

Viewpoints

When you can't go home again, you can't wait to go home

My husband and I took a week's vacation to California to visit family.

When we flew in to San Jose, we rented a car and drove the familiar Hwy. 17 one takes to get to Santa Cruz.

It's an uphill, winding, corkscrew highway lined with tall redwood, eucalyptus and brush oak trees.

There is a peak you reach at the top of the highway where it still winds, but you're not going uphill anymore. At that point, the gears of the car pull less hard and you seem to lift a little. There you feel a perceptible shift in the air and I swear you can almost smell salt from the Pacific Ocean.

But something strange and unexpected happened to me while climbing that highway. I was struck by a wave of panic and anxiety I wasn't prepared for.

Have you ever heard the phrase "You can't go home again?" That always seemed strange to me, but now I think I know what it means.

We never thought we would ever leave Santa Cruz in a million years. Our decision to leave was wrenching and very painful, but coming back just to visit made me think maybe it's not that you can't go back to where you raised your family, set roots down, or made life-long friends.

It's just that from now on, it will be harder to find your way back to those places where you were young in heart and spirit, when things were new, shiny and bright, and you were unafraid facing the future as a young married couple.

No, nothing will ever be quite the same again. And don't ever go by the house you practically rebuilt from the ground up, the one and only

Musings of a transplant Maria Stolz

Howard Lake

mariastolz@ix.netcom.com

house you have ever owned. We had to drive by the street we lived on to get into Santa Cruz. I could not avoid casting my eyes up the street as we whizzed by. That was a knife that stabbed deep in my heart.

I thought of all the stained glass I designed and built into the house. I could not bear to think that the new owner, a realtor, might have torn it out or sold it for scrap. You never know. People have such poor taste.

There's one particular window I designed that I was most proud of which was 48 inches high and 60 inches wide in a master bathroom we built over a double lumbar Jacuzzi.

It was an underwater scene of tropical fish, sea coral and a treasure chest spilling with jewels for a bit of whimsy thrown in for good measure. I found an unusual brass light fixture from France which held four large cusped sea shells. My kids called it the "Hollywood Bathroom." Leaving all of that behind was hard, too hard.

How bizarre and ironic it was to wish I were home in Howard Lake after that painful return, and so now we are.

We came home to an empty house with empty cupboards, sour milk in the refrigerator, literally no food in the house, so the great quest begins anew to find a practical grocery store with adequate fruits, vegetables and grains.

Today I walked into Howard Lake's city hall to check their bulletin board to see a posted copy of the

council's minutes and agenda. Not there of course, but it will be on their website, I was informed. I wanted to see if there was any information on the status of the council's effort to get a grocery store going in Howard Lake. You can imagine my interest on this issue.

I also wanted to follow up on the New Markets Tax Credit idea I brought to them at a public hearing I attended to help fund things like the grocery store, which attracts private sector investment to low income rural areas by offering 39 percent federal tax credit over seven years, a five percent credit in each of the first three years and a 6 percent in each of the last four years.

In addition, I brought them successful 2006 case reports from Wisconsin and Nebraska to compare notes. This was bi-partisan legislation signed into law by Clinton on his way out of office and implemented gloriously by President Bush and the Republican Administration to help strengthen and even the playing field for economic development in rural areas like Howard Lake, particularly in mid-western states.

At that public hearing, I will never forget the elderly woman who stood on her cane and exclaimed, "What if this was Buffalo [snowed in New York]; I can't shop for groceries!"

Does anyone want to make a guess where on the agenda the status of the grocery store is or what the council is going to do about taking advantage of this New Markets Tax Credit and not further burden or tax the residents of Howard Lake on this issue?