

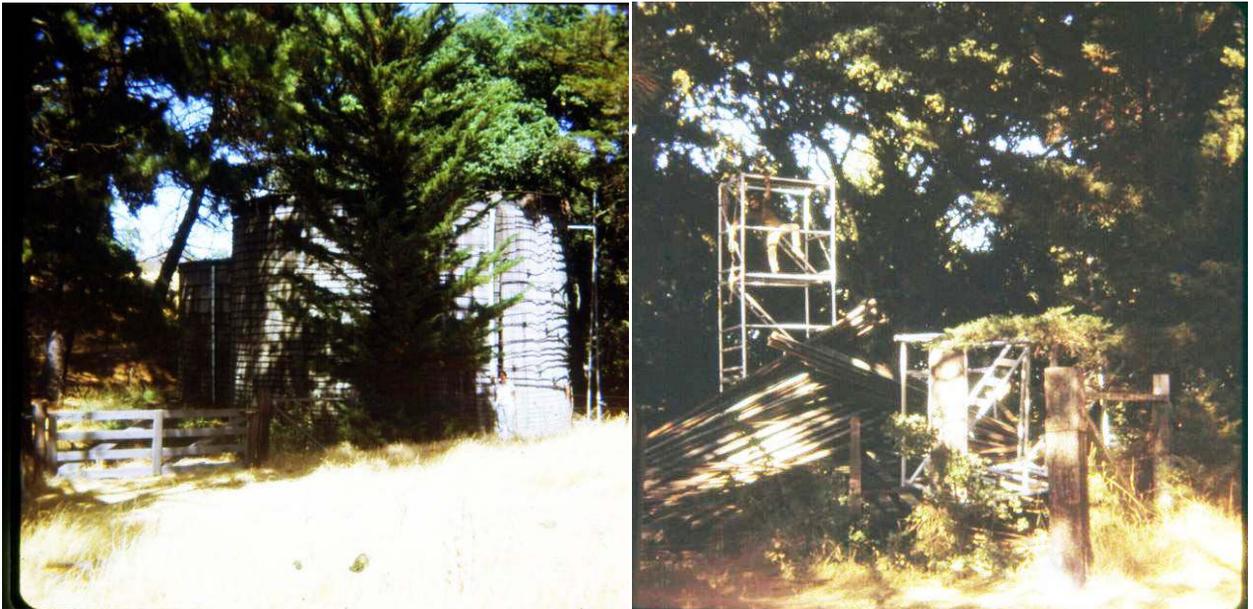
Howdy, howdy, all!

9/28/2019

It's that time of year when we normally put together our annual travelogue as a means of reaching out to folks from our past with whom we might otherwise not remain in touch! Unfortunately, this year our travel has been much more limited than usual, and we don't really have a single travel event to report on. As a substitute, however, we thought it might be fun to reach into the past a bit and describe a rather unique 22-year-long event (1974-1996) which played a major role in our family's local history -- the construction (using our own, then much younger, hands) of our "water-tank" house in the rural Skylonda area of the San Francisco Peninsula. If this seems a bit like winding the clock both back and down, it probably is! And in any case it forces us to document the whole thing for family records ...



"Before" view of 125 Skylonda building site (1974) "After" view of redwood tank at 125-127 Skylonda Drive (2019)



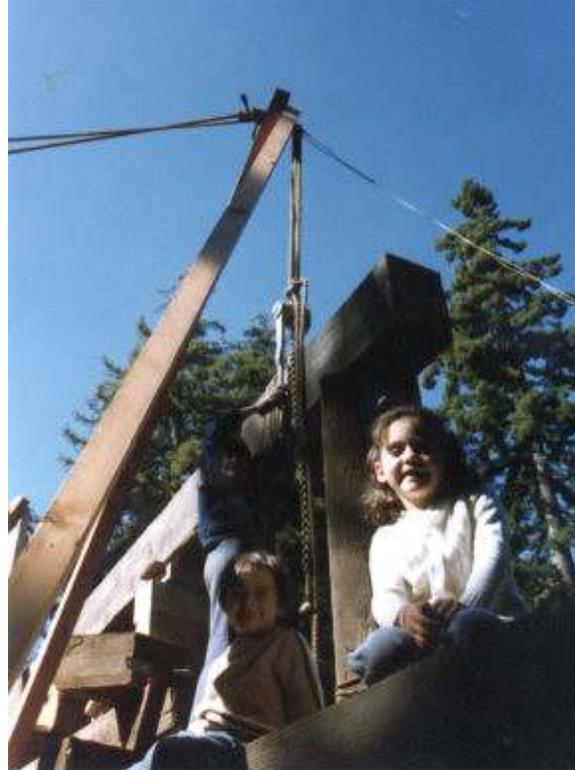
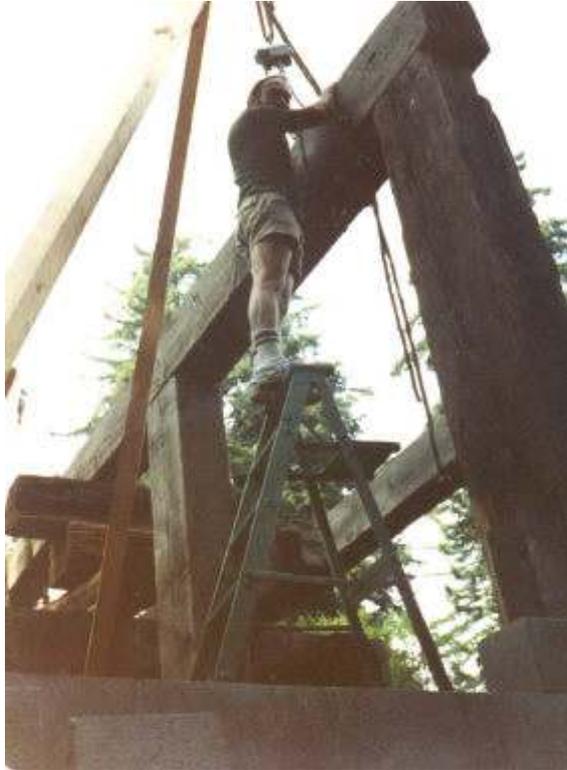
"Before" views of 100,000-gallon 30-foot diameter, 20-foot high redwood water tank "in situ" at Pony Tracks Ranch (a 450-acre property at 495 Old Spanish Trail, Portola Valley, CA) circa 1974 – before collapsing tank prior to removal (left) and after collapsing (right). Note very relieved Bruce in top of scaffolding after the "programmed" collapse (after knocking out a single stave, the others pinwheel around startlingly fast, careening into the center of the tank).

Once the tank had been "collapsed," we were faced with the prospect of transporting some 200 20'-long 3"x6" redwood staves (plus large amounts of miscellaneous – mainly 12"x12" -- redwood beams from both the floor and various underpinnings) from the Pony Tracks Ranch area over a dirt road and up to Skyline Boulevard (at 1500' above the valley floor). Our beat-up 10-year-old (\$450!) 1964 Chevy pickup (with handy overhead rack) stepped in to take up the slack, allowing us to transport the whole business uphill to our lot some 10 miles or so away (several months worth of trips several times a week). During this same period we also acquired several 12"x16" beams (two of which were 30' long!) – remnants from a gantry crane in a demolished San Francisco wharf. Once in place on our lot, everything was stacked and covered with tarps, where they rested for the next year or so while we put together our plans and begin a long struggle with the County to approve the whole thing – including an unexpected requirement for computing "loads + bending moments" for the 30' beams (something about 'unusual construction materials'), a development that forced Bruce to dust off his trusty slide rule, dig out his old "strength of materials" textbooks, and get to work (no computers in 1974!). The figures we came up with were never questioned by the local building department, which led us to believe that perhaps they themselves were not completely up to speed on such matters!

Following are pictures taken from 1974-1996 at various stages of construction at 125-127 Skylonda Drive, Woodside, CA. Adults(?) shown are Bruce/Kathy Craig, kids are Karen, Julie, Kevin – now all in their mid-40s circa 2019. Extremely useful rigging for lifting the 30'-long beams was shown us by then next-door-neighbor at 131 Skylonda, Gus Anderson, a retired PG&E lineman and all-around great guy, who called it a "gin-sling."



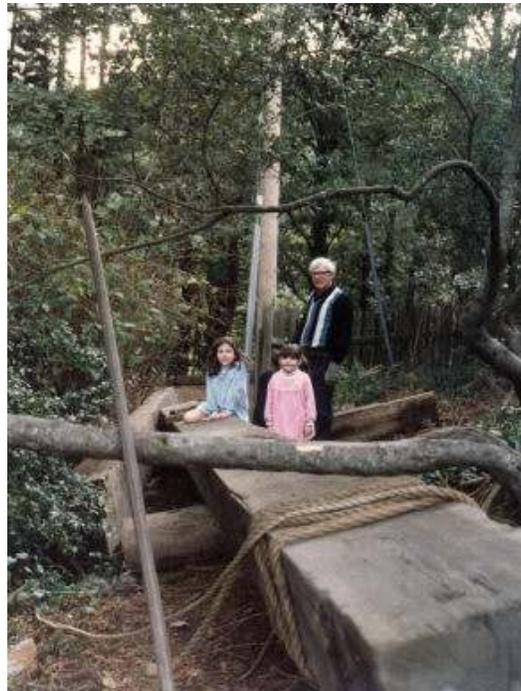
Bruce and Kathy each demonstrating "ease of use" of gin-sling hoist made of 2 16'-long 4"x6" beams
(Either rope-style pulleys or chain-style "come-along" can be used)
(Piece being hoisted is directly next to "hoister" in each photo)



The 30-foot long 12"x16" beams are from a surplus gantry crane on a San Francisco wharf. Main "building inspection" was the 1989 magnitude-7.0 Loma Prieta earthquake, which we passed without incident!



Kevin, providing a few much-needed tips
Julie (equipped with Craig standard-issue,
construction-grade pigtails)



Moving 12"x16" beams from street using phone-pole(!) rollers
(Karen, Julie, and old friend/neighbor Art McKenzie)



Interim stage of hoisting one of two 12" x 16" x 30' beams into place (former uprights for a SF gantry crane)



Redwood 12"x12"s stacked under beam for backup support were underpinnings of original water tank

Raising the two 30-foot-long 12"x16" Doug Fir beams into place using two "gin-slings" (one on either end) was the single most delicate part of the whole operation, and undoubtedly one that caused various friends to question our sanity (probably including Malcolm, although he never publicly expressed such a sentiment, bless his departed soul!)



A quick breather or two between "lifts" (What, me worry?)



Two views of massive poured chimney (support for one end of 30' beams) at various stages of construction



Interior framing starting to come together (siding and redwood staves not yet attached – next year's job!)

There was always a "next year" (22 of them, in fact), and occasionally we'd have a small get-together to show friends how crazy we really were (like to think we got it from our parents, which is very possible!).

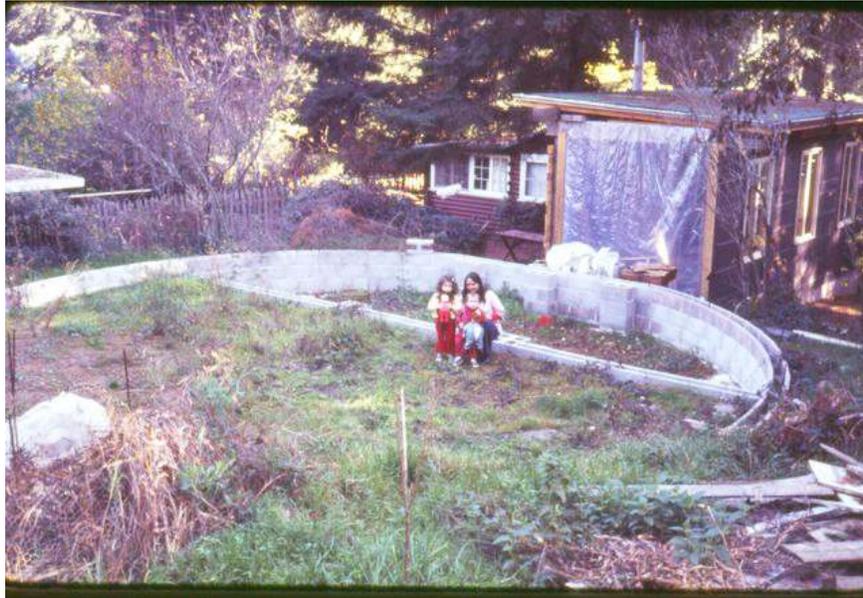


Bruce's sister Kim demonstrating how she garnered her 1950s-era BS in construction from Georgia Tech (as one of only half a dozen coeds!)

Shortly before Christmas in December of 1996, the San Mateo County Chief Building Inspector ("da main man") showed up for a "final inspection" (last of approximately 66 such inspections) and, after looking around for a few minutes, dug out his pen, signed a piece of paper with a flourish, handed it to us, said "Merry Christmas!" and disappeared out the door (probably under heavy pressure to get us off his books!). End of an era for us (so we thought), but the next year we got a terse letter from the County reminding us that we still had a two-car garage to build "to make the whole thing legal." Different story, although we eventually did that as well (1999-2000) and finally succeeded in "making the whole thing legal." Amazingly enough, almost 25 years have passed since completing the tank, and everything is still standing (sitting, lying, whatever it is that houses do...).

Cheers to all -- Bruce, Kathy, and family (3 children, 9 grandchildren!)

ADDENDUM 2 – A little additional background for family history purposes – People frequently ask us how we ever got involved in such an outlandish project – one that occupied us for almost a quarter of a century! The following photo we stumbled across recently (showing Kathy with Karen and Julie and an unborn Kevin!) partially answers that question.



Sometime around 1957(?) the County of San Mateo, California (the rural area where we have lived in the hills just south of San Francisco at 127 Skylonda since 1969 – 50 years ago!) crafted an ordinance requiring a minimum lot size of one acre for new construction. This ordinance essentially “obsoleted” any possibility of NEW construction on undeveloped smaller lots in areas that had been subdivided before that time. In the early 1970s, however, an enterprising local realtor (Rich Rollins, Jr) combed through County property records looking for such undersized lots that might be of interest to sell to immediate neighbors in order to increase their lot size, and in due course he contacted us regarding the property at 125 Skylonda, immediately adjacent to our property at 127 Skylonda. The price was so reasonable we couldn’t resist, and we then began looking around for options to expand the size of our tiny 1930s-era cabin (built during Prohibition for weekend getaways out of reach of the local gendarmes!), eventually stumbling onto the water-tank option, which zoning regulations required be tied to our own house (since each separate lot was less than an acre). A portion of this second lot that we acquired is shown in the foreground of the photo above, where the partial outline of the future tank foundation can be seen – adjacent to our own small redwood cabin on its original lot (shown in the background).

The photo above was taken about two years after we started and shows 1) the old 1930's-era cottage in the background (127 Skylonda), 2) the (tarp-covered) extension structure we built between the old house and the proposed tank to legally tie the two separate lots together (using staves from a smaller 10,000-gallon tank – also acquired from the Pony Tracks Ranch!), and 3) the beginnings of the foundation for the water-tank addition itself (125 Skylonda). It all looks a bit raggedy-tag, but what it really needed was another 20 years of work to sort things out! The photo above illustrates one of those moments when we began to realize what we had gotten ourselves into – two small children, a third on the way, lots of hard work behind, and much more ahead! Fortunately, we managed to get past it – perhaps something to do with youth!

And speaking of youth ---->
(or is it just scruffy low-paid help?)

