

THE NEXT PRINCE

A Kingvale Cabin Celebrates its Timeless Legacy



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VINTAGE PHOTOS FROM THE DAVID FAMILY COLLECTION
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The lessons we learn as children stick with us forever. They are the sweet indelible bits of wisdom that first give us a sense of who we are. They linger in our hearts and shine a light on the place where we began.

I remember Tahoe from a young boy's perspective. My grandfather built a cabin there in 1939, in a hamlet called Kingvale, high in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, just off the original wagon train route to the California gold rush.

Mornings at the cabin were a feast for the senses: a fire snapping in the hearth; finches singing in the eastern light; the gurgle of water rushing past us down the South Fork of the Yuba River; the scent of bacon frying in Grandma's pan; and the mustiness of a wooden structure that had spent

half its life hibernating under yards of snow.



1940. Dad and Grandma at the new Cabin.

My brother and I enjoyed terrific boyhood adventures there, as had our dad a generation before... spectacular summer-long explorations of the simplest variety, trampling through the dusty soil, kicking up "smoke signals" to alert the chipmunks and scare off the coyotes.

"The goal of a mountain hike," Grandpa would say, "is to admire the beauty that can be found at any point along the way. Stop along the trail to appreciate what you see. And don't go so far that you can't find your way back."

The knots in the cabin's pine paneling were like a million pairs of eyes, watching over my family and winking at the handsome mounted buck above the mantle. Most everything in the place was of Grandpa's design and built with his own hands, including the rustic tables, benches and stools. Grandma decorated the kitchen with gingham curtains and a printed wall hanging that featured a recipe for "Crepes Suzettes", which nobody ever bothered to make.

When we moved to Connecticut in the late 1960s, Grandpa sold the cabin along with everything inside. My family never looked

back and none of us ever set foot in Kingvale again. Until one day... nearly five decades later.

Jasper was eight years old the morning we met, almost fifty years my junior and exactly the age I had been when I last set foot in this place. He came bounding around Grandpa's cabin and introduced himself with a sense of confidence normally reserved for someone who had lived longer.

The intense May sun was busy working its magic, melting the last few lingering snowbanks in a hurry. I knew there were treasures in Jasper's pockets, even before he showed them to me. Bullet shells. His kind eyes and easy smile indicated he'd been anticipating my arrival. And he got right down to business by inviting me inside the cabin to have a look around.



1960. My grandparents introducing me to the Cabin.

I took a deep breath. I had prepared for this moment. I'd studied my family's photos, picked my parents' brains and memorized every detail. I'd even dared to hope... that finding my way back to Grandpa's cabin

might somehow re-connect me to a certain feeling I'd known there as a child.

Following Jasper through the open door, I was met by a warm rush of distant memories. All at once everything in the cabin rose up to greet me. Grandpa's pine furniture invited me to sit; my pal the buck above the mantle nodded in recognition; Grandma's gingham curtains waved from the kitchen window; and every last pine knot blinked hello.



1961. The mounted buck wearing Grandpa's hat.

The physical details of the cabin were incredibly well-preserved, almost as if the clock had spun back a half-century and my grandparents had never left. I exhaled and distinctly felt their presence.

It occurred to me that each object in this carefully curated collection (from the fireplace tongs to the roasting pan) carried the energy of every person who had touched it along the way. Years and layers of rich patina, all joyously resonating in perfect harmony. Even the kitchen wall hanging chimed in, taking the opportunity to suggest we celebrate the occasion by concocting a platter of fancy crepes.

The progression of my dad's boyhood growth was still charted on the kitchen doorjamb, inspiring Jasper, and legions of

children in between, to do the same. If only the walls could speak, they might explain the passage of so much time in a space where no one had ever paid attention to the clock.

Jasper's grownups welcomed me and we sat at Grandpa's table where I shared my family's stories and cabin-era pictures. Jasper listened thoughtfully, wrapping his strongly focused mind around the history, the images and the people.

When Jasper's papa offered to mark my height on the doorjamb, he reminded me that it should be done without cheating. At fifty-seven, I was likely the most senior child in the history of Kingvale to remove his shoes and rise to that humbling challenge.

My mark landed directly in line with one from 1945, written in the steady hand of a sixteen-year-old boy who would later become my father.

The walls, it seemed, had a message after all.

We stepped outside, where Jasper acquainted me with his three dogs and proposed we take a short hike to the river. He suited himself up in a tattered safari helmet that looked vaguely familiar, and offered me an enormous sombrero from his impressive assortment of vintage straw hats. The crown of the sombrero was embroidered with an upside-down horseshoe. I recognized it from my family photos... the same "lucky" hat my dad had worn fishing one day in 1949.

Jasper was deep in thought again, clearly on a mission to connect the historical dots in his head with mine. He asked if I remembered this object; who made that thing; and what on earth could be the purpose of the mysterious wooden frame in the yard,

covered with chicken wire.

The dogs bounded around us, tails held high, sensing the importance of our expedition, navigating a path to wherever it was Jasper had in mind. He led us over melting snowbanks and around mud holes, to a shed where his family stored two timeworn saws, several pairs of skis, and an assortment of cobwebbed curiosities, each offering an uncertain pedigree and, quite possibly, a clue to something we should know.



1949. Dad fishing the Yuba wearing his lucky sombrero.

Just beyond a broken wheel barrow and around a towering sugar pine we reached the destination Jasper had chosen, a spot I had once known well. Icy water swept native trout around a boulder, through a swimming hole and past the ghost of Dad's old treehouse. This was a place that only an eight-year-old explorer could locate: a patch of mud next to the river where anything was possible and the world was full of promise.

Like the familiar hug from a long lost friend, that elusive feeling I'd known as a child (the one I thought I'd lost forever) was suddenly upon me.

The children of Kingvale share a secret: they understand what it feels like to be royalty. Mother Nature grooms them to act thoughtfully and with a noble sense of purpose. Mentored by the pines, schooled

by the river and steeped in that regal air, every child there is elevated to the role of prince or princess. Jasper understood. And he didn't need a jeweled crown to prove it.

The rules in Kingvale had always been the same. No royal pretense. No trumpets or fanfares. And no fancy crepes.

When Jasper's grownups called to him from the cabin, I thanked him for his hospitality, acknowledging it might be time for us to part. He looked straight into my eyes, poised beyond his years, and invited me to keep the sombrero with the upside down horseshoe. He wanted me to take it home to Connecticut and set it on the head of the eighty-eight-year-old prince who wore it first.

Standing in the mud, stunned and frozen in that moment, I watched Jasper and his dogs amble back to Grandpa's cabin. The tremendous gap between past and present closed in on itself, and I felt the presence of every child who had come before, standing there with me, watching Jasper reach for the door.

People talk about moments that change you. Defining moments that determine who you are. This moment was mine.

The next prince quietly removed his safari helmet and turned to lock eyes one last time. He had opened his home and his heart to a stranger from the past. He had offered that stranger a remarkable glimpse of the present. And, together, they had stopped time... just long enough to discover the glorious pattern of an unlikely story.

A story with no ending, where parallel lines meet and, miraculously, circle back to the place where they began.



2017. Dad, 88, at his Connecticut home, reunited with his lucky fishing hat after 50 years.

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