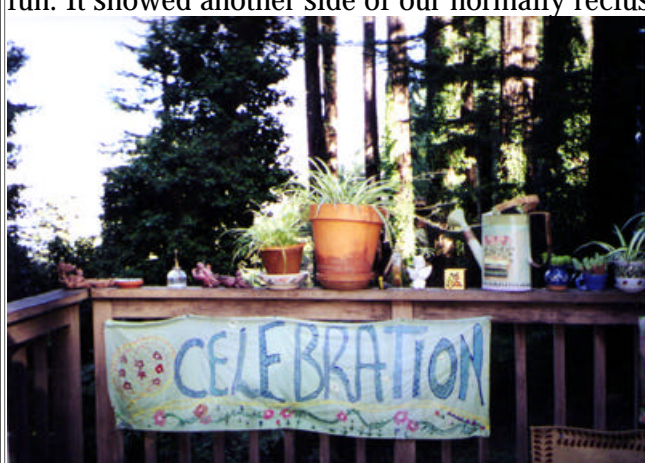


A Personal View: Local News and New Lessons In Democracy

by *Leah Lubin*

Surprise, surprise, spring in February on our normally quite cold Skylonda home turf. We've seen the sun and we look and feel better for it. So do our valley neighbors who pack our mountain roads from the bottom of Woodside Road all the way to the coast.

The Skylonda community is very small and subtle. First of all, I want to tell you people are getting closer and the usual connecting bond (children under the age of 12 in the household) has stopped being the only reason people are making efforts to get together. The celebrations started just before the Christmas holidays when Penny McCulloch organized a door-to-door caroling party. Yours truly, their second house visit. Ignoring the fact that I didn't have any young children and was actually celebrating Hanukkah, I was still included in a wonderful experience of over fifty kids and adults singing to us as my husband and I stood at our front door. All I can say is, do it again! Soon after, an invitation from Chris and Dave Butler for a fancy pants and black tie New Year's Eve party at their beautiful home. This I had to see, our neighbors in evening clothes. But there they were, all dressed up and partying to Madonna's "Hanky Panky" at midnight and having plenty of fun. It showed another side of our normally reclusive neighbors.



Just when I thought the party spirit had left town, a voice on the phone with a French accent told me late one night that he wanted to throw his wife, Jocelyn Concordel, a surprise 40th birthday party at the "Boulevard Grill," and could we come? "Sounds good," I said, so on Martin Luther King's birthday we turned up to wish Jocelyn a happy birthday. The evening was delightful, but best of all was hearing her husband Denny tell us all that Jocelyn hadn't changed one bit over their last twenty years of being together. Very romantic stuff.

Last night, we had a "Mountain Women's Gathering" at Kimberly Warner's impressive home on Skyline Drive. Over thirty women gathered to share food and drinks. A part of me, I must tell you, is quite impressed. I feel like I am watching a group of people become a strong community and it's quite an amazing sight to see.

Just in case you think that all we do is party in the trees here in Skylonda, let me tell you about an important (for me) conversation I had with my neighbor Dan. Dan, a longtime resident in Skylonda, can be described as a mountain cowboy who enjoys, with his wife, a reclusive lifestyle of forestlands with plenty of space, and a law degree with a real world job to pad his life and keep him real. Although we live next door, I don't see them much. So, one cold morning I was collecting the recycling cans, when there he was, moving his garbage cans. Instead of the usual cheery greeting, he asked me how I was handling the last four months of uprising and violence in Israel, the worst bloodshed in years. This direct question melted my mental reserve to appear okay to people I meet.

The outcome was a dialogue that lasted over forty minutes. I told him that I was born in Israel, grew up in England, and in 1986, I became an American citizen. My idealistic idea of democracy was that we were free to be happy and live here at peace with each other. I had come to stop having hatred in my life, having to hate people whom I didn't hate because I lived in a region of the world, the Middle East, where dislike from both sides just wouldn't go away. The way I saw it, by living in America, I could enjoy my Arabic neighbors, their ways, their food and music, and not have to explain myself.

Since this uprising, and the anti-Israel demonstrations on the streets of the United States by various groups were extremely troubling for me, especially when I saw the flag of Israel burnt in the streets of my adopted country, the USA. "Yes, that is also democracy," said Dan. "You can burn a flag and verbally express hate and anger, but you can't throw stones and hurt people." So, new lessons in democracy for me, understanding more about all people's rights to express themselves. My American dream not quite so rosy, but possibly more honest, exciting, and real.