game.

There were all kinds of other people there: Alexander Woollcott and Harpo Marx and Frances Parkinson Keyes. Since I don't think this is going to get wide publicity, I'll tell you that we all



Treehaven c. 1950

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Jim, Markie, Fred, Kathleen, Joe

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disliked Frances Parkinson Keyes extremely. She was very arrogant. She had a son who was about 22, and she treated him like a five-year-old, and we didn't like it. So that we kept calling her Mrs. Keys, and she'd say, "No, no dear. Eyes with a K, eyes with a K." I can still hear her the day she left, all of us standing on the porch saying, "Goodby Mrs.Keys" at the top of our lungs.

There were endless guests. People like Templeton Parker and Charles Dolbie. Oh, I couldn't remember them all. A funny thing happened once. When the men went to the Bohemian Club, their remaining ladies would all go down to the ranch with the family ladies of

whom there were about seven or eight. They would continue to dress nicely for dinner and sit around and play bridge after dinner. Three or four of them were very pretty.

One summer they were all down there on their grove weekend. Two women were driving by. Their car broke down at the foot of the road. They could see the lights up the hill and hear the music, so they came up to ask for help. Indeed, they received it. They phoned the garage, and the garageman couldn't come till tomorrow, and apparently here they were in a house, a very handsome house, with eight women in evening clothes all sitting around apparently without men, waiting for something. These women apparently assumed that they were in a rather fancy house of ill repute. They became more and more nervous, clasping their things, I'm sure. There was nothing for it but they should spend the night. There was no place else for them to go. So they went nervously down to a little cottage set off from everything else. They had arrived at nine o'clock at night, or something like that, and the kids were all in bed. They were told that breakfast was at eight.

The next morning they got up, and here were all these women in Chinese pajamas with a lot of little children around, and it wasn't at all what they thought. It was really funny to see them relax suddenly, and the feeling that they'd spent this terrified night, thinking that any minute a whole lot of drunken men were going to arrive. Too funny. There were quite a few situations in our family life, and all was grist for Aunt Kay's mill.

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