

The Davis Brothers

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Sacramento, CA – I am writing this month's article from a hotel room in Sacramento, California (hence the dateline). I have spent the past two days interviewing the Davis brothers, George and David P., Jr. Both men have spent most of their lives in northern California, where they still make their homes today; George in Woodland, outside of Sacramento, and "Junior" in Walnut Creek, near San Francisco. Though they were orphaned at an early age, they each have some distinct memories of their father, David P. Davis.

Both men asked why I wanted to come all the way out to California to talk to them. It was difficult for me to put the answer into words. There are a lot of reasons, not the least of which being the opportunity to meet D. P.'s sons. They have memories of events that I could only guess about. Plus, they have lots of photographs, scrapbooks and their baby books, all containing even more information. Why did I want to go? How could I not go!

I began my series of family visits with a barbeque at the home of Greg and Nancy Davis. Greg is one of Dave Jr.'s sons, and Nancy is the person who connected the Davis brothers and me. Greg and Nancy live in Sunol, California, a very hilly and picturesque town, located about forty miles east of San Francisco. This segment of the Davis family, along with their daughter Keri and Greg's son Devin, will be in Tampa at the end of March.

The following day I met David Paul Davis, Jr. He was born on March 1, 1922 in Miami, Florida. Since Dave was only four when he and his brother left Florida to move to California, he does not have many memories of his time there. He remembers being "surrounded by water," perhaps recalling a visit to Davis Islands during construction. He does remember his father as a kind, caring man. Dave's mother died two and a half months after his birth. The cause of death seemed to stem from complications following the birth, but there are photographs of her at the family's Miami home, apparently healthy and holding her newborn son.

Dave gave me a tour of the town where he and his brother grew up, Piedmont, California. Their mother's aunts, Harriett Grange Mann and Mable Grange, raised the boys. Piedmont was, and is, a very nice community. Completely surrounded by the city of Oakland, the town sits as

a separate entity, with its own schools, police and fire departments, and city government. The home they grew up in, 34 Sharon Street, still stands today, though the empty lots Dave remembered as a boy are long gone – replaced by more homes. Dave has very fond memories of his days in Piedmont, from the streets where he had a paper route to the tennis courts where he first met his wife, Elizabeth.

I interviewed Dave's brother the following day. George Davis was born on August 21, 1916 in Jacksonville, Florida. He has very distinct memories of his father, whom he accompanied on a wide variety of trips, boat outings, golf games and excursions to Davis Islands. He remembers his father's yacht, which was moored on the Hillsborough River in front of the Tampa Bay Hotel. George also remembers his older relatives, including his grandfather and namesake, George Riley Davis.

George related several stories about his father and about growing up in Florida. Perhaps most importantly, he remembers being on board the *Majestic* when his father fell overboard and drowned in October 1926. While he thinks he was asleep in his own room during the actual event and subsequent search, he remembers the sadness he felt when he found out his father was gone. He also recalls continuing on the trip to Paris after the ship reached Cherbourg. He realized, even then, that it was a bit unusual to be traveling after such a traumatic event, but he went anyway. He is almost positive that his chaperone for the Paris trip was his father's girlfriend, Lucille Zehring. He even remembers Zehring taking him to the Moulin Rouge to see a show – one not necessarily appropriate for a ten year old boy, much less one who just lost his father.

George thinks that, when he arrived back in Tampa, he and his brother lived with his dad's second wife, Elizabeth Nelson, at the Venetian Apartments on Davis Islands. He speculates that he and Dave moved to their great aunts' home in California in Spring 1927. Both men remember an accident at Raton Pass along the Colorado/New Mexico boarder that almost killed them. Fortunately for them, their families, and me, that did not happen.

I will end with a message of thanks to the entire Davis family. They all took time out of their lives to talk to me and share information, some of it very personal, about their family and D. P. Davis. Special thanks goes to the Davis brothers, George and Dave. They patiently answered all of my questions and never once objected to this nosey stranger who came all the

way out to California to talk to them about their parents, their childhoods and their lives. All I can say is thank you.