

## **Go West.**

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As a 19 year old Englishman from a small quaint English village, Castro of 1979 was somewhat of a cultural shock. Equipped only with a phone number of a friend of a friend, I arrived late at Oakland International Airport jet lagged from my first ever long haul flight. Erich, who lived four blocks from Castro's main drag, answered the phone and assured me it was okay to stay a couple of nights and to make my way right over. Unfortunately I got the street numbers mixed up and after knocking on the unanswered door I made my way through the empty house, and after using the toilet, I met Erich outside who told me I was in the wrong house and could have been shot as a prowler.

Erich's house overlooked downtown Castro and Bay Bridge. It was built, he told me, by his landlord in the 60's who was off his scone on LSD most of the time. After a cold beer and a home grown joint, Erich led me up to his bedroom via an enclosed spiral staircase with the skin of a reticular python stapled to the wall. In my condition of total disorientation the spiralling walk up the stairs seemed to be lasting longer than my flight from London. Once in his bedroom where some trashy disco album was being played on the turntable, 'Catch the beat, you're a star, you are a star...' Erich displayed his pride and joy which was enormous and dripping with potency. On suite was a glasshouse accommodating the biggest crop of home-grown grass I could imagine. Each plant at least 6 feet high and oozing vitality. By now the effect of jet lag, beer and grass was overwhelming and Erich kindly offered the floor of his lounge for me to crash on. That night, he explained, he was entertaining in his bedroom. Lying in Erich's borrowed sleeping bag, that smelt strangely like compost. I listened to the sounds of a San Francisco night.

I picked up the vinyl sleeve album which was still being played and saw a flamboyant queen on the cover dressed in silver with the wording Queen B on the left hand side going downwards like some advertising neon light. Wailing sirens, the thumping rhythm of the Village People in the distance, a gunshot (or backfiring car) and the strange accents and movements of Erich's guests. For me, this was the start of an incredible experience of the Castro of '79 which included drunken revelry at the Elephant Walk by night and exploring the streets by day.

The following night in Castro, Erich invited me to sleep in his bed, 'I'm not gonna rape you,'

he promised. What a dilemma, to insult my host's integrity or risk my uncompromised sexuality. Later that night, lying in his bed listening to his gentle snores I looked out over the bay and downtown San Francisco in wonder. What would my friends say? Here I was, in the gayest part of the homosexual capital of the world, in bed with another man. But for me, a so called Mr. Straight there were absolutely no worries.