

San Francisco (via Hawaii!) -- Searching for a Place to Put Down Roots ...

Off-the-Cuff Decision Making – My return to Atlanta was very much an interim step, mainly to retrieve things I had left there and sort of re-assemble myself for life in the US. At first, Tedi was very happy to see me, but when she learned I wouldn't be staying for more than a couple of days, things quickly got a little stickier. She felt I was being very foolish in jumping back and forth so quickly, and there was no doubt she was right, but that wasn't really the point. We had the usual stiff words about what I was doing with my life, something which hurried me out the door even faster. At a similar time in her early life Tedi had made a number of very foolhardy decisions, and she now felt she was in a position to give me the (unsolicited!) opportunity to learn from her mistakes. As she herself well knew, that's not the way these things work, but her own situation was too fragile at that point for me to do anything other than nod my head and retreat. It was a messy situation which I could only remedy by being on my way as quickly as possible. We continued to stay in close touch, but the distance was always there.

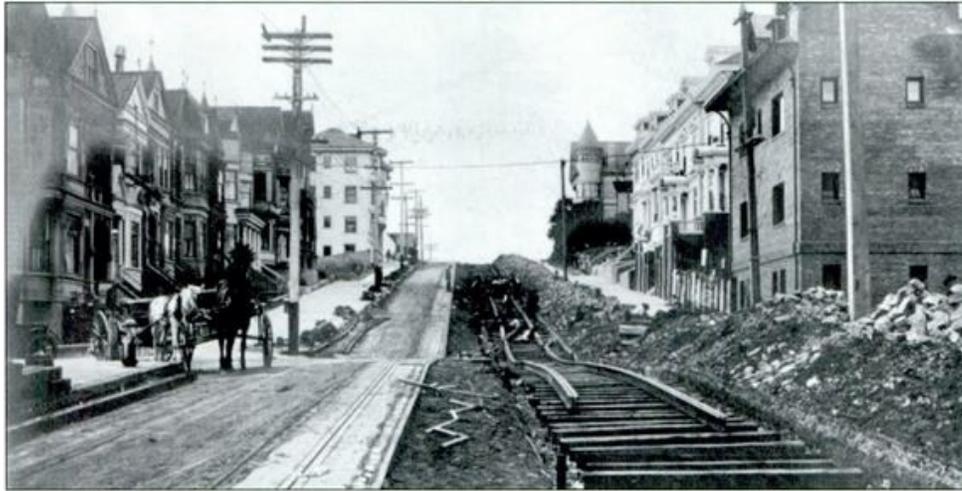
Taking a Look Around – I had greatly enjoyed my year's stay in Monterey back in 1960-61 (despite my lowly status as a private in the Army!), and my immediate instinct was to head back in that general direction. In looking things over though, I somehow became fascinated by the idea of taking a peek at Hawaii, a place that had always appealed to me as a place to spend some time while I still had a bit of my youth remaining. At that particular time the weather in Atlanta was very cold (it was November, and the South was definitely not sunny!), and in my haste to get out of Atlanta as soon as possible I grabbed a ticket for Hawaii and was on my way. I had friends in Honolulu from my Army days in Berlin, and next thing I knew I was knocking at their door late one evening.

Honolulu – My friends received me very cordially, and within a couple of days I had found a place of my own to stay and settled in to begin a job search. At first I looked through the local classifieds, but couldn't really find anything that looked suited to my technical background. The friend who lived there was working at IBM and suggested I interview over there to see what they might have, which I went ahead and did. It took a couple of days to set up an interview, and in the meantime I contacted a local employment agency to try and get an overview of what the overall prospects were for technical work. The only thing they could suggest had to do with programming a CDC6400 computer that was being used for work at a local astronomical observatory, something that sounded somewhat interesting, but that would involve a commute all the way up to telescope sites on Mauna Loa or Mauna Kea – the two volcanoes on the main island of Hawaii! The work sounded interesting, but moving to the main island seemed like it would be putting me in a rather remote spot, and I was still fairly young and not eager to sequester myself off somewhere quite that distant. My interview with IBM came up and involved sitting through a formal presentation by a very stiff-necked corporate representative in full jacket and tie (somewhat out of place in Honolulu, I couldn't help but think). Once done with the formal part, the gentleman became much more pleasant, had me take a set of written tests, and said they might be able to find a place for me as a technical rep – sort of a combination of salesman and trouble-shooter. My inclination was towards the purely technical, and after giving it some thought I called him back, thanked him for having taken the time to talk to me, but politely told him I would have to decline his offer. He seemed a little surprised, but wished me the best and mentioned in parting that it might be difficult for me to find the kind of technical work I was looking for in that particular geographical area. In the course of the next couple of weeks I came to realize what he was talking about – the opportunities for technical types such as myself were almost exclusively in the commercial sector, not the scientific – meaning the opportunities were not involved with hardware, but were mainly for commercial applications programmers, and in COBOL, not FORTRAN (COBOL was the high-level business-oriented programming language in widespread use at that time, while FORTRAN was the equivalent high-level scientific language).

I have to admit that my attention to the job search end of things was severely compromised by the distractions of the island of Oahu itself, which at that time was much less densely settled than now and offered a number of opportunities for swimming, surfing, sightseeing, etc. For a newbie like myself, there was a great deal to see and do – both during the day and in the evening – and my focus on a job search was not as laser-like as it probably should have been! Nevertheless, after several weeks of acclimatization, I slowly came to realize that living and working in Hawaii would involve a real “sea change” in the technical direction I had set off on at Lockheed and that, despite the many attractions of the area, it was basically a tourist-oriented economy which had little to offer that I would find stimulating over the long haul. This was a realization I came to slowly, perhaps inhibited a bit by a lack of enthusiasm

on my part to leave the island anytime soon. In the end, however, I turned my sights back toward San Francisco, a place I had already come to view as a sort of second home, both in terms of life style, job opportunities, and living conditions. It takes a certain sort of person to live in Hawaii for the long haul, and I gradually came to realize that unfortunately that person was not me!

Back to the Mainland – Looking back it's hard to believe, but I spent a number of weeks in Hawaii, and my transition back to the mainland occurred just a few days before Christmas of 1967. Arriving in the city, I headed for the one place I knew would take me in and still be quite decent – “Baker Acres” – what was at that time called a “residence club” up on the corner of Jackson and Baker by the Presidio of San Francisco—a very up-scale part of town!



This view is of Jackson Street looking west along Baker Street. The brick building on the right-hand side, 2210 Baker Street, was also known as Baker Acres. It was a residence club run by Claude Rebol that became popular for single young adults migrating to San Francisco after World War II. The office was on the street level of Jackson Street; the main level had a small living room, a large dining room, and a kitchen. The top floor had rooms for residents. They served breakfast seven days a week and dinner five days a week. (Courtesy of Paul Trimble.)

(Old, old picture of Baker Acres From “San Francisco's Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights By Tricia O'Brien)

Back in 1961 during my army days at Presidio of Monterey I had once or twice slept on the floor of a small apartment inhabited by a classmate of my friend John Rollinson named Cameron Rogers (during weekend visits to the city), and that self-same floor had been in an apartment at that very same Baker Acres! At that time one could stay there on a weekly basis for about \$120, which included a shared double room with two twin beds (one half of a small two-room apartment with a shared living area) along with two meals a day – breakfast and dinner (five days a week), not at all a bad deal! Later on in 1969, when Malcolm transitioned out to the West Coast from Georgia, I told him about it and he lived there for something like 10 months! Both of us had many interesting (perhaps even fond!) recollections of the place. It also had a sister boarding house originally called the Pink Palace at Scott and Green Streets in the Marina, later changed to Marine View to avoid confusion with a disreputable Turk Street housing project of the same name. (<http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Mansion-s-sad-death-S-F-boardinghouse-evicting-2672543.php#photo-2145032>)

My timing couldn't have been worse in looking for a job. I sifted through the local newspaper ads and contacted one or two employment agencies, but the message was always the same – come back after the turn of the year! That certainly made sense, so I settled in to enjoy the city for a week or two, although it was definitely kind of a lonely Christmas! My roommate at Baker Acres was an odd sort of guy (not unusual for Baker Acres, it turned out), and after I had been there for several days he took me aside one evening and said, “Bruce, I have to tell you something – I just came back from the manager's office, where I had to tell him you were queer ...” I wasn't quite sure what to say and just looked at him sort of blankly, whereupon he went on to say, “I don't know why I did it, but I just felt you should know.” As I continued to look at him in a very odd sort of way, he then said, “If you're not, I apologize, but I just felt I should say something ...” I had known he was a somewhat troubled person, and at that point I had the

feeling it might be good to start looking around for the exit before things really started getting hairy. I mumbled something to him like, “Oh, don’t worry about it – it’s no big deal ...”, then slipped out the door and went directly over to the manager’s office to see what had transpired. The owner/manager was a very blasé Frenchman (Claude Reboul) who was quite offhand about the whole thing and said, “Oh, yes, we know all about him. He’s said things like that before about other people, so I just ignore him, and if I were you I’d do the same.” He asked if I’d prefer to change apartments, adding that if it didn’t really bother me it would probably be better for my roommate to not stir the pot too much and leave things the way they were – in a day or two he would have forgotten about it altogether! In the end I knew I would only be staying there for a few more days, and I agreed with him it might be better just to let it go. He thanked me very sincerely, and that was the end of the matter! Fortunately there were no other problems before I left, and I never knew what happened to the lad – probably nothing very good. Later on, Malcolm had a number of such stories to tell in the course of his 10-month stay there. The “residence club” (aka “boarding house”) scene would definitely have been a good one for a writer who was looking for filler for a novel about life in the city (there are probably many other such places, as well) ...

Moving Down the Peninsula – I had every intention of staying as close as possible to the central part of San Francisco, but in the end I encountered the same problem I had in Hawaii – the economy was essentially founded on a commercial base, not a technical one, and there were few electronic engineering jobs available (although plenty of construction engineering jobs in places like Parsons and Bechtel, where Malcolm eventually ended up after a 10-month search!). Over the years that profile would change, but in the late 1960s that was the existing situation. This was also the time that commercial cargo handling was transitioning over completely from cargo ships to container ships, and the entire waterfront of San Francisco essentially vanished, as freight handling by longshoremen disappeared along with the San Francisco shipping industry (no more Eric Hoffer longshoreman-philosopher types!).

In any case, once New Year’s 1967-68 had come and gone, I headed down the peninsula to Sunnyvale and LMSD (Lockheed Missiles and Space Division) – the newer wing of Lockheed which was involved, not with aircraft production, but with rocketry and its various offshoots. They also had an Analog Computing group which had a close relationship with the one at GELAC (Georgia Lockheed), and they immediately offered me a job. I would essentially be doing the same sort of work I had done in Georgia, but on the West Coast instead of in Marietta – a world of difference to me. I immediately moved from Baker Acres down to a little motel in Saratoga, a pleasant little hamlet within commute distance of Lockheed, and after a week or so there moved to an apartment complex in Los Gatos called The Riviera – a typical young swingers (sort of!) complex with a swimming pool, hot tub, and deck area for hanging out and meeting other folks. I felt like I was ready to boogie in the Bay Area (whoa!).

Thrashing Around a Bit More – In principle the commute from Los Gatos to Lockheed should have only been about 20 minutes, but in practice it would frequently stretch out to twice that. The year was 1968, and Interstate 280 was just in the process of being built. Much of the commute was on surface roads, which wasn’t too bad, but as things approached Highway 101 (called Bayshore Freeway) where Lockheed was located, things began to pile up. A more immediate problem than the commute, however, was the fact that I had been hired for a project that wasn’t actually scheduled to begin for almost 6 months (involving the Agena rocket – an upper-stage rocket used to launch the first US communications satellite and a staple of Lockheed’s projected longer-term business at that time). This meant that I spent a great deal of time in make-work projects which only required an hour or two of my time each day! I would try to fill in the rest by going over to the company library and doing some reading, but after about a month of this I asked my supervisor what he thought the prospects of my finding more comprehensive work anytime in the near future were. He could only tell me to be patient and to enjoy the free time, but it quickly got very boring and I started to look through the papers to see what else might be happening in the area. My eye caught a little filler ad for a place called Stanford Research Institute (SRI) which sounded kind of interesting and located in a much less industrial area up in a little suburb of Palo Alto called Menlo Park (not the one where Thomas Edison worked!). I put in an application and after a couple of weeks got a notice to show up for an interview. There was a position open for a scientific engineer/programmer in the Radio Physics Lab and after a brief interview I was offered a job. The director of the lab was suspicious about my changing jobs so quickly and, thinking I was just job-hopping (changing jobs to get a quick salary increase), made an offer for exactly the same salary I was getting at Lockheed (to the penny!). I laughed to myself at that, but accepted the offer and embarked on a job I was to end up holding for almost 30 years! My supervisor at Lockheed was a bit embarrassed about my quick job swap, but he really had no control over the

corporate scheduling and wished me all the best on my way out the door. They even had a going-away party for me although I had only been there for a couple of months! When I demurred, my co-workers told me, "Hey, don't be a spoil sport. We're just looking for an excuse to have a party ...". The party was a lunchtime affair at a big Sunnyvale restaurant, and about 30 people showed up for it. Most of them I had never even seen before, so I guess they were being honest about it, or maybe doing some networking, or maybe just looking for a free lunch!