Giving Back - A Family's Legacy

By Megan Barber Allende CEO, The Community Foundation of Mendocino County



The Gowan name is known throughout our region for wonderful local apples and produce, so it does not come as a surprise that the history of Cecil and Alice (nee Studebaker) Gowan's family in Mendocino County is deep and rich. Both sets of Alice's grandparents moved to the Anderson Valley in the 1860's. Notably one of her grandfathers traded sixteen horses for his initial home property in Philo. Cecil's family moved to the Anderson Valley from Shelter Cove in 1902 when Cecil was 13.

Education was important to both families. When Cecil and Alice were growing up, public schools were just being created in the area. In Shelter Cove there were none, so Cecil's parents hired tutors to teach their children. Of this experience, Cecil remarked, "We studied just like any kids, as little as we could!" In the Valley, Cecil and Alice both attended elementary school at the Shields School, which the community built on property donated by the Studebakers. One of Alice's happy memories was of third grade when she and Cecil would be asked to go together to bring the bucket of drinking water up to the school.

Alice continued her education through 8 or 9 grades, which was all that was available in the Valley. Cecil attended high schools in Cloverdale and Ukiah and obtained a teaching certificate in 1911. His teaching career, however, was short lived since the pay was not adequate to support a family. Later, as a school trustee, he noted, "It is a thankless job and a good way to lose all your friends. If I was to make a choice, I'd choose the teaching!"

The Gowans and their family are known for agriculture. Alice started the roadside fruit stand business by putting fruit next to the oak tree and selling it to passing travelers in the 1930s. Her granddaughter Grace Espinoza currently runs the stand. Cecil began peddling apples, fruits and vegetables in 1922 by taking over his father-in-law's route. He and his son Jim entered into a partnership in 1947. Jim's wife Jo worked with her husband on the ranch for sixty-five years. She recalls that soon after they were married she joined him in the orchards to thin apple and peach trees. In later years they were favorites at local Famers' Markets. "We were always together," Jo says. "We were great companions."

For many years the family has administered a scholarship fund for Anderson Valley High School students that Cecil Gowan created in 1978 as a memorial to his wife. Since Jim's death, Grace has helped her mother with the scholarship. Now the family is looking to create a lasting legacy by transferring the scholarship to the Community Foundation. "We want it to continue, and this looks like the best way to keep it going," says Jo.

The Community Foundation will continue to administer the scholarship in keeping with the family's values. Jo says, "Cecil believed that every child should have the opportunity to continue their education. He didn't believe that everyone needed to go to college, but that everyone should have the opportunity. He liked to pick students who didn't have the highest GPA because he knew they might not get as many scholarships. He looked for students who were more in the middle academically but who participated in school activities. Good citizenship and attendance were important to him. He said he wanted students who were a part of the school and not just attending the school."

The Community Foundation will work with the Gowan family to find students who meet with the criteria the family has developed. It is a privilege to administer the M. Cecil and Alice M. Gowan Memorial Scholarship on behalf of a family that has done so much for our county.

For more information visit <u>www.communityfound.org</u>.

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