

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Connell

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'A Little Cupa'

"Pepe," by James Hopper, is typically Monterey Peninsula.

I wrote about this short story in Tuesday's issue of Peninsula Diary but have been forced to continue it today—there are so many interesting things to say about this short story by a well-known author who lived for many years in Carmel. It was published first in 1937 as number five in a series of contemporary short stories by the Book Club of California.

Pepe might have been a real "paisano" of today or 1935 when John Steinbeck first wrote "Tortilla Flat," for the characters were real people and perhaps well known in to a great many folks. But they have fast disappeared from the local scene, and the romance of the era is gone forever.

"Pepe" is the story of a descendant of the race that sparsely peopled the wide golden land in the period known as the Spanish days, according to the author.

Hopper wrote: "While some of these are of old aristocracy now poor of money but still possessed of vast acres and large hospitality, most are humble folk—woodcutters, herders, vaqueros, lavanderos. They are a gentle people, kindly courteous, soft-spoken. But they will do, now and then, something which astonishes us of more masterful race."

It was one of these who visited James Hopper in his garden one morning. He described him as being more often than a fence rider, a simple and graceful loafer. He came softly into the garden as Hopper chopped wood and stood there "soft and quiet, awaiting the pleasure of my attention. Around his neck was a bright bandana, and in his sombrero strap he had stuck a feather at a merry angle.

Finally the author said, "Good morning Pepe." And he responded "Good morning senior!"

"What is it, Pepe?"

"Senior—could I have please, could I have if you please, a little cupa?"

A very little cup of wine?"

After thinking over this request from every angle, whether it would be good for Pepe who seemed already

be in a fiesta mood, and remembering that his keg of favorite angelica was beginning to sound hollow, Hopper answered; "No, Pepe, you cannot have any wine." Pepe finally vanished after a softly-said, "Adios, Senior."

He struck the Mission Trail, worn many years ago by the soldiers and the priests, followed down the draw toward the sea, took the coast road, and went on south till he came to the old Gonzales farm, abandoned for long years. He settled down to rest, the story goes, when in drove his old friend Manuel with his pretty young wife with food and a demijohn from the Sicilian's in Monterey.

Then, after a gay meal of vegetables and meat and many drinks from the demijohn, the two friends fought over the attention of Luisa to the younger man Pepe. The quarrel ended in the death of Manuel.

At the trail in Salinas Pepe confessed that he had killed Manuel, although Luisa claimed she had done the act for the love of Pepe. Pepe was sent to San Quentin for 10 years, and James Hopper was sent overseas to enter the war.

It was in Bordeaux many months later that he received a letter from San Quentin, Pepe confessed that he did not do the killing that Luisa did, but that he had thought it would be best for him to go to prison.

"So, I telling you, I do not want you to think that after I been in your garden, having a nice visit, I go right away down to the Gonzales ranch and kill Manuel."

James Hopper ended his favorite short story: "And I thought, if I ever get out of this war, and if he ever gets out of San Quentin, and we meet in my garden again, and he says, 'Just a little cupa of wine, Senior?' certainly I'll give him a little cupa out of my fragrant jug."