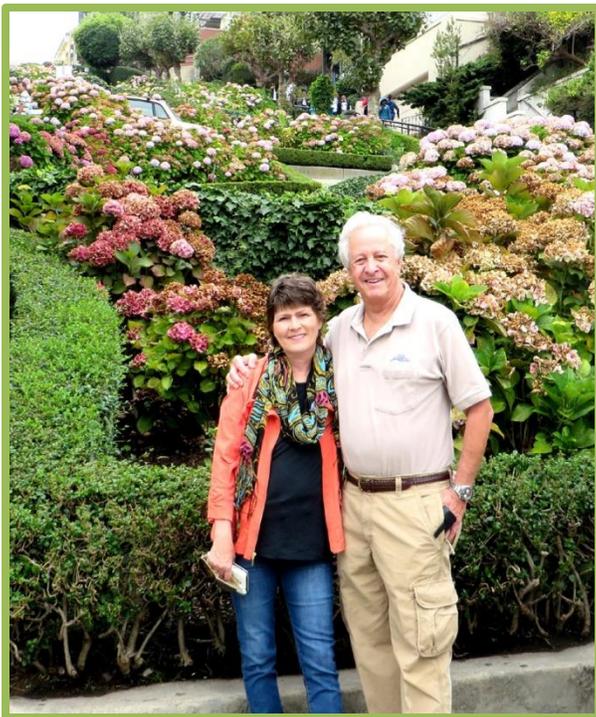


California, here I come - Aug. 24-31, 2015

My first trip to California was during the summer of 1962. I had mustered out of the Army and took my brand new 1963 VW Karman Ghia and picked up a elementary school friend, Steve Demarest, who was getting out of the Air Force in Denver, and we did our own version of the "Route 66" TV show, traveling by car throughout the western states. My friend Steve was now going back to CA to see his brother and wife at their new home, and we were invited to meet him there. Our trip covered three major locations in the Golden State. We started in San Francisco and, 4 days later, we picked Steve up at its airport for the drive to the Napa vineyard valley to visit his brother before heading over to the Pacific Coast and Bodega Bay for our final 3 days. I have been to California a total of 6 times, half of which was to do work related projects, and the **last trip being some 25 years ago.**



Breakfast with Miriam - at Fisherman's Wharf



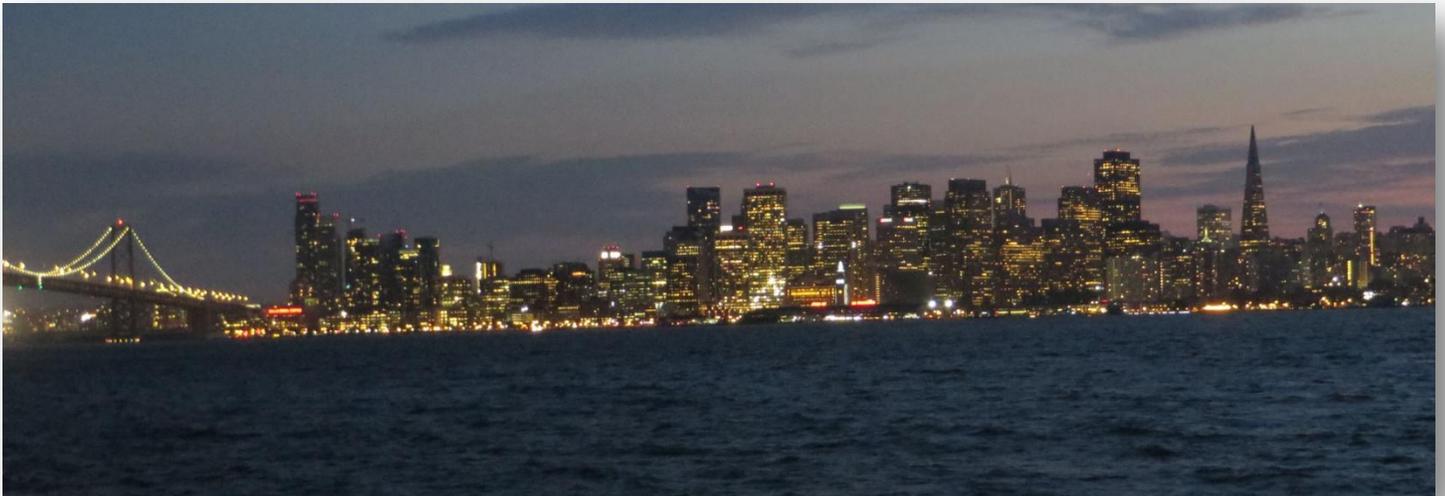
We explored San Francisco by mass transportation, including rental auto, cable car, double decker bus, and ferry boat as well as on foot. One of those walks was both up and then back down Lombard St., which is billed as the crookedest street in the US. Actually only this one block of Lombard St. is windy with its many switchbacks and curves. The remainder of Lombard Street is straight as an arrow. Unfortunately on the day that we were there, just an hour after we had begun our workout walk up the block, a tourist from Thailand was mugged and then shot when he refused to give up his camera. For his resistance, he got a bullet in the shoulder. He was lucky and was released from the hospital two days later. The thieves were caught but, I'm sad to say, San Francisco, with its sanctuary city philosophy, is fast becoming a very dangerous place to visit.

Of course when in San Francisco the major thing to see is the Golden Gate Bridge. One day we took the ferry over to Sausalito to enjoy a lunch in this quaint city, just across the Bay. The photo, on the right, was taken showing that famous **orange** colored bridge located just behind us.



The Hop-on/Hop-off bus was one of the best ways to see the city and we opted for a day/night package which gave us an entire day of sightseeing. That evening crossing over the Oakland Bay bridge to Treasure Island gave us fantastic views of the city all lit up in its nighttime finery. This has to be the most spectacular city water view at night...short of NYC as seen from NJ. **See the photo on the next page.**

A Night view of San Francisco Bay and the City Beyond, taken from Oakland's Treasure Island



Once we left San Francisco we were off to the Sonoma and Napa wine country where I had reserved a rental Cessna 172 for some local sightseeing of the vineyards, mountains and Pacific coastline beyond. Unfortunately when I got to the Santa Rosa airport the only thing available was a 182 P Skylane, an model that I had not flown previously. Since my Sport License requires a safety pilot when I am flying other than Light Sport airplanes, this was not a problem and I looked forward to our hour's aerial excursion around central California.

The scenery was breathtaking, and it is amazing how quickly we reached the nearby mountains while flying this airplane. Within minutes we were over the lakes, rivers and vineyards and on our way toward the coast. This same trip, a couple of days hence, would take us almost 3 hours to accomplish. An airplane brings such prospective to any new area visited



relative to the surrounding terrain and sights. I do miss the 190 MPH Comanche Twin that I last owned before heart valve issues kept me from my FAA Medical certificate, thus forcing me into a 100 MPH Light Sport Airplane. (Oh well, at least I am still able to fly.) When we got deep into the mountains, between the valley and the Pacific cliffs, we came upon an very interesting complex.

A Buddhist Temple and Monastery deep in the California Mountains



The hour flight was soon over and after a fairly decent landing back in Santa Rosa we met up with my Demarest family friends for dinner at a upscale restaurant in Healdsburg, a tourist community which our hosts now call home. I have known these folks since Grade school back in New Jersey and Steve (the fellow in the middle) and I were in the local volunteer Fire Dept. and Ambulance Corps. together when we were in our early 20's. We spent a total of 5 days in Wine Country and took several road trips to the various vineyard tasting rooms for samples and cheese. In addition we drove over to the Coast to see the quaint village of Mendocino, yet another tourist Mecca, where we had a delightful lunch.



About a year ago I saw an episode of the "Big Bang Theory" which featured the Napa Wine Train, incorporated into a romantic Valentine Day plot and I thought that it would be a neat thing to do on our California trip. So I booked a gourmet lunch excursion for the 5 of us aboard this very scenic 1950's era 10 car train. Back in High School I traveled from my NJ home in Harrington Park for the 5 mile trip to Dumont High aboard a commuter train each day, but sans the good food and wine.



These photos were taken in front "Old 73" the diesel locomotive which pulled our excursion Wine Train. We enjoyed a glass of vino and a 3 course meal in one of the dining cars on the outbound journey and took our coffee, desert and a glass of fine sherry on the return. All of the food is prepared in the onboard kitchen cars and the both service and food variety and taste were well above par. Cost for this delightful sojourn into the last century... priceless!!

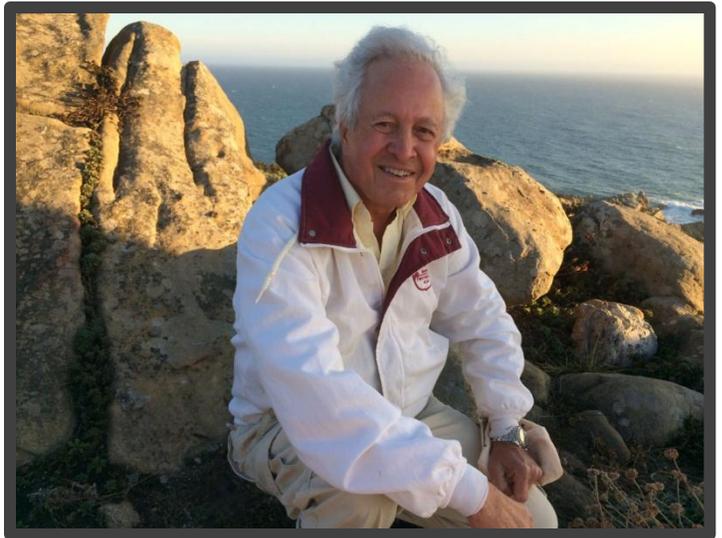
After our visit to the valley we headed toward the Bodega Bay area of Pacific Coast where we had booked our final 3 days in California at the Timber Cove Inn, high on the palisade cliffs. This was a delightful venue which I would classify as "Luxury in the rough". It was both elegant and rustic at the same time. The views from of our upper story room's balcony were spectacular and breathtaking. At night we left the sliding glass door open so that we could hear the surf as it pounded against the rocks below. Although, at the end of August, night time temperatures reached into the low 50's, thus air conditioning was never needed, on several evenings we had to have the gas fireplace going strong.

The Timber Cove Inn and Lodge, Bodega Bay, CA.





A brilliant sunset as seen from our room's balcony



Climbing the rocks around our hotel was exhilarating.



In just minutes we went from cliffs to beach.



Here we are at the Russian Stockade of Fort Ross.

Upon returning to San Francisco, and before heading for our red-eye flight back to the heat and humidity of West Palm Beach, there was one further place that I wanted to explore. One of the things that I enjoy doing, besides my flying, is going over to the nearby gun firing range and seeing how close together I can group holes in a paper target. I realize that this will probably sound "politically incorrect" to those who still live in the northeastern or western coastal states, but here in the south we are legally permitted to carry concealed firearms (once we have passed a federal background investigation), and I have been so doing for well over three decades. When Miriam told me about the Winchester Mystery house, a 160 room mansion designed and built by Sarah Winchester, the widow of gun magnate William Winchester, which has doors that lead to nowhere, windows that open to blank walls, and stairways that end at ceilings, I knew that I had to see this San Jose attraction. Now that I am back home I can look forward to our next trip to California... **in another 25 years!**

