

HIP SANTA CRUZ

Estelle's Journey

I. Brooklyn to San Francisco

Two years after Lewis and I were married in 1962 a strange hurricane force wind blew through out cozy, newly renovated Brownstone apartment next to Prospect Park. “Go West” it howled “Go West to California” . No denying the message. As we were swept along we noticed many of our friends and neighbors were caught in the same funnel. After a short stop in Salt Lake City, at the University of Utah where I almost completed my Master's Degree in dance, and before our \$\$ hit \$0, Lewis and I landed in San Francisco on 8th Avenue, up the road from the Japanese Tea Garden on the edge of The Haight-Ashbury. It was 1965.

For those not familiar with the great upheaval and cultural shift of this time, suffice it to say that our entire past was wiped out in the next 3 years. We struggled to create new paradigm for every great human endeavor:

Religion
Health
Family
Gestation
Birth
Post-partum
Education
Music
Art
Everything!!!

In January of 1967 we had the great human be-in at Golden Gate Park, a true verification and consolidation of what we all suspected was happening. 10,000 people congregated at the event, billed as a “Gathering of the Tribes” to do nothing but hang-out, listen to music, picnic, watch Tim Leary parachute out of a plane and acknowledge that “Yes! Indeed!” Something big was going on.

By 1968 we were discovered by the world at large. It was the beginning of the end of our beautiful exciting Hippie Era. The Mafia moved in, tour buses came through the streets, bad

drugs were passed around, the emergency room at SF General was packed with freaked out lads, the Era of Peace, Love, Flowers as working life goals came to an end. At least in the most visible parts of San Francisco.

Some of us, however, did not give up on the dream. What was wrong with envisioning a world with peace, love and happiness as goals taking the place of greed, selfishness, competition and corruption? So with the help of spiritual guidance, Lewis and I moved to Santa Cruz. He opened a Metaphysical Bookstore, “The Occult Shop” and then onward to become the hip, well-known astrologer and I to delve into alternative views and practices of childbirth, postpartum, family education and community. Turned out to be a steeper mountain to climb than I first imagined.

II. Birth in Hip-Freewheeling Santa Cruz

While the occult shop was attracting all sorts of interesting folks, I was trying to track down some way to have a peaceful humane birth experience. In 1969 I was pregnant with my first child who was due in April of 1970 and the birthing options were dim indeed. There was one OBGYN, Dr. Pierce that the nurses called the baby killer because he drugged the laboring mothers so heavily that the babies could not breathe.

Uh-Oh!”

At that time there were no mid-wives, no birth centers, no nothing. There was a faint murmuring about a change that was beginning to emerge. Some women were just going out in the woods and having their babies with no help other than from friends. Brave women trusting their bodies, trusting life. I was not that brave or trusting. I prayed and prayed that help would come. It was going to be a home birth, no question, but I needed help. Help did arrive in the form of a very compassionate doctor and a daring young woman named Patti Lang, soon to be known as Raven Lang, soon to become the first midwife in the county.

I was totally unprepared for what was to come. I felt safe and supported, but the reality of birth contrasted to the reality of the society was enormous. My mind was blown and shattered. The struggle to stay sane was so intense. No awareness of post-partum depression, no one to share stories with, no nothing. Help came in doses. Mrs. Webb came

and took all of the laundry, Lewis fixed food, folks came to visit but the enormity of what had just happened infused my body and soul and pointed me in a new direction for the rest of my life.

About this time we were booted from our house on Windham Street next to the last working windmill in Santa Cruz County. Our landlady got kicked out of her rental house and needed her place back to live in. Geneva was a kind soul and before we left she gave me a gift that I still remember to this day. She was caretaking a 95 year old man who she brought over to meet me and my newborn son. This man had never been sick a day in his life. He had the clearest eyes and tons of life force. He stared into the eyes of my child and I swear I saw the transfer of power from him to my newborn. Two days later Geneva came over to tell me that the old man had died – Just like that! Never sick a day in his life, he just died.

III. San Lorenzo Valley

So now we had to move, a horrible strife after a challenging birth. We looked at 1 or 2 places in the Seabright and then someone told us there was a beautiful property for rent in Boulder Creek.

Boulder Creek???

What the hey? We were two kids from Brooklyn, Coney Island, the Atlantic Ocean – flat terrain! Never saw a mountain in my life. But something told us to go there. There was a small red cabin and a long line of folks interviewing for the place, a gorgeous property overlooking Kings Creek, Lots of trees, the sun. BIG TREES. New to my eyes! After a conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Mandler, we were chosen. \$100 per month and a promise not to have dancing on the roof!

Ai Yi Yi!!!

We had no idea what we were getting in for.

On September 8, 1970, we moved in. Beautiful, warm days and lovely dark nights. So dark at night we could not see our hands in front of our faces. Out of the window were glistening

stars, new to us, we had never experienced DARK like this before. It is never dark in Brooklyn.

Soon the weather started turning to fall then became winter and there was no heat except for a small wood stove. We had no clue how to build a fire. We read Boy Scout books on the subject but that info was too advanced for us. We were advised to track down a man named T-Bone, and sure enough he showed us how to lay logs, stack paper and kindling, overlaying more logs, how to bank the coals. Soon we knew dry wood from wet wood from green wood. We learned about opening and closing the damper and most importantly, how to bank the fire and lay logs so that in the morning the fire was hot and ready to go. This involved a 2 a.m. chore of banking the coals. To this day I still awake at 2 a.m. to lower or raise the thermostat on my more civilized heater.

Now we settled into a life of voluntary poverty. We learned to survive with very little. We struggled through the winter in this storm soaked strange land, often with no electricity, often wondering why the heck we were here. The only answer I ever got was the crystalline raindrops on dark green leaves that said, “STAY” .

In January of 1971 everything changed. I met Betsy who was struggling as was I with being a newly delivered mom with post-partum issues in a hard, woodsy life. As the crow flies we were only ½ miles from each other. Although we had been at many dance events together in San Francisco we never met each other until we both landed north of Boulder Creek in the San Lorenzo Valley with newborn babies.

Once we met we started talking and talking and talking. We chewed the telephone wires to shreds. We were both dancers and soon we were organizing dance events in the San Lorenzo Valley. Mostly women's dance events, mom's trying to connect with their very changed bodies and very changed lives.

IV. The Evolution of Hip Santa Cruz

As our children grew, Lewis and I added another child to our family, a girl. Now we had one of each sex and felt complete. Our daughter was born at home but this time, only 2 years after the birth of her brother, the scene was entirely different. There was now a full-fledged community of midwives, a birth center, the collection of women's stories for the "Birth Book", compiled by Raven and a feeling of empowerment among women daring to challenge traditional notions of birthing.

The society at large however was not ready to give up so easily. The midwives were accused of practicing medicine without a license. One day the FBI showed up at the birth center and one of the prominent midwives had to leap out of a window and run. She was not caught, but now we were all alerted to the fact that we were doing something illegal. I could not submit to the idea that taking charge of our own bodies was wrong and illegal. I participated fully in the newly formed birth center, hanging out, sharing stories and encouraging women to own their own power.

Because of all this consciousness my daughter's birth was a whole different experience. The Blessingway that Betsy held for me at the Double Dome on Alba Road filled me with energy, love and power. The birth was fast, easy and empowering. Betsy took care of me, Lewis, our son and took care of the house. Community members came to celebrate and provide food, services and whatever we needed.

Yes indeed, a long way from the birth of 2 years ago.

V. Models of Education in Hip Santa Cruz

Meanwhile, up in the Valley the kids were doing what kids do, growing. There were 3 counter-culture families who decided to base the children's education on observations of the children themselves. We were 3 teachers with different experiences but we came together to try to determine what kids really needed. We were surprised.

We discovered that:

- 1.) The children really like their parents and want to be with them.
- 2.) Kids are born full of curiosity, ready to learn and they loved hands on discovery.
- 3.) They were very interested in food, gathering, preparing consuming.
- 4.) Then they turned 5 and nothing changed. They showed no interest in “school” .

So, these 3 families, Fred & Roberta, Ned & Betsy, Lew & Estelle decided to create an educational venue for our kids, consistent with what we were discovering about how kids grow. We called it Upper Valley School. We registered with the state as an R-4 private school and met at a local camp 2 days per week.

WOW! Was that fun.

Our curriculum was: making music, dancing, building trails at the camp and working in the camp kitchen. At home we read to the kids, did storytelling, art projects, cooking and survival skills and just generally enjoyed them - most of the time.

VI. South Street Centre – SLVUSD Home School Program Charters

The kids kept growing and soon they were searching for a larger pond to swim in. Lewis and I did all sorts of educational gymnastics:

- 1) Unschooling
- 2) Tutoring
- 3) Traditional school
- 4) Private alternative school
- 5) Anything and everything

While they were growing and experimenting Betsy and I started feeling a strong pull to create an alternative space where homeschooling families could meet to alleviate feeling of isolation and share the lore of that most challenging my enterprise, parenting.

Voila! South Street Centre was born.

In 1987 on South Street in Boulder Creek in an old beautiful county house rented to us by John Scopazzi, Sr. This venerable old building soon became a hub of activity for educationally alternative minded folks.

By the by, San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District noticed that many local kids were not enrolling in the traditional schools and set out to do something different. In 1989 Fred, under the skillful administration of Eric Scoffstall, created a public school, homeschool program which soon exploded and everyone was surprised at how many families wanted this option.

In 1990 Estelle came on board. We loved our unconventional school and soon we had 90 students and a waiting list of 80. There was pressure to expand and take these kids in. Not wanting to create a vast urban program, Estelle, as the mentor for the newly formed Charter School, set out to create small, village-type schools under the umbrella of Charter 25, so named because we were the 25th Charter School in the State of California, now there are over 800. So a whole new cadre of homeschool's was born.

We changed the name of our SLV Homeschool to SLV Family and Community Based Education because that name more aptly describes our intention and our modus operandi. To this day (2016) the SLVUSD Charter School offers options to all of the families in the Valley.

So on we go.

South Street Centre is still alive. Home birth, Homeschool, Gentle Childrearing, now mainstreamed.

I am proud of my legacy. Makes growing old happy, less scary and joyful. I still hang at South Street Centre, encouraging community-based schooling and offering counsel to anyone who wants it. AND – I still enjoy the many parents, babies and children of all ages who cross my path.

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