

Speaking of Birthdays

By Mel Lavine

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It was my birthday. The Lady Friend had an elaborate weekend planned. She'd booked a lovely cabin in the woods in Inverness. It was only a few miles from Limantour Beach, a great favorite of ours for long walks.

The fog sculpted the images of the groves of redwoods as we made our way through Samuel P. Taylor Park. Some miles later, fog lay like a cloak over Limantour Beach. There we made our way down a path to the seashore.

Stray ghost-like figures emerged from concealment only to disappear a few moments later. But the fog soon lifted. We could see that the tide was ebbing. Canvasbacks, a wild duck, dove underwater for small marine animals. Marsh wrens inhabited the reeds and tall marsh grass. Marsh hawks soared. Walls of water crashed and flowed.

The wet sand slowed our progress. We managed about four miles in an hour and a half.

Weary but exhilarated, we left the beach and drove to our favorite café in Point Reyes. I ate a delicious lamb dish (osso bucco), the Lady Friend a tasty fish and chips. We both enjoyed a glass of wine.

It was getting dark when we got to the cabin, in plenty of time to witness the New England Patriots massacre the Buffalo Bills, 56-10. The Lady Friend slept and read a book, "Writers on Artists," famous writers like John Updike writing on famous artists like Andrew Wyeth. I'd brought along "The Journals of Lewis and Clark," a paperback, to put me in the mood for our adventure in the country. I never touched it.

Before we nodded off, we watched "Casablanca," the World War II classic, with Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman and Claude Rains.

We never slept better, and ate a hearty breakfast — in the cabin — of bagels, cream cheese

(fat free), fresh fruit, tea and coffee we'd brought from home.

The fog gone, the sun was welcoming. As we set out on the trail, we remarked about the autumnal colors and the green vegetation. After we'd gone a short distance — as if on cue from the shrill cry of a rooster — we came into a sunlit meadow that we thought would be ideal some day for a picnic. We made a mental note to come back on the Lady Friend's birthday next March.

Since we were going home to the East Bay on Monday, we decided to take U.S. 1 rather than a more direct route to 101. Traffic, as we'd expected, was light. We were able to take our time over the winding coastal range, and take pleasure in the awesome seascapes.

The next day I sat down to write the column, but didn't know what to say. The Lady Friend suggested I write about our trip to Inverness. I said it was all very nice but what's the story?

"Your birthday," she said. "I've known you for eight years. In all this time you claimed you weren't going to make it. But you've made it. You're 80."

The Lady Friend, who will be 75 in march, added, “You get there by doing what keeps a person alive; exercise, diet and fun. Now don’t tell me that’s not a column!”

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