

Aptos

Cabr

Then or now—happiness is being in Aptos

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The question most frequently put to me by readers of this column and by the delightful young people sent to interview me by their high school and college teachers is: Did I like the Aptos of my childhood better than I like present-day Aptos?

I am asked if I'm sorry the countryside has changed.

I usually avoid answering the question, because it has no direct, simple answer. But I realized that I could answer it when, a few days ago, Lucille Aldrich at a planning session for the Aptos

Fourth of July celebration showed motion pictures of former celebrations.

In one parade a float appeared that was just a small truck, crowded with smiling youngsters under a banner proclaiming "Happiness is APTOS." I realized that I agreed with them now and I would have agreed with them in 1915.

Of course, I am saddened by many of the changes, but I realize that they are as inevitable as my own whitening hair and waning energies. Passing the fire house I feel a pang of regret that the

hospitable Freitas house has vanished and with it the neat little orchard that surrounded it. The sprawl of Seacliff is a poor substitute for the rich, deep green sweep of artichoke fields that it replaces. I no longer anticipate with joy the opening of trout season, when, in a pair of old boots, I would greet the dawn at the dam on the old Loma Prieta millpond and work my way downstream to the Aptos bridge, getting a basketful of trout along the way with a black hook tied to a bit of green line on a willow stick.

There are too many strangers along the stream now who would resent my trespassing on their land. I can hardly suppress my resentment at the highway department for cutting through Dad's carefully - preserved giant oaks that shaded our childhood dramatizations of "Hawkshaw the Detective," and other long - vanished comic strips. And the great, low-sweeping limbs of those oaks became the library where I could recline for long, warm afternoons of reading.

Aptos Village seems asleep without the chugging and bell-

ringing steam locomotives shunting cars of lumber and apples and cattle about the maze of sidetracks. I miss the space, the freedom in which I moved as a child and the social intimacy that made one family of all the people for miles around.

But when I consider my life as a retiree, I confess that I have no complaints about the Aptos that is.

It's good to know that all my needs can be satisfied in local stores and by neighboring tradesmen, that in an emergency I won't have to wait for a doctor

to come from Santa Cruz or Watsonville, that there is a modern fire department within easy call, and that, winter or summer, I can drive about the countryside without miring down or spinning my wheels helplessly in deep sand.

I forget the artichoke fields when I see happy groups emerge from Seacliff bungalows and motels and rush laughing to the beach. The air is clean, the climate is salubrious, flowers still grow without much coaxing. Life is intensely interesting.

Happiness is Aptos!