

CALIFORNIA, HERE WE COME

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The year has been filled with anticipation. We packed and planned, and downsized our needs with an eye to this day and all that it promised for the future.

We had said our goodbyes to New York yesterday.

After a pleasant and uneventful flight the small plane rolls to a stop at the Carlsbad regional airport late in the afternoon. My excitement is mixed with half-formed doubts and questions about the finality of my/our decision as to whether this move is right, and some vague apprehension for the future. I don't know which feeling is dominant.

It's life-changing for us; moving from one coast to another leaving more than a half century of learning and experience, as well as an aging mother behind.

In any case, we're safe, we're on the ground. California, **HERE WE ARE!**

Sunset is approaching, the landscape is bathed in that golden light so common and so fleeting at this time of day at the edge of fall. The temperature is delightfully comfortable, no need for a sweater. My adrenalin is running high, I'm elated. We're ready for whatever is to come. Our new life starts here and now.

Coming down the stairs off the plane I see a young woman holding a sign with our name in large block letters printed on it. She introduces herself as the rep of the car dealership where I had contracted to buy a car by phone and internet some weeks before. She takes our luggage,

stows it in the trunk of her station wagon, and we get in for the drive to the showroom to do the paperwork on this, the last leg of our cross-country migration, the long-awaited arrival.

On the way to the office we exchange pleasantries; “how do you feel? How was the flight? Are you going far when you leave here?”

In the course of the previous 12 months of waiting and preparing for this moment we sorted our belongings, prepared the house for sale, and transferred title to the next owner. Now we are paying for and taking possession of a new car we had seen only on a computer monitor and spoken about on the phone.

Bob fills out forms in silence we chat some more, shake hands, and move the suitcases from her car to what is now ours. She gives us driving directions, and we’re off with a “welcome to California and good luck” at the peak of rush hour on a crowded highway with the sun sinking into the Pacific behind us, to begin our life as California residents.

Happily we make no wrong turns, and arrive at our destination before dark. After parking the car and dropping the luggage in a guest room we rush out to see the lake I remember so vividly from our first viewing of the property a year before. I’m excited, fatigued, and hungry, but mostly want to see the expanse of blue water. It has always been something very important to me to be able to see water. I run to the balcony to see it before it gets dark.

Looking over the railing where I remember the lake, I see thousands of bright green trees. The entire expanse is green. What’s going on? Am I in the right place? Am I losing my mind? Wasn’t there a body of water here when we saw this place last?

Yes to all of the above, is the response from a friendly resident, but this is California, it's an irrigated desert. The water in the lake is no longer there. It might return someday.

I find out later that it was drained for some regional reservoir-related reason, and that it happens periodically in this part of the country.

I had never experienced such a thing before. In my mind bodies of water are forever, notwithstanding that my mind knows of dry wadis and lakes, and even of dry seas that dot other places in the world. This is not congruous with my expectations.

Lake or no lake, were glad we're here, yet it feels strange in my scheme of things to see a forest where only the year before there was a lake.