# TASSAJARA



By "Tassy" Oksen

ZEN MOUNTAIN CENTER
CARMEL VALLEY, CALIF.
93924

# TASSAJARA

By "Tassy" Oksen

Watsonville, California -- 1985



Photo by Donna and Ron Reaves

Irma "Tassy" Reaves July 198

In memory of
Mama and Papa.

# PREFACE

My special thanks goes to Teri Locke, my granddaughter, who did the typing of this manuscript. I also wish to thank my son, Bob Aldridge, for the layout of this book and arranging for the printing. Thanks, also, to Larry LaCourse for his photographic assistance in improving the quality of old photographs.

All of the pictures in this book came from my early photograph album.

The first part of this book is composed of my memories, as told to me by my dear parents. The second part is just as I remember Tassajara from my childhood days. In the third part, a few of the notes about the Zen Buddhist Center are from my recent reading.

Very special appreciation goes to my dear husband, Ted (Pappy), for encouraging me to write of my memories and recollections, to make this my first story.

Irma R. Reaves
("Tassy" Oksen)

Green Valley
July 1985

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# PART 1

## MEMORIES OF TASSAJARA HOT SPRINGS

# PART 1

## MEMORIES OF TASSAJARA HOT SPRINGS

Tassajara Hot Springs, nestled deep in the heart of the Santa Lucia Mountains, holds memories very dear to me. This resort is located at the end of a steep, narrow, winding road. Once you have visited this remote place, in this deep canyon, you will never forget it.

Tassajara was first discovered and named by the Indians hundreds of years ago. The name means "Meat Drying Place". During the summer the climate is very hot and dry. The Indians found it ideal for drying their deer meat for jerky.

As the legend goes, "Somewhere in the Santa Lucia mountains a Chief's youngest sister became very ill with a strange disease. The Chief was very fond of this sister. The Medicine Man tried very hard to cure her, but to no avail. Thinking they could find a cure for her at 'the big ocean' they headed for the coast. By the time they reached Tassajara Creek, the sister was at the point of death and could travel no further. The Chief

prayed to their Sun god for help, offering his own soul as a sacrifice. As his dying tears spilled over the hot rocks onto his ailing sister she suddenly arose, completely cured of her illness.

This miraculous news reached other Indian tribes. Each year, after that, the disabled and sick found their way into Tassajara Hot Springs. There they would bathe in the hot bubbling waters that poured forth from the big rock where the Chief had died." On a huge rock, up the narrow road, was a painting of the Chief's head.

The mountains surrounding Tassajara were a haven for wild animals. My father, Jim Oksen, spent much of his early years fishing in the cold, winding streams, hunting deer, bear, lions and wild boar, and trapping wild animals in the Santa Lucia Mountains. Many times during those hunts he had camped at Tassajara.

It was shortly after my mother and father were married, in January 1898, that Mrs. Helen Quilty, then proprietor and owner of "the Springs", contacted my folks. She asked if they would assist her in various tasks at the resort. They



Emma and Jim Oksen with their dog, Skip. 1905

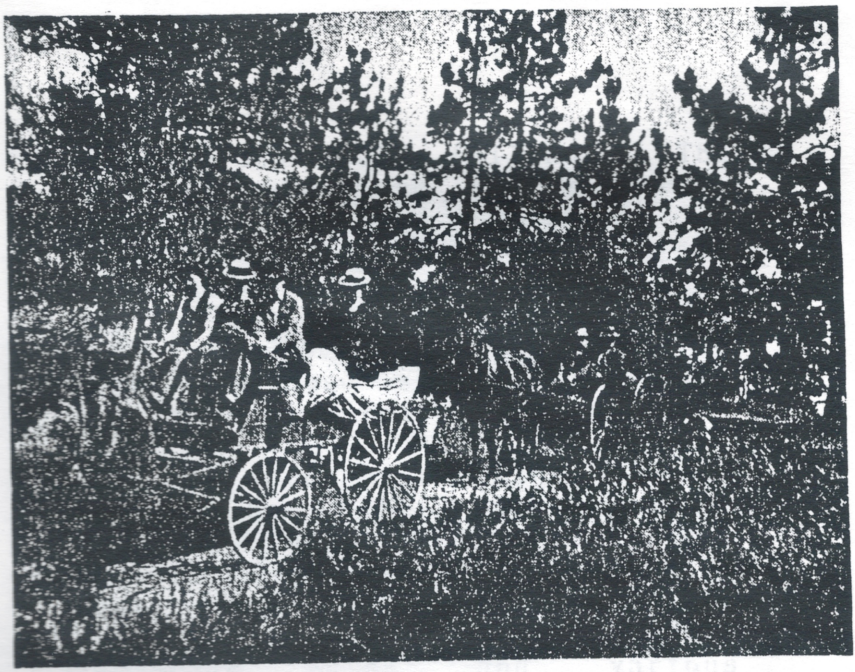
accepted and drove into Tassajara in the early spring of that year, in their horse and buggy.

This was my mother's first trip into Tassajara Hot Springs. She told me that she thought she was coming to the end of the world. The narrow, winding, dusty dirt road was steep and torturous. That alone was frightening, but when she looked down the rugged, wooded

canyons, that seemed to have no bottom in sight, it was almost unbelievable.

Regardless, of being frightened of the wilderness, and rugged terrain, my mother couldn't help but enjoy the beauty of the many species of vegetation. The shrubs that lined the dirt roads consisted of sage, yerba buena, ceanosa, (more commonly known as tick bush), yerba santa, poison oak, bracken ferns and much chaparral. The trees on the roadside and canyons presented a great variety of God's handi-work. These consisted of California laurel, madrone, live oak, scrub oak, manzanita, sycamore and western maple. Nearer the summit, the Jeffry, Coulter and ponderosa pines grew in abundance.

It took my folks three days to make the journey from Watsonville to Tassajara in their horse and buggy. They camped enroute and staked their horse, Topsy, out for the night. Snow was still on the ground at the higher levels. When they reached China Camp, at the summit, they contacted Mrs. Quilty at Tassajara by one line phone hookup. This was done in order to make sure no other team was on its



Tassajara Road near summit.
Emma and Jim Oksen with horse,
Topsy, in second rig. 1900

way out, as the road was too narrow to pass.

If my mother was unnerved traveling over the mountainous roads, thus far, she became even more so after they left the summit. The summit was 5,000 feet above sea level and Tassajara was 1500 feet. Dropping 3,500 feet in ten winding miles was a frightening experience. She grasped the sides of the buggy

thinking she would fall out. The steep hairpin turns were so sharp that the front and hind wheels of the buggy scraped together. At the dead end of this road was Tassajara Hot Springs. It was a relief to my mother when the beautiful sandstone hotel came into sight. My father must have been relieved, also.

As soon as the winter snows melted and the warm weather started, people from Salinas Valley, Pajaro Valley and the entire Monterey Bay area came to Tassajara seeking relief from rheumatic pains and various disorders. However, many came just to enjoy the beauty and solitude of this majestic and remote wilderness. A stage, pulled by four horses, left Salinas twice each week to carry passengers and mail to and from "the Springs". This was only during the summer months.

During these months my father, being a butcher by trade, did the butchering and meat cutting for the hotel. My mother, Emma Oksen, assisted in the dining room and other tasks. Also, they being masseur and masseuse, gave the guests that desired, a massage after their hot baths.

On the opposite side of the creek was a large, concrete bath house. A short distance from there were huge rocks out of which poured steaming, hot water. This water was piped into the bath house to fill a large, square concrete tub. A little further up the creek was a corrugated, steam bath house. The steam rose through a slatted floor. After standing nude in this steam house for a few minutes, one would jump into the cold creek, which was covered by a large tent. Planks served as bridges across the flowing creek.

From another large rock flowed sulphur water. Although the taste of this water was not too palatable, many guests partook of it, thinking it would cleanse their system.

Most guests stayed at the hotel which was two stories high and consisted of about fifty rooms. However, some preferred camping along the edge of the cool, babbling Tassajara Creek. There were rocks and small boulders imbedded in the crystal stream. The banks were lined with various kinds of shade trees and ferns.



Vapor Bath over Tassajara Creek.
Circa 1910

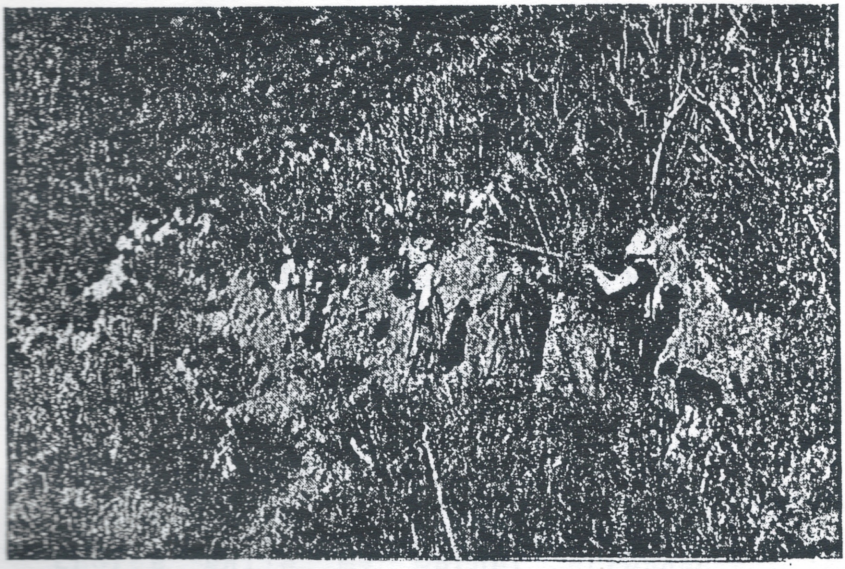


Boiling Sulphur Springs at Tassajara.
Circa 1900

Hiking parties were often formed. Tony's trail, the Narrows, Hog's Buck trail and Bruce's Caves were some of the trails frequently traveled. My parents, with their dog, Skip, often escorted the hikers on these trips. The women wore long sleeve shirt-waists, as they were called in those days, baggy knickerbocker pants or cullottes and boots. On their heads they either wore sun bonnets



Emma and Jim Oksen on way to the Narrows. Circa 1900



Tony's Trail at Tassajara. Last two are Emma and Jim Oksan. 1898

or wide-brimmed hats for protection from the hot sun. The men wore shirts with long sleeves, regular pants and heavy shoes. Usually a cloth, light weight hat was worn on their heads. Most all carried a staff. Rattle snakes have always been plentiful in the hot dry climate. Much of the mountain's sides were covered with chaparral. The trails were narrow and sometimes steep. The shale dirt

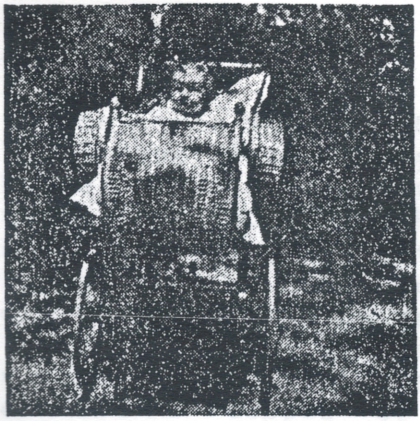
was dangerous so precaution was taken for sure-footing.

The evenings at Tassajara were spent in dancing in the outdoor pavilion, playing the piano and singing in the big, front parlor of the hotel or playing cards and visiting. Everyone seemed happy and enjoyed each other's company. Mrs. Quilty was a most gracious hostess, yet a very austere business woman.

When Tassajara was closed for the winter season, my father took care of the stock and the outdoor chores while my mother attended indoor duties. They remained there for the next eight years with the exception of a month or so, during the winter. When away, they were always happy to return.

It was during April of 1905 that my mother finally became pregnant. She remained at "the Springs" until two months before I was born. She was a very brave lady. Snow covered the mountains and roads. For this reason it took my parents longer to reach Watsonville that November.

I was born on January 15, 1906. Papa stayed in Watsonville



Little "Tassy" (Irma Oksen) in her baby buggy at Tassajara. 1906





Proud Mama and Papa (Emma and Jim Oksen) with little "Tassy." 1906

with us for three months. On April 6, 1906, Papa left early that morning to prepare the hotel for the summer guests. Papa had two starts on that trip. He got as far as Salinas when he discovered he had forgotten his keys to Tassajara Hotel and surrounding buildings. Having to return to Watsonville delayed him a couple of days. After waiting eight years for his bouncing six-pound baby girl, is it any wonder why Papa was forgetful? It must have been difficult to say "good bye" to his loved ones.

In the early morning of April 18, 1906, the terrible San Francisco earthquake struck. Papa thought the world was coming to an end there in Tassajara. Huge boulders and rocks tumbled down the steep mountain sides surrounding the Tassajara basin. It was an experience difficult to describe. Immediately, Papa headed for Watsonville with Topsy, his horse. There was still snow in the mountains which slowed his progress. Each day he drove as far as Topsy could travel. Enroute he heard that Watsonville was "under water". This made my father all the more anxious to reach his little family. It was a very happy reunion as he found his wife and

baby safe. Papa was so grateful to God.

Shortly after the earthquake, when I was three months old, my parents took me to Tassajara to live. It was there that I spent the first few years of my life and acquired the pet name of "Tassy". My mother would wheel me outdoors in my wicker baby buggy. This had a pretty ruffled parasol attached to it for shade. As I grew a little older, I was content to sit outdoors in my buggy, making friends with everyone. They called me "Everybody's Sweetheart".

Is it any wonder that Tassajara Hot Springs holds a very special and dear spot in my heart? It casts a spell upon one that will linger forever.

# PART 2

# CHILDHOOD DAYS AT TASSAJARA

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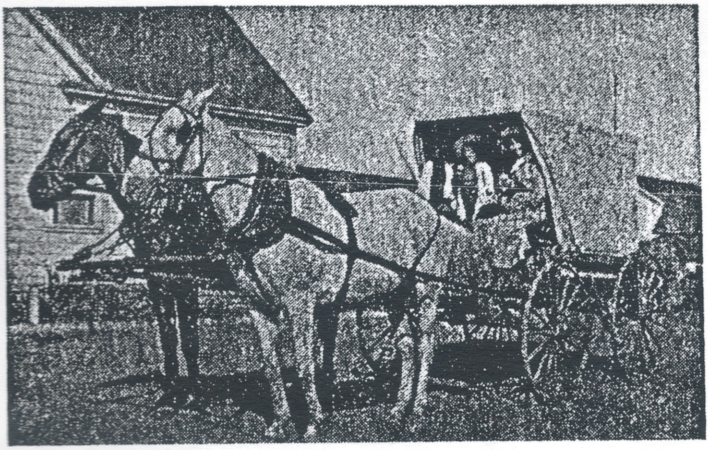
## CHILDHOOD DAYS AT TASSAJARA

My memory of Tassajara Hot Springs goes back as far as I can remember.

When Papa went into the hack business, now called taxi service, we no longer lived at Tassajara throughout the year. However, this did not keep us from enjoying this lovely place, as we visited there each summer for many years to come.

By this time I had two younger brothers, James and Lloyd. They, too, learned to love the Santa Lucia Mountains.

Papa made a small, covered wagon just for these vacation trips. It was drawn by two horses. Of the many horses he had for the hack service, these two were chosen the best for this occasion. On the rear of the wagon sat a wide cupboard. The front panel-door dropped down to serve as a table, enroute. We called this cupboard "our Grub Box". It contained many goodies such as a large variety of canned goods, including an assortment of sardines and potted



Enroute to Tassajara in camp wagon made by Papa. Papa, "Tassy," Lloyd, James and Mama. 1913

meats, cheese, crackers, bread, jams and jellies, home make cookies and cakes and various fruits. Inside of the wagon was a crate of strawberry, orange and root beer soda water. This was an extra treat for us kiddies

As soon as mountain weather permitted, we started on our vacation trip to "the Springs". Our hearts were filled with joy as

we left Watsonville early in the mornings. Mama sat on the seat with Papa while he drove. My two brothers and I rode inside of the wagon. The canvas sides could be rolled up so as not to obstruct our view. We kiddies expressed our joy and happiness by singing various songs, inserting "Tassajara" for names of other places. For example, to the tune of "Tipperary" we would sing:

It's a long way to Tassajara,
It's a long way to go.
It's a long way to Tassajara,
To the dearest spot we know.

On one occasion, we had to cross the Pajaro River over a fill, as the new Pajaro bridge was under construction. Somehow, two live electric wires were left lying across the fill. It was impossible to detect them before the horses came in contact with them. The two horses practically fell down. Papa, being a good horseman, knew just what to do. It was an exciting time for all of us. I'm sure "The Man Upstairs" was on the job, too.

The only route to Tassajara was through Salinas by way of Moss Landing and Castroville. Between

Castroville and Salinas was a huge eucalyptus tree. Due to the hard winds, this tree took on the shape of a large elephant, standing on its hind legs. The trunk hung out over the roadside. We kiddies always watched for the "elephant tree" to come into sight on our trip.

In later years it was found necessary to trim back the trunk hanging over the roadway. I always felt a touch of nostalgia and hurt when seeing the big, old tree after its pruning. It no longer looked like an elephant.

It took us three days to reach Tassajara. Each evening enroute, we erected our white, canvas tent. This was always fun for us kids. Usually we camped at the same place each year as we had to have water for the horses as well as for ourselves. In those days, one could stake the horses out at night, along the edge of the dirt road. There was always plenty of luscious grass for them to eat. We carried barley for the horses in the wagon.

I can still hear the hum of the telephone wires overhead before going to sleep. This was at our

first camp enroute. That hum was like music to my ears -- weird, yet beautiful.

Usually, our first camping stop was at the crossroads on the other side of Chalk Rock Grade, southwest of Salinas. This mountain was well named. As we drove over this grade, the chalky dust flew. If another team was ahead of us, the dust was almost unbearable. We always had chapped faces and lips after that part of our trip. It was a "must" to carry a tube of camphorated ice in our medicine kit. In those days they were not called "first aid kits". Initials and names covered the walls of Chalk Rock Grade.

At various times we met wagons and teams of horses on this grade, going in the opposite direction. Often times the meeting was at a narrow stretch of the road where it was difficult for two teams to pass. If our wagon was on the outer side of the grade, Papa would unhitch the horses from the wagon to let the other team pass. If the other team was on the outer edge of the road, the driver did likewise. The reason for this was understandable. If the horses touched or rubbed against strange

horses while passing, they would balk and kick and could easily upset the wagons. My brothers and I were always happy to leave Chalk Rock Grade behind us. Of course Papa and Mama were accustomed to such practices.

It seemed as the further we went on our journey, the grades became steeper and the dirt roads more winding. We often came upon beautiful deer as we rounded a horseshoe curve. The mountains were full of them and a paradise to hunters. Sometimes bobcats were close by and would startle the horses. Squirrels and birds were plentiful.

There were many cool, flowing creeks to cross. We kids thought it was great fun to have the horses wade through the streams and deposit us on the opposite side. We usually managed to cross a creek at lunchtime. Our lunches sometimes consisted of sardines, cheese, soda crackers, pickles, cookies and fruit. How exceptionally good everything tasted. We always got hungry before lunchtime. Here we had wonderful mountain water to drink. The horses drank their share, too. Papa took time out for us kids to

wade in the cool stream and pick up pretty pebbles. Before leaving, we would fill our canteens. They were empty by the time we found water again. The air was hot and dry and we got very thirsty. However, there were lots of bushes and trees along the roadsides to relieve ourselves. A shovel was always handy.

Our second camp was usually near Jamesburg, alongside of a deep, flowing creek. This was our favorite campsite enroute. As I remember, we never saw other campers there over the many years on our way to Tassajara. Had others known about this beautiful spot, I'm sure we would have had company.

We made the most of our stay at this site. There was a little foot bridge leading from the road across the creek. We three could hardly wait to start fishing. Being late in the day, we often caught enough trout for supper. The trout were very uneducated "away back then". We used bent pins on the end of a string line. Our fishing pole was a branch from a tree which Papa selected. For bait we used bacon pieces. Of course, we kids were the first ones

up in the morning so that we could have fresh trout for breakfast. They were beautiful large fish. The smaller ones Mama fried with their heads on. I sure didn't like their eyes popping out at me, but they were so, so good. (This is no fish story.) We usually hated to leave this beautiful place, with lots of ferns and wild growth around. Nevertheless, we had our hearts set on Tassajara. After a full day's camp at this site, we got an early start the following morning.

A short distance from this camp, at Jamesburg, lived an old blind man. His name was Mr. Hallock. We loved to hear him play his violin. I know he enjoyed playing for us kids, too. To us, his music sounded beautiful. It was a mystery how he could make such lovely music and not be able to see.

Another campsite where we often camped on our second night out was located about six miles further on from Jamesburg. We called it "Blue Trough Camp" as there was an old horse trough painted blue on the side of the road. It was also known as White Oak camp.



"Tassy" at Blue Trough Camp. 1919

Sometimes we would remain at this camp for several days. In fact, one year we made our camp there for the summer. We really enjoyed this site, also. We always pitched our tent under big white

oak trees located in a beautiful meadow full of bracken ferns.

My brothers and I would gather these ferns while my folks made camp. We filled half of the tent, lenghwise, with ferns, about three feet high. They served as our mattress. Mama would make up the beds in one, long row. Of course the ferns would mash down after being slept on, but they made a very comfortable mattress. This is just one incident where we improvised in camping. Papa knew "all the tricks of the trade".

There was no stream close by at this campsite. Being a great outdoorsman, Papa knew just where to dig to locate a spring underground. As I remember, he had to dig down about 2-3 feet before he found water. He lined the hole with rocks that we gathered. In the future, when we camped here enroute, we used the same, cold spring. Of course, it had to be cleaned out each trip. It served as a cooler for us, also. We kept our butter and perishables at the edge of the water, carefully covered so that the wild animals couldn't get to them.

A friend of ours had a ranch about three miles from this camp. He brought us kiddies an old horse to ride. We had so much fun riding up and down the road. In those days, and in those mountains, there was practically no traffic and no one around but us.

Being small, it was rather difficult for us to mount the horse, once we got off. A short distance from camp my two brothers stood on an old fallen log in order to climb onto the horse's back. I happened to be in camp. We heard some terrible shrieks. About that time the horse came galloping into camp with no riders. Not too far behind were my two brothers, running as fast as they could and screaming to the top of their voices. A swarm of yellow jackets was following them. All the boys were wearing were bib overalls. The yellow jackets had crawled inside their overalls and were really giving them a miserable time for molesting their nest in the old log. Mama and Papa rushed the boys into the tent and removed their apparel as fast as possible. Papa applied mud to the afflicted places. The boys learned a lesson never to be forgotten. (Look out

for old logs.) We didn't know that old horse could run so fast.

There were numerous white oak trees in this pretty meadow. We had fun gathering oak balls from the ground, after which we proceeded to have oak-ball fights. They were not injurious as they were very light. I was a real tom-boy, being raised with two brothers, and participated in boys games most of the time. However, Mama showed me how to make dolls out of the oak balls. This, too, was fun.

As I grew older, I enjoyed sitting on the ridge of the mountain, overlooking Bear Trap Canyon. It was fun just to be alone and daydream. This area was noted for its bears as well as other wild animals. It was our last camp before arriving at Tassajara.

As we reached the summit, at Chew's Ridge, the pine trees grew in abundance. They outnumbered the other varieties of trees. It was fun to pick up the pine cones that had fallen to the ground. Most of the cones were practically open and the pine nuts fell out readily. They were so sweet and very good

eating. However, we always managed to get pine pitch on our clothes. This was quite difficult to remove. The nuts that we three gathered were worth the mess.

From "Blue Trough Camp" to the summit at Chew's Ridge Lookout, was only a few miles. A short distance further on we approached "China Camp". Presumably, this area was named during the period when Mr. Quilty brought in Chinese labor, many years before.

As in years past we had to call into the Springs over the one-line phone hookup. No one could take the chance of meeting a team of horses coming out from Tassajara on that narrow, dirt road. If a team was on its way out, we patiently waited until it reached the summit.

From here we started on the decline. Ten steep, winding miles of dirty, dusty, treacherous road. The foliage and trees were beautiful, but how can one enjoy the beauty of this wilderness when you are fearful? It wasn't that we didn't have faith in Papa's dexterity and ability to handle the team and wagon, but we had never encountered such terrain before.

Of course, this all was a new adventure. I could not remember my baby days over this road. I felt like Mama did on her first travel into Tassajara. She became used to it but to me it was always a bit frightening.

About halfway down, we stopped at a watering trough at the side of the road. Here Papa watered the horses and poured water over the hot brakes on the wagon. A drink of cold, spring water, out of the little aluminum folding cup that we always took with us, was welcome to us all.

I do not recall just how long it took us to make the trip from the summit to the Springs, but I do know that we three kids were always happy when we saw the beautiful Tassajara hotel come into sight.

Mrs Quilty greeted us upon our arrival. She was a most wonderful person. We felt as though she was one of our immediate family and we all loved her dearly.

For two years we stayed at the hotel or in one of the cabins. As we kids grew older we chose to camp out. The camp grounds, or camp flats, were located about one-half




James, Lloyd, Papa and "Tassy" in camp at Tassajara. 1913-1914

mile from the hotel. We usually arrived at our "stomping grounds" early enough in the day to make camp before dark. Papa and the boys pitched the tent while Mama and I unpacked the wagon and lined things up for supper. This was always great fun and supper was a most welcome meal.

We always made our camp under one of the large oak trees along

the banks of the Tassajara Creek. We became acquainted with other campers from various places.

Part of the fun of camping was going barefooted. However, the sandy road and paths became extremely hot in midday. The rocks on the sides of the creek were almost unbearable to our tender feet. Wading in the cold stream was a delight. The water was glassy clear and the beautiful pebbles looked like jewels.

Each day we looked forward to the steam bath. In the mornings, the women from the hotel and camps would gather under a big tent that stretched across the creek. The tent had a wooden floor and benches on each side. This is where we disrobed. We then entered a smaller room. Here, we sat on a small bench awaiting our turn to go into the adjoining steam bath house. This room, or house was made of corrugated tin and, as I remember, was about eight feet by eight feet in size. The floor was made of wooden slats, through which the steam from a hot spring emerged. It was said that if an egg was dropped into this hot spring, it would be hard boiled in ten minutes. The steam enveloped

the enclosed room. One could not remain in this steam bath for long as it became very weakening.

From here, we would jump into the icy water of the Tassajara Creek, that was covered by the big tent. It was very invigorating. I would have enjoyed it much more had not a little, black water snake popped up in front of me several times.

The "Hot Bath", located fairly close to the steam baths, was like a small plunge, approximately nine feet square and about four feet deep. The hot water that filled this plunge was piped in from the hot springs in the rocks nearby. There were cement steps leading down into the bath. The walls, of the concrete plunge, and the floor were painted a pretty shade of blue.

When I was small, I could only immerse myself by sitting on the steps as I could not swim. Sometimes I would cling to Mama and she would take me out in the deeper water. Here the bathing limit was about ten to fifteen minutes as the water was very warm. The women occupied this bath in the afternoons and the men in the

mornings. Everyone bathed in the nude.

The two baths were located across the creek from the main road. To reach them, one had to cross a small foot-bridge. Here too, the hot sulphur water was piped out of a large rock. As a child, I could not understand why so many people would drink that terribly, smelly water. This, they claimed, cleansed their system and had a therapeutic reaction. These two baths, the warm sulphur water, and the hot, dry climate along with the solitude of the resort were the principal factors that brought help to many rheumatic sufferers.

Of course, the food was excellent. Stewed prunes for breakfast was a memorable must, to my recollection. The dining room, overlooking the creek, was inviting. A Chinese cook was always on duty. His pies were "super".

During the day, the guests spent many hours playing croquet, horse shoes, fishing, hiking and sitting in the hammock under "Gossip Oaks" visiting and reminiscing. At nighttime, the dance pavilion, located outdoors



"Tassy" on Pat Hayes' lap. 1914

near the dining area, was always full of joyful dancers. Music was furnished by accordionists and various other sources. Tassajara was also a chosen place for honeymooners. Card games were a

delightful pastime in the large reception room of the hotel. This room also housed a piano and phonographs. Just outside this room at the front of the hotel were long benches. Here many of the guests gathered to converse and rest.

A stage, drawn by four horses, carried passengers and mail into Tassajara twice each week. It left Salinas very early in the morning and arrived at "the Springs" late in the afternoon. The drivers were very efficient and the horses were very sure-footed.

The stage would reach Tularcitos ranch about noon. Here the passengers ate lunch prepared for them, while the driver changed horses. Very shortly they were again on their way. The stage, too, had to call into Tassajara from the summit to make sure the road was clear. The drivers always stopped at the watering trough half way down to douse the hot brakes of the stage with cold water. Even though the road was shaded much of the way, the air was dry and torrid during summertime.

When the stage arrived at "the Springs," it stopped directly in

front of the hotel. Here, guests and campers would gather to greet the passengers and receive their mail.

Across from the hotel was a hill with steps cut out of the rock, leading to the top. At the bottom of this hill was a sign which read, "To the Iron Springs". A man with an artificial limp always met the stage, carrying an empty pitcher. He would ferret out the most distinguished looking gentleman from the rest of the passengers. As he approached him, he said, " Will you please go up that hill and bring me a pitcher of water from the Spring?" Before the gentleman knew it he had the pitcher in his hand and could hardly refuse. When the poor fellow returned, he had an empty pitcher and a red face. At the top of that hill he found an old iron bed spring in an old box. This seemed to be the indoctrination ceremony for the new-comers. There were many pranksters and jokers there and Papa was one of them.

Early the following morning the stage left Tassajara, taking passengers and mail back to Salinas, arriving there late in the afternoon. Supplies for the hotel

were brought in by horses and wagon. A man was hired for this job. Below the Club House was the barn where horses and stock were kept.

Whenever an automobile came into Tassajara it seldom made it out under its own power. Very, very few did so as a 70% grade was almost an impossibility to achieve. A man with a team of horses stood by ready to pull cars out. If I remember correctly, his name was Mr. Malcolm. Mrs Quilty would call to him saying, "Go get 'em, Malcolm." Later on, the cars had more horse-power and many could climb the grade. The Fords would steam up readily.

Just past the watering trough, on its way down the grade, a new Dodge car went over a steep cliff. The occupants, a man and two women, survived the fall but the Dodge is still in the canyon, sitting on all four wheels.

Our summer camping days at Tassajara all passed too fast. There were so many things to do, places to go and just having fun. We met many nice campers and spent hours together sharing meals and play. At the entrance of our tent



Oksan camp at Tassajara. "Tassy" to right of yucca plant. Circa 1915

we would always place a beautiful, tall yucca (sometimes called mescal) in a bucket of wet sand. This preserved the lovely ivory colored blossoms which covered most of the stalk. When the waxy flowers wilted, the stalk was cut into two or three inch lengths. These pieces we would decorate and take home to our relatives and friends as pincushion souvenirs. I'm sure that the few yuccas that

we cut and enjoyed from the mountain sides were never missed. The steep terrain was covered with these beautiful, waxy candles.

Often times, when our parents would take us on long hikes, we had to forgo our baths. Mama always fixed a nice lunch to take with us. Sometimes we would hike upstream to the "Narrows", or to Bruce's Cave. Carved on the inner wall of the cave is a large heart bearing the names, "Jim and Emma Oksen, 1904".

Behind our camp was a mountain which we called "Hog's Back". The trail leading over the mountain was steep and quite narrow. For us kids, this was a hot, rugged hike. However, we were rewarded when we reached the other side. Awaiting us was a natural, swimming hole. It felt so good to paddle around in it, even though it was only waist deep. We all had to be alert as rattlesnakes were in abundance, particularly under the hot rocks.

Papa went deer hunting on our vacation trips. He always bagged one or two bucks during the season. When he dressed out a deer, he had a special tree stump that he used for cutting up the meat. The yellow jackets always seemed to



James, Lloyd and "Tassy" on trail to the Narrows. 1914



"Tassy" and her two brothers, Jame. and Lloyd, on Hog's Back Trail. 1914

know when there was fresh meat in camp.

Clad only in a light weight coverall suit, I proceeded to sit down on that tree stump. With a loud yell, I headed for the cold creek. There I sat for about an hour. "Tassy" was more careful where she sat from then on. Papa always had strings of deer jerky hanging on a line, salted. (And peppered, in order to keep the flies and yellow jackets away.) It was so good to eat.

The only illumination we had at night was a kerosene lantern. We very seldom used candles except on our eating table. We thought it great fun when Mama and Papa took us to watch the dances on the pavilion at night, then to walk the half mile back to camp by the light of the kerosene (coal oil) lantern.

One day, while playing in the sand, near a shaded , cold spring, I unearthed a twenty-dollar gold piece with my toes. Did my eyes light up? I took it to Mrs. Quilty and told her where I had found it. She said, "That's yours, Tassy. The fellows 'cut up' down there. They will never miss it." Believe me, I really thought I was rich and

I treasured that twenty-dollar gold piece.

One of our favorite places, and where we kids could often be found, was at the Club House. This big stone building was a short distance from the hotel. Here we spent many of our nickels and pennies. I can still see the glass jars of beautiful, colored, stick candy. Also, the many varieties of flavored suckers. If we were "flushed," we bought a bottle of cold soda water (soda pop) for five cents.

I can remember a big painting of the Indian Chief's head on a huge rock. This was just a short distance up the road from the hotel. My father pointed it out to us many times as we passed it on our way home from the Springs. It was right next to the road on the right hand side.

When we vacationed at Tassajara in later years, we had the camp grounds to ourselves. Mrs. Quilty barred all camping except to us. We camped there for two more years.

In 1914, two beautiful Cadillac stages, with brass

cylinders, brought passengers and mail to Tassajara daily. They left the Jeffery Hotel, in Salinas in the morning and arrived at the Springs at four P.M. For years these two stages were driven by Ira Bailey and Mr. Coffee. They alternated days. While driving over the mountainous roads, they allowed no one to talk with them. They could not take their eyes off of the road for a second. It took good vision and concentration.

The arrival of these stages received the same reception as the horse-drawn stages. It was the highlight of the day. Everyone dressed up for the occasion. All were eager to receive their mail. Of course, the man with the empty pitcher was always there to play the "Iron Spring" joke on one of the passengers. I do not know just how long the old iron bed spring lasted but it furnished lots of laughs and embarrassment.

My last childhood trip to my beloved Tassajara Hot Springs was in the summer of 1921. I was then fifteen years old. My father did not make this trip with us as he was busy. My Mother, two brothers and I boarded the stage at Salinas. How different it was from the many

times we traveled over that road in our little covered wagon and team of horses.

On this visit to the Springs we stayed in a cabin. It was located on the left side of the road, a short distance before coming to the hotel.

Although we had not been to Tassajara for several years, everything was the same as on our last visit. It must have been a wave of nostalgia that hit me as I felt the joy and happiness of all the past years more multiplied.

I enjoyed sitting in the hammock under the two "Gossip Oaks". The moonlight seemed brighter than in years past. Could it be so because I was enjoying the evening with a sixteen year old boy from Salinas?

While writing this, it is so interesting to relive the experiences and memories of my early childhood. Deep in my heart, I am very grateful to my dear parents for giving me and showing me the love and appreciation of nature. This, I truly believe, has been passed on to my children and grandchildren. Hopefully, my great

grandchildren can enjoy the beauty and feeling of the wilderness and the great outdoors as I have in years past.

Although it has been sixty-four years since I made my last trip to Tassajara with my dear parents, to me it seems only yesterday. These beautiful memories are embedded deeply in my heart and mind.

"The rocks, the trees, the wind and the blue canopy of the sky, on the top of a mountain, provides faith and refreshment for the spirit."

# PART 3

## A TASSAJARA DREAM COME TRUE

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June 6, 1980

For some reason, I thought that I would never again visit beautiful Tassajara Hot Springs. During the past fifty-nine years my life was very full and busy. The years passed quickly.

My last trip to "the Springs," in 1921, was a most memorable and exciting occasion. The memory of the dusty, winding roads and the steep, mountainous and deep canyons -- beautiful but treacherous -- still haunted me.

While talking to my daughter-in-law, Donna, one morning, I made the remark that my fondest desire was to again visit Tassajara, where I spent many of my childhood years. When my son, Ron, came home for lunch that day, Donna told him of my remark. He immediately phoned Tassajara and made reservations for four for a day's visit the following week, June 6, 1979. "The Springs" is now

owned and operated by the Zen Buddhist Center.

To make this trip to Tassajara and home again in one day sounded almost impossible to me. I could visualize the roads and terrain as in years past. I'll have to admit that I was somewhat reluctant to go. However, I felt that my son knew the roads well as he and Donna had been to "the Springs" several times recently.

At 8:00 A.M. that Wednesday morning, Donna, Ron, my husband, Ted, and I were on our way in Ron's new Mustang car. We had packed a picnic lunch to take with us as we did not know where we would be in the Santa Lucias at lunch time. We had several places in which to linger, enroute.

Strange as it may seem, I did not recognize the old Chalk-Rock Grade. We were almost on the other side before I realized it was the old chalky, dusty grade that gave us chapped faces and lips. The road was wide and paved. many sharp turns seemed to be gone. I believe the true name for it is Laureles Grade.

Enroute, I pointed out the various spots that I could remember. Places where we had camped with our little, covered, camp wagon and team of horses, on our way to Tassajara, many years ago. It took us three days to make that trip from Watsonville.

About 9:45 we stopped at a little store, on the side of the road, to get a cold drink. When I was told that this was Jamesburg, I could hardly believe it. How did we get so far so fast? From Jamesburg on to "the Springs" the road was a graded dirt road. The present dirt road was more like a highway compared to the road that I remembered.

I pointed out Frank Bruce's old homestead site, just a few miles from Jamesburg. The old house, cabin and barn were gone. A short distance up the canyon we stopped at one of our old campsites that we called "Blue Trough". At one time there was a faded, old blue watering trough on the side of the road. Across the road was a beautiful meadow with many white oaks, laurel and pine trees and an abundance of bracken ferns. I tried to point out the spot where many times we had pitched our tent.

Also, where my father had dug out the spring for water each year. I knew it was under a grove of oaks. I can still remember how refreshing and good that cold, spring water tasted. However, I failed to locate the area. The years had make changes.

This meadow, or flat, is now called "White Oaks Camp". Two outhouses were on this location. They were riddled with bullet holes as were the metal toilets. One door was lying on the ground and the other was hanging by one hinge. The water tank, built in later years, was also vandalized. The beauty of the surrounding hills and mountains had changed but little. This area was not ravaged badly by the 1977 forest fire as was the other side of the mountain. The deep Bear Trap Canyon still held its awe for me.

Gradually, the road started a descent. After leaving Chew's Ridge we were soon at China Camp. We no longer had to contact the Springs by phone from here, as in years past. Now the road became steeper and more winding. Down, down and around switchback curves we drove. It was treacherous but not like the one way road I

remembered. At least now two cars could pass at certain places.

On this side of the mountain, the big fire of 1977 had taken its toll of various kinds of beautiful trees and vegetation. Some chaparral, wild lilac, sage and yerba buena had managed to grow back through the cinders. It was sad to see the destruction of the one-time beautiful terrain. Some yucca plants, in blossom, were growing out of shale rock on the mountain sides. These tall "Candles of the Lord," as they are called, brought back fond memories.

About halfway down from the summit we could see our road ahead in the distance, winding far below us. It was hard for me to realize that the last time I had been over this steep, narrow road, very few cars had driven into Tassajara. Most of the ones that did so had to be towed out by a team of horses.

After ten miles of steep descent, we reached the Tassajara parking area. Here was an attractive, wooden sign reading "Tassajara Zen Buddhist Center". It was in this area that I remembered the cabins, on the left

side of the road, where we stayed in 1921.

As we entered the gate to the Center, we registered. The fee per person for the day was $5.00. This did not include meals but the privilege to use the baths, pool, etc. Here, I made the remark that my mother and father were masseur and masseuse at the Springs around the turn of the century. Also, that Tassajara was my childhood home some seventy years ago.

We crossed a small footbridge over a little stream. As we approached the area where once stood the beautiful, two-story sandstone hotel I experienced a heart-felt sadness. This hotel was burned down completely in 1933. As I remember, it was quite a long building, made entirely of fairly large sandstone blocks. To me, it was the most beautiful structure that I had ever seen. I'll have to admit that I cried a little inside knowing that the lovely hotel of my childhood was gone forever. All that remained was the high sandstone steps that had led up to the entrance of the hotel, and the beautiful three-foot sandstone walls that surrounded the hotel. It was on this wall that I had my

picture taken, sitting on the lap of Pat Hayes (old timer at the Springs) at the age of three months and again at the age of eight years. On this visit, I had my picture taken alone, sitting on the memorable steps. They still retain their beauty.

When the Tassajara Hotel burned down, other buildings were also destroyed. The one building that was not damaged by fire was the Club House, near the creek. That is the place where my brothers and I use to buy our "goodies" when we were kids. Some said that the hotel fire started in a garbage container from spontaneous combustion. Others thought it was caused by boys playing with matches. Whichever, it was devastating and sad.

The two old "Gossip Oaks", with the hammock hanging between them, were gone, apparently burned in the fire. Also the old wooden sign, "To The Iron Springs," had vanished. There were many changes over the years.

We walked down towards the creek to a patio-like structure. This contained tables and chairs. I believe it was called a zendo.

Here we were served coffee or tea. This was a welcome refreshment.

Not being able to walk a far distance, my thoughtful Donna rented a wheel chair for me. This was a delightful experience as now I could cover more ground with someone else doing the foot work. My son, Ron, maneuvered the wheel chair while Donna and Ted followed.

We wandered down a lovely, shaded foot path. The Buddhists had planted a large vegetable garden on one side of this pathway. Also, a pretty flower garden and various herbs. A gentle spray of water saturated the plants. Many ferns enhanced the setting. On the other side of the path was a row of cabins. This was where the students lived. Along this pathway was a swimming pool which looked most inviting. Several people were sunning themselves on the walkway surrounding the pool. This was built by Grant Stewart, from Watsonville. Everything in this area was new to me. However, I expected to see many changes.

It was now lunch time. The students and guests gathered around picnic tables where their luncheon was served. We wandered around

until the tables were vacated. By that time we were quite hungry. We spread our tablecloth and lunch out on one of the tables. To me, it tasted so good. I almost had to pinch myself to realize that I was again eating at Tassajara. However, the rest seemed to enjoy the food, also. We all devoured it with gusto.

A young student named John Nelson accosted us at the table. He introduced himself and then said, "I understand that one of you ladies lived here at Tassajara many years ago." Of course he knew it wasn't Donna. From then on they really laid out the "red carpet" for us. I felt like "Queen for a Day". Mr Nelson brought books, pictures and clippings to our table from various buildings. We spent quite some time looking and conversing over old time memorabilia from Tassajara. One of the head Buddhists, head shaved and long robe, came to chat with us. Mr Nelson took us for a tour of the buildings, (all built since my last visit to the Springs), and introduced us to many of the students. Also a tour of the kitchen where student help was working on dinner. I took Mr. Nelson's arm while Ron wheeled the

empty chair and Donna and Ted brought up the rear. It all seemed like a dream.

After our visits and tour, Donna and I decided to have a hot bath. A Chinese carved bridge spanned the creek. The bath houses were on the other side. Before we crossed the bridge we had to remove our shoes and leave them at the entrance. We really enjoyed our hot bath, (in the plunge, as it was called years ago). To my amazement it was exactly as I remembered it in years past, with the exception that it now had a metal hand rail leading into the water, alongside of the steps. The walls were painted a more vivid blue than before. A shower had been installed for an after bath rinse.

When the bath house was rebuilt or renovated, a second bath was built for the men. They no longer had to alternate hours with the women bathers. On the wall, by the entrance of the men's bath, a plaque was hung bearing the legend of Tassajara and a painting of the Chief.

Leaving the plunge, we headed for the steam baths. Although the weather was fairly cool for June,

the concrete steps and walk leading to the steam bath house was so hot that we couldn't walk on it with our bare feet. We laid our towels down to walk on them. Even so, we just couldn't make it. This heat on the cement was caused from the hot spring water flowing out of the huge rocks and over the concrete. I was sorry that I couldn't at least peek into the steam bath house. From the outside it looked as though it was somewhat changed from years past.

After our refreshing bath and cold shower, we all wandered down the road to my old campgrounds. Apparently, this area had not been used frequently by foot or vehicle as it was overgrown with weeds and had many chuck-holes in the so-called road. The old oak trees looked as though Father Time had taken his toll with them over the years.

I recognized the little mountain which we called "Hog's Back" and wished that I could now climb the trail (if there was one) over the top and down to the little pool on the other side. I couldn't but feel a little sad thinking of the yesteryears.



Tassajara Creek. Circa 1900

About there, under those old trees, was where we use to pitch our tent each year. The old Tassajara creek, close by, babbled on its way with a distant murmur of its flow over the pebbles and rocks.

Time now for us to head back to our car and our return home. As we left the Center many bade us good bye and asked us to return

again. They were all so kind. We took several loaves of their delicious bread home with us.

On our way up the grade, a short distance from the Springs, we looked for the head of the Indian Chief painted on a huge rock on the side of the road. I can plainly remember seeing it from our camp wagon as we drove past. However, a little way from the road was a painting of the Chief's sister's head on a large rock. To locate it, we had to get out of the car. This was definitely not the same location nor the same big rock. Possible the huge rock on which the chief's head had been painted had been removed when the road was widened. This painting was facing north. As I remember, the Chief's head was facing the opposite direction.

As the sun set over the Santa Lucia mountains on our way home, I drank in the beauty of what remained from the 1977 forest fire. It destroyed two thousand acres of trees and shrubs, many acres of which surrounded the Tassajara Zen Center. First it was called the Marble Cone Fire as it apparently started in the Marble Peak and Cone

Peak areas. These areas I knew well.

Fortunately, the Zen students and fire fighters managed to save the Tassajara buildings.

This terrible fire left devastating results, as the protective and much needed watershed was destroyed. The following year the heavy rains took their toll in the lovely Tassajara basin.

The Tassajara Zen Buddhist Center opened in July, 1966. It became a place for intensive Zen training but not a retreat from the world. It differs from other Centers as women are welcome as well as men.

The daily life of a Zen follower is sacred. About three years is the average stay of a student at Tassajara. When they leave, they feel rewarded in many ways. They also have learned the art to eat in a satisfying and simple manner.

The Zen Center has one hundred rooms. Forty of these are for guests and sixty for students.

Sometimes they rotate these numbers.

In 1914 the cost to stay at the hotel in Tassajara was eighteen dollars per week. That included meals, baths and all. As of this date at the Zen Center it costs $35.00 per day on weekdays and $50.00 per day on Saturdays and Sundays, for guests. They have stone rooms and pine rooms, all with patios on the creek side.

Tassajara Hot Springs has been visited by many for hundreds of years. It casts a magic spell upon one that lingers forever.

There are many changes from the Tassajara that I remember of old, but God's creation will never change. The hills and mountains surrounding this magnetic place are just as I remember them from my early childhood.

In the Springtime the wild flowers and green carpets adorn the landscape, which turns to golden tan in the Fall. Although I was too young to remember the winters at Tassajara, I can visualize the beauty of the snow covered mountains by the pictures that my

loving parents imbedded in my memory.

I shall always be grateful to Ron and Donna for this wonderful trip and enchanting visit to my beautiful Tassajara. It was a dream fulfilled.

Irma Rose "Mimi" Reaves
("Tassy" Oksen)

Cover photo:
Sandstone hotel at Tassajara Hot Springs
(Destroyed by fire in 1933) Circa 1898