

## Winning 'Tales' of Bay Area cities

### READER CONTEST

Paulina Borsook, Mary Ann Olsen, Steven Hibshman Published 4:00 am, Sunday, July 3, 2011

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Paulina Borsook is the winner of The Chronicle's "Chronicles of the Bay" writing contest in the style of Armistead Maupin's "Tales of the City."

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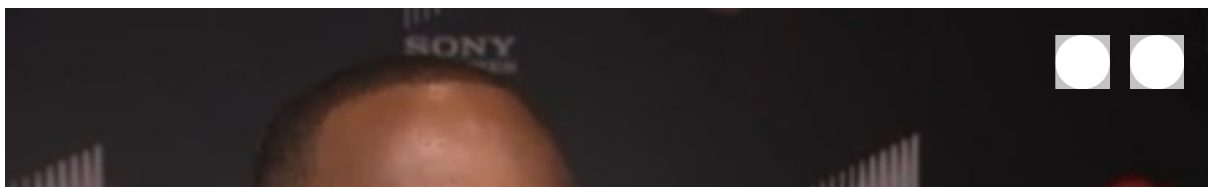
Santa Cruz writer Paulina Borsook has won first place in The Chronicle's "Chronicles of the Bay" contest, earning herself two free tickets to a performance of the world premiere musical "Tales of the City" at **American Conservatory Theater**.

Our contest asked readers to consider how they might begin a novel about their city today, in the way **Armistead Maupin** captured San Francisco in the '70s and '80s in "Tales of the City."

Borsook perfectly captured a sense of Santa Cruz in "Tales of Surf City." Among other things, Borsook is known for her 1999 Salon piece "How the Internet Ruined San Francisco."

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The second-place entry by **Mary Ann Olson** of Millbrae and third-place tale by **Steven Hibshman** of Foster City are printed below, along with Borsook's winning story. Thanks to all who shared their hometown stories. You are all winners.

**First place:**

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## Tales of Surf City By Paulina Borsook

She sometimes wondered if she should have listened to the astrocartographer who had advised her to move to Santa Cruz from the City.

As Antonia pulled into the parking lot near the **Rio Theater**, heading into the screening of the documentary about the **Ukulele Club of Santa Cruz**, she was thinking about how the "**Obama**/Biden," "Stop the Spray" and "Keep Santa Cruz Weird" bumper stickers had mostly disappeared, strangely coincident with the rise of day spas all over town.

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It reminded her of how, during the dot-com boom, she had first spotted, driving in Capitola, women who looked petulant but not fit; Antonia hadn't thought such people were allowed south of Davenport and west of Salinas.

Then, it was the invasion of the Silicon Valley people. Now, it was locals turning into business-incubators that were changing Santa Cruz: first, Whole Foods couldn't be prevented from coming in and then Gateways metaphysical bookstore went out of business and the next thing she knew she was having dinner with a trustafarian who wouldn't shut up about depopulation, vaccines and Monsanto.

Antonia could get wistful about her years living in the City, remembering what it was like to go out with someone who didn't expect cycling shorts to be part of a second date. If it weren't for the weathered-looking Central Valley citrus-growers who sold at the downtown Farmers' Market, she feared there was no one in her life who didn't hyper-focus on (pick one)

- 1) decriminalization of marijuana
- 2) board sports
- 3) the merits of Rock lobster custom steel versus Calfee Design Bamboo.

As she walked past **Charlie Hong Kong's**, she was startled to hear "Hey, Toni, how ya doing?" Was it the citizen-scientist/chem trails activist? The cute white-guy-wearing-dreads she had met at the Land of the Medicine Buddha tui na workshop? Or one of several men she could think of who had something to do with guitars, guys who always had to bring up a connection to **Jerry Garcia**, no matter how long ago or how tangential?

Attempting to cultivate an attitude of gratitude, she turned, catching a glimpse of a Hawaiian shirt. But whose?

### **Second place:**

## **Under the Radar in Millbrae By Mary Ann Olsen**

Natalie stared out the window as the plane flew over the red tile roofs of Millbrae. She looked for her house, as usual, and let her mind wander. She and her husband, Gregory, had settled in Millbrae for the convenient transportation hub and had been surprised to find a diverse Mayberry. Millbrae's old Spanish stucco homes were authentic, as were the lovingly attended gardens, which could be enjoyed since every service and amenity in town was within walking distance.

Last night they had walked to their favorite Asian restaurant, owned by a wonderful family from Taiwan. The owner, Johnny, was short, energetic and known by everyone in Millbrae. The food was delicious, Americanized and no one cared if you used a fork. When Natalie had broken her leg, they sent over dinner and refused payment. On Thursday they strolled to their favorite Mexican family restaurant. When they walked in, the staff started their fish tacos. Gregory inquired about the gorgeous Venetian salt and pepper shakers that had been replaced. Carlos, the owner, said they were for sale, but when they left, they were handed a bag and Natalie got teary at his generosity. Watch the emotions, she told herself.

During Chinese New Year, they delighted in the drums and red dragon going inside each store to bring luck in the new year, and usually ran into neighbors. With Sean and **Anne O'Sullivan** and their two adorable daughters, age 13 and 11, we hit the neighbor jackpot, Natalie thought. We watch over each other and the neighborhood. That is so important. There had been one unsettling incident during a hike Natalie took on the trail near their house. She heard a rustling and looked up at a beautiful cougar staring at her with its large yellow eyes. She froze, but the magnificent animal sauntered away before she could make herself appear threatening. The encounter had unnerved her. Was it a sign?

Before she got on the plane, Greg gripped her shoulders tightly and said, "Be safe." "I will - I don't know when I will be back." They kissed quickly. With her simple hairdo and light makeup, she looked attractive but not memorable, probably on vacation. Little do they know. She took out her laptop and opened the encrypted file. She would be in St. Petersburg in 14 hours. She started reading in Russian. Her name would be Natasha Alexandrovna Sukhova for an indefinite period of time if all went well.

### **Third place:**

## Foster City Stories

### By Steven Hibshman

Almost no one in the Bay Area wanted to live in Foster City in the '70s. It was windy and dusty and besides, everyone knew in the next big earthquake it would fall back into the bay like a modern-day Atlantis. But to a young Chinese boy of 9, Foster City was like heaven.

His parents were both doctors in China, and during the Cultural Revolution his parents were branded as criminals because they were educated, and so they were thrown into labor camps. The boy was cared for by a cousin, but since everyone knew his parents were undesirables, he would get taunted and beaten up at school nearly every day.

When they could, the family was able to escape to Hong Kong and then to California. In the Bay Area, you can live between many worlds, and in his case he could live part of the time within the Chinese culture and part of the time as an American. In addition to learning the American culture going to school, the young boy learned his English and Western ways by watching old movies on TV. Doing well at Bowditch and Hillsdale, he went to Berkeley and then away to Tufts for medical school, and after a time in the Air Force, he is back in Foster City.

Foster City has changed a lot. It did not fall into the bay in the '89 quake and now lots of people wanted to live between the City and Silicon Valley. In some respects, it was now easier to live a totally Chinese lifestyle in Foster City with the 99 Ranch Store and Marina Market nearby and decent Cantonese restaurants that couldn't care less if Caucasians came or not. But there were elements of the rest of Bay Area life, too. The two women who lived in the house down the street were not sisters in the usual sense of the word. The Indian man who beat up his father because he thought that was the only way to get him help. The local Bank of America was robbed three times. Then there was the murder. {sbox}

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