

"this new life"

# The Spirit of a Family

The mantle of leadership sometimes falls on those who don't covet such. And the question becomes for Jack Parnell, Angus breeder-Angus auctioneer, did he seek his lot, or was it simply the right amalgamation of times and places?

For though he still climbs into the auction block on occasion, Jack Parnell spends the bulk of his energetic schedule striding the corridors of California's seats of power—the legislature or its administration. He's a member of Governor Deukmejian's cabinet, he's the director of the Golden States' Department of Fish and Game.

One would almost have to be there to believe it for the Parnell family must fuel each other's level of endurance; they are involved. To tag an occupation on Jack alone, for instance, reminds one of those titles John Le Carre creates for his spy epics. Breeder, banker, broker . . . chief is a feeble attempt. We left out restaurateur.

And to probe the Parnell experience, one might have to conclude that some fortunate things just came together. Simplistic, perhaps, but the impression is that Jack stuck with some good things for quite a long time before there were any fruits. He sold cattle for 20 years,

One thing to be said for a dairy, it's an effective classroom. The consequences of neglect or a job half-done show up vividly. Jack Parnell was raised in such a setting, and its lessons have never failed him. He remembers fondly the headquarter house of the ranches where he lived and worked.

"Parties given at the boss's house . . . were something special and something I always looked forward to as a boy. So I tried to recreate that feeling in my own home. When we decided to open a restaurant, the architect and I decided we wanted just that same feeling in the restaurant, so we copied the design of the house." The result was the Headquarter House Restaurant near Auburn, Ca. . . .



Susan Parnell  
Dunipace Angus  
Auburn, Ca.

traveling the country over in what has to be one of the most demanding segments of this cattle business. Maybe he learned to stick it out, be patient.

Early on, he became involved in what was then a modest little hometown bank. And look what happened.

"I've been on the board of directors for a long time. This bank went from a \$10 million institution to a \$20 million, then \$40 million. We merged with another bank and became a \$200 million bank.

"Now, at this point, I'm involved heavily up to my ears. This very day, today, I heard the chairman of our board report our bank is viewed by the federal office of the controller as the number one bank of its contemporaries, number one in return on equity and on capital. It's considered to be the best managed independent bank in the state. Well, I'm pretty proud of that." Jack credits the philosophy of the board as responsible and

*Susan believes the Angus breed was doing itself a disservice by breeding only for excessive height and frame. They found in their commercial herd some of the middle-of-the-road cows were more useful over the years since many of the taller, more extreme cattle milked poorly, didn't breed back, or were poor keepers.*

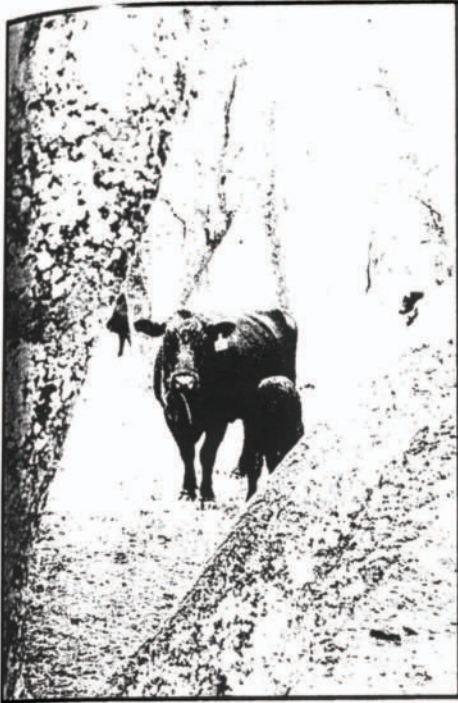
hastens to add it did waiver a bit when the heights got a little dizzy.

"We started to make decisions based on what we did last year. That's where Bank of America is today." Jack contends his bank didn't gain its stature and respect by looking backward and doing "our banking like everyone else. We have to run our bank in what we think is an innovative way. Lee Iaccoca breathed new life, a new way of doing things into an old tired industry. I commend that."

If innovation is one of his hallmarks, it's served Jack well and the family too. For the Parnells seem to be endowed with a spirit of commitment.

"I get impatient with people who

At Dunipace Angus Ranch...



*The cow herd at Dunipace Angus is largely of Mr Angus breeding with some Sir Wms Warrant daughters included.*



*The horses are a Shire-Clydesdale cross and called "An American Shire." "Jack and I really enjoy driving and parading with the show wagon. Now the grandkids are learning to drive."*



*"Billy Yarbrough (B&L Ranches of Fairfield, Ca., and Shawnee, Ok.) bought our entire cow herd in 1982. He even took the dairy cows we were using for transplant. We've gathered these cows back together since then.*

*"We were without cows for about four hours. Couldn't stand it and bought some more."*

can't become excited about something," he says. And, that doesn't mean chasing around willy-nilly after some vague dream or bogus imitation of another's success story. He likes to quote Bernard Baruch, financier, who employed a very simple formula when exposed to crowd psychology: "Just look around. When people are walking, I run; when people are running, I walk."

Fish and Game is regarded as the most problematic agency of the state. Jack has no background

in its nuts and bolts, but he has some talents and experiences he can bring to bear. Prior to taking over this wing of the administration, he was the governor's director for state agriculture. He was asked to move when the challenges posed by fish and game just couldn't be mastered by previous administrators. Heading the department of agriculture was a proper baptism, though, into the mechanics and mysteries of a huge state government.

"I was privileged to write the California approach to the national farm bill. I had grown up with the problems of that department. I enjoyed it over there." The exposure to all the aspects and ramifications of a farming base as large, complex, and of such variety represented a watershed, helping him to consider old positions and to formulate new ones. For instance:

"Ag in general hates the word subsidy, but I say if governments across this country have to

subsidize agriculture in the short term to keep it in business and keep it viable, it will be dollars well spent because it's the best defense mechanism we'll have.

"People sit back on their haunches and say, 'It's always been OK, so it'll be OK again.' I don't believe that.

"I believe we're going to have to make it happen. I think we have to be dedicated to making it happen, and that's part of the reason why I'm in the arena I'm in.

"Major families are going out of the cattle business," Jack comments on its "devastation." "A lot of people have been pushed out of agriculture. The infrastructure hasn't started to fall away. It may be edging toward the wicked edge, though. Agriculture is a renewable resource, and when it fails, everything fails—from the depressed ag market to the local implement dealer to the manufacturer, to the miner who takes the ore out of the ground."

Auctioneering helped prepare him for a political experience, Jack thinks. He learned to read people extremely well. This instinct coupled well with his involvement in Seven-PAC, a cluster of California farm and ag organizations comprising a \$15 billion dollar industry. Seven-PAC represents the power group of farming, the main stalwarts of farming within a state producing

more than 200 different crops.

When he took the job of heading up such intimidating dimensions, Jack determined he couldn't do it without some allies.

"Learning the complexities of the system and the different players was easier when I surrounded

myself with people—right off—who were political operatives who knew the system. I brought them on staff as soon as possible.

"It's not hard to walk on water as long as you know where the rocks are. The staff we put together could point out the rocks

## At Headquarter House and Angus Hills...



*Jack Parnell, the auctioneer, remembers. "I spent 20 years traveling, living out of a suitcase with 160-170 sales a year. And one thing I noticed, restaurants were not all that good. I wanted one that resembled home with a warmer feeling.*

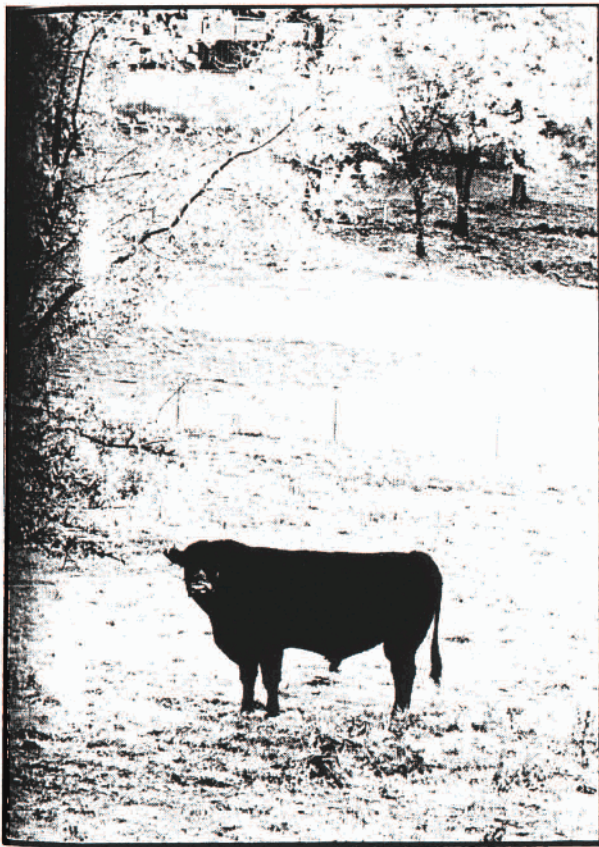
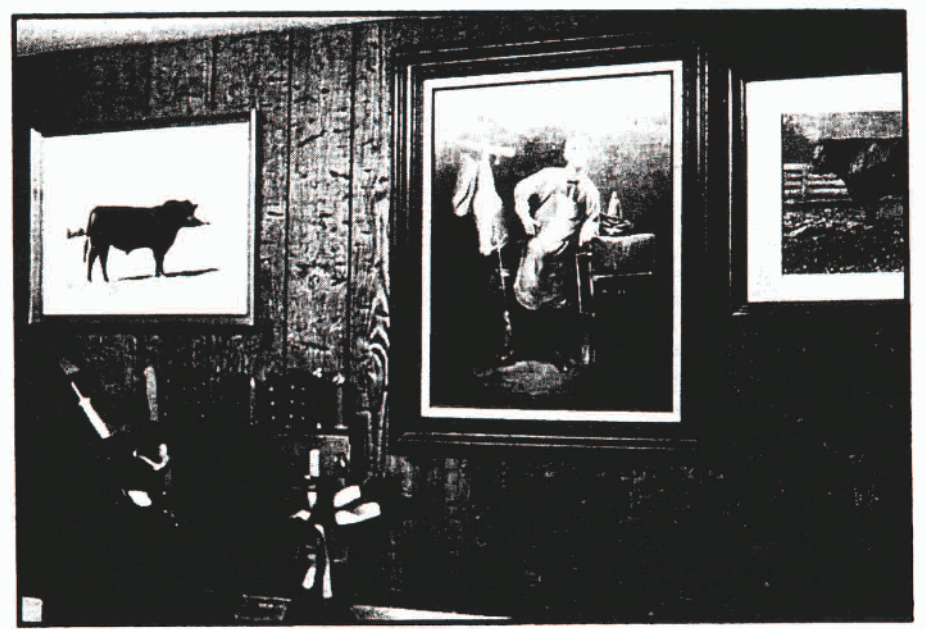
*"It was like playing in the middle of the freeway. If we would have known then what we know now, but it's been the greatest thing for us we've ever done.*

*"One day, we stood at the end of the driveway, when we were about to open this, and the reality hit us. We were going to have to open this thing and serve real people. We started construction in October and we finished in January, January of 1977.*

*"this angus life"*

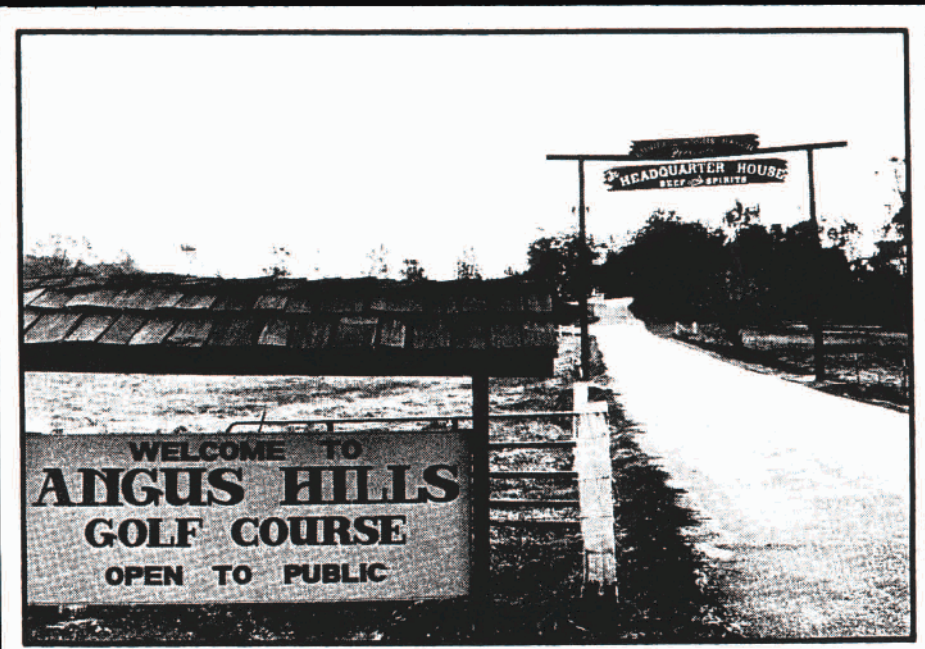


*"We built the meat shop when we didn't think we could get the kind of beef we wanted to serve."*



*"Then we built the golf course," says Susan. "Like so many ranch people, we said—'Golf? That's ridiculous.' But Randy's father-in-law talked us into playing and Jack and I got hooked from the first day on. We didn't have a lot of time, but we played it anyway."*

*"We got our bulldozer and brought all the farm equipment over. 'Here's the greens, and this is where this is going to happen.' There was a golf pro that helped us lay it out. We raked it and the kids all helped. Somehow, it all came together."*



and gave us some awfully good guidance. It came together in reasonably good order."

Transferring this to fish and game took a hard swallow, because F&G is a highly visible agency. Some 26,000,000 people

want a piece of the state's outdoors and recreation. Jack describes California outdoors as mountains, valleys, seashore, pristine streams, wetlands, deserts, grasslands, range with just about everyone wanting a piece of it.

Little wonder the head of California Fish and Game is such a tempting and accessible target.

But, he's been in the glare of the spotlight before and hasn't wilted but rather flourished through keeping a cool head and mastering the art of diplomacy.

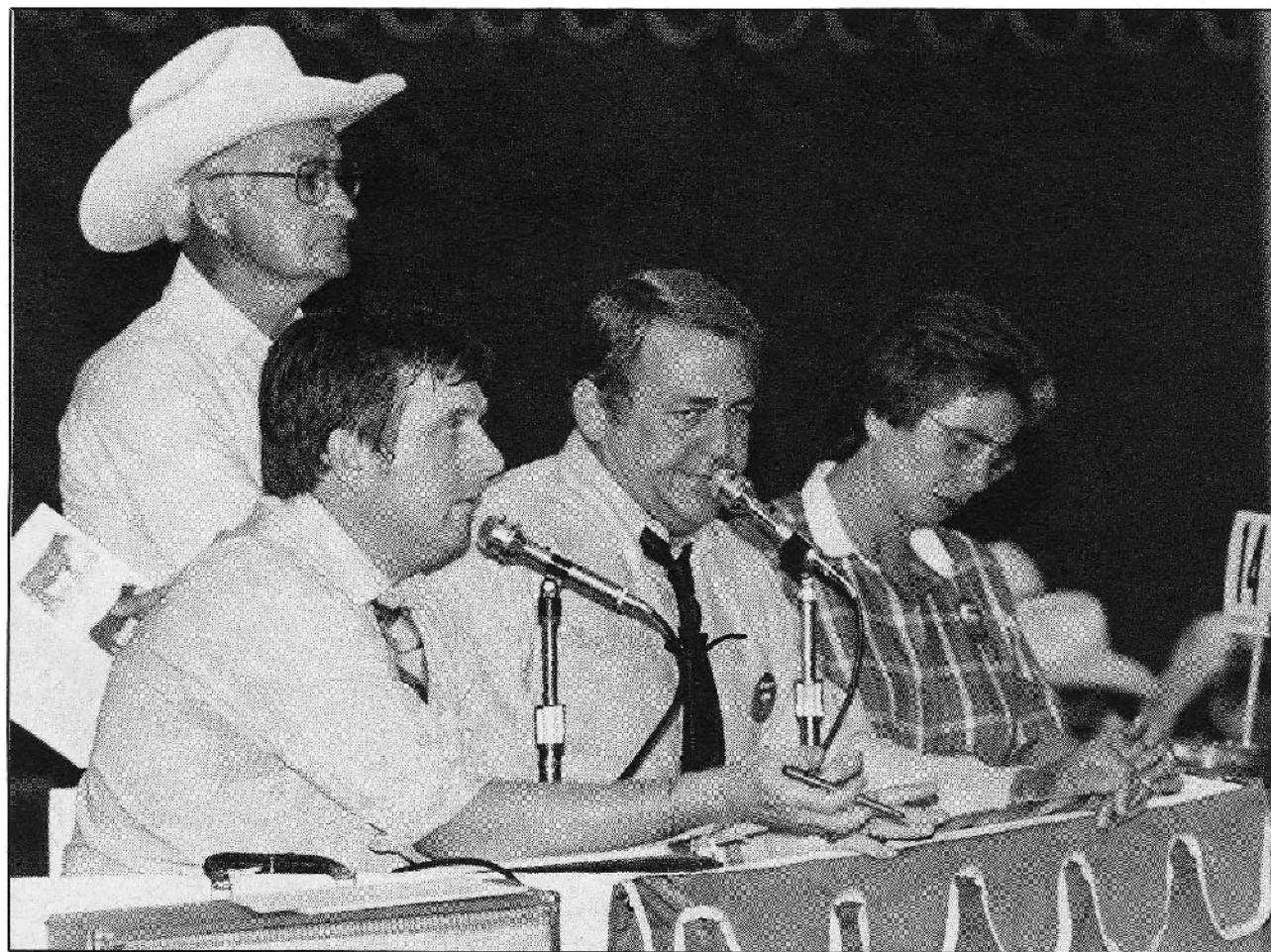
Jack pays credit to witnessing some of the great merchandisers

### Behind the mike...



*Susan clerking, Jack calling at the Grass Valley Fair, 1982, one of the junior livestock sales Jack does to help the kids.*

*Bill Roche, James Danekas, Jack and Susan. Inscribed, "To Jack Parnell, who gets the last dollar. California State Fair Angus Auction, 1984."*



of purebred and Angus cattle ply their trade.

"I got to be around the great auctioneers like Johnson, Paul Good, Ham James, just to mention a few. My life has been absolutely blessed in the respect I've lived

during a time when the great merchandisers were very visible.

"There'll be some that criticize the old cocktail circuit as we referred to it. But nothing was selling until McCorkle assembled some astute breeders who enjoyed buying and selling. They started

going from one ranch to another and had great production sales. It kept the business alive and a few of us out there on the periphery were able to keep our hopes up and believing in Angus cattle.

"It can be that way again," he says, "if we encourage our little people. There's a lot of enjoyment in Angus. Yet, we also have to keep our eye on the reason we're here, and that's to sell enough cattle to make them and the business economically viable."

His blood still "gets up" at the prospect. "I miss the day-to-day contact in the auction business. One day, when they run me out of the government, I may be back packing suitcases and riding airplanes again."

Jack expresses some concerns from his perspective. One is all the attention given to merchandising the exclusive cow. "That's where the emphasis seems to be now, and there are many in the business who have that ability."

It's the middle and lower end cows with still a serviceable place and future that seem to be devalued in his appraisal, victims perhaps of A.I. and E.T.'s impact on today's selling environment.

"It would be nice, if we're going to E.T. so strongly, that we also make a market for our lower-end by requiring embryos be transferred only into black Angus cows."

Jack agrees with Susan when she declares, "The Holstein breeders wouldn't like it!"

But, Jack continues to wonder if the seed stock industry as a whole doesn't need a sort of retreat where it can examine afar and away from the daily demands some of the options left to it. He's seen some excesses.

"It always seemed ironic to me," he recalls, "that we were a breed of cattle that was reasonably good, reasonably fertile, easy calving with good milking cows. Then the

### In Sacramento ...

**Jack Parnell**  
Director, California Fish & Game  
Sacramento, Ca.



*At the annual Blessing of the Fishing Fleet, Badger Bay, Ca.*

*Susan and Jack with Gordon Van Vleck, California's Secretary of Resources.*



*"this angus life"*

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Charolais were some of the first big cattle to come in, and we didn't like them because they were infertile, they'd go to pieces. They rarely had calves so you didn't have to worry about them milking out and all that hard work.

"Then, we in the Angus breed tried so hard to select Angus cattle that looked like Charolais—it was a mystery to me. So now we've finally got some big cattle, and they'll have a calf every other year whether you want them to or not."

He recognizes the argument that one needs some bigness in the background to get movement in the undersized cows. "But I reject the idea the biggest cow is the best cow. I would refuse to transfer a cow via E.T. unless she met

some very rigid criteria. I guess if I were a dictator I would close open A.I. too."

A rebel streak perhaps but not without foundation. It's Jack's opinion A.I. or frozen eggs—merchandising's next sensation, he thinks—can do a great service or disservice to any breed. He believes the danger for any breed arises when teetering on a narrow genetic base, discovering genetic defects in a highly touted but untested bull, or letting its people become disenchanted from modern merchandising failures.

He takes unpopular positions despite his political savvy. Here's

one from his days on the American Angus Assn. Board of Directors.

"I was a great proponent of registering red cattle in our Association plus recording all Angus cattle bred to 'exotic' bulls—just to monitor on our computer what they did and what their ultimate disposition was. That led to my demise on the board.

"I was there with Fred Johnson, Jess Bontecou, during the early 1970s."

There are positive advances too Jack hastens to include. The registered Angus steer, as one example.



*A balky Diesel responds finally. Note the Jeep's gearshift, a fine example of necessity mothering invention and the faithful Crescent wrench remedying the situation.*



*Randy Parnell also auctioneers.*



*Moving cattle on a rainy day in Central California.*

## With the grandkids...



Susan and Juli, Randy's wife, putting up jam last summer. Jake and Luke sampled.



Jack explaining the mysteries of pine nuts in pine cones.



From jam to concrete, Jake and Luke exhibit a regular spirit of helpfulness.



Jacob and Lucas on "Smokey." The man in the background may appear vaguely familiar: then USDA Secretary of Agriculture John Block visiting Dunipace in the summer of 1985.



With his experience and apparent interest in all modes, Jack may be grooming himself to become someone's Secretary of Transportation.



"I'm really glad to see the Association moving in that direction with the steer registry. We were kept alive by selling 4-H heifers to youngsters who wanted to compete. Our cattle haven't always won, but they've been reasonably good and well-received."

"Angus steers do well," Susan agrees, "and Angus cows crossed with anything do well."

Perhaps it could be said the years have ticked off for Dunipace and the Parnells with a sort of rhythmic chant, in a cadence not unlike that of an auctioneer. There's been enough to fill a couple decades at least. What has gone on? The Headquarter House restaurant, Jack's venture into the realms of state government, grandkids here and on the way. And while this historic gold rush country of Sacramento and surrounding area has been good to the family, nothing's come automatically. It all had to be mined.

Those roads were long and lonely for an auctioneer, that's a "known." To Susan fell the chore of raising the family and helping Dunipace through its day-to-day rigors. The rewards she and Jack enjoy today have been well-earned, an inspiration for others starting out. Cattle have been such a part of the pace and life of Dunipace, they've played almost a founding role. In the background at times, and a minor part of the whole enterprise, still they were there, always there. To do without for even four hours simply left too great a void.

When Jack Parnell reflected on the future of agriculture and its meaning for his family, he said:

"There will be a time when this thing will be excellent again. There always seems to be a renewal of the spirit of the fiber it takes to stay in this business.

"We're encouraging our family to stay in it, to stay close to the earth."

*'the angus life'*