

What I Like About California – Hint: It's Not the Numbskulls in Sacramento

By George Cunningham

People warned me when I decided in move to California in 1969 that I wouldn't like it. Forty-three years later, they may be right. The things I liked back then haven't changed, but California sure has.

Frankly, I'm sick to death of this state, and I'm not the only one. Figures show that after decades of folks moving west to be here, they are now moving back east, or north - in short, anywhere that's not here.

Almost four million more folks left California for other states in the last 20 years, than came here from other states.

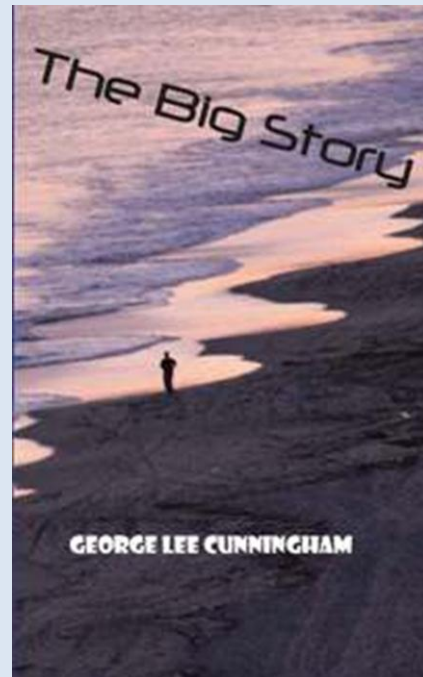
The reasons for dissatisfaction are clear. It's the traffic, the taxes, the cost of living, and the endless dictates of how we should live that are handed down annually by the numbskulls in Sacramento.

It's the regulations that don't allow roads to be repaired or airports to be upgraded or business to be done without months and years of hearings and litigation. And it's the general lack of progress in addressing any of these ills.

So why are my wife and I sticking around? What anchors us in this place that we used to love but now grow more weary of by the day?

These are good questions and so –

George Lee Cunningham's



A hard drinking reporter has to decide whether to keep chasing his big story or to make his bosses happy, rekindle the flame with his ex-wife, and be a responsible adult. Guess what he chooses. Mobsters, corrupt police, sissy editors, and the body of a naked girl on the beach. What more could you ask for?

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despite all our qualms about life in California – let me tell you about some of the things we do still like.

The Pacific Ocean

The Pacific Ocean has been there long before people populated the shore and it will be there long after all of us have gone. It is the edge of the nation – that squiggly line on the map that says this is where America ends and the rest of the world begins. It is beautiful when it's angry, sparkling when it's calm, soothing in its majesty and scale. It reminds us how small we are in the scheme of things and how little our personal problems matter. You don't have the Pacific Ocean in Kansas or Illinois or even Florida. The Atlantic is beautiful and so is the Gulf, but it's not the Pacific. Not even close.

The Mountains

The mountains, especially the Sierras, are tall, rugged and wild. The mountains surround us. California is a state of elevations, a state of surprise vistas around sudden turns in the road, of cliffs and scarps and ridges and rifts. The peaks and valleys that define our landscape are as much a part of the California experience as the Hollywood Bowl and movie stars, the Golden Gate and cable cars.

The Climate

There is nothing quite like the California climate. From the marine layer along the coast to the extreme summer heat of the Central Valley, from the fogs of the Bay Area to the frigid snowy winters in the northern mountains, the climate of California is as diverse as its population. You want a change of weather? Get in your car and drive. Surf in the morning and ski in the afternoon.

The People

The main reason I came to California, despite all the warnings of how much I would hate it, was the people. California was a place where you could be whoever you wanted. Californians were the kooks, the crazy ones, the folks with a dream, the people who sought solitude and the people who sought fame, the hucksters, the hipsters, and the entrepreneurs. That has changed over the years. California has become stodgier, the people more willing to sacrifice freedom for the security of a handout or the illusion of the same. But some of that former spirit remains here, hopefully to be rekindled.

And I love the diversity. Not the politically correct, entitlement quotas assigned to various ethnic groups. I love the fact that so many people of such diverse backgrounds – not just ethnic, but religious, cultural, and educational – get along as well as they do. I love seeing kids, whose parents and grandparents grew up worlds apart, playing Pop Warner Football while mom and dad watch from the bleachers or skateboarding together on the steepest hill they can find.

There's still a lot to like about California.

But we can't get past the feeling that this state is doomed, and there are no grownups in charge with the political will or the leadership to make the hard changes necessary to pull the state back from the precipice.

California is like Maureen O'Hara in that movie McLintock, where John Wayne has finally had enough with her carping and foolishness and chases her down while the whole town watches, and then turns her over his knee and gives her a good spanking. All the townspeople cheer. If we could get somebody strong enough and bold enough to do the same thing to the state of California, just turn the whole state over his or her figurative knee and administer an old-fashioned, no-nonsense spanking, not only would everybody cheer.

They might start moving back.

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