

Chapter 27C: Home

It don't make any differunce how rich ye get t' be,
How much yer chairs an' tables cost, how great yer luxury;
It ain't home t' ye, though it be the palace of a king,
Until somehow yer soul is sort o' wrapped round everything.

Edgar A. Guest, "Home", from *A Heap o' Livin'* (1916)¹

1. My House

Note: I go on in some detail about the domestic details of my house. This is for future researchers – wouldn't such a detailed description of a private house in 1701 be a useful thing to have? But it might seem tedious to contemporary readers – as elsewhere in this memoir, they should feel free to skip the boring bits.

We sold the Truro property in 1988 for \$600,000. Divided four ways, this gave me \$150,000 toward a new house. I didn't want to buy a house – I would have preferred to invest the money for income and rent a place to live. This would have been a bad idea economically, and eventually I was made to see this – Andy Schwartzman patiently explained the economics of the mortgage tax deduction to me, showing how I would actually save money by paying interest and deducting it. It is still not something I understand particularly well. But buying was unavoidable because of the capital gains tax. My father paid \$150,000 for the house – my tax basis in my one-fourth share was \$37,500. That meant I had a capital gain of \$112,500. If I didn't roll the money over into a new primary residence within two (or was it three) years, under the law at the time I would have had to write a huge check to the government. It was of course unimaginable that I should do this, so I had to buy a house.

I liked 2634 Yorba Street, where I was living in 1989, and tried to buy it from my Burmese landlord Benny Tan. I offered him \$300,000 for it, which was more than it was worth even in the fevered San Francisco real estate market of the day. But fortunately Benny didn't want to sell, so I had to find another place. I liked the Sunset District and decided to stay there, but to get closer to the ocean if I could. Makiko Wisner had just

¹ Edgar A. Guest (1889-1951) just edges out another dialect poet, James Whitcomb Riley, for the title of worst poet in all of American literature. When I was a lad doggerel from both poets was still force-fed in the schools. Guest may be the worst poet not only in America but in the whole English language. The Scottish poetaster William Topaz McGonagall (1825-1902) usually gets this title, and he really is an awful poet, and cannot scan a line. But he also has sincerity, vigor, and a naïve and forthright charm. Guest with his smarmy sentimentality and phony illiteracy has none of this.

got her real estate license, and ordinarily I would have used her for this project, but she was specializing in Marin County real estate, so she referred me to a Chinese lady whose name I now forget, and Makiko got a slice of her commission.

I called the Chinese lady and we went out to look for houses. The very first one we saw was 2331 – 47th Avenue. It was owned by an elderly Chinese acupuncturist named Andrew Tseng and his wife, who were going to cash in on the boom and retire to an East Bay suburb. During our visit Dr. Tseng sat in his office (now my bedroom) and Mrs. Tseng sat in her parlor (now my office). Thick curtains covered the windows. No one mentioned anything about a view. Finally I asked if I could look behind the curtains. They said OK as if this were an eccentric request, but why not humor the white guy. I peeked behind the curtain and found a panoramic view of the ocean that went all the way out to the Marin Headlands. Zowie!

Since no one mentioned this view to me, and showed the house with it concealed behind curtains, I guess they didn't charge me for it. I decided on the spot to buy this house, the first one I had seen. My real estate agent insisted I go with her to see another property, so I did, but I remember nothing about it – this was the house for me. That night I called her and told her to meet the \$300,000 offering price. The deal was done as soon as the inspections and formalities could be finished – there ended up being about \$7000 in discounts to me for various things. A mortgage was no problem as I was offering 50% down. And pretty soon, in the first week in January 1990, I had the keys. Document 27C-4 is my title deed.

The more I got to know this house the more I liked it. I am still very satisfied with it 20 years later, and hope I can stay here for the rest of my life. Document 27C-1 includes a picture of it in 1991. It was built in 1934, when the area was first developed, and is the only structure ever to stand on this site, probably in the history of the world.² It is on a small rise, which is why there is a view of the ocean in this block and maybe one or two more; other lots on 47th Avenue do not have one. The ocean breeze keeps the house cool even when it gets hot, which it is doing more and more now that the planet is warming so fast. By opening the back windows, and perhaps also the front and interior windows, I can always generate as much cool breeze as I want. Air conditioning is never needed even on the hottest days. Document 27C-1 contains views of the house and street, mostly from the appraisal that went with my mortgage application in 1989. Document 27C-2 is a plat of the block, showing my lot.

² I can't *prove* that no Ohlone Indian ever built a shelter here. But their structures were pretty ephemeral and tended to be made of earth and brush and tule rushes and redwood bark, and similar materials not found in the treeless sand dunes that were on my site before the house was built.

Document 27C-3 is a floor plan of the house. The front door is up a set of brick steps. There is a light above the door, which opens into a small foyer with coat hooks and a closet. An archway leads to one large room in the front (the width of the house minus the stairs) which I use as a living room and have kept rather sparsely furnished, with a small table I had in Truro and some office swivel chairs. I have just added a larger table (nearer in the picture, right) to keep the blue one from silting up with books and projects. The Eames chair I sleep in when I have back problems is there also, and a lot of bookcases. There is a large fixed center window and two side windows which open, providing lots of light, and cross-ventilation when needed. White Venetian blinds shade the windows from the morning sun, and the tree branches in front provide privacy. One of the bookcases used to hold a record collection I built up when I had my radio show (see Chapter 26.A) but never used after that. I sold them all in 2009 and filled it instead with books about symbols and iconography that could no longer fit in my heraldic library. There is a working fireplace with figured terra cotta tiles I have been told are valuable – I don't use the fireplace but I do use the mantel and the chimney-front for pictures of people.



From the living room a large archway leads to a room that would be a dining room if I needed one, but which I now use as an guest room and for projects. It also opens onto the foyer – one of the nice features of the house is that an irregular succession of rooms is always visible through doorways and arches (see left). This room has more bookcases, a table, and a set of French doors leading to a small polygonal interior patio or atrium.

The atrium is mostly for light – it is a common feature of these long 1930s row houses, used to bring light into the middle area. I planned to paint it like a regular room but without a ceiling, with *trompe l'oeil* painted “wallpaper” and paintings made of tile, but efforts to make it into a living space have so far not succeeded. However, it has glass-paneled doors on four sides, plus a large window into the kitchen, which provide light and cross-ventilation to the whole house. There is an electric light in the atrium.

On one side of the atrium there is a small room with built-in cabinets and an alcove above – I use it as a television room and the alcove for pictures (mostly of myself through time, old international licenses, baby pictures, some portraits, a picture of my public singing debut). The centerpiece of the alcove is a large map showing all the counties I have been to so far (see Chapter 30.B).

This room in turn leads to the kitchen, rather small and triangular, with original tiling – it has insufficient counter space, but I’m no cook anyway. As I said in an e-mail in 2001:

I had lived in my house for more than 10 years under the impression my oven did not work, before a guest giving a party here pointed out that it did work. I have not used it since because I believe somehow that while it worked for her it would not work for me. I’m not proud of this, which is just an attitude (Mary will do it) left over from a privileged childhood one effect of which was to unfit me for household tasks like cooking and vacuuming and sewing and ironing even though I know how to do them. It’s all conditioning – it might have been different if I’d been a girl, as there were still girls when I was a lad and such tasks were thought important for them to feel comfortable with, which was not so for boys. But then, if I’d been a girl, a lot of other things would have been different too. If I’d been a girl I doubt I would know today exactly which 2060 counties I have been in.³

On the other side of the atrium is a corridor with two more closets, including one walk-in supply closet from which I have removed the door. I try to herd all small objects into this open closet – I have shelves for office supplies, and travel supplies, and spare eyeglass frames, and gadgets, and bookends, and whatnot. Also in this corridor are a bathroom and a (separate) toilet, both in their original pink and gray tiles and connected by a light well I painted bright yellow to simulate sunshine. Some years ago I started throwing the cores from empty toilet paper rolls into this light well, to see how long it would take to fill it to the level of the windows. It was my performance art. I turned out they were drifting into the downstairs bathroom fan. Art is so hard.

The corridor ends at the entrance to the two back bedrooms. Both have angled bays with a center window and two side windows; these are framed in aluminum, which probably replaced earlier wooden sash windows like the one in the kitchen. One of these bedrooms is my office and library, with an ocean view and bookshelves covering both walls to the ceiling, containing my heraldic and atlas collections (see Chapter 5). If The Big One comes and shakes the house while I’m in my office the books could squash me like the loser character in *Howards End*, but never mind.⁴ There is a big flat worktable in

³ Now 2103.

⁴ Ross MacDonald wrote of someone that “the walls of books around him, dense with the past, formed a kind of insulation against the present world of disasters.”

the middle of the room, with my keyboard and printer and fax machine and work materials on it. I am sitting at this table as I write this memoir; there are also some chairs for guests (below left). The heraldic shelves fill the wall I face when at my desk; they continue into a doorless closet. Atlases fill most of the wall behind me, but two bookshelves are reserved – instead of atlases one has my most heavily used reference books, and until I retired the other had ready-reference law books. I was really glad to get those law books out of there. At the other end of the room from the windows is a standing desk folding down from the wall (below right). A globe (just visible at the top of the photo below left) hangs near the ceiling and can be lowered with a pulley. There is a copier on a small table in a corner. The electricity and phone and data lines come up through the floor to a hub beneath the worktable (also visible in the photo), my own design, so cords will not have to run across the floor to get to wall sockets.



From my office I look out to sea and watch the shipping coming in the Golden Gate. There is a lot of shipping, and most of the time I can see at least one container ship. I keep binoculars for ship-spotting on the shelf behind my chair. Gulls and crows are



common, but sometimes I also see formations of brown pelicans flying along above the surf – these are impolitely called the *Mexican Air Force*. I can see the fog in the morning and the sunset every night. Here I am at my desk, in a characteristic posture, in a picture taken in February 2010 by the webcam on my computer. The picture on the reference shelf behind me is of Rosemary Woodruff-Leary – note the mourning band – for a larger version of this picture see Chapter 19.A.

The other bedroom (shown below) is where I sleep. The head of my bed is up against the windows – this gives me a breeze and the soothing sound of the surf, and shields my eyes from direct light. There is a folding table, and some dressers and storage bins, and a closet in that room too, and some more bookcases. An array of coat hooks, towel racks,

and similar gadgets for holding clothes are fixed to the back of this door. Every room in my house has at least one phone and at least one icon of Lord Ganesha, but the Ganesha shrine where I make offerings is on one of my bedroom dressers.



The back windows overlook not only the ocean and the Marin Headlands but my garden and the larger green space in the middle of the block formed by all the adjacent back yards, the last such space before the dunes begin. Although the back yards are separated by fences, from upstairs they seem like all one meadow, as the birds and butterflies see them. Cats occasionally prowl through the fences, and raccoons have been seen here. Once a raccoon even got in through a cat door and climbed up my bookcases, until Animal Control came and captured it and released it nearby.

The corridor also has a door to an inside staircase leading to the downstairs level. Downstairs there is a garage, in which I now park after learning that parking inside protects a car from the corrosion of the salt air. Corrosion is pretty extreme so close to the ocean and the salt eats away even at the brass fittings on my door frames. The gas cock is here (turn off in case of earthquake!) and the circuit breakers and telephone connections. I had some shelves built along one wall of the garage that hold a lot of stuff. I cleared out 1800 pounds of clutter one time, under the influence of a wonderful book on the subject called *Clear Your Clutter With Feng Shui* (1999), by Karen Kingston. I recommend it to everyone.

But it silts up with junk, and then I have to clear it out. I just did that *again*. There is an automatic garage door opener mounted on the garage ceiling. A swinging panel just to the right of the garage door (on the right side seen from the street) is for mail; on the other side of the garage door is a separate entrance to the house, with a light above the door. Inside this door is a corridor, with a closet built under the front steps and the hot water heater and a furnace in one corner.

At the other end of this corridor is a studio apartment (below). For 18 years I kept it for guests. It let me offer hospitality to my friends, sometimes on a long-term basis, without impairing my privacy or theirs. I had a separate phone line down there so guests didn't have to be called on my home phone – it was also a way to communicate between the two apartments. There's a kitchenette with a small range, fridge and sink, a bathroom, and a spacious room (furnished in those days with bed, table, chairs, bookcases, dresser, and a built-in worktable Simon Kenney added when he lived here). According to law the apartment should not have both a stove and a fridge, because that makes it a second

living unit for which my house is not zoned. But they haven't caught me yet. Two more aluminum windows give out on the garden.



I booked guests into this apartment on a strictly first come, first served basis – they could stay as long as they wanted. My brothers Christopher and Adam, my nephew Noah, Annette Barbasch, Jim Ito and his husband Nick Coman, Denis Berry, Janis Mara, Lee Oestreicher, Peter Miller, Whitney Smith, and many others have stayed here on visits. Several people have stayed for a year or more. Rosemary Woodruff-Leary lived in that apartment for more than two years; Bernie Segal lived there for about a year; his daughter Amy and her husband Simon Kenney lived there for over a year when they came back from Malaysia; Joel Solkoff spent about a year and a half here, and his daughter Joanna later stayed for a year. I offered this opportunity to close friends who needed a place to stay while they found their feet – it was long-term but not permanent, and allowed people moving to San Francisco to make suitable arrangements without time pressure. I liked having people there – I get isolated living alone in this house at the very edge of the continent. Michael Bowen used to stay here with his entourage when he came to town to sell art (see Chapter 18.F). My girlfriend Julia, who lived with me when I moved in in 1990, also stayed downstairs toward the end of our affair, when living together upstairs became too anguished for us to tolerate.

Here's an extract from an e-mail I wrote when Amy Segal and Simon Kenney were staying there in 2000:

I have long-term house guests in my downstairs unit. Since I won't let them pay rent, they have been doing home improvements – laying carpets, painting hallways, adding shelves. They have turned a studio apartment into a 3-room unit by clever use of service areas, they replaced the stove, and now they are landscaping my back yard. Bread on the waters? Anyway I like having them around – they are the fourth set of very long-term guests in the place, and it does make it pleasant to have someone else here. I *do* like the silence, and I *do* prefer living alone, but it's nice to have someone you can visit or go to the movies with, *or not as you choose*, without necessarily having them in your face (or in your bed) all the time. I know there are advantages to having someone in your bed, and I'm *absolutely not* putting that down, but like one of those mollusks (or whatever they are) whose shape grows to fit its niche, mine is doing the same.

When I retired I needed the money, so I decided I would rent the place out after all. Joanna left at the end of July 2008, and after a few final guests the painters came in mid-

August. But they were such incompetent painters they didn't ever finish, and I had to fire them and start again. I finally rented it in October. I am on my second tenant now. I scarcely ever see her, which is ideal.

There is a nook under the stairs which used to find occasional use, and overflow bookshelves. There is also a storeroom and a laundry room, and one more very small room which used to be a toilet. When I had a cat the rule was that people never used that toilet (there was another one nearby), and I would flush it every day to provide fresh drinking water for the cat. Since I no longer have a cat the toilet was not useful as a cat fountain and I had it removed. I don't use the room, so I include it with the apartment as storage space. There's also a large room under the house, reached from a door in the garden, the use of which I have never figured out. It is much larger than a crawl space and the builder had to have excavated the spot in order to create it. I don't use it for anything, although while the electrician was here I had an electric light and a socket installed there just inside the door.

The back yard used to be quite untended – I called it an urban ecological preserve, and it was crowded with wild grasses and mallow and similar weeds. Amy and Simon made a lovely garden there, with a path and a picnic table and flowers of various kinds. Jim Ito, a genius landscaper, works on it when he comes to visit, which he does several times a year, and gradually the flowers that like to live there have asserted themselves. Some are introduced and some are “native,” but the ones that don't like the fog don't make it here. Geraniums, nasturtiums, calla lilies, passion flowers, lavender, and some others do very well, and there are usually flowers in bloom. When Jim isn't around I have someone come and weed occasionally so it doesn't get overgrown, and I try to remember to water it during the dry season. Or anyway I used to – I am tending to let it go again, now that it is filled with flowers rather than mallow and beach grass. There is an English-style park bench in a shady nook at the back, nestling against the ivy-covered back fence. See the picture at the end of Document 27C-1. Jim trained nasturtiums and passion flowers to climb up the fences, and the passion flowers have spread to neighboring fences too. There is also a venerable hydrangea bush, and we are coaxing an apple tree to grow there. There's a picnic table, too, with attached benches – I had an umbrella in the center, to shield the table from the sun, but it wasn't working well so I had a sort of fiberglass canopy built. I should sit there a lot, but it is often too cold and windy to spend much time in the back yard. The same with the beach. But they are both nice to look at.

From the atrium it is possible to get onto the roof. I had an iron-working company make me an attached ladder, which I designed like a swimming pool ladder, with rungs continuing past the roofline so a person can climb up to roof level and step directly onto and off of the roof standing upright. It will do as a fire escape also – I could walk to safety along the neighboring roofs. The view from the roof is spectacular – about 350°, with a magnificent vista of the ocean to the west and the hills to the east. But it is

uncomfortable up there, and you can't put furniture on the roof because it would blow off in the wind, and to make a deck requires planning permission. So I haven't developed it.

Julia and I moved in at the end of January 1990. I put down carpets in the back of the house, but the two front rooms had inlaid hardwood floors, which Julia wanted finished. So at substantial expense I had those repaired and polished. I never liked them – too hard, I preferred carpets – but I did it for Julia. After we parted I was so demoralized I didn't do anything about them until Adam, on a visit, told me to get my *tuchis* in gear and do something, so in December 1990 I had wall-to-wall carpets laid over the hardwood floors. It's much better that way. Remembering from the Cape Cod house (see Chapter 25) the gloomy effect of dark floors, I chose light-colored carpets. To keep them clean I instituted a no-shoes policy in my house, still in effect. The carpets are kind of dull and worn and stained now, after 19 years – I would replace them if I could afford it, but if I do it will be with light colors again. Another 19 years will bring me to age 85, an age when stained carpets are expected.

Julia also wanted glass-paneled doors on the downstairs unit, and at the top of the internal stairs, so I replaced three regular doors with these. The glass-paneled doors are quite unsuitable for a private apartment and I put hangings over them; finally I had the downstairs ones painted over.

I did other things to the house, not all at the time of moving in. I removed the heavy iron bars from the downstairs windows and doors. They were depressing and unsafe. I had flagpole holders installed on the front, one for an American flag and one for a banner of my arms (see Chapter 6.C), and floodlights for them. They looked really handsome, and I kept them flying for years, but after a while, as mentioned, the tree in front grew so much it swallowed the American flag. There is still room for my armorial flag, but those flags (I had two made) have worn out and I haven't got around to replacing them.

I had a hippie electrician do a lot of rewiring to replace the original 1934 wiring. He put in a modern circuit-box to replace the old fuse box, and ran a 220-volt line to the back room for a dryer – for the first time since leaving my parents' home in 1963 I had a washer and dryer on the premises. He put phones in every room and two phones in some, and as noted a box coming through the floor, with phone lines and electric sockets, all wired from below from a circuit-box on the ceiling of the laundry room. He put in a light over the downstairs door, and a photoelectric cell so it would go on automatically at night and off in the morning. He also installed floodlights in the front to illuminate the flags, and put a photoelectric switch on those too. The flag lights don't work anymore – the sea air eats up outside fixtures. I had electric sockets installed in profusion, and brass plates on the light switches, and rheostats on a lot of them, and a special light fixture on the internal stairs, and another above the tub (with a rheostat). I had all the walls painted white except for the former dining room, where the original paint was peeling in an

attractive way. This I have kept intact, and the peeling has grown very picturesque – I call it the *craquelure* room.

In the downstairs unit I had a partition removed, and a large rectangular opening cut into another to give access to the living space from the kitchenette. More light fixtures in the apartment and in the corridor and elsewhere, and a special floodlight with a motion sensor pointed at the downstairs cat door to frighten away raccoons. When Joel lived here I had wheelchair ramps made for the downstairs unit. I had the heating ducts wrapped in linen to make them less obtrusive.

In front of my house are a big tree with white flowers, which my neighbors trim on their side of the property line but which has spread across the front of mine, and a tall juniper which nearly covered the entrance to the front stairs until Jim Ito trimmed it. When I moved in this block had a lot more trees than most Sunset blocks. They were an especially attractive feature of the block, but they have come down one by one (some new ones are going up now), and my property is now the one of the greenest and bushiest. There are also geraniums and succulents and other things in the front, but the front doesn't get watered much. Some Italian majolica tiles with my house number, a gift from Lee Oestreicher, are attached to the front of the house. I also had a statue of the Buddha under the tree (until someone stole it!), an apotropaic Chinese trigram and mirror charm on the garage door, a bronze Ganesha above the front door, and a Venetian mezuzah on the doorpost. For the story of these items see the end of Chapter 18.H.

It is nice to own a house and be able to do whatever I like with it. But it is not so nice not to be able to call the landlord to have things fixed. I had to install a new sewer line for \$3000, and had the front of the house painted, and the steps to the garden replaced, and repaired window-frames the salt air had eaten. Property taxes are approaching \$5000 a year – thank God for Proposition 13!⁵

I started out in 1990 with a 30-year mortgage at about \$1400 a month. When rates dropped around 1993 I refinanced, but instead of choosing a lower payment I chose a shorter term, 15 years. That would have been up in 2008, but after my illness in 2005 I decided to pay it off early. I was very glad to get this continuing responsibility over with.

⁵ Proposition 13, an initiative passed under the leadership of that right-wing gorgon Howard Jarvis (1903-1986), amended the state constitution to limit annual property tax to 1% of the cash value of the property. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proposition_13. While this has had some bad effects on funding of local government, it has prevented politicians from raising property taxes as much as they please to fill in lack of revenue from other sources. Without Proposition 13, now for example in the slump of 2010 my taxes could quadruple to make up the city budget shortfall and it would become very hard for me to continue to live here.

Choosing a shorter term rather than a lower payment was one of the smartest moves I ever made. If I still had 13 years to go on a mortgage, I'm not sure how I would have been able to retire.

When I bought the house under tax pressure in 1989 it was the peak of the market, and prices fell soon thereafter and stayed down for a while. I challenged an increase in my tax assessment with comparable prices and won. But prices are back up now – the last time I got a notice of increased assessment I got more comparables, and they showed the house worth almost three times what I paid for it (prices have since fallen again). But this increased value doesn't do me any good unless I sell, and if I sold where would I live? You can get a nice house with some acreage in ruralest Mississippi for \$20,000 – I could move there and walk away with well over half a million dollars in cash. You can get a house and land on the windswept plains of North Dakota free for the back taxes. But location, location, location, as the real estate people say. I don't want to live in rural Mississippi or in North Dakota. Prices are low there compared to San Francisco because people prefer to live here. There are good reasons for that. Document 27-5 shows some views of San Francisco. I think it is the most beautiful city in the world, except maybe for Venice, and it is drier than Venice.

- From a 2001 e-mail: *The sun has set, lending a dramatic purple glow to the fogbank which now obscures the ocean. I have cracked the window a bit to hear the sound of the surf, but not much because of the sea-wind which keeps us air conditioned whether we want to be or not. It is hard to stay unattached to such a beautiful place. In theory I would not mind if I were in Camden, New Jersey, instead, but actually I would mind. Bad Buddhist! No leper's thumb for you!*⁶

2. My Neighborhood

I really like this Outer Sunset neighborhood. It is part of a great city without feeling like it – it feels like a smallish coastal town, but the L-Taraval streetcar goes from 46th and Taraval, less than two blocks away, right to Montgomery and Market in the Financial District. (The northbound No 18 bus, to the Palace of the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park, stops at that corner too.) In San Francisco a person can walk or drive or take public transportation. Downtown feels like a different world.

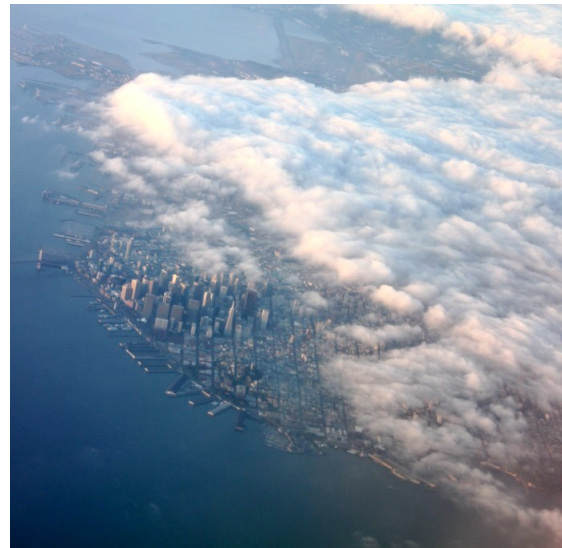
The dominant force at my extreme end of the Sunset District is the ocean – I can hear the surf as I write these lines. The ocean a block away marks the end of the continent, the

⁶ From an old Buddhist story of a monk who was begging, and a leper accidentally dropped his thumb into the begging bowl, and the monk ate it in the spirit of humility, and to avoid giving offense. Yuk!

end of civilization, the end of abstraction. It is thrilling to see it at the foot of Taraval Street on my way back home. I sometimes walk on the beach, although not as much as I should or used to, and it is always a revitalizing experience out there with the sand and the sea and the clouds and the birds.

- Flights of brown pelicans over the ocean near my house – they fly silently in formation along the surf, very stately birds in unmistakable silhouette against the brilliant yellow and orange sunset, which shades to greenish-blue at the edges, while the cliffs to the north and south are barely seen in a violet haze. Suddenly a whole flock of seagulls, at least 500 birds, startled from their perch on the beach, fly over us not in formation but in amazingly graceful unified chaos. Sandpipers dart along the surf; the plovers are off today.

The fog helps a lot too – not only in keeping us cool out here, but because it is beautiful in itself. The fog, which arises from a complicated heat exchange system between the ocean and the air, is like a ground level cloud. From afar the fogbank looks like a white fluffy cloud (photo taken from the northeast). Suddenly appearing as you drive west in Contra Costa County, for example, or seen from above on the Marin Headlands, perhaps with a tower of the Golden Gate Bridge pointing out of the top, it is one of the most dramatic natural sights in the world. Inside the cloud it is moist and misty, with beautiful soft iridescent colors. In my diary I speak of fog raptures – that's what it feels like to me. When I see and feel and smell the fog, I know I'm home. When I see bright sunshine I am somewhat disappointed – I really prefer the cool gray fog (gray from the inside but white from the outside).



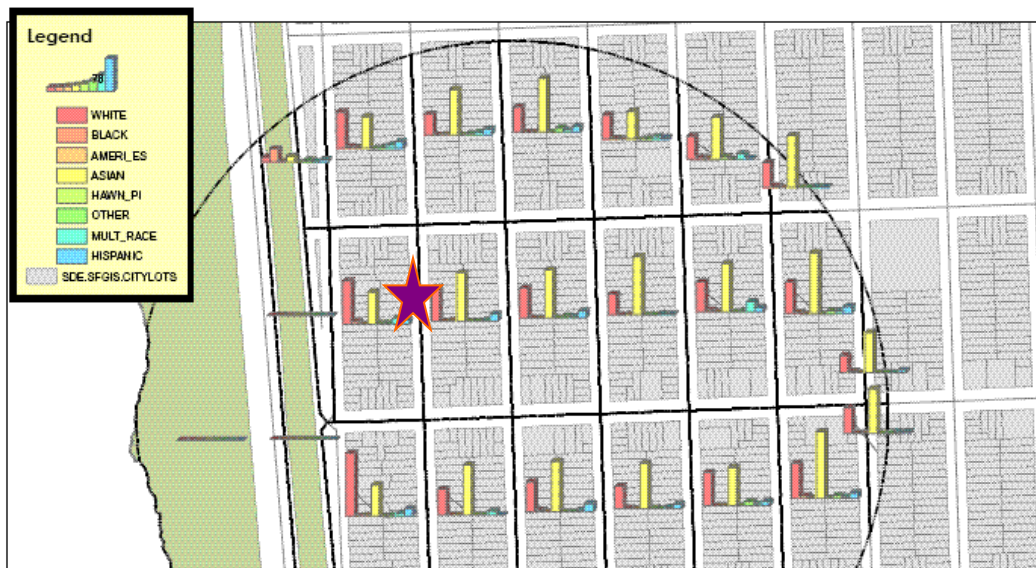
come out and spoil everything.

I have not yet taken for granted the mild and gentle climate of San Francisco. I appreciate it every winter and every summer. I have mentioned the cool summers by the sea, with a nice salty breeze from the ocean a block away. And the winters!

- The rains are coming this winter and people are going to complain about it, but when I hear them I think (and sometimes even say) hey powderpuff, you think this is bad? How about four months of snow and slush and bitter arctic winds, like in some eastern cities I could name? People who came from elsewhere (which is most people in San Francisco) look sheepish when I remind them how

mild are the conditions they are complaining about. The native Californians try to look sheepish, but they really don't get it – an eastern winter is something you have to carry in your bones to really understand (it's in my bones forever). To them, rain is as bad as it gets, and snow has something to do with Santa Claus or the Olympics.

My street is a quiet residential street like many in the Sunset, still overwhelmingly single-family houses just as designed in the 30s and 40s, one story up from the street. A lot of



them have Art Deco detailing. The neighborhood is about 47% Chinese, 47% Anglo, and 6% other, but in the few blocks around my house (except facing the ocean) there are many more Asians than Anglos. On the chart above, the star indicates my house.

Taraval Street is the main business street of my neighborhood – in the block between 47th and 46th is my local convenience store, a dry cleaner, a pizza place which I no longer use since diabetes but I used to, and a diner called the Bashful Bull Too. Plus a sort of rowdy bar. I was a regular at the diner before the retirement retrenchment. I still go there sometimes – they have great bacon, and pancakes (out now), and beef barley soup. There was an acupuncturist next to the diner, who did great work but then moved to Sacramento, a Chinese restaurant across 46th, and a terrific hardware store on 44th. A Vietnamese barber on 43rd cuts my hair and beard just right. There's another commercial block between 41st and 40th, with a Walgreen's drugstore, a produce store, and five restaurants. I favor Hong's Szechuan Kitchen in that block, and they deliver.

- Lakeshore Hardware at 44th is a tale of our time (the global recession of 2008-when?). This was a great store in the old-fashioned tradition. They had everything you could possibly need, and were as helpful and attentive over a 20-cent bolt as over \$500 worth of lumber. The store had been there since the 1940s. The seemingly endless real-estate boom of the late 2000s led the owner to close

the store for a few months, remodel, and add two floors of condominium apartments above what had been a one-story building. He finished the project, reopened the store, and then the economy crashed. The owner couldn't sell the condos, and so he couldn't pay his loan, went bankrupt, and had to close the store.

Further up Taraval Street are almost all the other services I need – a gas station which does repairs, a post office, a public library, a police station in case of need, and more restaurants. West Portal Avenue has everything else – a packaging store, two bookstores, a Wells Fargo Bank, Radio Shack, several excellent restaurants and a movie theatre. What I don't have there I have nearby – a shop on Noriega Street where I get my watch batteries replaced, with a dim sum parlor next door, a nursery for garden supplies on Vicente Street, a Russian dental clinic on La Playa Street with a Russian market next door, and a fabulous Chinese market on Vicente Street with live sea clams and lots of other great stuff, and butcher and produce departments with great prices. There is a small shopping center on Sloat Boulevard with a huge super market and other amenities. Stonestown, a serious mall, is not far away for when I absolutely have to go there, for example to get my blood drawn at the lab, or to go to Borders bookstore or find a Verizon outlet for cell phone issues. Even San Francisco State University, where I am a Friend of the J. Paul Leonard Library and have borrowing privileges, is not far away. This southwestern part of town is more or less self-sufficient, and while I go all over town for one reason or another, I don't *have* to. When I go to see a mainstream movie I often prefer a suburban theatre in Daly City because it is nearer, and parking is never a problem there. But when I want to see a non-mainstream movie I have lots of other theatres to choose from in the city. Best of both worlds!



This is a good site for the coming global warming. As noted, the fog keeps me cool, and the slight hill makes my house safe from a rise in the sea level of even a foot or two, all there is likely to be in my lifetime, *inch'Allah*. It is not quite so good for earthquakes. The house is a low wooden-framed row house, in the middle of a whole street of similar structures which help absorb lateral motion. But all the houses on the block are "soft-story," built over garages, a notoriously unstable plan for a major earthquake. And although my block came through the 1989 earthquake just fine, it is built on sand, and a large enough earthquake will liquefy the sand and it will all go *blorp* and swallow me and my house right up. I am "likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Matthew 7:26-27. Oh well. You pays your money and you takes your choice.

- This from a 1999 e-mail: We had a small earthquake the other day – remarkable how quickly one comes awake, and how wide, when something like that happens. One moment snoozy-poo, then WHAM! a giant kicks the house like a football. Unlike a football, however, or a Turkish apartment block, the house didn't go anywhere. Sturdy row houses, all built in 1934 when houses were still houses – not a dish moved. It was “only” a 5.0. But I welcome 5.0s – the more the tension dissipates with little ones, the less likely The Big One will come anytime soon. Yes, it will come, of course it will come, but maybe not for 100 years. Another 40 and I'm out of here anyway.⁷ In fact as I write this, we just had another little one.

I don't want to leave this house, ever, if I can help it. If I should become seriously disabled I have plans for installing a lift from the garage through the floor of the atrium. The downstairs unit can be part of the compensation for a caregiver if it comes to that. And if I *have* to go into care, even after the real-estate crash the money from the house should pay for a lot of it. If I should win the lottery and come into millions, I would not move to Pacific Heights or Sea Cliff or Marin County or New York, or even London as I once longed to do – instead I would buy the houses on either side of mine and cut connecting doors, so as to expand my house exactly where it is.

3. San Francisco



I can't close the chapter about Home without a word about San Francisco. I have lived here since 1971, except for two periods away.⁸ That's much longer than I've lived anywhere else, including New York, and San Francisco is now completely home to me. In fact, as I said at the beginning of Chapter 15, from the day I saw the place in December 1969 it always felt like home – even when I first arrived it felt like the place I was supposed to be.⁹

Nearly 40 years later I still feel the same way. It is possible to live in a place so long it becomes background and you don't notice it any longer. But that has never happened to me, in New York or San Francisco. I have never grown used to it in that way, or *blasé*

⁷ It is slightly chilling to realize that even if I get those 40, I've already had 11 of them.

⁸ Three years in New York, Washington and Taiwan, 1973-76 (Chapters 20.B, 21 and 22), and six years in Truro, 1982-88 (Chapters 25 and 26).

⁹ As noted in Chapter 30.A, that epochal visit in 1969 was not technically the first time I had been in San Francisco, as I spent a few hours here in 1962 on my way to Seattle. But that hardly counts.

about being here. I still actively enjoy and appreciate San Francisco every day – the beauty of its neighborhoods and natural setting, its brilliantly successful urban culture, its mild and pleasant climate.

I have spent a lot of time at both extremes – in New York, the great metropolis of the world, and Truro, a small village in the rural boondocks. Both have their attractions, but neither extreme is completely satisfying to me. San Francisco hits the perfect balance – perfect for me, anyway. It is the Goldilocks city – New York is too big, and Truro is too small, but San Francisco is *just right*.

The City¹⁰ is big enough to have whatever I need, and usually whatever I want, but small enough to really know. It has a very active cultural life – there are usually dozens of theatrical, dance, musical and other performances to choose from on any day. I go to the theatre almost every Friday when I'm in town, and I generally go to two or three events a week of one kind or another. In the last ten days (February 2010) I have been to a play, two movies (one in repertory), a lecture by a writer, a presentation on quantum mechanics (free), a cello master class (free), and a neighborhood gathering at a public school to meet the new police chief (free).¹¹

There is not as much to choose from as there is in New York, but there is more than enough to keep me busy and interested, and these diversions are a lot less expensive here than they are in New York. Successful Broadway plays often come here on tour, or are put on independently by our many local companies, and a lot of shows start here and then go on to Broadway.

In New York, if I had the money, I could go to the theatre eight times a week. But I don't want to go eight times a week – once or twice is usually plenty. We don't have as much here, but we have enough. The same is true of many other aspects of the urban experience. We have some good museums, not on the same level as New York's but no place can match that. There are some terrific second-hand bookstores, a conservatory of

¹⁰ By local newspaper convention *the City* (sometimes even *The City*), capitalized, means *San Francisco* without the need for further identification.

¹¹ Not an unusual week. Here's a passage from an e-mail in 2006, describing another.

Much gadding about – lecture at Temple Emanuel by an Israeli civil rights lawyer who protects secular Jews from the *Haredim*, a science night program at the café on the life of ants, a program on how to spot a liar which I even get continuing legal education credit for (useful in case I feel like keeping my license) plus a free dinner at the Palace Hotel where Harding died from food poisoning. And a free Giants game, courtesy of my office, and theatre every Friday, and tomorrow a program demonstrating newly created musical instruments in an echoful church on Fillmore Street. Life is pretty good at the moment.

music with a robust program of public performances, and some superb parks including the Presidio, the Golden Gate National Seashore and Golden Gate Park (designed by Calvert Vaux).

There may not be a hundred languages spoken here, but there are enough to give the City a distinctly international feel, not only Chinese and Spanish but Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Arabic and lots more. My dentist and my doctor are both Russian, and you hear more Russian than English in their offices. And of course all these languages come with restaurants. As mentioned, there is a fine Russian supermarket in the same block as the dentist, and an active Chinese market a few blocks from my house. I went to a naturalization ceremony not long ago and 50 countries were represented among our new local citizens.

San Francisco's large gay minority gives the City extra zip and flavor in much the same way the ethnic minorities do. It is large enough to be as distinct a cultural and political presence as the Chinese and the Mexicans, and like theirs the gay energy adds noticeably to the City's vitality. There is a cross-fertilization here – the gays contribute a lot to San Francisco's energy, but one reason there are so many of them here is that they were attracted by the City's open, tolerant and sophisticated atmosphere. So they come here and make it even more that way than it was before.

San Francisco is big enough to be authentically, convincingly urban, but not as overwhelming as New York. It is big enough to lose yourself in, but not so big that you vanish. You run into people you know on the street. You can go to meet the new police chief without the event being a major high-security urban circus. You can drive easily here, which you can't in New York, but you don't *have* to like you do in Los Angeles. If you don't feel like driving or parking, you can get around conveniently by bus and streetcar like you can in New York, but can't in Los Angeles.¹²



Part of the urban success of San Francisco is due to its location at the tip of a peninsula, surrounded by water (see left; red marks the county line). San Francisco is really quite small (49 square miles, as compared to 22 for Manhattan), and there is no room for urban sprawl except to the south of the City. The combination of steep hills and a rectangular street grid produces small self-contained neighborhoods with distinct characters. Some of these, like North Beach and Chinatown, are world-famous; others are more local but still

¹² Or even by bicycle if your body can handle it – bike lanes everywhere.

distinctive and fun to go to. Even ordinary neighborhoods often have breathtaking views at the ends of their streets, of the hills or the water or the downtown towers.

They used to say of the Sphinx in Egypt that if you stayed there long enough you'd see everyone, because everyone goes there eventually. That is almost true of San Francisco – because it is a “destination city,” people come here on vacation, or for business, or for conferences. Just hang around North Beach and drink *espresso* – sooner or later all your friends will turn up.

San Francisco has a unique and colorful history going back to the Spanish occupation in 1776, Gold Rush of 1849, the lurid nights of the Barbary Coast, the Earthquake and Fire (1906), the General Strike (1934), the Beats (famous first reading of “Howl” 1955), the Summer of Love (1967), and lots more. These past events and eras still resonate here. Our politics are probably more reliably left-wing than any other county in America. Cultural movements start here, under the spiritual influence of our sacred mountain Mount Tamalpais just to the north, and then radiate out to Los Angeles and New York, where they are amplified and broadcast to the world. In a way San Francisco doesn't really feel like America, any more than Manhattan does – it feels like a little island of its own, especially so at the water's edge, and you are never far from the water's edge.

- H. L. Mencken said of San Francisco: “What fetched me instantly (and thousands of other newcomers with me) was the subtle but unmistakable sense of escape from the United States.”¹³

I learned the city well driving a cab in 1972. By now there is a memory for me on almost every street: a place I used to work, the house where a friend lived, a street I walked down with a girlfriend, the corner where I met Harvey Milk campaigning for office, somewhere I did an acid trip. I never get tired of it. It is still a thrill to see the City suddenly appear as I drive over the central mountain, or the Bridge poke through the fogbank at the end of a street, or a cable car clatter down Hyde Street in the moonlight. As in Manhattan, I hardly ever cross the bridges – why would I need to? When I'm on the freeway and I see a sign for San Francisco I think “can it be I get to go to *San Francisco*?” I imagine some people feel that way when they see a sign for Hollywood.

And the climate, of course, already mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, but worth mentioning again because it is so important to me. That was one of the big reasons I moved here. I hate the cold wet eastern winters – the wind, the sleet, the snowdrifts, the unsafe roads, the frozen pipes, the long darkness – and I hate the hot muggy eastern summers just as much. San Francisco doesn't have either one – it is always fall here. I

¹³ From “San Francisco – A Memory,” first appearing in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1920 and anthologized in, e.g., *Mencken's America* (2004).

rarely even wear a raincoat, and that's the heaviest coat I have. I have not yet taken the mild and gentle climate of San Francisco for granted. I appreciate it every day, but especially in the winter and summer when I hear how people elsewhere are freezing or broiling. People say we have no seasons, but actually we have six – it's just that none of them are unpleasant. What could be better than perpetual fall without any winter to follow? It rains here during the winter months, and it gets a bit chilly (wear your raincoat!) but I don't call that *winter* – no icy gales, no blizzards, no freezing pipes, no digging your car out of the snow, no filthy black slush.

All these things contribute to my enjoyment of San Francisco. But my feeling for the place is not just the sum of advantages – it's more emotional and much less rational than that. I just *love the place* – I loved it from that first day in 1969, and I still do, and I cannot imagine not loving San Francisco, or not being glad to be here, or ever again moving away. When I die, I have arranged that my ashes be taken down to the Municipal Pier on the City's north shore near Aquatic Park where I took so many joyful acid trips (see text and picture at the end of Chapter 16), and committed (illegally) to the Bay. It would be legal to put them out in the Ocean, beyond the Golden Gate, but it would be too cold out there, and too far from home.



Document 27C-1: views of my house and street (1989)



At left is the view of my house from the street. The triple window in my living room; the table where I spend a lot of my time is right behind it. This picture was taken in 1989; trees now cover most of the front of the house.

Below is the view of the back of the house, taken from the garden. My bedroom is above right. Above left is my office, where I am typing these words. I have removed the bars from the lower story.



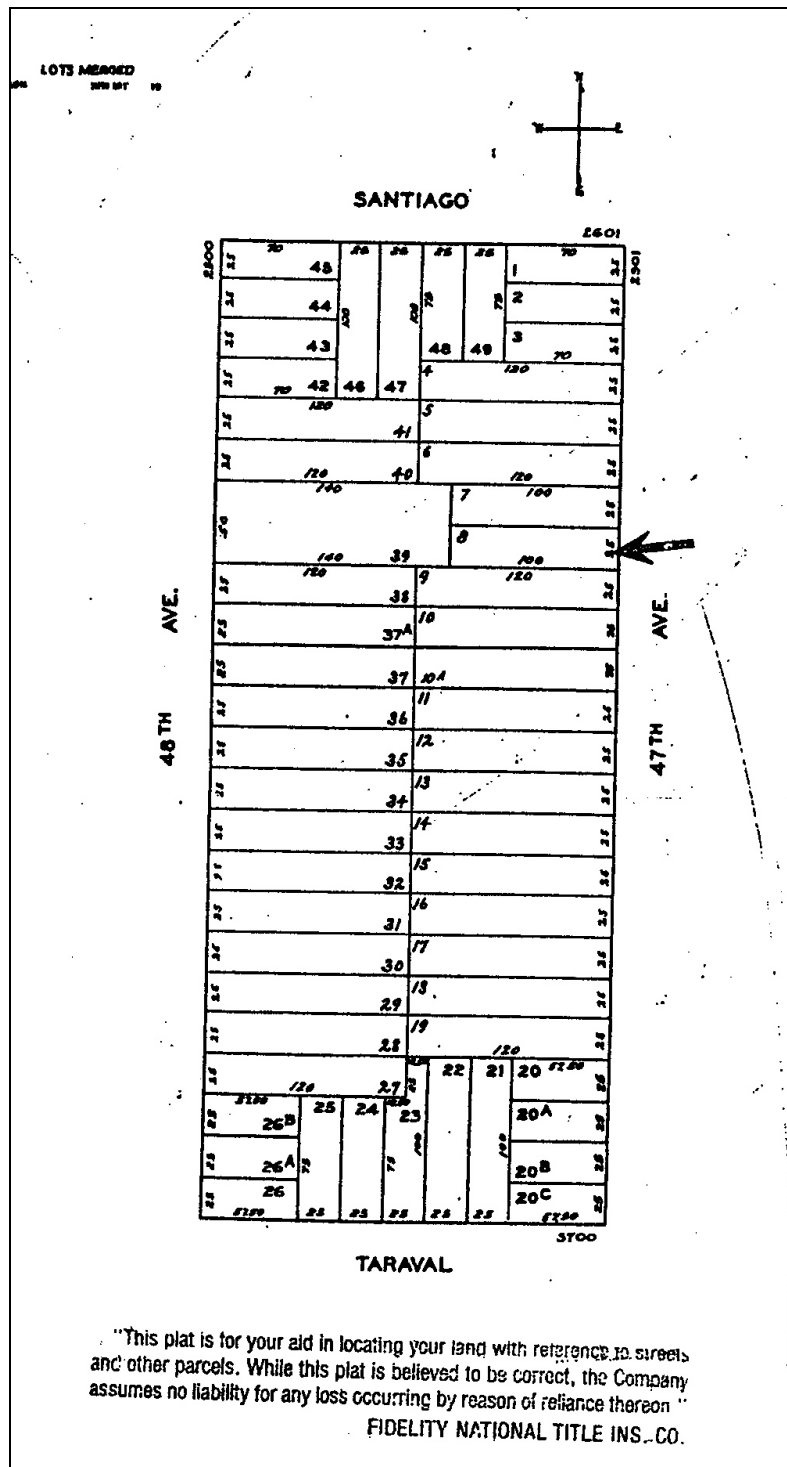


It's pretty quiet out here.



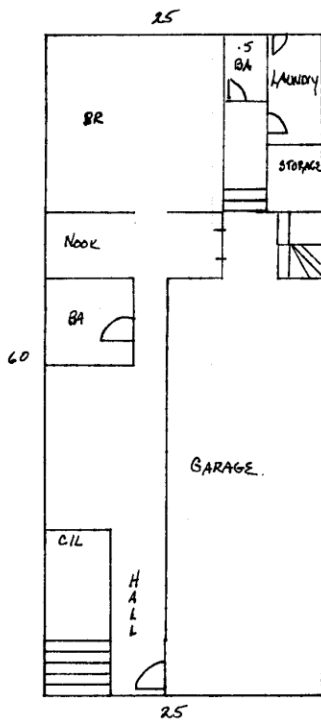
View of the back garden. The structure at left is part of a canopy I had built for shade over a picnic table.

Document 27C-2: Plat of my block, showing my property

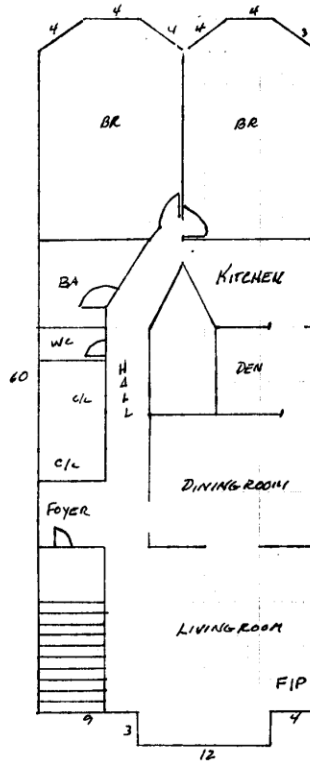


Document 27C-3: Floor plan of my house

2331 47th AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF
94116



1ST LEVEL
 $11 \times 30 = 330$
 $- 5 \times 8 = -40$
290 SF



2ND LEVEL
 $25 \times 60 = 1500$
 $- 6 \times 15 = -90$
 $25 \times 9 = 225$
 $2 \times 9 = 18$
 $14 \times 10 = 140$
 $3 \times 12 = 36$
 $1500 - 90 + 225 + 18 + 140 + 36 = 1799$
1799 SF

I have let the apartment next to the garage as a rental unit.

In the living quarters, the bedroom at the upper right is used as an office. The room labeled as a dining room is used for projects, and for guests now that the downstairs apartment is no longer available.

Document 27C-4: Deed to my house

RECORDING REQUESTED BY	
MAIL TAX STATEMENT TO	
WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO	
Name	DAVID F. PHILLIPS
Street Address	2331 47TH AVENUE
City & State	SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94116

SAN FRANCISCO, CA RECORDER'S OFFICE	
DOC- E484265	
FIDELITY NATIONAL TITLE	
Friday, January 05, 1990	08:00:00am
Rec 3.00 --- Pa 1.00	
Mic 1.00 --- Ttx 1500.00	
Amt 1505.00 ---	
TOTAL ->	\$1505.00

ORDER NO. 500715	SPACE ABOVE RECORDER'S USE ONLY
ESCROW NO. 500715-AC	GRANT DEED (INDIVIDUAL)

The undersigned grantor(s) declare(s): 1,500.00
Documentary transfer tax is \$
() Computed on full value of property conveyed, or
() Computed on full value less value of liens and encumbrances remaining at time of sale.
() Unincorporated area () City of
Tax Parcel No.

FOR A VALUABLE CONSIDERATION, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged,
ANDREW E. TSENG AND ALICE M. TSENG, HUSBAND AND WIFE

hereby GRANT(S) to DAVID F. PHILLIPS, AN UNMARRIED MAN

the following described real property in the
County of SAN FRANCISCO, State of California:

BEGINNING at a point on the westerly line of 47th Avenue, distant thereon 175 feet southerly from the southerly line of Santiago Street; running thence southerly along the said line of 47th Avenue 25 feet; thence at a right angle westerly 100 feet; thence at a right angle northerly 25 feet; thence at a right angle easterly 100 feet to the point of beginning.

BEING portion of Outside Land Block 1149.

APN: LOT 8, BLOCK 2376.

Dated January 03, 1990

ANDREW E. TSENG
ALICE M. TSENG

STATE OF CALIFORNIA } s.s.
County of San Francisco }

On this 4TH day of JANUARY, 1990, before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for said County and State, personally appeared ANDREW E. TSENG AND ALICE M. TSENG

personally known to me (or proved to me on the basis of satisfactory evidence) to be the person S whose name S subscribed to the within instrument and acknowledged that THEY executed the same.

WITNESS my hand and official seal.

Notary Public in and for said County and State.

(Notary Seal)

FD-13B (Rev. 9/88) MAIL TAX STATEMENT AS DIRECTED ABOVE

Document 27C-5: Views of San Francisco

The most beautiful city in the world.

