

On the Path

A Ridge, a Creek, and a Family Named Peters

By Keith Hammer

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Between Brown Gulch and Krause Basin lie a ridge and a creek named Peters. Most folks have heard of Peters Ridge, which exhibits a prominent profile as the Swan Range bends a bit to the west before continuing north to Columbia Mountain. Fewer perhaps know of Peters Creek, which flows between two little-noticed forks in Peters Ridge and crosses Foothill Road where it divides the Frank's remarkable farm.

Peters Creek is a small stream as it exits the Frank pasture and goes largely unnoticed until a bitter winter cold spell forms enough ice to cause Peters Creek to flow onto Foothill Road instead of through its small culvert! Indeed, it could easily be mistaken for an irrigation ditch diverted from a larger stream.

But its small size belies its importance to the Frank farm and the surrounding Mountain Brook community. Indeed, community landmarks still bear the names of families like Brown, Peters and Krause – but it was not until recently I learned of the Peters family.

On October 1, Helen Margaret Peters Frank died at the age of 92 and I am humbled to say it was through her obituary that I learned of the connection between the Franks and the Peters. After their marriage in 1946, Helen and Gustav Frank moved from Chester, Montana, to Mountain Brook in 1950, where they bought the farm from her father, Charles Peters, and set about raising eight children there.

I consider myself among those fortunate to have known Gustav and Helen, and to have witnessed the goodness and cheer they brought to the Mountain Brook community. I think of them when I drive through their farm along Foothill Road, remembering how Gustav, even in his elder years, would walk across the road to check on the stock watering trough that sits beneath majestic fir trees next to their fruit orchard. And one simply can't visit the Mountain Brook schoolyard or attend a community event without remembering Helen's smiling face and her dedication to the school and Mountain Brook Ladies Club.

Helen's passing is a reminder that each place has its story, not just in its geologic origins, but in the people that have lived, worked, and walked the land there. I am also reminded that my knowledge of the Brown and Krause families is limited to those members I have met and to the verbal history passed around the community. Thanks to Helen Frank, the Mountain Brook Ladies Club and others, however, I have the opportunity to learn more through the stories they took the time to collect and publish in their Babblings from Mountain Brook!

Both my great-grandfather and grandfather were farmers. While my father's main occupation was working with fish and wildlife, he bought a small hobby farm in Mountain Brook where we raised a few beef, pigs and chickens so we'd not lose touch with how to work the land and be self-sufficient. My father taught us the value of good farming and often used the larger Frank farm as a good example to be emulated.

I am reminded of those lessons and of Gustav and Helen Frank every time I cross their farm and Peters Creek while driving, walking or biking Foothill Road. They have

left a wonderful legacy for the Mountain Brook community. My condolences go out to their many friends and family with Helen's recent passing.

Keith Hammer grew up hiking, skiing, camping, hunting, and fishing in the Swan Mountains. He has worked a number of jobs, from Forest Service trail worker to logger to backcountry guide, and currently works as an environmental consultant and head of the nonprofit Swan View Coalition. His column appears regularly in this paper and is archived at www.swanrange.org. Keith can be reached at 406-755-1379 or keith@swanview.org.



Peters Ridge disappears into valley fog during a winter weather inversion. Keith Hammer photo.