

LOVE MADE VISIBLE

by Beth Dommert

(Part 3: Darden Hill
Grows and Expands)

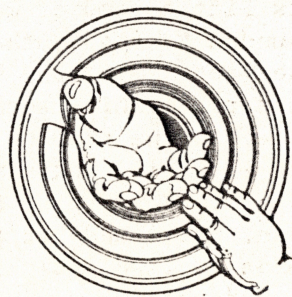
One significant matter about Darden Hill which has not been mentioned yet is the existence of the Burke Foundation, which now exists in memory of Mr. and Mrs. John Burke, Sr. The foundation is an incorporated organization which functions as a sponsoring agency for any number of residential care facilities. Of course, it serves this purpose for the Darden Hill Ranch School, and operates with the help of a volunteer board of directors. They include Mr. Art Millicam of San Marcos (president), Mr. Ralph Gonzales of San Marcos (chairman), Mr. Martin Altenhoff of San Marcos (vice-president), Zelle Petmecky of Dripping Springs (treasurer), Rosemary Bullard of Driftwood (secretary), Mr. Charles Campesi of Rolling Oaks

(parliamentarian), Sean Bullard of Austin, John Burke, Jr. of Dripping Springs, and Ann Cangelosi of San Antonio.

In about February of 1981, the board of directors recognized the need some sort of training facility. Just as some people need a half-way house before returning to full personal responsibility for their lives, so some Darden Hill boys could profit from a more gradual change from the strictly scheduled and restricted life style of the Ranch to a more normal foster home, etc.

The search for such a facility began, and it did not take long for the administrators of Darden Hill to find a new house which was being built just north of Dripping Springs on R.R. 12. The house was being built by Mr. Ron Bielke, and after a number of meetings and negotiations, a deal for the purchase of the house was made. However, another very special bonus was to develop out of that deal to buy a house. During the period of time it took to conclude, the Darden Hill staff became better acquainted with Ron and his wife,

Continued



DARDEN HILL: Continued from page 8
Sharon Bielke. It did not take long for both "sides" of these meetings to realize they had a common interest and need; and the means to merge all these factors was so simple. After several brief meetings between the Bielkes and the Darden Hill staff, a proposition was brought before the board of directors. There it was decided that Ron and Sharon Bielke would become the live-in house parents for the boys who qualified for acceptance into the group home. Soon thereafter, in May of 1981, the Burke Home opened with 8 boys and 2 houseparents.

The 2-story house has 5 bedrooms (each of which can comfortably be shared by 2 boys), a large living room, a dining room and kitchen; and bedroom, bath and study complex for the Bielkes. At the present time there are 8 boys in the group home and the extra bedroom is being used as a small game room.

This brings us to the next subject of this story: one of the residents of the Group Home. David Farris is one of Darden Hill's real success stories. However, no one--not Darden Hill, the Dripping Springs School District, the Bielkes, nor the Burke Home could have accomplished anything, if David himself had not had the courage and determination to build a meaningful life for himself.

One of his most impressive achievements occurred several months ago, and was greeted with a really big celebration by everyone connected with Darden Hill. As with all the other Darden Hill residents, David has participated in the Boy Scout program since he first came to live at the Ranch. However, he recently became the first Darden Hill resident to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout. This is the highest rank it is possible for any Boy Scout to attain. It requires time, patience, determination, responsibility, maturity, and hard work to receive this outstanding recognition.

In addition, David will soon achieve another first as a Darden Hill, and now a Burke Home resident. This year David will graduate from Dripping Springs High School. He is the first boy from the Darden Hill Ranch School to remain with the program and complete the requirements to graduate and receive his diploma. Truly a special year for a special young man whose name evokes a tone of pride in the voice of any Darden Hill staff member who speaks about him.

One final structure has remained unmentioned throughout this series. It was decided to wait until Part 3 since the open house celebration for this building was held this past week. The building I refer to is a final and very special dream of Rosemary's.

Through contributions and volunteers of every imaginable description, Rosemary finally has her "little red school house." Rosemary has taught in a bedroom, the tiny classroom in the old barracks building, outside under the trees, and once, she even used the old barn for a short period of time. She laughs now when she twills of how she and the students sat around on bales of hay and sacks of feed having classes. However, even though she is the founder and assistant administrator of the Darden Hill Ranch School, Rosemary sees herself as a teacher, and this school is really her dream come true.

Finally--what of the birth which also served as the conception of Darden Hill? What about Rosemary's son Michael? Today Mike is 24 years old, lives alone in his own apartment, and travels to his job in a semi-sheltered workshop on a daily basis. Rather than being institutionalized and a burden to society, Mike is a functioning member of society. Rosemary and Mike have come far together; and accomplished much as individuals.

FBI

