

# The Jell-O Girl In California

by Lynne Belluscio

I just returned from San Jose, California, where I spent Thanksgiving with my son and his family. While there, I also helped them move into their new house – their eighth in ten years and the third since they moved back from China. But they expect to be in the new house for quite some time.

After spending five days packing and unpacking and covering miles of shelves with shelf paper, we finally had a chance to drive down to Monterey Bay to the fantastic aquarium. It was built in an old sardine factory with the help of the Packard family – of the Hewitt-Packard Company. Monterey had many sardine factories but by the 1950s the sardines were fished out of the bay and the factories closed.

The aquarium has a great exhibit about the sardine industry and there were some great ideas that perhaps someday we can use for the Jell-O exhibit. Unfortunately there is no film of the Jell-O production lines, that I know of and the Monterey canning factories apparently recorded a lot of their processing. There were hundreds of women packing fish into tin cans and others wrapping the cans in paper. On another line, the women gathered the tins and packed them into boxes – much the same way the women at the Jell-O factory worked. It would be great if someday we could find some film taken in the Jell-O factory.

In the 1920s, each box of Jell-O had a little recipe booklet packed inside. One series of booklets featured a picture of the Jell-O Girl visiting places throughout America. There were



twelve different booklets in the series, including Niagara Falls, Lake Louise, Ottawa, Mammoth Cave, Lookout Mountain, the

Grand Canyon and the Pueblo in Taos, New Mexico. There were three images of the Jell-O Girl in California. She visited the

Spanish Mission at Capistrano, sailed to Catalina Island and took a horseback ride through Yosemite.

The Jell-O Girl traveled with her pet parrot, Polly. While at Yosemite, Polly flew into the mist of Bridal Veil Falls and got so wet that she had to ride on the horn of the saddle as they went along the trail on horseback. At Catalina the “day was perfect. Overhead the sky was a deep and cloudless blue, the warm, soft air carried mingled odors of salt and orange blossoms and the sun smiled down on this kindly California morning.” After sailing to Catalina Island (the parrot got sea sick) the Jell-O Girl visited the San Juan Capistrano which was founded in 1776 by the leader of the Franciscan monks. The native Indians built the mission of adobe in nine years. Then they gathered at the church for a feast. The story tells that during the feast when hundreds were gathered in the church, the dome collapsed, crushing to death many of the people below. The celebration turned to a time of mourning.

When the Jell-O Girl visited the ruins of the old mission she walked in the shadowy cloisters and stood under the crumbling arches and thought of the early California days. “It was nearly sunset, one of the most beautiful times in those California hills. Long after, the Jell-O Girl was to remember the quiet chatter of birds in the trees, the hum of innumerable insects among the vines and the flowers, the long shadows stealing across the garden slowly and the faint perfume of eucalyptus trees.”

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