

## Spring into Summer, 1984

Part One: May-June, my first month in California

At the end of my first full year of college at MCAD, Brian invited me to stay with him over the summer, for exposure to California, and help him work on home remodeling, building redwood decks. He started a one-man business called "*Brian Builds*", catchy! This was in Contra Costa County just east of the San Francisco Bay and along the delta to the north. I was mainly interested in exploring San Francisco, which held a mystique for me — a mythos. The Grateful Dead was a strong part of my life at the time, and Jefferson Airplane, the sixties psychedelic bands were huge in my cultural upbringing. Also in popular culture were movies such as *Vertigo*, cinematically depicting a very unique city for America. Boosting this attraction was a speech with slideshow and sound by visiting neon artist Cork Marcheski, at MCAD that spring. This had the freshman class intrigued. I was mesmerized. Tales of this magical home to beatnik writers, hippie artist - musicians, and showing images of The City by the Bay, including *The Saloon*, with "*blues that will make your lizard brain squeak*", as Cork put it. I was sold! And Cork introduced us to his psychedelic band from 1968, *The Fifty Foot Hose*. Fascination for my 20 year old self, who embraced the psychedelic ethos far more than the limited yet boldly DIY post-punk attitudes prevalent in the Minneapolis zeitgeist of the time. Yep, San Francisco sounds *more* for me!

The semester wrapped up well at MCAD, I had unique education gained, exposure to different ideas about art in contemporary times, and new friends. I created some things I wouldn't have otherwise, and it felt exciting — yet my original goal to be a better painter wasn't being met.

**May 23rd**

Packing up to fly to SFO (while spinning my LP of *Uncle Meat* by Frank Zappa with the Mothers), I remember completely not knowing what lay ahead — nothing. I went on faith in brother Bri that it was going to be

great. Mom and Dad had been enthusiastic about California for years of visits by then. They would rave about how splendid it is, but as a teenager it fell on deaf ears. Now I was going west, unsuspecting what a massive life-changer it will be!

The plane ride when approaching the bay area, gazing with wonder at the earth below, I was first impressed by the rolling, golden tanned hills. Over Bay really blew my mind — the brightly colored saline pools. Totally unexpected and bizarre, quite alien planet-like! Nice introduction to the bay area — with psychedelic, sci-fi colors!

Landing late afternoon, I couldn't wait to explore the city! I met Brian pulling up in his white van, with a hearty welcome, I can imagine he exclaimed something like *"Hey bro! Welcome to California!"* with his characteristic enthusiastic voice! I hopped aboard with my luggage, and if you know the drive up 101 from the airport, it passes by South San Francisco, with its name displayed giant sized on a hill.

Brian didn't want to go into SF that evening, buback to his apartment on the east side of the bay. Guaranteeing that we'll return in a couple of days, and I believe he was working all day so his energy may have been lacking by now. We see the dense buildings of metropolitan SF while heading towards the Bay Bridge, to my inexperienced self it looked intimidatingly big, being the first big city I'd ever visited other than Chicago as a kid in 1973 (too young to register as much). Bri pointing out the distinctive aroma of coffee as we entered the bridge, describing that the **Hills Brothers** coffee plant was under the bridge. [long gone now]

**The San Francisco - Oakland Bay Bridge** freaked me out going east since it felt like a tunnel that went on much longer than any bridge in Minnesota I know of. Up through the **Caldecott Tunnel**, and out the other side felt like a furnace compared. **Contra Costa County**, where I soon later discovered is mostly generic American suburbia, but with some fabulous hills, and **Mount Diablo**.

Bri lived in **Pleasant Hill**, in a pretty nice modern suburban apartment complex, only two stories tall, spread out and with a swimming pool that I

really went for! Getting later, we settled in, set up my room in the den, and Brian ever the movie buff with an early video tape deck, couldn't wait to turn me on to *Popeye* and *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*. Fun films of the time that I enjoyed, yet I hoped for San Francisco instead. Bri reassured me that we will definitely do that in a couple days. Meanwhile, the bro had plans.

### **First days**

According to my calendar, I arrived on Wednesday the 23rd, we got to work on a deck job that following Thursday, and after working on it Friday the 25th, Brian surprised me with the **Moody Blues** at Concord Pavillion! He scored the best tickets — 2nd row center! He also included his cute brunette love interest, Cathy. We had a perfect evening, a beautiful venue nestled in the hills of the area, great temperature, and we're both fans of the Moodies, Bri saw them in 1971 at the old Minneapolis Auditorium, he raved about how late the show was, with large joints being passed around, giving the event a dreamy feeling. This offered a connection to a legendary era of hippie concerts, and Brian loved reminiscing about this, from his college years at the U of M. I believe cousin Ron, probably his wife Carol, and Renee who might have been Brians fiance at the time (married in 1972) went together.

I had been a Moody Blues fan from high school, loving their ethereal sounding albums with friends Jamie and Matt. We saw them in St Paul, 1981 — eventful concert! Now this was my second time seeing them, in very different setup; outdoors, 2nd row! Close up! Wonderful introduction to California! Seeing them there became a nearly annual tradition after permanently moving there. The last time I caught them there was again up front, 3rd row center. (with visiting friend Tony, and my ex-wife Alisa, 1999)

What I remember of the show most was *Legend Of A Mind*, with Ray Thomas in the lead on vocals and fantastic flute. His solo was fab! *Question*, with Justin Hayward rapidly charging that rhythm guitar! *Isn't Life Strange*, beautiful spiritual song by John Lodge. *Gypsy* was a standout for me. The newer material well played with enthusiasm. All around great

concert experience. Thanks to brother Brian!

### **Memorial Day Weekend, San Francisco!**

The following days were loaded with being introduced to **San Francisco, Berkeley, and Marin County!**

Driving into the city was a thrill. It's dense, large and compact simultaneously. Driving there I was stunned by it's almost sci-fi visage of its skyline, from the futuristic **Transamerica** pyramid prominent then, with the sweeping vistas of the bay, **Golden Gate Bridge** span beyond, and the Bay Bridge views from the upper deck driving West is astounding — especially when going through the **Treasure Island** tunnel, opening up to the suspension cables of the western span. I never tired of that sensational geometric unfolding view, beholding the towers with their elegantly engineered cables. A major achievement of 1937, and the much more famous Golden Gate Bridge beyond.

It all gave excitement and a fresh, forward newness. I was having a great season!

Entering the city in 1984 from the Bay Bridge usually was on the (gladly) now long gone **Embarcadero freeway bridge** that wrapped around the waterfront to the east of downtown, and onto **Broadway**, bustling with a unique urban energy, with its strip joints and nightclubs and bookstores. **The Condor** with the famed tits of Carol Doda on the corner with lit nipples, on the tall you-can't-miss sign on **Columbus & Broadway**. I didn't know yet what neighborhood this was, with no orientation established.

I believe Brian had a goal to get some cookies he raved about, near **Ghirardelli Square / Fishermans Wharf**, the busy tourist trap. I don't remember the name, but I stayed in the van while Brian picked up a few from the shop. It was a beautiful day, with joggers out in full eighties style. This was near the cable car turnaround, with shops, street artisans, galleries and tourists. I sat absorbing the scene in. We proceeded up from the Bay through **North Beach** neighborhoods to **Russian Hill**. Impressed by the rows upon rows of bay-windowed apartment buildings, Victorian &

Edwardian San Francisco styles I would have imagined more to be European, not American. I remember how bone white most of them are. Distinguished, bright in the late Spring sunlight.

~~~ **The Ocean** ~~~

Bri knew how to show one around, and that drive through San Francisco had me mesmerized. When in Golden Gate Park, approaching my first, highly anticipated exposure to the ocean, around the bend that would be where the northern windmill is, then *boom!* -- **The Pacific Ocean!** I felt instantly awestruck by the active immensity of its enormous presence. The ocean was something I dreamed for, coming from the land of lakes, creeks and rivers, this was a whole new world of the biggest body of water on earth — or in the known universe. My heart and brain leapt!

We spent time exploring the beach, then the ruins of the **Sutro Baths**, with the cave, crashing waves and saline air, I was in love with the area! We walked out on the ruins, I was fascinated. The big rock that you could walk on carefully from the concrete walkway [long since demolished for safety].

What an amazing afternoon. Bri really knew what to show me!

Salt air at Ocean Beach, at the **Cliff House**. With the vintage arcade sounds of player pianos, *Laughing Sal*, *The French Executioner*, *Suzie dances the Can-Can*, and so much more...at the irresistibly fun **Musee Mechanique!**

The evening went to North Beach neighborhood all the way over east corner of the city, after more driving around more impressive areas! We ate at a future regular fav, **North Beach Pizza**, then the sign on the corner only had the word **PIZZA** back then! We thoroughly enjoyed the pizza with Anchor Steam beers — made right there in San Francisco. *I was sold.* This would be a wonderland to live in! Then we walked around the 'hood, with its crazy bustling night life.

I didn't then know exactly what the orientation was on my first night in the city, with Brian showing me around in style. All I knew was that I was *somewhere* in San Francisco, with hilly streets and buildings with true

character, eclectic, a buzzing nightlife, and I loved it. This turned out to be the slopes of Grant street near the oldest Saloon [established 1861], at Columbus in North Beach; an area I frequented soon after and became very familiar with.

That Memorial Day weekend was entirely spent experiencing San Francisco, and some Marin County too! I had no idea what years I would have there later as home. The Bridge, the vistas, history, Victorians, food, coffee, quality, etc. and Berkeley too!

### **Clams , Blues , Anchors**

One of the evenings we were joined by Cathy for dinner at **Yuet Lee's** at the edge of **Chinatown**, Brian was enthusiastic about the large amount of clams-in-the-shell with the dish, we counted 25! Then wandering, ended up in **The Saloon!** (the one I mentioned established in 1861) This is The Saloon that Cork Marcheski featured in part of his slideshow talk in the auditorium at MCAD, still freshly impressive a few months previously. A highlight was what he said about this very Saloon we're in to enjoy some live blues. On a good night, has *"blues to make your lizard brain squeak."* So in there, enjoying Anchor Steams, with the blues band playing in the tight narrow antiquated bar, grooving marvelously to a full house, I was moved to add Corks quote as additional graffiti to the restroom wall. **"Blues to make your lizard brain squeak"**. I then told Brian and Cathy about it, who were having a good time with barstool seats at the bar. When one of them went to the restroom, they told me someone else wrote under it, **"No Shit!"** A memorable night. A great initiation weekend to San Francisco! Yep, I want to move here, and with no inkling whatsoever of the rich, dimensional experiences I would have there for most of the rest of my entire adult life.

To summarize what I saw that three day weekend; **Chinatown, North Beach, Golden Gate Bridge, Fishermans Wharf, The Haight, the Jefferson Airplane house on Fulton — still black and gold, Ocean Beach - finding sand dollars with my feet wading a few yards from shore, Musee Mechanique, Sutro Baths ruins and cave, sunny days! Berkeleys Telegraph**

Avenue and the Marin headlands, Muir Woods. We really took a lot in — with more ahead that summer!

After that weekend it was back to work on building decks in hot weather Contra Costa County, a suburban area I found boring, so I got to painting, in the apartment one turned out good of the Nicollet Island mansion from a photograph. The other was a disastrous experiment with poor structure, eventually trashed, but painters need to burn through their wastes of paint and time, to eventually break through to something better. It's part of paying your dues, if serious about being a real artist, not just a dabbler which was what I still was at that stage.

### **Grateful Dead!**

I saw that the Grateful Dead are playing in Sacramento, and Brian instantly suggested we go! Cool! I was hungry for an opportunity to experience a California Dead concert, and outdoors! We got tickets for June 10th - great! A Sunday afternoon. We had Cathy with, and set out eastward to the hotter central valley. We had brunch at The Nut Tree, a kind of one-off Perkins/Denny's but with a kitschy sixties design that Brian had a nostalgic feel for in a fun way. Nice time, and after a laugh over the saying printed on the sugar packets, "*Enjoy life, eat out more often*", I took one and actually still have in an old wallet.

### **Cal Expo**

Reminded me of a high school sports stadium with simple bleachers, not very large. Really nice for the Dead. I bought a tie-dye in the parking lot full of deadhead freaks, and got a cartoon page from guys dressed as shieks, and I still have this.

Very hot weather conditions, so much that they opened the nearby water slide to help cool people down, in danger of sunstroke — yes, it was that hot (I should have gone). We settled in the middle of the ground with a cooler, sunscreen, and blanket, to a sweet spot. I felt like wandering, slathering sunscreen on and left Brian and Cathy to themselves for awhile during first set. Looking and sounding great, I thoroughly enjoyed the *Bird*

*Song* from the back rafters! Sweet scene, and hot in the sun. Wandering and dancing, then during set break I hung under the seats where it was shaded to cool down, along with others.

Set two was great, my first California dead concert! Smiles abounding I felt welcome! Reviews of Grateful Dead concerts abound by the thousands out there, so I'm keeping this brief. Highlights for me were *Bird Song*, *China Cat Sunflower*, *He's Gone*, *Drums*, *Truckin'*, *Throwing Stones*, *Brokedown Palace*. I've had the sbd recordings of it for decades now, and it's a fine show for 84. Jerry was in decline by then, but playing well. The weather was scorching that afternoon, and I was impressed they still could play music in that heat. I was wearing my favorite old Grateful Dead t-shirt with the classic skeleton with roses illustration. A hole was worn in behind one shoulder where I neglected to apply sunblock, so later I had a red oval of sunburn on my skin for a few days. It was a wonderful, memorable time!

### Suburban County

The following weeks were spent working on decks, learning how to build from Brians knack for it. Lunch was usually fun, we'd frequent a drive-in diner in the area of Pleasant Hill with waitresses serving at your car window! Like in *American Graffiti* without rollerskates. Comfort food, root beer floats, cute chicks, a nostalgic diner appeal that Bri in particular appreciated. After work I'd be in the swimming pool for around 45 minutes. I was a good swimmer then, from years of Minnesota lakes and the river. Dining often out, Mexican, or fast food. **Fuddruckers** was nearby, with massive burgers, too big to finish in one go for most people. Bri and I would almost compete on who would eat more! Fortunately we had high metabolism, working hard burning it off well. Also there were **Foster's Freeze** fast food spots around the bay area, a California version of Dairy Queen. The city had **Doggie Diner**, which would be part of my life years later via the iconic dogheads!

Contra Costa County is suburbia, with not much of interest to me there. Things that impressed: the botany! Unique plants not found outside in MN,



succulents growing all around the apartment complex, the spindly "bottle brush" trees, eucalyptus trees with the pungent scent and bizarre button like seed capsules they drop, so different. *Lizards!* Skittering about wildly. And the reflective disks glued down the center of every road, that would never last where snow plows are needed. I explored the hills nearby, golden California hills with vistas I appreciated as a flatlander. **Mt Diablo** loomed large as the biggest mountain of the bay area. There was a small park across from **Diablo Valley College**, with a pond, **Chilpanchingo Park**, where I ended up mingling with a few local freaks who hung out there. At **Brians** we watched a lot of movies. Otherwise I worked on the paintings mentioned, or rode around on my bicycle — I forgot to say that I took it as extra luggage on the plane!

My favorite thing was taking the bike on **BART**, to San Francisco, getting off at **Civic Center station**, riding West from there on busy **Fell Street** (because I didn't any better direct route yet), through **The Panhandle**, exploring **The Haight**, including finding **720 Ashbury**, the famous Grateful Deads Victorian house of the sixties. Through Golden Gate Park to Ocean Beach! Such great days into evening sunsets. Then often meeting Brian afterwards, usually after his acting class downtown.

**The Jean Shelton school of acting**, still there, on **Sutter** near **Powell**. Once I went with Brian to get a taste of the course and the downtown area, busy with downtown urban life, with **Union Square** nearby, hills hills hills, and the **Academy of Art** there on the same streets, where Bri pointed out as a potential school of interest. Hmm, *possibly*.

The class of around 20 acting students, and then one appears — a completely stunning brunette of a beauty that had me floored! (I think everyone is seeing her the first time) Her name was Holiday, I believe that was a stage name she adapted. Super nice to meet. Anyway, the lesson I remember from that sit-in was all about being aware of the room space you're in. The distance from your head to the upper corners of the room. Proximity of space, I could grok as a visual artist. Fascinating. Another feature of the area were the galleries on Geary near Powell, specializing in highly illustrated paintings from Slavic countries. One artist in

particular, a very surrealistic style, like a Russian Dali,.....,the name? Forgotten, and I can't track down those Slavic names.

### **Craig visits!**

San Francisco. Cable cars reopen in use in 1984, after a few years of refurbishing the old system. June 28th, 1984 is the date on my calendar that lists when Craig visited while I was staying at Brian's apartment in Pleasant Hill. We took BART in the morning while Brian had work to do that afternoon.

Craig and I got our cable car tickets from a vending machine at the **Embarcadero**, being the first stop downtown. I think it was \$3 for a free full days use. We caught the first one, and not crowded. A new experience! As the underground cable pulled the antique, cleaned up clanging trolley up **California Street**. I think we got off at Grant Street in Chinatown and walked for awhile, catching another cable car on Powell Street ahead, bringing us up **Hyde Street**, then down to Fisherman's Wharf. It was perfect late June weather.

After walking some of the steep streets, we were ready for lunch and a beer. Down near the main tourist drag of the wharf area, we found a German pub with a name like **The Hofbrauhaus**. We find a table easily in this mostly empty pub, and it must've been the hour around 3pm?

The waitress was dressed as a Saint Pauli beer label girl! Totally cute, fun knockout, keeping Craig and I inside ordering a few too many pints of Becks! (or was that pitchers?!) so we got a bit tanked — laughing with the waitress! She really knew how to work a couple of Midwestern guys. I'm sure the tips are generous!

We were scheduled to meet Bri at a point nearby there, but we mindlessly let beer and the waitress influence our sense of time, and left the Hofbrauhaus late, highly buzzed on a few too many beers, and laughing!

When we found Brian waiting in his white construction van, he was *furios!* I mean stark raving furious! We were late, and he must've been

waiting a long time. But we just laughed, making him even madder.

Fortunately, this was Brian, who got over it soon enough, and we went on to the classic fav spot for dinner — North Beach Pizza (or PIZZA) on Grant Avenue — moving on to pints of Anchor Steam!

Or was that the same evening of going to the Cliff House? We enjoyed the city a few more times with Craig visiting, but I bet it was North Beach that evening. The following was possibly a couple of evenings later after driving in earlier in the day with Brian in his white construction van.

Back to that evening....Or one of the evenings... A fun city evening with youthful livers, the discussion veered to great movies, being Brian's expertise. Both brothers couldn't believe that I'd never seen *Citizen Kane!*

Getting late, drive back to Brian's apartment — with a beer stop at a store on the way. I was amazed that California sells it in grocery stores (and no 3.2) drinking age was 19 in Minnesota. 21 in California, so I was underage, but didn't get carded.

On with the weaker Pabst from a 12-pack, we were *loaded* walking back from the store, singing Beatles songs loud and off key (way off key). I feel sorry for any neighbours trying to sleep on those streets after midnight. We were crazed!

Back to Brian's, he plays a VHS of *Citizen Kane*, on his large top loading player (1981 Panasonic?) The bro's hit the hay, while I stayed up watching it to the end, amazed. It was nearly sunrise.

Hard to believe that I didn't pass out after all of that beer! Like I said; youthful livers!

**More San Francisco** for the following few days, with Brian treating us to dramatic views on a rambling drive through the Berkeley hills, then to the western side of San Francisco, through the **Upper Haight**, walking the area, then the ocean! For Anchor Steams at the Cliff House. Those were some bright, fun days! Regardless of my lack of precise chronological order here. The loud, drunk singing *Citizen Kane* night could have been

that Saturday, not Thursday. We explored the Haight one afternoon. North Beach at least one evening. The Cliff House late afternoon? But the cable car and Hofbrauhaus day was the first day Craig was in town.

On one of the great North Beach nights, we came across a cable car line being worked on. The welders sparks dramatically illuminating the dark street. [Hyde?] Craig took a great photo of this historical San Francisco scene.

And that is merely a brief skimming jot of memoirs of fun couple of days exploring San Francisco with the bro's. Brian, Craig and I. Dammit all, I want to send this essay for Brian to enjoy — he's the one who made that San Francisco summer possible. For now, this is for Craig and I!

And those were highlights of my late May and June of 1984, a pivotal time! This is only part one. More ahead on the rest of that summer...

*~ DG, wrapped up this writing in February 2024*





*photos by brother Craig!*