

Irvine and Laguna Beach 1966-67.

We drove down from Palo Alto to look at University of California at Irvine, it was a beautiful place. This was the newest campus of the University of California system. The campus consisted of a few white, modern buildings surrounded by acres of orange groves. Very hilly and green, and one could not predict that in a few years all these beautiful hills would be flattened and covered with track housing, shopping malls, and even an airport. I was quite happy to meet John Holland and view the lab, and the projects seemed interesting. We decided to try and find a rental on the coast. There were two appealing small towns within 15 miles; these were Corona Del Mar and Laguna Beach. Laguna was at that time an “artists colony”, very hip and arty on the one hand and very conservative and wealthy at the same time. Today the hippy town has gone but the wealth has remained. We had no difficulty in renting a house a block from the beach. The house was owned by a couple of men who were only too happy to have a “doctor” living in the area. It enhanced, or so they thought, the value of the surrounding property. In fact at the beginning I was called a few times by neighbors asking for medical advice. I had to explain I was a Ph.D. doctor and not a physician, although I did give advice, usually just common sense. The house had been completely remodeled, had a beautiful front yard, with the largest Avocado trees overlooking the porch, and a couple of fig trees out front. It was more than anyone could desire. The avocados were the large kind, and every time one fell the house would shake. I learned to harvest avocados by taking a coffee can, cutting out a triangle so that it had a sharp edge, attaching it to a pole and with some manipulation this would cut the avocado stem. I felt I was living in the jungle and harvesting fruit in a primitive fashion. The children would sit under the fig trees and eat all the ripe fruit. I still have a passion for ripe figs, ever since I lived in Israel, and I need to ask the children sometime whether they do!

Laguna Beach is famous for its festival of the arts, when tableaux's would be presented of famous paintings. The city hugs the Pacific Ocean, with high hills and mountains surrounding it. There are beautiful beaches in small coves, and the promenade along the beach is astride gardens and flowerbeds. In our days the major landmark on the beach was a very elegant French Restaurant called the “Victor Hugo”, too expensive for us to afford. Today it is less expensive, and is Las Brisas, a Mexican restaurant, where one can sit outside on a wide veranda and look at

the breakers and surfers and drink Margaritas'. The center of the town consists of three shopping streets with boutiques and banks, as well as stores selling tourist paraphernalia, ice cream and a few great bakeries. The town has the atmosphere of a resort, and we would not go out at weekends since the beaches and roads through the town were packed. The last few years the town has suffered from fires and mudslides as it expanded up the hills and into the canyons. Unfortunately it is surrounded by large housing tracks, mostly built as retirement communities, but these do not really infringe on the town itself

Just as one entered the town one met the town greeter. This was a figure with a long white beard and long white hair who would wave to every car and greet the driver and passengers. This was Eiler Larson, the official town greeter. He stood on the Pacific Coast Highway from the 1940's to through the 1960s every weekend and waved to passersby. By profession he was a gardener, and lived in a room at the Laguna Hotel, a small hotel, still standing, in the middle of the town. We thought of him as being rather "crazy". However after his death the city put up a statue of him near the pottery shack, another old landmark, which is no longer there making pottery, but now an expensive restaurant where one can sit out on the deck and watch the traffic on the Pacific Coast highway!

Mimi was very happy, she would take the kids to the beach, and we made quite a number of friends. Her parents, who lived in Los Angeles, would often come down for the day. I would drive 15 miles back and forth to Irvine. Sometimes, the fog was so dense, that I had to get out of the car to ascertain I was still on the road, and not slipping off a cliff into the sea. The Pacific Coast Highway (Highway 1) hugged the coastline, and in many places there was a sheer drop of a 100 feet or more. At that time there was very little between the campus and Laguna Beach, not like today where there is Spanish style track housing on one side of the highway and major roads to the University, as well as remnants of parks fought over between developers and environmentalists. We had two sets of friends, one connected with the university world, the others from the town. It gave us a view of a society that to us at that time was strange, and I think influenced our decision later not to remain in California. Perhaps a mistake, but we still thought of returning to Israel.

Yuval was taking piano lessons at a nearby location, the Yamaha method, and parents would wait for their children to finish. Mimi would meet one of the mothers, Greta, quite often,

and since the children were the same age we decided to meet at their house one evening for dinner. Greta lived with her “ family “ on a house on the beach (Laguna used to have very primitive and cheap houses right on the water front, these houses or shacks are still there and are worth a million dollars, most having been remodeled and added to). Greta was from Denmark, a striking blonde. Greta and we assumed her husband, and another male friend lived together in the house. Philip, whom we assumed was her husband, was an artist. To make a long confusing story short, Philip and Greta had been married and were now divorced, the other man was Philip’s lover, and yet Philip was still having sex with Greta and later they remarried This was in 1966 **before** the great sexual revolution. They actually were very kind and friendly people and introduced us to the pre-hippy (intellectual) society of Laguna, including a nice couple one of whom was a poet (published). I think his name was also Philip and her name Dawn. I believe everyone was smoking Marijuana, and even into LSD (see later). We felt a little out of it. We have been to Laguna many times since then, 20 years later and have never been able to find any of our “old’ friends except those connected to the University.

This was the first year of UCI as a university. There was really no difference between post-docs and faculty, we all mixed quite freely. Everyone seemed young. The lab consisted of three post docs (including myself) and one graduate student (Don Kiehn), and a few high school students. We all worked on John’s ideas, which changed quite often. Actually John moved after a year to University of California at La Jolla, and found his true interest in viral evolution. Most of the time I worked on methods to purify tRNA and look at tRNA profiles from different tissues. The other post-docs in the lab were Clayton Buck, and Morrie Granger. Clayton had an unfortunate life, his first wife, whom we knew died of a brain tumor while still young, and his second wife I believe committed suicide. Despite this he had a very successful career in science. Morrie went on to become a professor at UCI. We met again a few years ago while visiting Laguna. Morrie’s fame lies in the discovery of Lymphotoxin, which later became known as TNF-beta (tumor necrosis factor). As the name implies it was hoped it would be a general anti-cancer agent, but it has proven to be too toxic. Still it has been a great research tool in immunology and in cancer research. Other on the faculty at that time were Calvin McLaughlin, a yeast biochemist, Dan Wolf, working on phage, and Stuart Krasner, who works on Chagas Disease. Of these we have maintained contact with Calvin, and have met a couple of times within the last few years.

The atmosphere in the lab was not as good as it had been at Stanford. We had problems with the high school students. LSD was big at this time, and many of these students would routinely take drugs. We were afraid to drink our coffee in case it was laced. The story I heard was that two of the high school students jumped from the roof under the influence of LSD and one blinded himself by staring at the sun for too long a time. We came up against the drug problem when some friends, the Duncan's, immigrated to Australia because they were afraid to bring up their teen children in Laguna Beach (they eventually returned not particularly happy with Australia). Mrs. Duncan could not stand the snakes and the primitive conditions that they found in Australia. We were likewise influenced by this very hedonistic society but we ourselves never took drugs. We were just too "square". As Mimi has pointed out if you were not enjoying yourself all the time then there was something wrong. This was the America of the constant smile, and California was the epitome of this.

As I mentioned earlier, we had befriended Cathy and John Pearse at Stanford. John and Cathy had gone to Egypt to teach at the American University in Cairo for a few years. Cathy's mother 'Mrs. Reap' had opened a store in Laguna selling imported goods. I can still picture the store, a small corner store at the corner of Thalia and Pacific Coast Highway, full of stuff from the orient and Middle East. The store is still there but different owners and different knick-knacks. We saw a lot of John and Cathy at weekends. John was looking for a faculty position, which he later found at U California Santa Cruz. Interestingly we talked a lot about their sojourn in Egypt, and how primitive the Egyptian army was despite the bellicose statements from Nasser. This was just before the 6-day war and their impression, proven correct, was that the Egyptian army was no match for the Israeli Army. They did not even have boots.

Cathy and John were having some problems, I am not sure of what nature, but they had decided to get divorced. Mimi might know the reasons, since Cathy had given birth while we were in Palo Alto to a stillborn child as the result of an E.coli infection and Mimi had helped Cathy during this period. Also Mrs. Reap had helped us when Mimi had a miscarriage, and we had become quite close. After leaving Laguna we lost contact with Cathy until a few years ago when we called on her after finding out that she was still in Laguna Beach, and was a successful artist, now Cathy Jones. We even have one of her paintings on the dining room wall. She had remarried, had been at one time a vice-chancellor in charge of publicity at UCI and had a number of children.

One might ask, why did we not try and stay on in Laguna and UCI in 1966? I know that Mimi, more than I was afraid of bringing up children in the hedonistic atmosphere of Southern California. There was also a lack of culture, as we knew it, at that time. No concerts or classical music performances, and Los Angeles was too far to go to the theatre. The area was just developing, and UCI could hardly be called a campus. On the other hand we should have considered Mimi's parents who most certainly did not want us to leave, and would have helped in purchasing a house. I really had no idea where I wanted to live, Israel was still a definite possibility and I really did not know the USA other than New York State and California. One day I received a letter from a Dr. Howard Gest, a friend of Charley Yanofsky asking me whether I would be interested in interviewing for a position at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN. I knew nothing about Bloomington, or for that matter Indiana but was told by members of my Ph.D. committee whom I contacted that it was a good place to perform science. I thus started looking at other possibilities for comparison. I was invited to give seminars at Oak Ridge, St Jude's Hospital in Memphis, and at the microbiology department at the U. Michigan at Ann Arbor. I met Howard Gest in La Jolla while he was visiting a friend, John Spizizen, and was impressed by what he told me. Indiana from his description was not as backwards as I thought, and Howard certainly was a very cultured person. Memphis, I ruled out after seeing how segregated the city was, although Alan Granoff the director, a very personable person made me a very good offer. Oak Ridge was attractive, but was a cultural wasteland, and I was not the number one candidate at Michigan. My visit to Bloomington was enjoyable, and I was very impressed by the faculty, the physical set up (lots of lab space) and I was blown over by being taken to a musical production in the Auditorium. I came back and filled Mimi in, and the decision was made, the Mid-West for us and goodbye to California. Was it the right decision? We still had ideas of returning to Israel, and thought that Indiana would be a good place for a year or so until something opened up in Israel. One final note, since this was written and revised in 2010, despite not wanting to bring up our children in Southern California, Jonathan has returned to that location and our grandchildren are being brought up in this still very hedonistic and crowded society. Unexpectedly, what I have seen recently of Israeli society near Tel Aviv does not differ all that much from Southern California society of today. It looks the same and feels the same, the only difference being that the young speak Hebrew rather than English or Spanish. Southern California has become more diverse, a mixture of Hispanics and Orientals

and has a slightly different atmosphere from 50 years ago, when Orange County, where Jonathan lives was John Birch Country, very conservative and white –Anglo Saxon Protestant and is now full of shopping malls, Hispanics, Chinese, Vietnamese and other ethnic groups but the car is still king.