

## Life In Atlanta from November 1965 to November 1967

Returning to Atlanta was something of an out-of-body experience for me. I had never really planned to live in Atlanta as an adult. It was a place my parents had ended up in, but not particularly from any desire to live there, more simply as a result of circumstance – my father needed a job, they moved to Marietta where Lockheed was located, once they could afford to leave Marietta they did -- moving to a large nearby city (Atlanta), and there they (and I!) ended up. I have never liked hot weather, and the combination of heat and humidity in Atlanta was something that had no appeal whatsoever for me. I lived there for two years during my junior and senior years in high school (1954-56), and also spent summers in Atlanta during my four years of college (1956-1960). Once I graduated in 1960, I never expected to return there to live. Six years later, however, there I was again – much to my own surprise and chagrin! The fact of the matter was simply that, even though I had a 4-year college degree in Electrical Engineering, I had no practical experience in the field other than 4 summers of working as a draftsman and technician at Lockheed, and, on top of that, I had been out of school for over 6 years without having worked in the field at all! Who would ever want to hire an obviously confused young gad-about like myself? The answer – Lockheed/Georgia! After all, they had given me a 4-year scholarship to school, provided me with work for 4 summers, and my father was currently serving as president of the Lockheed/Georgia Management Club! So in I went to the local Lockheed employment office and, sho' nuf, the gentleman in Personnel welcomed me back from my prodigal wanderings and offered me a job as one of them there “inginers” in the Analog Computing Group at GELAC. Hot dog, a real job – I was a newly minted employee of GELAC (Georgia Lockheed Aircraft Corporation) and even sporting an oval “salaried” badge instead of one of those round “hourly” badges, i.e., I didn't have to punch a time clock (as I had been required to during the summers I worked there)!

I didn't have enough money to buy a car, so I spent the first several weeks living at home and driving out each morning and back each evening with my father until I could make a down payment on a car (Marietta was north of Atlanta about 15 miles, with a real live car being the only practical transportation!). Driving back and forth with my dad was not an unpleasant experience since it gave us a chance to talk to one another for the first time in many years. Tedi and I had always lived on the brink of war with one another (due to our disagreements about Christian Science), but my father and I had always liked and respected one another, and we got along quite well. To this day I'm glad we had that chance to get to know one another as adults, especially since he was already in the process of becoming quite ill, and within a year and a half he would be dead at the age of 60!

**Buying A Car** – My boss at Lockheed, Whit Benson, said to me, “Bruce you must be a very unique phenomenon here – a young college grad with a job and no car – that's unheard of, and in fact it's almost un-American!” Whit was a great guy, and he was right, of course – a 28-year-old college graduate in 1966 America without a car – no way! So as soon as I had plumped up my bank account enough to afford a down payment on a car, I sidled over to the British Motors showroom in Buckhead and plopped down enough to drive out in a brand new 1966 Austin-Healey Sprite. Watch out, ladies -- cat's on the prowl! (Well, sort of anyway ...)

**979 Crescent Avenue, NW** – At about that time (late 1965) I ran into Malcolm Walker (who was driving a “vintage” Austin-Healey 3000 -- an early 1950s model with a few scrapes and dings, and with the muffler attached using a wire clothes hanger!). He had started up a little company called Walker Development Corporation (over-achiever of the week!) financed by a small infusion of capital from his step-dad Harry Walker. His “corporate” activities consisted of buying several acres of property down in Forest Park (by the Atlanta airport), subdividing it into about 15 lots, and erecting his own entire subdivision using pre-fab houses built by Knox Homes – the company owned by his sister George-Anne's husband's family for whom Malcolm had worked as a draftsman during the summers while he was getting his degree in light construction from Georgia Tech. Malcolm had taken up residency at 979 Crescent Avenue, NW – a small apartment building at 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Peachtree, where it was rumored Margaret Mitchell had spent a few months back in the 1930s writing a portion of “Gone With the Wind.” Be that as it may, the building had at some point been subdivided into apartments (my sister Kim and her husband Bob Keaten had lived there for a while a few years earlier in the late 1950s – after they were married, but still finishing up at Georgia Tech). Malcolm told me that there were a couple of units available and that I might just find it an interesting place to live. I drove by one afternoon, took a look, and, sure enough, it was just the sort of place I could be comfortable in – not one of the up-market townhouses that were being built all over the Northside of Atlanta at that time, but something much more

along the lines of the 7<sup>th</sup>-floor walk-up maid's quarters room I had lived in during my year in Paris. Within a week or so I had moved in – at the up-market tariff of \$85/month including furnishings and utilities (hot dog!). I ended up remaining there during the entirety of my two-year stay in Atlanta. The place was truly funky, and the crowd that hung out there was an offbeat one I got to know quite well!



Flames engulf the Margaret Mitchell House early Sunday, ruining most of the newly refurbished structure, where "Gone With the Wind" was written. Mitchell's ground-floor apartment was spared extensive damage. JOHN GROOMS / Special



**Life at 979 Crescent Avenue, NW, Atlanta GA! –**  
During the years 1966-67, 979 Crescent Ave, NW in Atlanta looked like a spiffed-up version of the 1955 photo on the left, which is to say it was something of “a dump” as Margaret Mitchell described it when she lived there in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This is also about what it looked like when Kim lived there in the late 1950s. My studio apartment was the one on the upper right (with the door leading to nowhere!), and Malcolm’s one-bedroom apartment was at the center left in the rear. The building had been bought by two brothers, George and Leon Cabero (from Hawkinsville, Georgia, no less!) and fixed up substantially, although it was definitely a very old building. It later burned down (center photo, circa 1996) and was rebuilt by the Chamber of Commerce as a tourist draw, looking like the picture on the left below – obviously not quite the same place!

Over the years of my young adulthood I had been in casual contact with the gay crowd in various cities on various continents, but never in close quarters. The tenants at Crescent Avenue, on the other hand, were predominantly gay with a sprinkling of very mixed-up straights! In contrast the folks I got to know at work at Lockheed were very much a straight (predominantly family-oriented) “aerospace” crowd – either somewhat older people who had been in the business for many years, or younger college grads such as myself who were just getting their teeth cut in the business – some of whom were dating around and looking to start a family. This latter group constituted the “townhouse crowd” – a group I hung out with during the day, but with whom I otherwise had only occasional contact, mainly at work-related parties I would be invited to and felt obligated to attend. One of the other disconnects I had with that crowd was the fact that most of them (let’s face it – all of them!) had gone to school in the Midwest or South, whereas I had spent my four years of college in a New England setting – a real cultural disconnect! I was, therefore, looked on as something of a “furriner,” complicated of course by the fact that

I had just finished spending over 4 years living in Europe – something that seemed almost surreal to most of them. In the end I attended a few parties, took out one or two of the gals I met or was fixed up with, but in the end realized that it just wasn’t a group I was in tune with! A couple of the chicks were actually really sweet and attractive, but, oh, so Southern! I had lived with Southern accents (and the Southern culture) through 5 years of school in Marietta and Atlanta, but a potential lifetime of it seemed really just way, way out there! Over the years since then I regularly receive notices of reunions, etc, but when I look at the photos I see most of the same faces still living in Atlanta and growing older there – something that has in fact worked really well for them, but would just never have made it for me – I would have been just as much a foreigner there as I was during the years I lived in Europe!

The building at 979 Crescent had recently been bought and was being renovated by two brothers – George and Leon Cabero – two lads from the little South Georgia town of Hawkinsville, where their father had immigrated

from Greece a few decades earlier, married a local Hawkinsville lass, and settled down for good. George and Leon had bought the building for a song (using family money – their Greek father had apparently done quite well!) and had then converted it into half a dozen fairly livable apartments, although they all smelled a bit of mildew and other unidentifiable substances. During the time Malcolm and I lived there in the mid-to-late 1960s (Malcolm for more than 5 years, I for about 1-1/2 years) it was in decent shape – with a little garden in the backyard where George liked to say he intended to spend his declining days with a glass of bourbon and branch water in hand and decay in a true Southern fashion! It did, however, back up to a greasy-spoon Chinese restaurant called House of Eng which always wafted a strong smell over the fence into our backyard from their Dempster Dumpster and sometimes (on busy weekends when they were doing a lot of take-out!) even into our building itself. Since that time a group of Atlanta society women bought the property and put up what they probably felt the house should have looked like when Margaret Mitchell lived there in the late 1930s (no way, although the House of Eng is long gone!). Despite the many oddities (both of the building and of its population), it was a much more interesting alternative than the townhouse scene, and I greatly enjoyed the year and a half I lived there. Perhaps the worst part was the insufferable summer heat and humidity, from which there was no respite as the building had no air conditioning – a real downer in Atlanta’s hot and muggy summer weather (a torrential 10-minute downpour almost every summer afternoon left the whole suburban area hanging under a constant layer of heavy humidity!).

George and Leon were both “gay” (or, as George liked to put it, “gay as a goose”), and their friends were all of the same ilk. Of the two, George was by far the more personable, as Leon tended to be more of an effeminate gay and to a straight person appeared to be a little on the oily side! They had set themselves up in two large apartments on the first (basement) floor, and each lived an independent life in grand style, each with his own coterie of companions. Leon had at some point obtained a doctorate in American History(?), and pursued a respectable profession, teaching history classes at the High Museum just down the street. George was 7 years older than Leon, but much more of a ne’er-do-well, apparently never having worked and simply living off the family money. He had no identifiable profession and tended to spend his evenings carousing in Atlanta’s gay quarters (mostly downtown, a very tricky area at night!) and sleeping until early afternoon of the next day (recovering!). Leon was fairly restrained, living with a single “kept” friend, while George was very outgoing. Among George’s colorful friends were “Bruce” (of the Atlanta Candler Coca-Cola family, a very attractive, although self-destructive habitual drunk), “Corky” (who ran a very colorful little restaurant called “The Maid’s Quarters” just a block or two away, with all the walls covered with old newspapers and serving excellent food), “the Count” (an aging Austrian roué who probably had very little noble blood, but who was quite charming, debonair, and who acted as a sophisticated senior member of George’s gay crowd), and a half dozen or so others who made periodic appearances. Other residents of the building included Marsha (an Eastern Airlines stewardess who had somehow obtained a Playboy credit card from some regular first-class passengers who had befriended her, and who would occasionally take me for a free evening at the local Playboy Club, which had very good food and an excellent jazz trio!), Jerry (a young, very square-jawed gay who lived on the third floor and who sort of careened from one failed relationship to another), and Mary (an older woman who worked in a children’s nursery just up the street and who was very sweet, although a confirmed alcoholic who would occasionally have delirium tremens and think there were things crawling all over the hall ceiling). It was a very colorful group, all of whom seemed to get along with each other without actually having much in common at all.

**Hanging Out With Malcolm** – One of the great advantages of living at 979 Crescent was the fact that Malcolm also lived there, and, what with his being a bachelor as well, he was always game for weekend outings for hiking, camping, skindiving, spelunking, horseback riding, driving down to the beach in Panama City (or even to Miami once!), or whatever other activity we could dig up. 979 Crescent attracted what Malcolm liked to call a “group of wooly chicks” – not at all the elementary-school teachers or downtown office workers who frequented the townhouse scene, and it made for a very colorful backdrop for weekend “social gatherings!” Malcolm himself was tied up with a couple of fairly steady girlfriends (Connie from Howie in the Hills down in the Orlando area in northern Florida and Mary Anne, a tough chick from South Georgia whom you didn’t want to cross – even though she was engaged to a local shyster lawyer, she would still tiptoe over to Malcolm’s apartment after returning from a date and spent the rest of the evening there!). That left me floating for evening activities, which was probably OK since Malcolm was a hardline CS’er and wasn’t into the local bar scene! Atlanta in the mid 1960s was still a very small-town place, but it was gradually becoming more of a magnet for social life, and things could have been much worse (Marietta, 20 miles north, for instance, where we had lived for a couple of years in high school was a pleasant little town, but had zero social life!).

Malcolm was a couple of years older than I was, and I hadn't really known him that well during our Forum days in the 1950s. I had hung out with him a bit when I was back in Atlanta for a couple of months in early 1964 (looking for a job I could do while living in Europe – which I had found!), and I had also spent a bit of time down at his “development” in Forest Park pounding a few nails and moving lumber around. After we got together again at 979 Crescent in late 1965 we discovered we had quite a bit in common (aging bachelors not ready to get married yet, free weekends to take off to various places, both hanging around in the evenings looking for something to do, etc). In addition, we were all part of the larger Lockheed family – Malcolm's dad was the head of Procurement at Lockheed, an extremely responsible job, and my father, in addition to his day job of working in Master Scheduling (involving managing the flow of the assembly lines), was also president of the Lockheed Management Club during the year I was there – a high-profile position in which he got to know a lot of upper-level management outside of his own department.

Malcolm remained a solid CS-er his whole life (I just couldn't get into it the way he did), so he didn't really participate in the various night-life opportunities that living at 979 Crescent had to offer. He did have several girl friends, however, and certainly kept busy in the evenings with Connie and Maryanne!). I had struck up various friendships with one or two bachelors my age at Lockheed, and Malcolm did run around with us a certain amount (the mid-1960s Atlanta “townhouse” crowd). My social life fluctuated between hanging out with this group (playing quite a bit of golf and tennis after work and on weekends, along with enjoying several “townhouse” party evenings a week - a real bachelor scene) and also spending a fair amount of time with George Cabero's crowd – sort of a faux-intellectual scene, but one where I could slip away when things started to get hot and heavy late in the evening. George's folk were also fairly heavily into drugs – not in an addictive sense, but a lot of marijuana and hash, and I had to avoid that sort of thing like the plague in order not to affect my ability to get security clearances. George was very disappointed that I wasn't a bit more into their scene, and one evening Corky said to him, “George, you're wasting your time trying to seduce Bruce – can't you tell he's just not interested!” Oh, well, it did give me a chance to sample a type of late-night Atlanta night-life that I would never have encountered otherwise – much more along the lines of the San Francisco scene, as I later discovered! I probably missed out on a lot by not getting more into things, but I had already seen a lot of it during the extended time I spent in places like Berlin and Paris – Atlanta seemed a bit provincial by comparison – a lot of people trying a bit too hard. I was in a coffee shop one evening watching a local guitarist and folk singer perform when they suddenly stopped the program to announce in somber terms that Bob Dylan had just been in a serious motorcycle accident, eliciting a concerned buzz from the patrons. Suddenly I felt like I was really out in the sticks!

One thing Malcolm and I did do a lot of together was traveling on weekends. Malcolm had a couple of scuba-diving rigs, and we made several trips to South Georgia/Florida places like DeFuniak Springs (deep diving hole at Morrison Springs), Panama City (long white-sand beach and good for catching crabs while snorkeling), and Crystal River (in northern Florida, known for its manatees). Jackie Smith and her boyfriend Jim (who was into underwater photography big-time) would occasionally accompany us. On our second trip to DeFuniak Springs, after we had dived down with tanks to an underwater cave with a ledge where air would accumulate, Malcolm talked me into doing a free dive without tanks down into the cave and coming up by the ledge where we could breathe before coming back to the surface – dumb, dumb, dumb – we made it in and out, but every once in a while someone would try it unsuccessfully, and I believe they finally closed off the hole to public use!



Morrison Springs (underwater cave)



Crystal River (manatees!)

Malcolm had also developed a minor interest in caving, and in April of 1966 I accompanied him to a well-known North Georgia place known locally as Cade's Cavern (more accurately "Howard's Waterfall Cave Preserve"). The week after we were there, a fatal explosion occurred after a group of Boy Scouts had gone into a large open cavern with carbide lamps – it turned out that a gas station directly above the cavern had a leaking underground tank, and gas in the form of fumes had penetrated the cavern ceiling. Whoa! Last time caving for me – we had been in that same cavern just a few days before ... From then on I confined my "undergrounding" to places like Carlsbad Caverns where things are more controlled!

On one of our last weekend trips before I left Atlanta, we drove down to Panama City in a brand-new Dodge belonging to a gal named Rita – a girl friend of Connie's, with Malcolm leading the way in his truck (stopping only once along the way to pick up his obligatory speeding ticket!). He had all his scuba gear on board, along with a large trash can to cook all the crab we hoped to catch. We spent several hours snorkeling around a shallow inlet, picking up crabs using a pair of tongs in one hand and stuffing them into a little net sack that we dragged along in the other hand (a patented Malcolm technique!). After we had accumulated quite a stash – maybe 20 or so crabs, we debated on how to cook them, with someone's saying they had read somewhere that if you were to put them into cold water and heat it up slowly over a fire, it would anaesthetize the crabs and they would feel no pain. So we filled the trash can with seawater, stoked up a fire underneath it, and sat back with our drinks to wait for our fresh crab meal. Bad idea! As the water heated up from the bottom the crabs started scrambling madly for the surface, tearing each other apart in the process! After watching this develop for a minute or so, we looked at each other, then went over and dumped the whole trash can over, kicked the fire out, and went to the nearest Frosty Freeze to look for something we didn't have to watch being tortured! Yoicks – never tried that one again – apparently it's better to just toss them into boiling water and have it over and done with as quickly as possible! It was a very quiet evening after that ...

After I had left Atlanta, Malcolm eventually realized that working for years on end for a salary of \$75/month just wasn't making it (he even wrote off his apartment as an office for tax purposes, so he didn't have to pay rent from his personal income!). He did one or two construction jobs on the side, working for old fraternity buddies building garages or add-ons or whatever, but eventually he more or less finished up the 14(?) houses he had lots for down in Forest Park, and had to decide what to do for the rest of his life. Things sort of came to a head sometime in early 1969, which was just about the time I wrote him from California and said I was getting married and in bad need of a best man! He was from California originally and had no problem coming back out here, so he tidied up the loose ends of his business, packed whatever he could in the back of his by now very beat-up truck, and set off for the West coast. The glamour surrounding his arrival in California was somewhat dimmed by the fact that he managed to accumulate two traffic tickets before even arriving in LA, although that wasn't the sort of thing to faze Malcolm (he had already accumulated more than 50 tickets while living in Georgia!). After the wedding in Los Angeles, he came up to the Bay Area and stayed with us for about a week, then moved up to a residence club in San Francisco (I had told him about a place called Baker Acres where I had slept on the floor once or twice while in the city during weekends in the Army and where I had also stayed for a week or two when I first returned to California). It took him the better part of a year to finally land a good-paying job as a construction estimator for Bechtel in downtown SF, but after that it was pretty smooth sailing financially (he even ended up buying three buildings in the Castro district, one of which greatly appreciated during his 40-year+ ownership of it).



Malcolm's SF Building in 2016



All of us in Skylonda in the late 1990s

**Other Miscellaneous Characters** – There were several young engineers in the group I worked with at Lockheed, and we frequently socialized outside of work. One of them, a lad named John, had a Capuchin monkey – a rather odd accoutrement for a young buck in his mid twenties. John also had a girl friend, but when he asked the girl friend to marry him in an unguarded moment (also a marginal move for a young buck in his mid twenties), the girl friend said she would do so only under the condition that John divest himself of the monkey! This was a tough call for John, but in the end he acquiesced and began looking around for someone who would like to take on a very active monkey. For some rather deranged reason, I thought a monkey would make an interesting addition to the already zoo-like menagerie of folk at 929 Crescent Avenue, and so I volunteered to take it in. The monkey came equipped with a very large cage, and for a period of time I kept it confined to the cage until it had habituated itself to its new surroundings. I lived in a studio apartment on the third floor of the building and, when I finally let the monkey out of its cage it made a brief survey of the apartment's interior, then promptly went to the window that opened to the alley below and climbed out (it was summertime, the building had no air conditioning, and the window had to be kept open!). I didn't think it was possible to go down such a wall, since it was a sheer drop to the alley below, but nobody had told the monkey that, and he made a very adroit swing over to a drain pipe and quickly descended to the street – where it completely disappeared! I spent the next several hours looking for the little beast, then finally gave up and went to bed. When I woke up next morning, the monkey was sitting in the window looking rather pleased with itself, but when I tried to retrieve it and put it back in its cage so I could go to work, it went back out the window and down the drain pipe again. After several repetitions of this, I finally got it back in its cage and soon discovered why John's fiancée didn't want the monkey around – it had some very unfortunate habits regarding its maleness, which would not at all fit into a young couple's newly found marital bliss. In the end I was able to persuade another older engineer at the office to take it off my hands (he had a large house in the suburbs, which also had a large backyard!), and I'm sure the monkey was much happier there (I never asked!).

Another co-worker at Lockheed was a young technician by the name of Chuck, who was working part-time at Lockheed while pursuing an engineering degree at Georgia Tech. Chuck came from a Jewish family who ran a large deli in Miami (not Miami Beach, but downtown Miami, right next to City Hall!). Chuck had grown up in the food business and, after I took him to Corky's "Maid's Quarters" restaurant one evening, he got the idea he would enjoy working there part-time as a waiter. He settled in very quickly (probably after having fended off the attentions of Corky and various other members of the kitchen and wait staff!), and he quickly became a regular in the 979 Crescent Avenue neighborhood (he and Malcolm also hit it off quite well). Chuck was only one of several of my co-workers at Lockheed who would occasionally drop by 979 Crescent Avenue to check out the unusual scene, but I mention him in particular because of the following event ...

One weekend Chuck and I decided to take a drive up to North Georgia to hike in an area called Vogel State Park. We were in Chuck's little Sunbeam Alpine sports car, and we parked and hiked up a trail to the top of a small waterfall. For some reason I got the itch to get in the stream and slide down a shallow pitch to one side and grab hold of a tree branch that was hanging out over the falls (something I had done with a friend on the island of Ios in Greece a couple of summers before!). Unfortunately, the bottom was slick from algae slime, and I went completely onto my back and underneath the branch and, being unable to stop myself by grabbing the branch, I slid out into the larger fall area itself and on down a very steep pitch, banging myself up badly both on the head and upper body and eventually landing on my side, severely splintering my right elbow! Not the best day of my life ...

Chuck had to run down the trail and get someone to call an ambulance, and a group of four men improvised a stretcher from some emergency equipment routinely stored at the bottom of the trail. They came up and carried me down the trail (in a pretty delirious state) just in time to meet the ambulance, which had come from the nearby town of Gainesville (which fortunately had a pretty decent-sized hospital). They packed me away in the ambulance which then took off down the highway at high speed with its siren wailing – and with Chuck in his Sunbeam Alpine in full pursuit! I was pretty delirious, but was suddenly aware of the ambulance driver slamming on his brakes and coming to a full stop with the driver spewing out a mouthful of very colorful country invective. The next thing I knew Chuck was in the ambulance babbling hysterically, and the driver took off again at high speed.

Apparently what had happened was that Chuck had been following the ambulance very closely at about 70 mph, when a woman in front of the ambulance pulled off the road to let it pass. She then pulled back onto the road

without noticing that Chuck was right behind the ambulance. Chuck slammed on his brakes and threw his car into a spin, sliding off the left side of the road into a field, where the car overturned. He was left hanging upside down by his safety belt in the middle of the field, relatively unhurt, but very shaken up, and with his car totaled! Somehow he pulled himself out of the car, ran up to the road, and climbed into the ambulance as a second passenger (I never found out if he was charged for the ambulance ride!).

After we arrived at the hospital I lost track of Chuck, as I was taken immediately in for surgery and emerged several hours later on a gurney with my elbow suspended from a traction device which was connected by a cable from a long screw all the way through my elbow to a weight at the end of the gurney (carefully adjusted to support my elbow, even if I was asleep!). I spent the next month in the hospital, losing almost 20 pounds in the process, but managing to read the entire set of four volumes of "War and Peace" in Russian, something I had been meaning to do ever since I graduated from Army Language School back in 1961! Oh well, it's always possible to find some good in any situation. Plus they had a bevy of really cute country gals working as nurses in the hospital who were just ripe for a city slicker such as myself to feed them some fast talk (hey, it doesn't take much to be a city slicker in rural Georgia ...).

**Onwards** – At some point my stay in Atlanta had to end, as it was purely an interim situation (i.e., I had managed to acquire a job, an income, and a mangled elbow, but not yet a direction in life). Eventually after a number of additional inexplicable and confused incidents (including my father's unexpected death and my helping my mother to re-arrange her life to deal with it) I decided to transition back to the West Coast (from whence I had originally come!), but this time to what I considered to be the principal geographic entity in California (San Francisco) instead of to the geographic entity of Southern California from where I had originally started (Los Angeles). And, so, San Francisco it was (and, as it happens, 48 years later, still is!) ...