

## Confessions of a Macroneurotic -- Un-Real Estate

Perspectives from a new Vallejo resident-to-be

Confessions of a Macroneurotic

Forget safety. Live where you fear to live. Destroy your reputation. Be notorious -- Rumi

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2/5/14

Moving to Vallejo -- Episode 2 -- UN-REAL-ESTATE

I didn't love the house enough, and withdrew my offer. I did love the location, however, and still hope to become part of that cool neighborhood and its singing community. People tell me there'll be more houses on the market when spring comes. But the experience of watching inspectors crawl around under the foundation looking for termites made me wonder: do I really want to deal with such things as dry-rot, mold, fungus, drainage, and termites; at my age??

At a friend's suggestion I went to look at a gated community of luxury condos a few miles from the center of town, but when I got there kept thinking I'd gone to the wrong place. I thought I was in Disneyland or Las Vegas; everything so phony and pretentious, with faux plaster statues and fountains, mausoleum-like slabs of marble in the kitchens, massive carved walls of dark cabinetry, a la mad King Ludwig, to house the 8 foot flat-screen TV, giant four-poster beds, decked out with tassels and braids and enough overstuffed fancy pillows for a Russian Queen, and piped in music of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Strauss, after whom the condos are named. I kept looking for slot machines inside the cavernous walk-in closets.

When I asked who designed it, the Barbie sales person announced with pride that she herself created the color schemes and interior designs, which you could only change after you bought the home, and that it was inspired by a palace in Vienna (name withheld to protect the palace). But I want to tell you I've seen that palace in Vienna, and this was no palace in Vienna.

Been through two realtors, so far. The first lost me because another offered to do the job for less than half the fee. But he turned out to be not right for me (don't ask), so I'm on to number 3, one of many recommendations given by friends. It seems that everyone in Vallejo either is or has a favorite realtor.

I've learned that outside real-estate vultures swooped into Vallejo when it lay dying from the busted bubble and bankruptcy. Prices went down the toilet and they bought up everything they could sink their claws into. And, they're holding on, collecting rent, not caring for their properties, unconcerned about their tenants; just waiting for prices to rise. Absentee landlords are blamed for a lot of the problems in Vallejo &ndash; but not all.

And there are the flippers, who buy, fix and sell fast. It's so profitable I keep thinking I should do that too, but then I remember I know nothing about this business, and had better stick to my own onions.

So, for the month of January, I'm renting a room in a beautiful Victorian house on Kentucky Street. Had I found it myself I would have bought it. I even made an offer to my landlady, who laughed at me; her house has more than doubled in value since she bought it in 2010.

Today was the first day I drove around Vallejo without my GPS and guess what? I got lost.

ALL I WANT&hellip;

Before I drove up to Vallejo, I put a sticky note on my desktop with the following: A big house, on a quiet street, with a front porch, and view of the river. Safe. Not expensive. 3 bedrooms and 2 bathrooms. Big kitchen.

I walked beside the river yesterday, a lovely path in a park of protected wetlands, scanning the hillside homes whose windows reflect the setting sun and shimmering river, and thought about how much I want that view.

OK, it's not a river, but rather the Mare Island Straits in the mouth of the Napa River that empties into the San Pablo Bay in the northeast corner of San Francisco Bay. But river sounds so much more poetic.

Went to the Empress Theatre Wednesday night to hear blues and rock and roll, with the Daniel Castro Band, first class artists from the Bay area. The music is sponsored by local businesses as a service to the community, and I thank them for it. The band is as good as any I've ever heard, and Daniel's blues guitar made me weep.

After living in Hollywood so many years you can imagine my shock when I saw grey-haired men of 60 years or more, get up and dance by themselves, rockin' n rollin' in front of the stage, same as they did 50 years ago, and women of all ages, who weren't skinny, gyrating ecstatically to that hot wailing guitar. Couples too, young and old, up on their feet. groovin' to the music. A fellow in a wheelchair joined in and wheeled himself wild. I went to the bar during intermission and chatted with the band, who told me they love Vallejo. People carried cocktails back into the theatre and drank in their seats, which is ok to do in the Empress Theatre.

Did you ever go slowly through the aisles of a supermarket , examining exotic fruits and packaged items with not a word of English on the label, then turn around to sniff some lemon grass and squeeze a purple yam, only to find your shopping cart has been replaced by someone else's, who's obviously gone off with yours?

That happened to me in Seafood City, a Philippine supermarket with the best fresh fish section I've seen outside of Tokyo. Wild Mexican halibut, Canadian salmon, fresh skate wings, live crabs, shiny mackerel, and bright-eyed Oregon sardines at \$1 per pound. Everything is pristine fresh, with a team of guys who gut and scale your fish. I found beef tendons, good for what ails me, which I'm now cooking with ginger, star anise and lemon grass. I also found pig snout, pork blood, and pink tapioca, which I managed to pass up, and green grass jelly drink, coconut cider vinegar, sardines in a glass jar, and butter in a can, which I couldn't. I love this shop!

I soon found the manager, who, together with a bunch of friendly bystanders, combed the entire market with me, but we didn't find my cart and I had to start all over again.

Vallejo has no Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. Someone told me we don't have the demographics for those shops. But, between Seafood City and a year-round farmers market every Saturday morning on Georgia Street near the ferry, I'm covered.

Now, all I want is a home with a view of the river.