

Although I've never been there for more than a couple of days or weeks at a time, my love affair with the City by the Bay goes back almost 65 years. As a 17-year-old graduate of Navy boot camp, my first trip ever out of the East was to report to the Naval Base at Treasure Island, California.

Treasure Island conjured up images of pirates, Long John Silver, yo ho ho and all that adventure stuff. It turned out to be a bunch of drab Navy barracks on a little hunk of land under the Oakland Bay Bridge, halfway between San Francisco and Oakland.



As soon as I had checked in and stashed my seabag under a bunk, I was told I had a 72-hour pass. Where to spend it? Oakland? Nah. I hitched a ride on a Navy bus into San Francisco. What a beautiful city. Beautiful flowers. Beautiful streets. Beautiful houses. Beautiful hills. Beautiful girls. With a monthly paycheck of \$54, my money couldn't go very far in such a high-class city.

But, hey, just in case no one had told me then in the summertime of 1943, everyone in town was wildly patriotic (no hippies and Nancy Pelosi hadn't had her first face-lift yet) and constantly reminded me that they loved the Navy. To my delight, I didn't need my few dollars unless I wanted to go to fancy restaurants, nightclubs or hotels. Movies were free. Theater was free. USOs and other service clubs served free meals day and night. The cable cars were free. Most of the girls, except for certain professionals, were free. What teenaged swabbie wouldn't fall in love with San Francisco?

Unfortunately, my first love affair with the city ended abruptly several months later when my orders came in. The Navy message ... report by earliest date to the USS... blah...blah. I didn't see San Francisco for another 24 months. But, of course, when I sailed back in late 1945, the city looked even more wonderful than ever. World War II had just ended and everyone wanted to celebrate day and night. I was an old man of 20 by the time, but I pitched in and enjoyed the historic moment.

I returned to San Francisco again in 1951 as a recalled Navy reservist for service in the Korean

War, and again on my way out to the Pacific. Both the city and I were six years older, but her beauty hadn't diminished in any way, and again I wallowed in her many charms. Anyone going off to war should first be permitted at least one month in San Francisco. Then, after she generously gives you her endless varieties of love, facing the dangers of battle is well worth it.

I've visited San Francisco with my family several times during the past half-century, and the City by the Bay never fails to welcome and fascinate us. Now that I think about it, Tony Bennett's song about "where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars" must have been written just for me and that elderly pumper in my chest.

*Submitted by Sam Jeffries, Philly PA*