

The most inspiring experience I have ever had ...

By Caroline Skinner

Most people go to Santa Barbara for the temperate climate, environment, the beautiful beaches, the restaurants, fresh seafood and its atmosphere, but Caroline Skinner's trip was the most inspirational trip a young woman could experience. Caroline and her family were invited to the Reagan Ranch, which is not open to the public, for a rare glimpse into the life of one of our most beloved presidents. This was a very intimate journey that included Judy, Laura, Caroline Skinner, Laura's fiancé Ryan Kunhart and their guide, Rick Keith.

The climb to the Ranch was one of breathtaking beauty. As you ascend simple narrow roads from sea level up to 2600 feet, you are able to view the ocean and valley; each sight has its own unique personality. God's hand is so apparent.

When you reach the Ranch, you are amazed at the humbleness and simplicity of the Reagans' home, Rancho de Cielo, and its surroundings. Grazing in the open pastures, just a few steps from the house, were many horses living out their lives in peace and beauty. The Reagans referred to these pastures as "View of Freedom."

When you enter the front door of the ranch, you walk through a doorway of not only President Ronald Reagan's home, but a doorway that opened for many historic dignitaries, from Queen Elizabeth to Mikhail Gorbachev. This is where President Reagan's cabinet and advisors crafted a way out of an immense recession, and to the destruction of the Berlin Wall.

We walked in the steps of history in a home that reflects modesty. You would not believe the size of this house. My mother estimated it to be around 1,500 square feet. It had no pictures of the President with the many leaders of whom he shared history, but simple pictures of Native Americans and Western themed pictures, which, of course, included the American Cowboy. In addition there were a couple of family pictures that were in the part of the house that no one but family stepped through until after the death of the President.

The President's sunny optimism was reflected by the color yellow that covered the walls of the bedroom, which had twin beds pushed together to make one, the small closet with his riding boots and attire belonging to both him and Mrs. Reagan,

the tiny bathroom was yellow as well with a liberty bell for a showerhead. This was all he needed; therefore this was all he had.

After the house visit we walked out back to view a small lake.

The lake originally was a lowland area that the President envisioned to serve a grander purpose. The President himself dug out this land to create Lake Lucky. Lake Lucky is where he paddled Mrs. Reagan around in a canoe that he named "True Love." It took a decade of hard work for our President to complete Lake Lucky and the fence that surrounds the Ranch. President Reagan did all the work on the ranch, from chopping firewood to warm a house that has no heating or air conditioning, to building a small addition to their house.

We then made our way to the secret service headquarters where we

ate lunch at their center of operations. After we finished lunch we each had our picture taken on the Red Phone, we observed the stables, then explored the workshop and the tack room of the President. Did you know President Reagan rode saddle seat? He did and he was in the Cavalry.

In all its touching beauty, across from the helipad, is the highest point of the Ranch known as Guardian Point, where armed snipers were always on alert for the safety of the President. We also visited Booth Hill where President Reagan himself buried the many animals that encircled his life. These animals were so loved, that each has a large rock as a headstone with their named carved in them by President Reagan. The headstones ranged from the most familiar to the public Millie, Nancy Reagan's horse, Duke and Duchess longhorns, to name a few.

Before we returned to the ranch house, we went to Freedom Wall. Freedom Wall is within walking distance of the ranch house and the open pastures referred to as View of Freedom. Freedom Wall is a series of walls adorned with almost 13,000 names of great Americans who have supported the Young Americans Foundation.

We spent the whole day listening to authentic stories preserved by those closest to the President and shared with us. Standing in the same place where these events took place made you feel as if you were standing there as a witness, and it was a moving experience.



Standing in front of the plaque at Freedom Wall.