

Joe Mendoza, lifelong Point Reyes dairy rancher

by **Jacoba Charles**

Joseph H. Mendoza, influential dairy rancher and lifelong resident of the Point Reyes Peninsula, passed away on October 25 at age 90. For the last half-century Joe was the patriarch of the Mendoza family, which has been part of the fabric of West Marin since 1899.

“He was our mentor and our leader and our father,” said his son, Jim Mendoza. “Mom was the nurturer, and he led mostly by example. He didn’t say much, he just looked at you, but you knew. He was a little man but he had a big man aura.”

Joe’s father J.V. came to America from the São Jorge area of the Azores when he was 16 years old. Like many other Portuguese immigrants at the time, J.V. settled in Marin, where he began working as a dairy farmer on Point Reyes.

“Dad always liked the swish of skirts and the sound of music, and at the nearby Home Ranch was a family with seven girls,” Joe said in an interview published by the Inverness Foundation in 1998. “He’d row over there whenever they had a party. Then he’d row back and go to work.”

When J.V. was almost 30, he entered into an arranged marriage with his cook’s 16-year-old daughter Zena. In 1912 the couple had a daughter, Tessie.

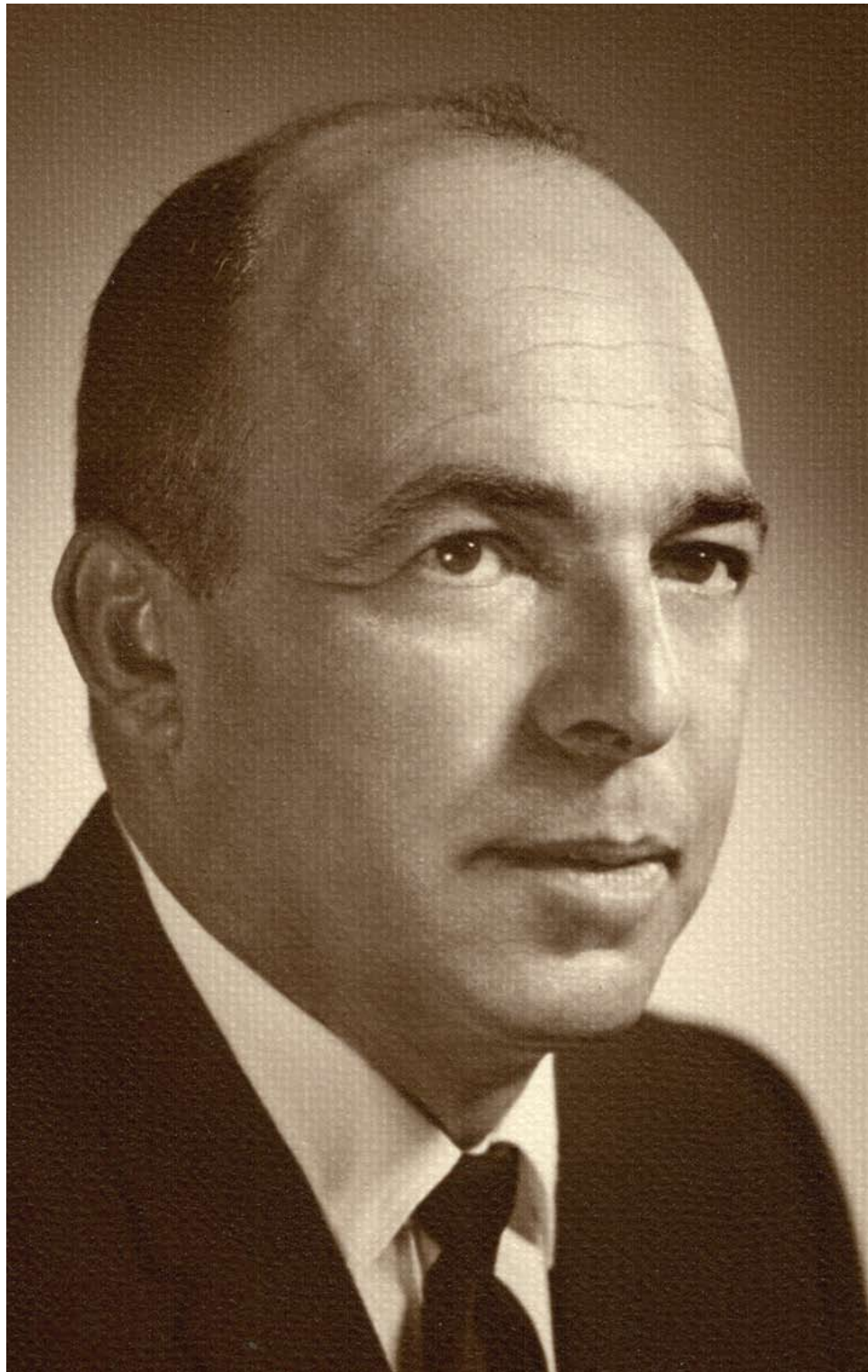
Joe, their second and last child, was born on July 5, 1918 in the main farmhouse at Pierce Point Ranch, which they were leasing at the time. By the time Joe was two years old, J.V. had purchased A and B Ranches on Point Reyes and was running dairies on both.

“The Point was a very different place back then,” said Joe’s daughter, Sharon Doughty. “It was very remote. There were at least 15 gates you had to open and close to get to town, no electricity, no phones, no schools.”

J.V. placed a high value on education for both his son and daughter, in part because—although many of his friends were doctors and lawyers—he was illiterate. In 1921 he hired a teacher for nine-year-old Tessie and the six-year-old son of a lighthouse worker. They converted a toolshed into a schoolroom, and the teacher boarded at the ranch.

Both Joe and Tessie lived away from home during high school, since daily travel to Tomales high was next to impossible. Tessie went to the all-girl school over the hill. Joe boarded with the Rodonis in Point Reyes Station, where he shared a room with his classmate Fred Rodoni Sr.

The family owned a bar and restaurant in the building that now houses the Old Western Saloon and lived upstairs. According to Sharon, Joe commuted to Tomales High in a bus that didn’t have any windows.



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After graduating, Joe went studied agriculture and business at UC Davis. While at college he met his wife, Scotty, who worked at a soda fountain in the Woodland hotel. In 1941, the young couple married and returned to live on B ranch. There Joe helped his father run the dairy until J.V. died in 1950, shortly after he saw his youngest grandson walk for the first time.

Joe was a successful dairyman from an early age. In his early 30s he became president of the Challenge Cream & Butter Association. He traveled widely, often accompanied by Scotty. He was community-minded, and served on the original board of directors of Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the grand jury, the school board, the draft board, and all three local Portuguese clubs. He was president of the West Marin Lions Club,

and helped found Western Weekend.

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“No problem,” Joe said in the 1998 interview. “You live pretty high off the hog.”

Though he could no longer hunt locally after the park service bought his ranch to establish a national seashore, Joe made the best of the situation. He used some of the profit from selling his ranch to buy a private duck club on Grizzly Island in Suisun Marsh near Fairfield. He also bought a 42-foot-long fiberglass fishing boat that he named the Scotty Joe.

Although Joe bought several more properties and dairies throughout West Marin, he lived on the ranch he was raised on until the day he died, said Sha-

ron’s husband Steve Doughty.

Joe was devoted to his wife, kids and their growing number of grand- and great-grand-children. His oldest son Joey returned to B ranch to help run his father’s dairy and raise a family, just as Joe had done a generation earlier.

When Sharon lost her second husband in 1985, she made the virtually unprecedented decision to keep running their dairy on her own—and her father fully supported her. “I said that I was going to keep it, and my father said, ‘Of course you can.’ And he helped,” Sharon said. “He’d always come around with pearls of wisdom.”

Joe loved it when his wife brought the grandkids—sometimes as many as half a dozen of them—home for the weekend. All the kids would pile into their grandparents’ big bed to sleep for the night, Sharon said.

“He taught all my girls to dance,” Sharon said. “They’d stand on his feet and he’d do the moves. He taught me the same way.”

Joe played games of make-believe with his granddaughter Teresa when she visited his duck club. “They would get in the boat first thing, and ‘go look at Hawaii,’” Jim recalled. “They’d have their little imaginary run through the canals and he would describe how it was this part of Hawaii and that part of Hawaii.”

Even at the end of their 67-year marriage, Joe and Scotty remained very much in love. “My mom always said, ‘If there is love in the home, then the children will be fine,’” Jim said. “They were very, very affectionate to each other. They were always holding hands and kissing. That’s what they taught us.”

On their 60-year wedding anniversary, the couple played a quiz show called the “marriage game” during a cruise. Several couples were put on a stage, and while the husbands were out of earshot the wives answered a list of questions: where was your first kiss, what does the wife think of the husband’s old girlfriend, and who would you like to be stuck on a desert island with. Then the husbands returned, and answered the same questions.

Joe and Scotty answered every question the same way.

“He even knew what their most romantic moment together had been,” Jim said. “It was their first ride on the Scotty Joe.”

Joe was the beloved husband of the late Doris “Scotty” Mendoza. Adored father of Sharon M. Doughty and her husband Steve of Point Reyes Station, Joseph H. Mendoza Jr. and his wife, Linda of Point Reyes Station and James Lee Mendoza and his wife, Luci of Petaluma. Cherished grandfather of Kathleen von Raesfeld, J.V. Mendoza, Karen Bianchini Taylor, Jamie Mendoza, Teresa Hatcher, Jolynn McClelland and Jarrod Mendoza. Loving great grandfather of nine.