

First Person: The Ormonde Family and the Holy Ghost Festival

—Rose Ormonde, May 2021

The Holy Ghost Festival or Chamarita has been a part of my life since I was a small child. Some of my first childhood memories are of this annual Portuguese festival because my Dad, Ken Ormonde, was such an active member and officer of the local I.D.E.S. Society. He joined the I.D.E.S. as a young man just back from the Pacific theater in World War II. He served as President in 1973 and 1974 and later in 2003.

My Dad passed in 2014, but he left me a treasured legacy that is so precious to me now... His love and pride for his Portuguese heritage and the importance of contributing to your community.

When I was growing up in the 60's, Chamarita weekend was the biggest event of the year for Half Moon Bay. I remember the excitement of the Monday or Tuesday before the festival when the carnival would come into town and we would watch them set up the huge Ferris Wheel, various rides and all the arcade games in preparation for a Friday night that seemed magical...the lights of the Ferris Wheel, the delicious smell in the air of the Chamarita meat cooking for hours in the cookhouse, the first taste of pink popcorn or that wonderful cherry snow-cone. My Dad took me on my first Ferris Wheel ride and I remember the exhilaration of sitting with him quietly at the top of the wheel on a Friday night and seeing the whole town from up above...he would point out our house, my Grandmother's house, the school yard...it was quite a thrill for a 5 year old kid!

In 1967, I was honored to be chosen as Little Queen. I remember being excited, although I didn't really understand what I was supposed to do. My cousin remembers that I kept asking my Dad if I had to talk or say something...I was painfully shy and was worried I would have to give a speech! My parents assured me all I had to do was march down Main Street in a pretty dress that my aunt sewed for me. I remember her stitching the rows and rows of lace on that dress. The cape was hand made too and it was my favorite shade of pink.



Rose, Little Queen of 1967, with her parents Ken and Lina

Every Summer I would travel with my parents for weekend Festas in other cities... Tracy, Newark, Mountain View and of course Pescadero were always on the itinerary. I remember the parade in Tracy was always in June usually in 90 degree weather... we would leave early in the morning just in time to get there to march in the hot sun.

As I grew older, I understood that the Holy Ghost Festival was more than a carnival or a colorful parade...it was to honor a centuries old tradition giving thanks to the Holy Ghost for saving the people of the Azore Islands after a drought and famine and honoring Queen Isabel. I would follow my Dad into the Capella every Sunday after the parade and lunch in the hall and he would give me a dollar or two so I could make a donation to the crown.

My Mom, who is 91 now, remembers her mother taking her to see the crown on Pentecost Sunday in the 1930's during the Depression. Even with what little they had then, my Mom always was given a few pennies to leave as a small offering for Queen Isabella.

Our house was a whirlwind of activity from about April to late May, early June depending on what weekend the Pentecost Sunday happened to be that year.

My Dad loved all the preparation for the festival...He spent time on the phone ordering supplies, collecting donations from local businesses and various people in the community and in the weeks leading up to the festival, there was always work to do at the I.D.E.S. grounds. If someone stopped by looking for him, I remember my Mother always saying, "Did you check up at the Hall?"

It was a true brotherhood of members and for us a family affair. My uncle Bob Valladao, who was the I.D.E.S. Secretary for many years, was just as dedicated as my Dad. All the officers and members then, just as they are today, enjoyed working tirelessly to make each celebration a success.

When my Dad would come home and say "the flags for the parade are up" then I knew Chamarita was just around the corner. My Mom would work Festival weekend with my Dad...her post was usually as part of the linguica-stand crew making sandwiches from Friday night to Monday afternoon.

I would always be impressed when reporters for the Half Moon Bay Review would call through the years hoping my Dad would give them a new "angle" for that year's festival article. He was comfortable speaking to anyone about the history and lore of the Holy Ghost Festival and loved talking to whoever inquired about the early days or the future of the organization. I think one of his biggest thrills was being interviewed by Huell Howser for a PBS episode of "California Road Trip."



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