

ROARSHOCK PAGE

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San Francisco

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August 2017, 50 years after the so-called “Summer of Love” (and let there be hype!), ROARSHOCK PAGE notes how at all times San Francisco stands as a continuing beacon of freedom in the world. Lo, even in 1987 it was thus.

THIRTY YEARS UPON MY HEAD

August tropical mists and light rain are falling over San Francisco and the Bay with chances of summer lightning and thunderstorms, putting a temporary veil over the frenetic change and construction sweeping through the City. Thirty times I’ve seen the seasons cycle around since I moved into the heart of this City, middle of August 1987. Three full decades watching things change and grow, and from that learning much about the life of the town and extrapolating from that understanding to life and evolution of cities generally as concentrations of human expression and society. So I could tell you about the village of Yerba Buena, the boomtown of the 49er Gold Rush, the Barbary Coast and the Great Earthquake and Fire, the General Strike, the Gateway to World War II and the Founding of the United Nations, the Beat Generation and the Summer of Love, because I feel those events and times. This knowledge won only through experience and the passage of time has deepened my understanding traveling to far away and older towns, so I very much feel the presence of the Greats when walking through the back jumbled streets of Venice. I have Victor Hugo at my side in old Paris and can almost see Hemmingway and Joyce turning round the next little corner. In Lucerne, Switzerland I was impressed by the old house with painted sign proudly proclaiming that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stayed there in 1779. San Francisco has always been an impossibly expensive place to be and live. It’s fantastic. When I moved in on Nob Hill in 1987 it was clearly beyond my reach to sustain myself (and young family) in that concentrated super-charged environment. Decades passed, my family changed and grew, children attended the San Francisco Unified School District receiving a good public education, and we all spent innumerable hours riding MUNI and BART, while through all that housing and the cost of living remain absurd — no one can afford to live like this unless they have a whole lot of money coming in regularly or in reserve. Yet even without much money, 30 years, 2 children raised and now show-

ing grandchildren around the sights, I am still here. Some other people from that time also remain and I am happy seeing familiar faces out on the street, and I am sure some of them are happy seeing me — a guy who’s been here 30+ years, a local. Although I had been a visitor in the City since I was a little kid, coming in across the bridge (later also under the bay via the BART tube) from the East Bay suburbs and countryside, first with my parents and other relations and later with teachers, classmates, different individuals and groups of friends and all alone by myself, it definitely felt different when I actually began living downtown. The little studio on Clay Street was too small a space for a family to live, but somehow I did with mine for about four years. Most of the studios were occupied by older single gay men. There was the eccentric German fellow on the floor below and directly beneath us the little old fellow who was growing a bit daft, and filled me with worry he would burn us down after he attempted to cook a frozen dinner, plastic tray and all, directly on the stove filling the building with smoke and eliciting a visit from the fire department who gave the all clear by yelling “Burnt food!” Across from us was a weird guy named Erik who I remember dramatically stopped me at the front door one day to announce he was “leaving the building.” Now thirty years later I still see Erik occasionally downtown on workday mornings when I am out for my coffee and he is going into Lee’s Deli for a snack. A fat guy moved into that unit who would yell “Get in there, Robert! Do something right for once in your life!” while he was washing dishes and/or masturbating. The last tenant in that unit (while I lived in the building) was a beautiful brunette French woman who would lay out on the roof next to her window and sunbathe naked. The blond woman upstairs once returned my wallet containing several hundred dollars cash when my young daughter took it out and left it in the stairwell. After much action and drama and a reconfiguration of my family, it was none other than The Great Fishbini, after she had arrived, who insisted we move into larger digs a block away. I hesitated because the rent would almost double and the flat was on the first floor facing the sidewalk. We were in that apartment a couple of years and it was often chaotic around us with people in and out the building door and up and down stairs at all hours. The young Vietnamese tenants across from us were dealing some serious kind of dope and apparently engaged in other shady activities involving young women. In the back

unit behind ours, the Filipino family seemed to add another auntie to their household every few months. Many tenants in the building in the early 1990s had been in their apartments for years and some for decades. Out back of the building an eccentric garden has always been the domain of the Real Saint Steve, at least since the Sixties when he used to sneak in to sleep at night and secretly practice his planting and arrangement. He eventually moved into a flat upstairs with Philippe and Maximilian who were antique hunters and sellers. Saint Steve went out each morning to the thrift stores and other odd places where he had an almost mystical knack at finding, and for pennies acquiring, many rare and valuable items amidst countless bunches of junk. When a flat opened up on the third floor in the back I jumped on that and have been here ever since. A previous tenant — a guy named David — reputedly then the biggest speed dealer in the central city, added much fuel to the gay nightlife along Polk Gulch. It was years before I stopped having my doorbell rung at all hours of the night by former customers inquiring after David because they needed to score. Most of the flats only turned over after the long-term tenants died, and we have lost many over the years. The new renters have not tended to stay as long so many different people transited through the building. By the time the Chinese American family who owned, managed and lived in the building sold to a local property management corporation only three units (including Saint Steve's) out of 16 total had been occupied longer than mine. That was in 2016 and since then there has been constant construction in the building as vacant units are torn down to the beams and studs and slowly rebuilt — Like a mirror of the building boom in the City adding to the fastest changes and transitions I've ever seen here. Even though change growth and evolution (or devolution) are constant and never stop, so much of the old and wonderful has been swept aside with more at risk every day. Now my best dive bar, Lucky 13 and it's historic Market Street lodge are slated to be raised and replaced with more dumb, ugly, insanely expensive condominiums, but my beer drinking paradise, Toronado, just celebrated 30 years on Lower Haight having opened the same August weekend in 1987 that I moved into town! If in the end at last I too am driven from San Francisco it seems likely there will be very little familiar left to miss, which I don't consider a good thing, and yet the City will continue along — a gentrified citadel of greed with perhaps little sense of history, but with some of the most expensive hype smoke and mirrors in all the world. To the readers in San Francisco in 2047, you know it's absurd to live here as it always has been, and the City is changing around you even as you sit in Golden Gate Park, or stroll along understanding how different still things will be in yet another thirty years, but no matter what it will always be San Francisco.

— D. A. Wilson

AUGUST ALMANAC

- 08/01 1942 Jerry Garcia born in San Francisco.
2017 LAMMAS
- 08/02 70 The armies of Titus destroyed the Second Temple in Jerusalem.
- 08/04 1470 Lucrezia de' Medici born in Repubblica Fiorentina.
- 08/07 2017 FULL STURGEON MOON
- 08/08 1974 Richard Nixon announced his resignation as U.S. President effective noon next day.
- 08/12 1987 Toronado beer bar opened @ 547 Haight Street, San Francisco, California.
- 08/13 1987 D. A. Wilson began residence in the City and County of San Francisco in Ardmore Apartments # 9 @ 1525 Clay Street.
- 08/17 1953 First meeting of Narcotics Anonymous took place in Southern California.
- 08/18 1962 Ringo Starr joined The Beatles.
- 08/19 1883 Coco Chanel was born in Saumur, Maine-et-Loire, France.
- 08/21 2017 NEW MOON
TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE OVER U.S.
- 08/23 1933 Pete Wilson born in Lake Forest, Illinois.
- 08/24 1954 Communist Control Act went into effect, outlawing American Communist Party.
1991 Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.
- 08/26 1920 19th amendment to U.S. Constitution took effect, giving women right to vote.
- 08/29 1987 Jerry Garcia Bands, acoustic and electric on the Eel River @ French's Camp. CA.
- 08/31 1928 Die Dreigroschenoper (The Threepenny Opera) was first produced at Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin.

<http://roarshock.net/august.html>

Calling for Contributions! ROARSHOCK PAGE invites submissions of art, photographs, poetry, and micro-prose, to be considered for inclusion in future issues.

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