

# Connecting with the Land through Others



Photo, Bob Evans

By Cindy Salo

## **About the author**

Cindy Salo is a plant ecologist who writes about science, agriculture, and natural resources for general and technical audiences. In her 20 years as a researcher, she investigated plant interactions and invasions in the Intermountain West, the Sonoran Desert, Senegal, and Mexico. Cindy currently owns Sage Ecosystem Science Corp., where she provides sound research and clear writing.

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THE SOUTH SIDE OF HOT SPRINGS CANYON, across from Rabbit Ears, looks different now, since Sharon visited. We showed her where her family homesteaded; she showed us the people who used to live on the land we care for.

Sharon Gale Pyle Pelley's daughter, Heather, found us through the Saguaro Juniper Facebook [page](#). She recognized the name of Hot Springs Canyon from her family's stories. Heather put us in touch with her grandmother, Lillie Bennett Finch, who shared memories of her father, Marion Francis Bennett's, homestead. (Sue Newman published Lillie's remembrances in her Valley View Newsletters of [June](#) and [September](#) 2014.)

Heather's mother, Sharon, seized the opportunity to visit the storied homestead for the first time. She and her husband, Jim, with friends Mary Roberts and Louie Walton, arrived in February 2015. A group of us gathered at the Community Center to meet the visitors and car pool into the canyon. We crept up the recently rehabbed road as far as The Windmill, and then walked the last mile under dramatic clouds.



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A saguaro on the north side of the canyon once had two upright arms that resembled twin “ears.” The cactus has grown and changed until its “ears” are no longer visible, but “Rabbit Ears” lives on in our lexicon of the land. The saguaro that used to resemble a rabbit is still our signpost at the bend in the canyon that sheltered the Bennett homestead.

We found the Bennett cabin’s fireplace, foundation, and the lean-to Lillie described. The walls were made of saguaro ribs over adobe. A jumble of rusting bedsprings lay in one corner, under rolls of barbed wire, frozen in rust.



Photo, Bob Evans

On our way back to the cars, Mary Roberts danced away with the Hotter Spotter ribbon of the day when she found a lizard and a tarantula. She added style points with a snappy, “Oh, No, It’s Alive!” two-step after she nudged the lizard with her toe.

We returned to a different Community Center. Casey Hubbard had finished transforming the building’s brick walls, drafty metal casement windows, folding tables, and haphazard lighting into a stunning art gallery displaying the talents in



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our valley. The exhibit included paintings, furniture, clothing, and handicrafts. Sharon added embroidery work and wire-beaded serving utensils to the First Annual Cascabel Art Show.

The four visitors dazzled us with their potlucking skills as they conjured a smorgasbord to add to the lunch potluck. Sharon's cousin, Ellen Bennett, drove out from Benson to join us and share her stories of our valley.

After lunch, we sent Casey home to get some sleep after his art show all-nighter. Valley residents took a breather, while our visitors toured the area and Sharon searched for family landmarks.

We regrouped for a dinner potluck and art show celebration. Sharon and Company pulled more food out of their professional potluck coolers and strong-armed their way into taking over most of the kitchen and clean-up duties.

Residents and visitors chatted and lingered into the evening. Stray forks and serving spoons appeared under Louie's elbow and splashed into the dishwater. Mary cleared and wiped down tables until the Foreman kids collected them and folded them in the corner with the chairs. Visitors and residents collected artwork and salad bowls and drifted home.

WE RECORD PLACES ON OUR MEMORY MAP of Cascabel as "Rabbit Ears" and "The Windmill." We measure time from our first visit, the last time we were at Red Tank, and the time we hiked to Ladder Canyon with Chris and James. We stretch our connection to the land back through the stories of earlier arrivals, but few of us can follow the chart lines of family ties to the area.

For us, last February marks "the time we hiked to the Bennett homestead with Sharon and her friends" and "when Mary Roberts found the tarantula in February" (July is the usual tarantula time). Next time we hike up Hot Springs Canyon, we'll look at the south side and wonder which box canyon Sharon's uncle used for trapping feral horses. Through Sharon, we refined our memory map of the land and sank our roots deeper into the valley.