

## Time Travel

Amy's birthday was last November. I had it all planned out. That is usually my role...The travel planner. I like researching, optimizing, along with being creative and making an adventure happen. We had it all set—a couple of days visiting her daughter and her family in San Francisco, then off to Carmel and Big Sur for four nights, back to the Bay area for one night. The last leg is for me going to San Diego to visit a best friend and attend the private screening of a short film produced by a client. That's 10 or 11 days of all the elements that make for a wonderful trip: quality time with your partner, a larger family gathering, beautiful sites and hotels and dinners, time with a best friend, attending an art event and meeting interesting people. However, two months and four iterations later the trip shrank to just me flying to San Diego on a Sunday and returning the following morning. During those two months lots of other things got in the way, it was mainly all the other participants having other commitments...all good. Now it was mostly just business-seeing a dear client and her film production on Sunday night. A week before leaving I vacillated on whether this trip really made sense. No one at the event would really miss me. And, there are no nonstops from Cincinnati to San Diego and I am 6 foot four! Business class was not available and, as you know, Comfort plus really isn't. In spite of all this I decided to go. I needed to get out of my comfort zone and have an adventure.

When I arrived at the hotel I was pleasantly surprised to find I had a beautiful corner room. On one side the room overlooked San Diego Bay and on the other side I had a view of all of downtown. I unpacked my few items, napped, had a cup of coffee and then I was ready to walk around to see the city. I had three hours before I had to be at the film screening. It was a beautiful day – 75° and bright sun just like it is almost every day in San Diego.

Although San Diego is a major urban city with lots of downtown residential towers, it appeared fairly deserted on this Sunday afternoon. I enjoyed gazing up at some of the bold commercial architecture and was impressed with the scale of the downtown area. There is a sterile nature to a downtown full of office towers with few people on the street. I wanted to feel the heartbeat of the city to get a sense for the people and the character of the place. I made my way up and down streets until I found an older section of town that had an entertainment District that had seen better days. The spirit and sound of NFL football games spilled out onto the streets. This particular area felt like a sleepier version of comparable areas of Chicago or New York. I kept walking hoping to find something more genuine, with charm.

The climate of San Diego attracts homeless people and there were sufficient examples of those sleeping in alcoves and others shuffling about. That put me in a very reflective mood. As I

walked, I started processing. Prior to this I had not considered the significance of this trip in terms of revisiting my past. It occurred to me that a formative part of the beginning of my adult life took place on these streets.

46 years ago I landed in San Diego with nothing but a backpack. Essentially, I was homeless. Using that description, I am taking liberties with a sad social condition. At that time, homeless was not a widely used term. The term more commonly used was hobos. I wasn't a hobo. I did have a family back home. I was a recent college graduate looking to plant his flag in fruitful new territory. I was long on confidence, short on a plan and resources and naive or foolish enough to chase rainbows. I was seeking adventure and opportunity. Looking back the whole idea seemed preposterous and risky. I rationalize it today as a risk and return calculation. The most I could lose was the several hundred dollars in my pocket and a few months of my life and the upside was an interesting adventure, seeing California and possibly getting my foot on the rung of a promising ladder. I had excellent college transcripts and a strong work ethic so I believed in myself and expected I would be successful and it may as well be in a cool place. What I didn't have were immediate and rousing employment prospects in Cincinnati. I had not engaged in the proper résumé building activities that are derived from internships and exploiting special connections.

During my senior year of college, Phil, a classmate and I would carry on lunchtime conversations about life after graduation. Neither of us had natural job opportunities in front of us nor were we ready to commit to what might become a lifetime commitment to the Queen city. And, we had wanderlust. We wanted one last hurrah before settling down. We didn't have much to lose and an adventure in pursuit of success spurred our imagination. In the early 1970s, California was a common destination for intrepid graduates like us. That was where everything seemed to be happening. California was growing rapidly and had its imprint on clothes, music, free speech, politics, psychedelics and everything having to do with new ideas and youth culture of the 1960s and 70s. It seemed like the land of milk and honey. It was a force...a seductive and magnetic force for me.

Phil and I decided that we would jump off the high board. We would head to California on a one-way ticket. After graduation in the summer of 1975, I found a car delivery service that had an office in the Union Terminal train station. At that time, the Terminal rented some of their massive excess space to various small businesses that were spread out within the rotunda. This particular company consisted of a man, a desk and a telephone. He would arrange to have a car delivered to another city in North America. A driver, like me, was found and that person would have so many days to get the car delivered to where the owner wanted it. The driver did not get paid. As I recall, the business model was you would get some gas money and free

transportation to your destination and the owner of the car paid the agency the delivery fee. Phil and I had quick paydirt. A woman wanted her late model Cadillac delivered to Los Angeles from Cincinnati. We were to pick up the car in a week and we had eight days to get it to LA. This would be the nicest car I had ever driven and increased the chances that this could be a real "joy ride". I had my backpack, \$150 in cash and \$250 in travelers checks. Many people today may be unfamiliar with travelers checks much like they might be with a rotary phone.

The eight days of driving had enough content for a forgettable Hollywood movie: some good laughs, drama....and the excitement of an occasional hustle. We slept in the car several nights (thank goodness for old-school bench seats) and had pitstops to visit friends in Boulder Colorado and Salt Lake City. We also stopped in Reno Nevada for twenty four exciting hours and then to San Francisco. The details of the eight days would be juvenile and would exceed the allotted time for this paper. We finally delivered the car in LA at the final hour of the eighth day. Phil had a friend in Los Angeles and we crashed there. He decided to stay with his friend who worked for a large department store chain and there was some promise that Phil could find employment there. After a couple of days, I decided to leave Los Angeles and head south to San Diego. I have no idea what I was thinking. I guess the idea was to keep moving until something happened. And, it was easy to do. I grabbed my backpack and hitchhiked to San Diego. Getting in the car of a complete stranger seems quite precarious now. However, hitchhiking was the original Uber with a few wild cards thrown in. Arriving in the downtown San Diego area, I found a YMCA and I checked in there.

San Diego in 1975 looked a lot like downtown Cincinnati in the 1950s. There were a few tall office buildings probably built in the 1920s or 30s and then a number of mid rise buildings that covered a surface area similar to downtown Cincinnati. I suspect the population of the two cities were similar.

The Armed Services YMCA was dedicated in 1924. Navy ships were concentrated at the foot of Broadway where the Y was located. At its peak, millions of servicemen annually passed through America's YMCA's never locked front doors. For me, it was clean, safe, and affordable. The room was properly sized for my few possessions which helped me feel like something was in order. A metal frame single bed, a sink, hooks on the wall and, as I recall, a metal chair. Each morning I would scour the newspaper for professional looking job postings then I would head over to the Manpower office looking for some short term employment to make some money to feel useful and cover my expenses at the Y. These assignments did not require post graduate degrees. I loaded trucks and moved commercial kitchen equipment, among other jobs. I turned over whatever rocks I could find. One week, it was a recruiting event for a pyramid marketing company and then a reception for future Merrill Lynch brokers. It was hard to find the sweet spot of me wanting the employer and the employer wanting me.

It was not hard to meet attractive young people. Natural forces seemed to be at work connecting people with similar energy, goals and values, kind of like animal magnetism. One day as I was strolling through Balboa Park I was approached by two attractive young women. They were engaging and seemed to be the kind of girls you wanted next door. They lived in a two family house on the outskirts of downtown. We hung out and the next day they persuaded me to go with them to a camp resort for the weekend in the San Bernardino mountains. They were kind of mysterious but said there would be a group of people I would like. This was irresistible. They drove me up there and I quickly discovered that Reverend Moon was recruiting new followers and I was in his crosshairs. Reverend Moon was born in North Korea and later imprisoned there for his religious beliefs. He founded the Unification Church which had millions of members worldwide. He believed he was a disciple of Jesus and his role was to spread the word. He came to the United States in 1971 and converted hundreds of thousands of young people to his form of Christianity. During those years, he was quite popular for those seeking a fresh approach to religious faith. I was not moved, however, by his spiritual charisma. After a couple of hours in the large meeting room I managed to slip out the back, grabbed my stuff and somehow I made it back to town and the YMCA.

A week or so or later, I met some other young people. Four girls and four guys had recently graduated from the State University of New York in Binghamton. The boys had ridden their bicycles across country and the girls followed by car. The girls rented a house in Pacific Beach, just north of downtown, and the boys rented the house next-door. One of the guys had to return to New York and they asked me to move in with them. It was a lot of fun. We all hit it off and whiled away the days in a version that was a little bit like Friends and a little bit like Seinfeld. Pacific beach was a great location. It was very close to the water and I learned some of the basic skills of surfing and yet it was easy to get downtown, La Jolla or the University of California San Diego. It was a lively and enjoyable time for me. I continued to look for a career opportunity while working odd jobs a couple days a week to stay afloat. It is remarkable how you can parachute into a spot and quickly form meaningful relationships. Social networks formed naturally as like-minded individuals gravitated to each other. We were all hungry and ambitious and hoping the next person you met might be the key to helping unlock your future. The connections may not have been as quickly and perfectly formulated as it would be with a cell phone and a social media algorithm but with just a little bit more effort, it blossomed just as well.

As the months rolled by, It became clear that my shelflife was approaching and the big opportunity I was seeking in California was not materializing. It was a difficult time for our economy in terms of the job market. I didn't seem to be getting traction here and I was running

out of money and energy. One of my roommates, Paul, decided to head back to New York and he encouraged me to join him and it seemed time to move on. We took the southern route in his Volkswagen Beetle to see the Grand Canyon and to avoid potential winter weather problems further north. Five days later he dropped me off in Cincinnati.

Within a month of knocking on doors of financial institutions in downtown Cincinnati I secured a position as an investment research analyst for a bank trust department. This formally marked the beginning of my business career.

As I walked around downtown San Diego on that Sunday in November 2021 I realized I was revisiting my past. It is surprising to me now that I was not more aware of the significance of this event. I had been so focused on planning a trip with many different components that I overlooked the now obvious importance of San Diego to my earlier life. I was now on a mission to see the old YMCA which I remembered was nearby. This building might bring back memories and connect some more dots. I stopped a few fellow pedestrians but none of them knew of the YMCA. I realized that I was stopping the wrong people, people that likely had little knowledge or interest in a residential YMCA. I changed my selection criteria to someone older, who looked like they were down a little bit on their luck. After a couple more tries someone pointed me in the right direction. After a few blocks I turned a corner and saw the building and memories started coming back to me. As I approached I became a bit confused as something about the building seemed different. It turns out the YMCA had been reimagined and reborn as an upscale hotel. I was disappointed.

I was hoping to see the original YMCA and the diverse mix of people that I remembered from those many years ago. The trip had not started with expectations of connecting with my past. In the end, it allowed me to revisit and reflect and reconnect with that 21 year old version of me—someone who kept an open mind and sought opportunity. The return to San Diego left me with a renewed interest in not losing some of the values of that 21 year old—willing to take some risk and continuing to have adventures in travel.

The End