

chapter 1: finding home within

Residential Treatment — Where Safety Takes Root

In every forest, there are moments when a child needs a safe clearing—a place to rest, to learn, and to grow strong enough to continue the journey. For nearly a century, Five Acres has been that place for children who need care when home feels uncertain.

Sarah Bonk, a 17-year-old student at Flintridge Preparatory School, first came to know Five Acres not through a brochure or a website, but through family history. Her grandfather, Donald Bonk, had once called Five Acres home. Curious to learn more about the place that brought safety to her grandfather during a difficult chapter of his childhood, Sarah volunteered at Five Acres over the summer, walking the same grounds where his story began.

Donald was born in 1926, the same year Five Acres moved to its historical headquarters in Altadena. During the Great Depression, his family faced hardship. Originally from Chicago, Donald and his mother were struggling to find steady footing. She knew she could not care for him on her own. In that moment of uncertainty, Five Acres became a place of refuge. Donald arrived at age nine and remained until he was sixteen.

Life at Five Acres looked different then. Children shared dormitory-style rooms, and a husband-and-wife team oversaw daily life with firm expectations. Donald mowed lawns, washed dishes, and learned responsibility through routine. It was not always easy, but it was steady. And it was safe.

After living with his mother for two more years, Donald joined the Navy at age 18 and left for boot camp. While others cried themselves to sleep, Donald, having already learned how to live in a structured environment, felt prepared. Five Acres had quietly taught him resilience, independence, and how to stand on his own.

Years later, Donald returned to Five Acres with Christmas gifts for the children who lived there. He noticed how much had changed—private rooms, softer spaces, and a new way of caring—yet the heart of the place remained the same.

Just as Five Acres once took care of Donald, he spent his life taking care of others. He lovingly supported his mother until the day she passed away. His son, David, remembers how deeply his daughters adored their grandfather, growing up close to him, laughing, hiking, and sharing everyday moments. Sarah remembers watching Western movies with him when she was little. He loved working on cars.

Though his childhood held adversity, Donald was determined to make a full life, and he did. Surrounded by family, heart, and hope, his story came full circle.

Like Pooh once reminded us, sometimes the most important thing a place can do is help you discover your own strength. For generations of children, Five Acres has been that place—quietly helping them find home within themselves.

