

Tour dei Simola

by Cheryl Burlingame Dillard



The "Over-the-Hill" Gang

This year Frank Smithhart '60 (my cousin by marriage) invited me to a very special event hosted by Bob Simola '62 and his brother, Jim '60 (former Azusa High cheerleader). The 18th annual Tour dei Simola bicycle ride took place April 24 through the beautiful vineyard-covered hills of Templeton, California.

Bob and his gracious wife, Lucy, threw a spaghetti dinner at their home Friday for early arrivals, and as a special treat Bob uncorked some Zinfandel made from his grapes. Many of the Simola clan showed up for dinner along with Georgine White Baur '62 and her husband, Pat Baur '59—a nice surprise.



Zinfandel from the Simola vineyard



Pat Baur sampling wine

Bob and Lucy live in a ranch-style home they built on five acres several years ago. A retired schoolteacher, Bob now spends time woodblock and silkscreen printing, making stained glass panels, painting, writing poetry and tending to his small vineyard. With a PhD in English Literature, Bob has a Chaucer collection coveted by many major universities. He also has an impressive collection of vintage cameras handed down from his father. Lucy is a doll collector, weaver, quilter and she dyes her own fabric and yarn—in fact, Lucy hand-dyed our Tour dei Simola t-shirts and Bob printed the logos.



Bob Simola's studio



Bob Simola in his studio

Saturday morning we all gathered at Bob & Lucy's house again for a light breakfast and some socializing before the 18-mile ride. At 10 am we hopped on our bikes and eagerly followed our tour guide, Jim Simola, through the starting gate—although Jim forgot to mention that the first hill was very steep—so steep that I had to walk my bike most of the way to the top. After I caught my breath and spotted the backs of the other riders through my binoculars, I cruised along on my borrowed mountain bike and enjoyed the scenery—rows of evenly planted grapevines, old red barns and horses playing in the fields.



A Templeton vineyard



Winery junction

Our first major rest stop was the Pomar Junction Winery where some of the riders did a little wine tasting. Since I was trailing behind the others most of the way, I decided to refrain from consuming spirits (I needed all of the help I could get). Back on our bikes we rode by more vineyards and horse

ranches, past country homes with wraparound porches and crossed over a bridge into the tiny town of Templeton. We made it just in time for the Saturday Farmer's Market, our final rest stop.



Georgine White Baur, Pat Baur & Jim Simola



Georgine White Baur – final four miles

After bicycling 14 miles my legs felt like rubber so I threw my bike in the back of the “spotting” truck and hitched a ride back to Bob & Lucy’s. Georgine White Baur, who hadn’t ridden a bike in over 20 years, pedaled all the way to the finish (she has very long legs). Lucy’s brother, Newt Cobb, finished first.



The Winner—Lucy’s brother, Newt Cobb



Nancy & Conrad Brazzel

Bob and Lucy had a picnic waiting for us after the ride—barbecued tri-tip beef, homemade potato salad, mixed greens, deviled eggs, locally-cured olives and fresh strawberries. Conrad Brazzel '59 and his wife, Nancy, joined us for lunch, however Conrad missed the Tour dei Simola because he had just finished a 100-mile bike race somewhere else (now I really felt like a wimp).

Sunday morning Bob treated us to his famous killer waffles and tangy homemade orange syrup while Lucy organized an Easter egg hunt outside.

Bob & Lucy invited me back for next year’s ride. In the meantime I’ll be working on getting my bike legs ready, so look out Newt.

More photos: <http://www.azusahighschool1961.com/Pages/TourDeiSimola-photos.pdf>