

APRICOT APPEAL

Author gives readers a taste of Silicon Valley

By Vicki Larson
Contributing writer

Lisa Prince Newman grew up in a Garden of Eden, surrounded by vineyards, pastures and orchards, on a 2-plus-acre property with just about every kind of tree imaginable, from walnut to kumquat to apple to apricot.

It was magical.

A different kind of magic happens in her once-pastoral home now called Silicon Valley. Newman watched depondently as the bucolic area was slowly bulldozed to make room for housing and offices and malls, she says. But the taste of her family's fruits, especially apricots — in her mind, a pretty much perfect fruit — never left her.

To honor that taste, that landscape, her childhood and all the orchardists and farmers who still work the land there, the San Rafael resident has written "For the Love of Apricots" (178 pages, Prince of the Orchards Publications), a cookbook that includes treasured recipes and memories of growing up in the Santa Clara Valley, once known as Valley of Heart's Delight.

"Their appeal is so unique. They're so beautiful to behold. They fit in your hand, and they're just the most luscious fruit," she says. "It's like looking at the California sun."

She'll discuss the fruit, the recipes and her book this weekend at two local events — Saturday at the Saratoga Blossom Festival and Sunday at the Los Altos History Museum's Apricot STEM Fair and Tasting Competition (details below).

With degrees in land, city and regional planning — she is a senior planner for the city of Mill Valley — a career choice driven by the destruction of the orchards, Newman didn't intend to write a cookbook. It wasn't until her frequent visits back to Saratoga to care for her aging parents, many years after her family home was sold, that she realized only one commercial orchard existed in the area.

She'd often walk Novakovich Orchards on Fruitvale Avenue with her father — a nostalgic, comforting habit they shared before he died in 2011. Chatting with the Novakovich family as they purchased their fruit brought back happy memories of her

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COURTESY OF LISA PRINCE NEWMAN

Lisa Prince Newman, of Mill Valley, has written a cookbook that celebrates apricots and her childhood memories growing up in the Santa Clara Valley.



BAY AREA NEWS GROUP ARCHIVES

Juan Hernandez reaches up for apricots at a Santa Clara Valley orchard.

Apricots

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childhood. Newman began to forge relationships with other orchardists, planted three apricot trees in her yard and started a blog with the same name as her book, which connected her with others who had similar memories of Santa

Clara Valley, as did a high school reunion.

Her book was born. Newman includes recipes from her family, friends, orchardists and Bay Area chefs, including the Apricot Bars that won the 1958 Pillsbury Bake-Off and the Bacon-Wrapped Apricots inspired by a French bistrot. She also explains the various types of apricots, delves into their history as

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Lisa Prince Newman will be at the Saratoga Blossom Festival on Saturday. The event runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Saratoga Civic Center and Heritage Orchard area, at Fruitvale and Saratoga avenues. Admission is free. www.saratogahistory.com.

On Sunday, she'll be featured at the Los Altos History Museum's Apricot STEM Fair, a family celebration of science, agriculture, robotics and more. Admission is free. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the museum, 51 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos. www.losaltoshistory.org.

well as the valley's history, Apricots, she says, and offers resources. shouldn't be relegated to

being considered just a summer fruit.

"Apricots can be preserved, they can be frozen, you can make jams, and dried apricots can be used throughout the year," she says.

As much as she hopes her cookbook turns readers into "apricot advocates," Newman also hopes they'll support the remaining orchardists by buying their fruit. talk-

ing to growers at farmers markets and asking favorite local grocers to carry the best-tasting varieties.

"The book is trying to celebrate folks who are still growing those apricots and trying to shine a light on them," she says.

And maybe the taste of a juicy, sweet, luscious apricot will eventually become part of someone else's childhood memories, too.