

Circle N News

August 27-28, 2012

Tulare, California



RULER(S) OF THE RANCH

– Story Inside

Daisy Lee Meacham Nalbandian, Queen Bee of the Circle N



The Circle N Ranch in 1963. The house has expanded to the left and to the rear. The building to the left of the garage became the saddle shop and is now larger than the two outbuildings combined. The vineyard at the lower right has been replaced by my cousin Nancy Crase's home and pasture land. My cousin Karen Waggoner's home is to the right of the saddle shop on the lane cutting diagonally across the picture. A barn and stables are to the left and rear of the large trees, and the vacant land to the upper right is now pasture for boarding horses. The arena is out of the frame to the right.

Ruler(s) of the ranch

Something clicked in 1941 between the tall freckled man from California with an odd last name and the small-town North Carolina school teacher whose name was perfectly normal.

He finished his paratrooper training at Camp Mackall and shipped out to the South Pacific to make Gen. MacArthur a man of his word. She kept teaching at Pansy Fetner School and volunteering at the USO.

When Mike Nalbandian came back to the United States in 1946, he came back to Daisy Lee Meacham – to marry her, start a family and settle on a ranch in the San Joaquin Valley where he grew up.

The Circle N Ranch outside Tulare is where Gordon and I visited this week while we were doing some traveling together. We first dropped by for a couple of days in 1991, when Gordon was only 2 and we were returning from a train trip to

– Continued on next page

Ruler(s) of the ranch

– **From previous page**
Disneyland. We have returned periodically since, usually with Emily, for short visits or Thanksgiving shish kabob for as many as 50.

Mike – my Uncle Red – died in 2008, but Daisy Lee, now 94 and retired from teaching, still rules the ranch from her wheelchair. Two of my three cousins live on the ranch and the other in town. The family my aunt and uncle started has produced great-grandchildren.

The main house, now nearly 150 years old, has been expanded several times, and the ranch has evolved to accommodate the kids who were raised there. The barn sheltered cousin Butch's sprint cars and second-cousin Kristin Crase's Shakespearian theater production.

The arena and stables were built to accommodate Karen's love of horses and for nearly 50 years have hosted everything from team roping events to equestrian drill team practices, barrel races and other rodeo stuff I can't event begin to name.

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Psst! There's a new sheriff in town, and he brought his dad.

We are all Armenian

Michael Nalbandian was born in the United States, but his parents fled here from Armenia between 1915 and 1916 when an estimated 600,000 Armenians were killed in a Turkish genocide.

The first Armenian to reach America landed in Jamestown, Va., in 1618, but most by far came as a result of the genocide and subsequent absorption into the Soviet Union, settling mainly around Los Angeles and in Fresno and Tulare counties in the San Joaquin Valley.

Nalbandian, Hovanisian, Sarkisian, Saroyan, Parseghian, Aprahamian, Yepremian, Tarkanian, Bedrossian – the surnames nearly always end in "...ian" or "...yan." Khardashian? Yeah, but we don't talk about them.

Many Americans are unaware of Armenia's existence, but they know its most famous landmark. Mount Ararat is identified in Genesis as the place where Noah's Ark alighted after the Great Flood receded.

Biblically, then, Armenia was the cradle of the new civilization Noah fathered, which followed the extermination of Adam's descendants. Which would make us all Armenian.



Jim and Karen Waggoner ride herd on the Circle N's herd

Ruler(s) of the ranch

– Continued from previous page

For many North Carolina visitors and Red's friends from the military, the Circle N has served as a temporary home in California.

As is the case in most monarchies, much of the real ranch work is done by people of lesser rank. A horse and cattle operation needs cowgirls and cowboys like Karen and her husband Jim, who ride, rope and brand.

Chain stores and strip malls are pushing Prosperity Avenue farther east from downtown Tulare toward the Circle N, where the road is still called Avenue 240. Some day Prosperity may even reach prosperity.



A proper queen has a corgi. This is Susie.



The saddle shop's customers have come from Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, New Zealand, Australia, Russia, Germany, England, France, Armenia, Israel, Canada, Ireland and Scotland. They include actor Anjelica Huston, who lives in the area, and pro football players Bear Pasco (New York Giants) and Logan Mankins (New England Patriots), who played for local high schools.



Inside the saddle shop are – surprise – saddles and everything else, like ropes, you need to go out and rope your own steer.



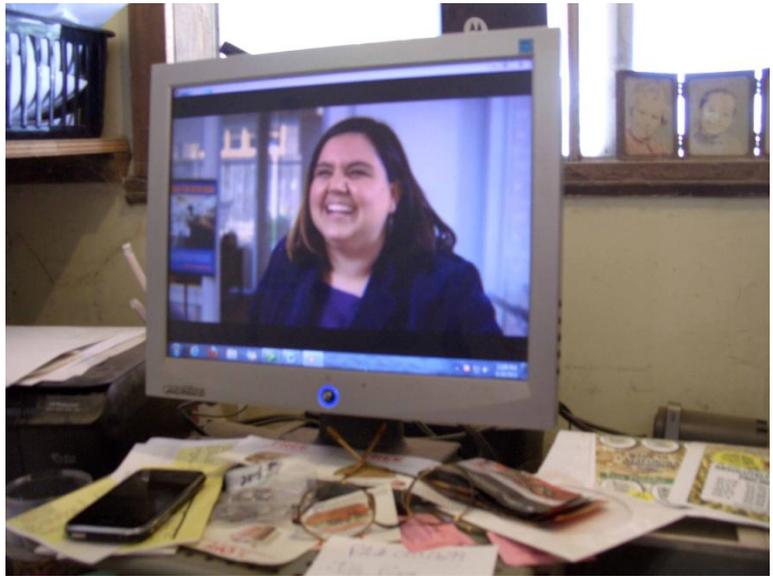


Leather detailing and silver, such as applied on the saddle on the left and the stirrup below, can raise the price of a saddle into the thousands of dollars.



Kristin Crase, who lives most of the week in Fresno, and her mother Nancy

Kristin, the original actor in the family, showed us a TV commercial she appeared in for a local bank. She once staged Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Circle N's barn.



Nancy's husband Gary does all kinds of carpentry and construction work, and he built this porch for their home using bricks from a fireplace he removed. Nancy scraped and hand-cleaned nearly 2,000 bricks for this project.

These bad boys earn their keep at weekend steer roping contests in the Circle N arena. Sometimes they win.



Lunchtime in the pasture. The mask protects the horse's eyes from flies but doesn't block vision.