



Neighborhoods

SAYING GOODBYE

By Duncan Forgey

Like Calico and Bodie before it, Crystal Cove now joins that unique fraternity of communities that have become ghost towns. A foster child of the State of California, the older section of Crystal Cove consists of miles of flat beach, with a verdant slope approximately 100 yards in depth. Upon this gentle plateau sit 45 original cottages approximately 80 years old. Built for basic shelter and without codes, the shanties are rudimentary at best, held together by "magic, dreams and sacrifice," say the locals.

Personal and intimate names like Critterville, Hide Ho, and The Whistle Stop adorn mailboxes in the shape of mermaids, crabs and dolphins. The cottages are painted an assortment of primary colors. This is a stark contrast to the new "McMansions," built on the hill-sides of the Newport Coast, painted in monotonous.

Crystal Cove's pristine sand beaches, with granite boulders scattered like marshmallows on a cake top, are home to specters of Native Americans. Along the bluff top are the shadows of squatters, movie stars, rumrunners and Japanese farmers who frequented the cove in the last century. These ancient spirits are now united with the souls of the recently removed tenants of these unique and wonderful cottages. On July 8, 2001, a state government with no idea what they are going to do with Crystal Cove, removed the residents.

In 1837 Rancho San Joaquin, a 47,000-acre ranch, was granted to Juan Jose Sepulveda. He sold the cattle ranch to James Irvine, Benjamin Flint and Llewellyn Bixby for \$18,000 in 1864 to satisfy his debts. Irvine eventually bought out his partners who were investing and buying land to the north.

Crystal Cove was considered useless because it was unfit for the commercially important aspects of farming and ranching. The beach

was best suited for a recreational area enjoyed by the Irvines, their friends and employees. Eventually, it became a campground accessible by overland dirt roads. The building of the Pacific Coast Highway opened up Crystal Cove to the public. For a fee tourists could spend a relaxing week at the beach. Fortunate families set up elaborate tents on designated lots. Soon, a neighborhood was born. In 1920, a schooner carrying lumber and building materials went aground near Crystal Cove. Opportunistic locals, seeing lumber floating up to their beach, built small homes on their lots. Cottages and thatched huts built with board and batten single-wall construction sprung up along the bluff. Today, most of the cottages are the originals.

Since those early times, Crystal Cove has been home to lucky families that have grown up and passed it along to subsequent generations. One such fortunate clan was that of A. G. "Bud" Carter. While walking among the flotsam and jetsam scattered across the beach, Bud reminisced about his days in Crystal Cove. He talked of four generations of Carters that have frequented Crystal Cove.

Bud's family purchased the rights to their "home" in 1939 for \$750. For 62 years the Carter family spent childhoods, adolescent years, parenting and grandparenting time in this unique setting. There are 45 different stories like the Carters'. Each cottage has its own individual history reflecting the family that has lived in it. Some cottages have remained in the same family for five generations.

In 1979, the Irvine Company sold the Cove and surrounding lands to the State of California for \$32.6 million. This gave the Irvine Company a green light for building in the Newport Coast while putting the "tenants" of Crystal Cove on notice that they would someday be moving out.

July 8, 2001 marked an emotional end to Crystal Cove as a residential neighborhood. The final use for the property is still up in the air. It was scheduled to become an upgraded bed and breakfast style resort. When this fell through, the options narrowed. It was suggested

that the cottages be torn down, or restored for use by the state. Other investors were pursued, but to no avail. The recently removed residents asked for an additional stay but it was not to be. Today, the cottages sit abandoned.

Crystal Cove is noted for its wildlife as well, including migrating gray whales that spout greetings to the residents a shoal of dolphins that frequents its waters. For years the dolphins frolicked as if on stage. Beachcombers and residents spent many an hour watching the group. In the last few weeks, the dolphins have been less energetic and less frequent. It is as if they are mourning the loss of an old friend.

