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PHONE 332-1591

Feb. 28, 1968

Mr. Sessions S. Wheeler  
Conservation of Natural Resources Dept.,  
University of Nevada  
Reno, Nev.

Dear Mr. Wheeler:

When a friend of mine sent me your Desert Lake book I was most happy to get it and even more so when I turned to the pictures opposite page 85 and saw my mother and father. They were attributed as part of Maggie and Jim Sutcliffe's family, but that is not so. We were not related. My father, the one with the cigar, was C.H. Smith, sportsman, gambler, showman of Los Angeles and San Francisco. My father and mother spent much time at the lake before I was born and I believe Nettie Cooper once told me (Maggie and Jim's daughter) who died several years ago in Sparks that my father had some early money in Sutcliffe. However, when I was about 4 my father kidnapped me from a hotel near Glendale, Calif where my mother, who had separated from him, was living, ~~she~~ spirited me to Pyramid. However, covering his trail, he had a friend send phoney cards from Europe for a while--then silence.

My mother, barely more than a girl at the time, was working for the Los Angeles DA's office and the story had been much in the press as my father just seemed to drop out of sight. About a year later, a judge's daughter, driving through Sutcliffe's saw a group of Indian children, one of which, while dark as the others, didn't look too Indian. It was me. She determined this then drove to the nearest telegraph office and wired my mother. Within days my mother and a cadre of LA police were up there. My father was out on the lake and thinking it was the game warden (Indian agent) dumped all his catch back in the Lake. There was quite a bit of feeling against my father by the Indians as he always seemed able to catch fish, even when they couldn't. And for them, it was their food.

Anyway, I was restored to my mother's arms and we set up housekeeping in the old Reno jail until she could get her divorce. The court awarded my mother custody but I was to spend part of each summer with my father. Until I was 13 they were all spent at the Lake, most of the time in the company of Nettie Cooper and her husband Charlie, who more or less cared for me. (6 weeks)

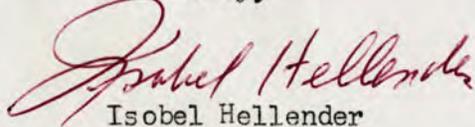
The cast of characters is large and the scenes still vivid in my mind--the time some Indians grabbed me and threatened to kill me if my father didn't stop catching fish. The chief was standing there, a knife at my throat, when the agent fortuitously came by---helping with the Sunday dinner serving and waiting on FRD and Mrs. Roosevelt--long before, of course, he became president. ~~xxx~~ Years later, a Sutcliffe niece joined the Red Cross and was in the South Pacific when Mrs. R made her famous junket there during WWII. Standing in the reception line to greet Mrs. Roosevelt was the niece with the other staff members of the club. Mrs. Roosevelt stopped did a double take then said quickly. "We're a long way from Pyramid Lake, aren't we?"

There were the trip<sup>s</sup> to the Pyramids, the roundups at Circle S, hunting rabbits for the police dogs for a large dog farm up near Round Hole. There were horseback trips to Nixon, cat-fish fries on the Truckee, all -night dances at a school house miles away where us kids would be put to bed on auto seats circling the floor. There were nights when we tried to catch the skunks in the turkey house, bloody fights between the Mexican road workers and the Indians, <sup>Set notes)</sup> spilling a bottle of coyote bait all over the farmhouse floor, nursing back to health a lamb that had been thrown out of a cattle train for dead--the dogs, old deaf Polly and big black Collie owned by Pepe the Greek. Farm food, plenty of it, churning butter, making break, milking cows, gathering eggs--all delights for an essentially city girl who looked forward to her summers on a desert farm.

<sup>(Snap-shot)</sup> The picture that brought all this on was given to the folks <sup>who</sup> ~~that~~ now run the place on the lake, by me several years ago when I came up, hoping to see Nettie Cooper once more before she died. She had been almost ~~totally~~ blind when I'd stopped by several years prior to that--and well into her 80's. But I was too late. She had passed on several weeks before I arrived but I couldn't leave without a sentimental journey to Pyramid. And, of course, once there, I couldn't resist sharing a bit of nostalgia with anyone who would listen to me. The Hellmans did and later I sent them a picture --one of many ~~photos~~ I found in my father's things when his last wife died several years ago in Brookings, Ore.

I hope I haven't bored you, but the picture brought back so many memories. Pyramid Lake has always been a sort of secret word in my life. Out in Manila I married a man, one time, knowing little more about him than he'd been stationed there during the war when it was a bomber base. <sup>Year</sup> book was sent me by a young photographer friend of mine, Jim Milton, who did many jobs for me and now lives in Reno. Our professional basis ended and friendship began when he uttered the word<sup>s</sup> shortly after I met him and when he still lived down here, "Pyramid Lake."

Sincerely,

  
Isobel Hellender