

Welcome to Paradise

In the summer of 1969, taking a break from my scientific college-lecturer career in apartheid-era South Africa in a vague search for something called “cosmic consciousness,” I found myself at the Chelsea College of Arts in London, refining my photography skills, deepening my art history education and enjoying the experience of integrating into a vibrant, world-class city at the very peak of the 1960s. It was a year of student unrest, the Pop Art Retrospective at the Tate, the Arts Lab in Drury Lane, the Brian Jones memorial concert in Hyde Park, and Bob Dylan at the Isle of Wight, followed by Woodstock in the USA.

There was a strong South African presence in London at the time, and many expats were studying at the famous Chelsea school. Among the English students were some lovely young women who liked the South African lads, and before I knew it, I was part of a delightful creative community. One of my new friends learned that my long-term plan was to make my way to California, penniless as I was, and pursue a postgraduate degree there. She introduced me to an American friend of hers, a black American photographer named Reggie Jackson - not the baseball star, needless to say.

Reggie came over to her flat one afternoon, introduced himself, and showed me a striking black-and-white photograph of a bearded, bespectacled man who bore an uncanny resemblance to Jerry Garcia, the iconic lead guitarist of the Grateful Dead. The photograph was not of the famous musician, but rather of a mysterious stranger. Reggie explained that the subject of the photograph was Ralph Abraham, a brilliant American mathematician, a college professor from a place I had never heard of: Santa Cruz, California. Reggie would see if he could

make an introduction, he offered, and we went on to other subjects.

Suddenly it was a gloomy September afternoon and winter was coming, a phenomenon my sub-tropical upbringing had not prepared me for. Pondering thoughts of faraway, sunny places, I was walking along a wet, grimy street in Earl's Court on the way to my temporary crashpad, when I noticed a very attractive girl coming the other way. She was radiantly suntanned - the epitome of an endless summer. I stopped as she turned and went up the steps to a building entrance, then I realized it was my destination as well. I ascended the steps behind her. She turned, smiled and said: Andrew? It was Leslie Anderson, one of the loveliest girls at the Art School in my home town of Durban, South Africa, and like myself, an avid sailor.

We stood there on the steps, and my life changed. What have you been doing? I asked. Chartering in the Caribbean, she replied. Really, that would be my ultimate dream, right now. Are you serious? A friend of mine is looking for crew for a delivery to Granada. Can you meet him at the RORC tomorrow? What's the RORC? The Royal Ocean Racing Club.

As my time in London drew to a close, my art-school friends decided to host a farewell dinner for me on my last night in the city. They had chosen a peaceful, cozy macrobiotic cafe called *Seed*, in a side alley away from the bustling streets. It was the perfect spot for an intimate gathering - or so we thought.

We were the only diners. Perfect! We had just settled into our seats, the Eastern music and soft ambience soothing our spirits, when the tranquility was rudely shattered. The restaurant's doors burst open, and in swarmed a boisterous, obnoxious group of

stoned Americans, their uncontrolled laughter and uproarious chatter drowning out any chance of conversation. They energetically rearranged the tables along the wall behind my seat. There must have been fifteen or eighteen of them!

I tried to maintain my composure, even as my annoyance grew. Then, just when it seemed the evening was veering off course, my final guest of the night arrived. It was Reggie Jackson, the photographer. Reggie, an amused glint in his eye, settled into the seat opposite mine, reached across the table to shake my hand, and gestured towards the commotion behind me. "Andy," he yelled, leaning closer so I could hear him over the cacophony, "there's Ralph, the man I want you to meet. Come!"

I found myself face to face with the bearded, bespectacled man from the photograph—Ralph Abraham himself. He extended his hand, introducing himself with a warm smile. Amidst the chaos of the American rowdies, who, by the way, turned out to be Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters - of whom I had never heard - Ralph and I managed to exchange a few words. He gave me his contact information in California and told me about his new position at the University of California, Santa Cruz. At that moment, I had never heard of UC Santa Cruz, and I had no clue that Santa Cruz, wherever that was, was going to play a pivotal role in my future.

That chance encounter in a London restaurant was the prelude to a journey that took me across the Atlantic to Central California, to a place where the convergence of art, mathematics, and the counterculture would forever change the course of my life. The party, despite its chaotic start, was the catalyst for a new chapter, one that would be filled with unexpected adventures, lifelong friendships, and the exploration of uncharted spiritual territories in

a glorious seaside city on the north shore of Monterey Bay in California.

The following morning, as the sun was peeking over the London skyline, I bid farewell to the ancient city that had been my home for a significant chapter of my life. With feelings of equal parts excitement and trepidation, I embarked on the first leg of my journey to the New World. I took a train to Gatwick Airport, where I caught a flight to Torino, Italy. From there, a series of trains and buses took me to the picturesque coastal village of Chiavari.

Awaiting me in Chiavari was a sight that would take my breath away—an immaculate 90-foot racing yawl, the world's fastest monohull, winner of many prestigious ocean races. The owner, one of the Rothschild wine barons, was selling his world-famous *Gitana IV* to an American, and our task was to deliver her to Grenada, an island in the West Indies. She gleamed in the late afternoon sun, a vessel of great beauty and power. Beyond the yacht harbor, the Mediterranean Sea beckoned, and I realized that I was about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime.

Our course took us westward along the Italian coast to one legendary locale after another, including Monaco, San Tropez and the South of France, the Spanish Costa Brava, Gibraltar, Tangiers and finally, the Canary Islands, where we moored in a port called Santa Cruz de Tenerife and awaited the official end of hurricane season, October 31st. The highlight of our voyage was yet to come, the challenging Atlantic crossing ahead, an adventure that filled the 11-person crew with anticipation, awe and trepidation.

As we plowed deeper and deeper into the vastness of the Atlantic, I marveled at the power of the ocean and the resilience of our

vessel. We encountered threatening seas and calm waters, endless skies, stormy nights and breathtaking sunsets. It was during those solitary moments at the helm in the middle of the night, gazing up at the endless expanse of stars, that I felt truly alive, perhaps for the very first time.

One of the most memorable experiences of the journey was surfing that mighty 98-ton yacht into the welcoming waters of Barbados at dawn on November 17th, my 26th birthday. The thrill of riding those enormous swells on such a grand vessel was a testament to the perfect design of the boat and the skill and expertise of our multi-national crew.

Our voyage culminated in Grenada, where we were met with an uproarious welcome. Every vessel on the island sailed out to greet us! The prestigious yacht had garnered attention and admiration wherever we went. As a result, it was here that I received news of an opportunity that would change the course of my journey once more.

A job offer awaited me in the United States, one that I couldn't have foreseen when I first boarded that train in London. The Kennedy yacht, the notorious *Jacqueline* herself, was in need of a cook. A cook? Well, OK. As it turned out, I would be the only one aboard with the skills and knowledge to operate a sailing vessel of this magnitude. I was the fucking cook, but that's a whole 'nother story! The rest of the crew, I swiftly learned, were retired US Navy personnel. What I did not know was that the US Navy does NOT teach its recruits the most basic rudiments of open-ocean sailing!

Arriving in America on Thanksgiving Day of 1969 with just \$45 in my pocket, I felt like a modern-day Mayflower Pilgrim, setting out on an adventure in a land of equal parts danger and opportunity. I sensed that my journey would be filled with unexpected twists and turns, like the pioneers of old, but I was young, immortal and up for anything life might throw at me. I was learning to trust the loving Universe, as it guided me every step of the way.

Joining the crew of the *Jacqueline*, JFK's personal yacht, marked my first taste of American politics. The vessel had recently been sold to a right-wing American millionaire, and the crew, all US Navy-trained, proved to be dangerously incompetent. It was a challenging environment, but I was determined to make the most of it. The *Jacqueline* had been re-named, absurdly, the *Poppsie III* and was a monument to the Republican Party, meaning that below decks one waded through 3-inch deep red-white-and-blue shag carpeting, surrounded by elephants on all sides. Stainless steel ones on the bowsprit and at the mastheads, red ones on the port side, green ones on the starboard, and everything from paper mache to bronze to marble elephants everywhere you looked below decks.

Our initial charter took us out to the Bahamas, where the turquoise waters and white sandy beaches provided a stunning backdrop for our charter party's adventures. Despite the crew's shortcomings, I did my best to ensure that our guests had a good time. I enjoy creating memorable experiences for others and I saw myself as the entertainment director.

However, my commitment to the charter party's happiness did not sit well with the yacht's skipper, whose attitude and political leanings clashed just a tiny bit with my own. In the end, I found myself without a job, but with a severance payment of fifteen one-

hundred dollar bills in my back pocket. *Poppsie III* sailed off into the sunrise one morning, headed for the US Virgin Islands. With a huge sigh of relief, I watched her disappear into the distance. Little did I know what I was missing. The vessel was dismantled in a tropical storm off the coast of Cuba, sustaining over \$100,000 in avoidable damage. She drifted helplessly for ten miserable days before being captured and towed into Havana by the Cuban navy.

Knowing nothing about the above, but with newfound resources and a strong sense of relief, I set off for the next chapter of my journey, this time with Kendall, my first American girlfriend, by my side. As we drove west toward Los Angeles, I couldn't help wondering about Santa Cruz, a place that had become a beacon of curiosity and fascination ever since my encounter with Ralph Abraham in faraway London. The town was only a few hundred miles up the California coast from LA and the prospect of exploring the legendary counterculture scene and intellectual pursuits of San Francisco, just seventy miles north of Santa Cruz, filled me with anticipation. Would I be too late for the Summer of Love?

After spending a couple of weeks in the frenetic City of Angels, it was time to head north. I bid farewell to Kendall and my new friends in LA and got a ride to Santa Barbara. From there, I was planning to hitchhike the final leg of my trip to Santa Cruz.

I stuck out my thumb by the roadside, praying for a kind soul to offer me a ride. A bright-red VW van screeched to a halt. The driver, a man named Jeff Love, who bore a striking resemblance to the character Ray from the movie "Alice's Restaurant," greeted me with a warm smile.

"What takes you to Santa Cruz?" Jeff asked. Santa Cruz was his destination that evening, after a quick stop along the way. I couldn't help feeling a sense of serendipity in that moment, as if the universe was once again conspiring to bring me to my destined place at the perfect time. I relaxed and began to enjoy one of the most memorable days of my life.

I began to recount the story of how I had met someone named Ralph Abraham back in London, how our paths had crossed in the most unexpected of ways, and how he had suggested that I consider Santa Cruz for my graduate work. To my astonishment, Jeff's response was: "Ralph Abraham is my business partner!"

The threads of fate seemed to weave themselves together in an intricate but discernible pattern. As we turned off Highway 101 and headed for the coast at Morro Bay, Jeff told me about our destination, its unique spirit, a surfing spot called Steamer Lane, and the groundbreaking project that he and Ralph were involved in together: something called the Pataal Foundation. The Sanskrit word *pataal* meant the navel or bellybutton of the Universe, he explained. I had definitely entered another dimension!

I felt an increasing sense of guidance, connection and destiny. By trusting the unknown, this “chance” encounter on the road to Santa Cruz would lead to a deep immersion in that city's vibrant culture and the beginning of a new chapter in my life, one that would be forever intertwined with the enigmatic Ralph Abraham and the captivating city on the California coast.

After a leisurely stop at the Esalen Institute along the breathtaking Big Sur coast, part of which involved my getting comfortable with being naked in public, my driver and I continued our journey northward along the winding highway that led to Santa Cruz.

The rugged beauty of the California coastline unfurled before us. As the day drew to a close, Jeff offered me a place to stay for the night in a charming redwood mountain town called Boulder Creek. The cozy evening spent on Jeff's couch allowed me to rest and gather my wits, sensing that the next day held the promise of a new beginning.

The following morning I found myself standing on Ralph Abraham's doorstep on California Street in the heart of Santa Cruz. This moment would mark the beginning of a profoundly transformative phase of my life. Ralph, with his deep intellect, resonant voice and magnetic personality, welcomed me into his world with open arms. I soon discovered that Ralph was at the very heart of the Northern California consciousness scene. He was not only a mathematician but also a bridge between worlds - connecting the realms of mathematics, spirituality, psychedelics and the emerging counterculture.

Ralph introduced me to some remarkable individuals, leaders who were pushing the boundaries of human understanding and exploration. People like Peter Demma, who was running for County Sheriff on the "legalize marijuana" platform, challenging the status quo in bold and visionary ways. Jazz musician Max Hartstein, with his impassioned pleas for the creation of a neighborhood psychic laboratory, opened my mind to the possibility that everything was already perfect, that we all lived in the Garden of Paradise. Max got me started in music by inviting me to join his improvisational jazz group, the 25th Century Ensemble, courtesy of which I participated in the creation of some of the strangest music ever heard. It was called "perfect music," perfect because it was no longer possible to hit a wrong note. The group existed in the 25th Century, by which time all the wrong notes had already been played!

One of the most influential people I encountered through Ralph was Dr. Ralph Metzner, the de-frocked Harvard professor, who initiated me into Agni Yoga, an ancient meditation practice that resonated deeply with my soul. It was my first true foray into the world of spirituality, and it marked the beginning of a lifelong journey of self-discovery and inner exploration.

With each passing day that magical first year, at the Thursday night perfect music sessions, the spring fair and the monthly full moon festivals, I felt a sense of belonging and purpose that I had never experienced before. I had found my tribe, a community of creative kindred spirits who shared my thirst for adventure, peace, freedom, knowledge, spiritual growth and above all, FUN.

As the years rolled on, Santa Cruz became not just an interesting place on the map but my spiritual home. The friends I made in that transformative year of 1970 remain some of my closest confidants, companions, and soulmates to this day, including Ralph Abraham himself. Our bonds have grown stronger with time, and today, fifty-three years later, Santa Cruz still holds a special place in my heart—a place where the spirit of adventure, intellectual exploration, and spiritual awakening continue to thrive, just as they did on that fateful January day when I knocked on Ralph's California Street door, a pilgrim seeking a new beginning in a beautiful city that will forever be part of my life.