



The Taylor Times

The Newsletter with "Schmaltz"



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Seattle, Washington

COLORADO TO CALIFORNIA



This is the final chapter on the house in Denver. In April I received a call from a neighbor there telling me of considerable police activity around the house over the last few days. I immediately called the local police and was told that the boyfriend of the daughter of the tenant, who claimed the house as his home address, had been arrested. I don't know what the charges were, but was told that he had a fairly lengthy criminal record. Since he was a resident, the management company agreed that eviction was in order and the tenant was given three days to vacate. Had the tenant had no knowledge of the other occupant's activities, he could have protested the eviction and possibly been exonerated. As it turned out, however, he put up no resistance at all, at least suggesting complicity.

After one deadbeat resident sandwiched between two druggies, it now appeared the time had come to do something different. The house had become known as a gang/drug house despite its good location in the city. The police had had it under surveillance a number of times over the years. Neighbors were complaining of noise, drive-by shootings, and an over-abundance of traffic for too long. I certainly did not want to see this continue, nor did I want to be responsible for the devaluation of the neighborhood. Although I'd had another time schedule in mind the time had obviously come to sell the place.

Over the previous few years I had reroofed, replaced the entire plumbing system, installed

new bathroom fixtures, including the tub, had the hardwood floors refinished, replaced the linoleum, replaced the space heater in the master bedroom, replaced the water heater, and done electrical repairs, just to mention the major items. Before selling it was also necessary to spend another \$1600 to install a new furnace. Functionally, the house was in very good shape... but it looked like bantha doo-doo. (See Star Wars for an explanation or take your best guess at the inference.) The landscaping had been allowed to grow unchecked, the lawn had never recovered from being used as a parking lot, and the drought that was wreaking havoc on even the best of yards, was taking its toll as well.

Home prices in Denver had pretty much reached their peak for the moment, but continued low mortgage interest rates helped keep things somewhat steady. It took a few months and reduction of \$20,000 from the original asking price but on September 18 the contract was signed, sealed, and delivered. So ends Colorado.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

For a long while I've loved the Palm Springs area of Southern California (reference various previous newsletters), so much so that I've decided to retire there. This seemed like a perfect time to do a 1031 exchange (selling one property and buying similar property elsewhere

(Continued on page 2)

California House

(Continued from page 1)

while deferring capital gains tax) so I started looking for a place I might like to live a few years down the road.

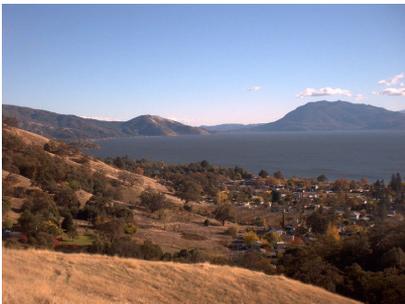
On the weekend of September 26-28 I flew down for a quick buying tour. I met the agent I'd contacted at a house being used as an office in Desert Hot Springs (DHP), 20 minutes north of Palm Springs. It turned out, this would be the house I'd buy. I made an offer then looked at other houses in the city and in other communities. Some were nice but significantly higher priced. The house on El Mirador was to be it.

Located about two minutes north of downtown DHP, it has a nearly 360° view of mountains from an altitude of about 1200 feet. DHP, while not as luxurious as the other valley locations, has everything one might need... all

CALIFORNIA VACATION

During the rainy, even snowy week of Thanksgiving, I took a long drive to Southern California. The original intent was vacation, but with the new house it would be "working" vacation. I had the Trendwest condo for the week and used another of their properties as a way station on the trip down. This was at Clear Lake, about 150 miles northeast of San Francisco.

Clear Lake is California's largest natural freshwater lake and lies beyond the mountains just north of the Napa Valley. The town of Nice (Neese - like the French city) is one of those laid back resort communities where not much happens yet one can really enjoy it. The lake is surrounded by mountains-- not spectacular, but



very pretty, there are only two nine-hole golf courses nearby, a few casual restaurants, and a local market or two. Hiking is limited since virtually all the nearby property is privately owned. But the condos are beautiful, with views of the lake out the huge French doors, and the grounds are peaceful (as long as the other

the shopping, restaurants, and gifts. If the desire is for something more... a wider variety of food establishments, night life, etc., Palm Springs is just a short drive away. DHP has the same easy access to points west... Los Angeles and the ocean... and close to the interstate, also provides access to the other desert communities, especially Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, and Palm Desert. An hour's drive takes you to the Salton Sea, another hour to Mexicali. Three hours the other direction and you're in Tijuana.

As for the house, I couldn't ask for much more. It's three bedrooms, two baths, two-car garage, on a property of about 10,000 square feet. Two sides are utility corridor, and one is the street, leaving only one side with neighbors. At night the back yard opens to the city lights below almost as far as La Quinta. Now the question is, do I really have to rent it out? I'm ready to move there. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot... I have to retire first.

residents are quiet). It's a great place to take a week and a bag of books and just relax.

When I left I took the most direct route out, which was through the Napa Valley. I certainly was not going to let this rare opportunity pass me by and did take the time at a few wineries to taste their wares. The biggest contrasts were probably Beringer, whose grounds were quite elegant... very old world, large yet quaint, to the tiny tasting room of Prager Wine and Port Works. While I was happy with Beringer, I was elated with the exquisite ports at Prager, not to mention pleased that they DO mail order.

I arrived in Palm Springs late Saturday night then went to the house on Sunday. I had planned to take two days to visit northern Baja in Mexico, and was a little concerned that the schedule would be difficult after purchasing a refrigerator that was to be delivered either Wednesday or Friday, but renting a truck proved to save both time and money. I was free to take Tuesday and Wednesday for my jaunt across the border.

MEXICO

I'd hoped to be on the road to Ensenada as the sun set. The Mexican toll road hugs the coast and is a very pretty drive, but after delays getting out and the need to stop for Mexican auto insurance before crossing the border, I was a few hours late. That was all right. I still had time to do a little shopping and have the most delicious squid steak covered in shrimp and crab that I could have imagined at Restaurant Casa Mar.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

The hotel I found, Hotel San Isabel, is (as it's claimed) the only Colonial style hotel in the city. It has a very classic, even rustic, and unique appeal. The rooms, too, are rather antiquated. In fact, figuring out how to light the open-flame gas heater was a challenge, and the bathroom



reminded me of so many old European baths. Definitely no card-keys here.

Tuesday morning (this time reasonably early) I set my compass to cross the Baja peninsula to the Gulf of California. My intent along the way was to take a side trip to Parque Nacional de Constitución de 1857 where a shallow lake, Laguna Hanson, lay nestled among mountains and pine forest. According to the guidebook I'd picked up at AAA this was about a 30-mile side trip on good roads. The turnoff to Ojos Negros took me through the little village to a "wide, graded road" that would lead east to the park. This is where I must begin to question the guidebook's reliability.

The road began comfortably enough, but it soon became obvious that "graded" did not necessarily mean this century. The washboard surface soon became so severe that I could not travel faster than about 5 MPH or risk shaking the car apart. Eventually it eased up and progress was promising, until I reached a cattle fence, beyond which the road changed markedly. Suddenly it was now a single lane with loose sand 12" deep on either side and down the middle. Where the tires met the road traction was acceptable, but to deviate would be to risk getting stuck. As I gazed ahead of me and saw a truck traveling toward me in the distance it became obvious that passing on this road would be impossible. I found a pullout and waited for two vehicles to go by then turned around and headed back. I found a better road to get me back to the main highway, but that would be the end of my attempt to get to the park... or would it?

About ten miles down the highway was a crude sign pointing to the park. The guidebook

said this was NOT a good road and should be avoided, but they were wrong. It was MUCH better, but would not be without surprises. As I neared the junction with the other road that I had earlier abandoned, suddenly two militarios walked out of the bushes with their weapons and uniforms and flagged me down. My crude Spanish, their crude English. Yes, I was headed for Laguna Hanson. They thoroughly inspected the car then sent me on my way, returning to the bushes from whence they came. (Before this excursion ended I would pass through four more military checkpoints. "Got any guns? Got any drugs? No? OK.")

So on I went. The road was sufficiently smooth and wide that I could travel 30-35 MPH pretty consistently. Soon occasional pine trees began to appear. Gradually they became more frequent, harboring scattered cabins and ranches. Finally around a bend in the forest was the sign signaling my arrival at the park. My goal was in range. Only another mile or two lay



between me and the placid mountain lake. Unusual rock formations enticed me and the air was warm and inviting. I reached that last turnoff and approached the lake. What lake? The guidebook had described it as



"intermittent", but there was not a drop of water in it. Well, I took my commensurate photos, some of which were actually pretty good, though obviously not of the "lake" itself, and turned around for the return trip.

(Continued on page 4)

Vacation

(Continued from page 3)

Onward across the peninsula. One of the most interesting features was the Valle de Trinidad. After winding through so much chaparral it was a remarkable change of scenery to suddenly find myself in a relatively lush, green valley full of farms and ranches.

The day was beginning to fade as I crossed the last mountains and made my way to San Felipe on the Sea of Cortez. San Felipe



is a small resort town full of shops, good restaurants, fishing, boating, and other attractions for vacationers. During spring break it is known to swell substantially with

crazed college students, but during most other times it is quiet and very leisurely. I did find myself faced with one interesting problem, however. Apparently this part of Baja is known for a good deal of credit card fraud. When my bank noted charges occurring in the area, they first tried to call my home, where they did not get a favorable response, then froze my debit card. I was suddenly unable to get cash or charge to the card. It was fortunate that I had gotten a little extra cash before I entered Mexico or I might not have been able to get out since I used nearly all of it before crossing back into the U.S. After dinner I hit the road again, painlessly crossing the border at Mexicali. (By the way, they have a Costco there!)

Except for a round of golf at Desert Dunes most of the remainder of the trip was spent puttering around the house and making various necessary arrangements for things. The drive home took me past fruit stands near Bakersfield that provided some of the best grapefruit the world has ever known, as well as lemons, oranges, pistachios, and butter almonds. Overnight in Medford, Oregon, and home by early Sunday evening. Nearly 3500 miles. Time now for some rest.

PONTIAC BAY SYMPHONY

This has been another busy year for music. The Highline Band seems to be even better this season than it has been in the past. And in addition to normal performance activities with them I have also (at least temporarily) taken on the responsibility of webmaster for their new website. (www.highlineband.org) Hopefully, I will have an opportunity very soon to create a similar site for the brass quintet (Black Diamond Brass) which, along with Brass Band Northwest (www.brassbandnw.org), continues to be very busy. But to this list of already fulfilling assignments as a tuba player I have recently added one more.

The Pontiac Bay Symphony is a new "mentoring" orchestra just started within the last

year (www.pontiacbay.org). It is designed to give youngsters from ages 12-18, who make up about 2/3 of the membership, the opportunity to work, play, and communicate with experienced adult musicians. Another unique feature is the concentration on film and theater music rather than the standard orchestral repertoire, which may be a little more fun for the players and accessible for the listeners. The first concert with this group was on December 6, and I must say it was a rousing success. Everyone... adults, students, conductor, and all those behind the scenes... loved the results. It certainly is no professional orchestra, nor does it aspire to be, but I predict in a few short years this will be a very reputable and respected group with which to expand the ranks of the amateur ensembles in the area.

DILBERT

