

Ah, yes, springtime in San Francisco. Although I've never been there for more than a couple of days 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.

THAT Treasure Island, I thought. I 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 ... what else ... Oakland.



"Where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars"

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 spring flowers. Beautiful streets. Beautiful houses. Beautiful hills. Beautiful girls. With a monthly paycheck of \$54 ... I earned the extra four bucks on graduation from boot camp ... 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 springtime 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, figuratively and physically. 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 professional ones, were free. Who wouldn't fall in love with San Francisco in the springtime?

Unfortunately, my first love affair with the city ended abruptly six 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 12 months, nor not much of anything remotely like it in the Pacific. But, of course, when I sailed back in early 1946, it was springtime and the city looked even more wonderful than ever before.

I returned to San Francisco again in the springtime of 1952 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 springtime month in San Francisco. Then, after she generously gives you her endless varieties of love, facing the dangers of battle is almost 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.