

The Late Great City Of San Francisco

by Fred Hudson

I returned from my latest soiree in San Francisco thinking that the most exciting days of this great American city are probably behind us. I am not saying that San Francisco is in decline; I AM saying that its glory is most likely in its past.

I've read about and seen footage of that cataclysmic event of 1907 when The City collapsed like a house of cards. How many cities can claim to have been totally destroyed by an earthquake and then rebuilt from scratch? The sheer thrill of it all!

It was in San Francisco in 1955 when Allen Ginsberg first publicly recited his poem "Howl." I have no first-hand report from that reading, but I've read about how awed the crowd was. If I had been there, THAT would have been something to tell my grandkids about.

We associate Kerouac and The Beats with San Francisco. Though I came along too late to consider myself a Beat, I do identify strongly with their innate philosophy. The word "beat" came from their feeling of being beaten down by the conformity and repression of American society in the 50's. I feel beaten down by American society in 2008.

In 1966 thousands of young people descended on The City with flowers in their hair heading for Haight-Ashbury. Sex, drugs, & rock and roll was born here. I do have a first-hand report on this one. My former roommate, Young Boozer III, was there, albeit a little late---in 1970. Young grew up in Tuscaloosa---his father

Young Boozer, Jr., was on the U of Alabama Board of Trustees---but his Dad sent him to Stanford. Young told me how he visited Haight-Ashbury in that year. By then all you saw, he said, were hippie wannabes, with everyone running around yelling, "Peace, Peace"! and giving the peace sign with one hand while trying to pick tourist's pockets with the other hand. The fun, he said, was separating the hippie wannabes from the FBI and the CIA operatives who spent their vacations milling around the area in training to be wannabes.

I like to think that in 1966 it was "real." But then John Lennon said in his song "Strawberry Fields Forever" that "nothing is real." So who knows.

If something new and novel does come along in San Francisco, the problem is that 400,000 tourists would be there to see it the next day. If you hear of something new and interesting in S.F, better get there early before the herd shows up.

In 1967 we Sixties People had the Summer of Love. Growing up in a small town in Alabama, I had to experience most of it vicariously, but in my mind I associate that summer with San Francisco and Monterrey, Mexico (the Monterrey Pop Festival). Since Mexico is in the process of moving to California, it has all come together in 2008. (The more fortunate South-of-the-Border up-and-comers make it to Alabama)

Rolling Stone magazine was founded in San Francisco in 1967 and remained there for 10 years before removing to New York. If nothing else, S.F. will always have a warm spot in my heart for being the birthplace of all-time

favorite magazine. I still have old copies from the 70's that I pull out of the trunk and read on occasion.

While in San Francisco this time I went looking for a "San Francisco Liberal." The term seems to be in common usage. The only one I know for sure is Speaker Pelosi, and unfortunately, I did not see her while I was there. I asked the desk clerk when I checked into the hotel if she knew where I could find a San Francisco Liberal, and later I asked the concierge, but neither seemed to know what I was talking about. I asked the bellhop who took my luggage to my room. At least HE laughed, knowing what I was talking about, but said he didn't know any San Francisco Liberals. You would think that hotel help would be better trained. San Francisco Liberals should be icons along with that bridge they talk so much about and the cable cars. I left S.F. disappointed at not finding a bona fide San Francisco Liberal.

I used to think that if I had the McCain's money---if I had married a woman with a \$100,000,000 beer nest egg---I might have one of my houses in the Bay Area. But no, I think I would pass now. I might have ONE of my 7 houses (was that the last count?) in California, but not in San Francisco. That city's most exciting days are in the past.

Of course the San Andreas Fault can decide that its next hiccup will be in Northern Cal rather than Southern Cal. In that case, all bets are off.