

Docktown
Creative Non-fiction
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"Evicted." My brother, David, tells me, when I arrive at the rickety Yacht Club, near his floating home in Docktown Marina, Redwood City, Ca.

"What are you going to do?" I asked, knowing he did not have many housing choices.

"Resist."

I join Dalton, nicknamed Dal, David's son, my son Ethan, called ET, and another boy, Ringo, and David's dog, Duke, and we all follow David down the steep stair ladder leading to the floating walkway, treacherous now, at low tide. Ringo, Dal, and David go barefoot without any problems, ET, and I, in tennis shoes, seem secure. The dog has four-wheel drive.

The plankway rest in the muck, bubbling holes indicate wormholes or long-buried gasses from the toxicants discharged from the Tannery in its heyday. The reek of rotten eggs permeates my nostrils. A rat scurries in the rock embankment. We descend in front of a manufactured two-bedroom cabin cruiser that looks clean, and perhaps could be seaworthy, but I guess it has not set out for sea in decades. An old retiree scrubs the barnacles off the side and greets us. He reflects on the the history of the area as he was there since WWII.

"Redwood Creek provided the only deep-water port in the South Bay. Initially, back in the mid-1800s, the loggers would cut the redwoods up in the hills and float them down." He nodded back up to the club and said, "That used to be the old Tannery. A nearby cannery processed oysters, mussels, fish."

David interjects, "That's why Shell Beach exist out at the Bayhead. The cannery dumped all the shells back into the channel. Construction companies used the shells for landfill when filling in the wetlands."

Duke spots a raccoon under the rocks and engages in battle. Raccoons pour out like a beehive being disturbed. Outnumbered, the dog stands his ground, flinging raccoons here and there. David rushes to aid his dog, and when Duke launches one out, David dropkicks it, like a football. He played sports in high school, and his training comes in handy.

We all note a physical law that applies to raccoon kicking. Every time he kicks one, they sail up to about the same height and achieve about the same arch and distance each time. Upon landing, they chargeback in to battle the dog. Eventually, we boys and men gather behind Duke, and the raccoons are not sure that they cannot beat anyone of us, but collectively they see how many we were willing to commit to the battle. They retreat to their digs under the bank, assuring they will live today but be able to fight another day when the odds are more in their favor.

Success in battle leads us to cheer, high five each other, and we follow our 'coon fighter." We walk by the little hand-built wooden hut floating on a small barge and on to our leader's slip. His one-thousand square-foot cement barge has the first wooden level resting on the railing.

Ringo asks, "How did you get it into this slip? My Dad's little liveaboard sailboat barely made it over the sandbar."

"The foundation I had towed down from Sausalito, timed it to arrive at high tide. The incoming flow and the November rain filled up the waterway enough to float the barge into the slip. I popped a two-man camp tent on the bottom of the cement structure."

"Why the empty coffee can in front of your tent?"

"To pee in if I can't make it up to the clubhouse."

ET pipes in, "One sleep-over night, I got out of the tent and stepped right into the full can."

We climb into what will someday be a window. Navigating the sawdust spewed walkways past David's tent offers challenges. Ascending a wooden ladder up to the next level of what will be the living room floor provides a view. There in the cool breeze blowing up the Bay, with fog hanging in the hills and puffy clouds passing overhead, we enjoy the view.

In the deep muck, sandpipers peck, out in the small stream of water still flowing out, bat rays flap their wings and feast on the exposed mussels. David hangs a little fish trap over the side, and now the boys pull it up and squeal at the crabs and small fish splashing around. Under Dal's Dad's instruction, the creatures get dumped into his four-foot-long aquarium salvaged from his rental.

A hand me down sailboat from a tenant left it with David to keep for him but never came back for it; it provides us a little shelter from the breeze. The boys and dog clamber in and out and up and down as they please.

We, adults, open more beers, and someone pulls out a bag of chips. Life cannot get better. The sailboat has a small lavatory, and it, like the other boats in the Slough, it is just open to the drainage when you hit the flush button.

"Doesn't flushing the toilets into the Bay bother you?" I ask him.

"Before sealing the first floor on my floating home, a large plastic human waste container will be put down and then build the deck over it." He points to the container sitting propped up on the side of the house for now, until its moment of installation and first christening.

"How do you empty that?"

"A sewage extraction boat comes by once and week and vacuums it out."

"Lovely."

"The dock does have a connection to the City Sewage system, and I might connect to that in the future."

"That would probably be in your favor, as opposed to those that would argue the marina pollutes the creek."

"Yeah, agree, want to do the right thing for the environment."

"Let's go fishing."

"Great."

We all jumped in the Tidely Idly, David's small johnboat. Beer, soda, and various lunch foods and snacks get handed around. We do get some old, ragged life jackets on the boys; we men take our chances. David cranks the outboard. It makes a lot of noise but does not start. He keeps at it for many pulls of the cord; then, I take a turn. No results. David pulls the top off and pours some gas in the carburetor. We crank it a few more times, and it fires up and belches white smoke. The boys all cheer, and we untie from the post.

The tide heads out. Good for us, as we are way low in the water. To keep the front-end level, we get Duke, the dog, and ET, to sit-up front. Dal, weighing more than me, plops in the mid-section with Ringo and me. David, a middleweight, squats behind us, and man's the prop.

The motor whines and spews white smoke, but makes its way down the drain, mostly drifting with the tide. We come to comedy corner, the Redwood Creek's juncture with the Belmont Slough, named so, as the on-lookers loved to watch the show as returning sail and motorboats, misjudging the low outflow tide, got stuck in the mud trying to return home.

We make it out to Shell beach, which laps at the San Francisco Bay's edge, where the Slough empties. Duke jumps out and swims to shore before we even get to the beach. As soon as

the nose of the boat rubs in the shells, ET jumps out. He runs up and hooks the anchor. The rest of us pile out, except our pilot operating the motor. We all get our socks and shoes wet and muddy. The Skipper reeves the outboard, and the Tidely Idly leaps onto the shells. He hops out and tightens the line to the anchor.

We throw our gear, lunch, beers, and sodas on the beach and rig up the fishing poles. Chunks of squid, the bait of choice for sharks and bat rays, were de-frosted in David's 'frig, back at his house, while sitting next to his eggs, milk, vegetables, and left-over chicken. The live earthworms from his 'frig were picked off the refrigerator shelves and put back in their box.

The boys secure the bait and fling their lines out. For sharks and rays, it is a waiting game as they feed on the bottom. A couple of poles get worms for fish catching. Ethan trolls from the mudbank. He yells and disappears. We run over to find he fell into one of the many crevices in the marsh. We pull the mud encased boy up and out of the hole.

Duke splashes around and chases critters. Urination calls get answered wherever the person happens to be standing at the time.

After a spell, one of the rigged poles bends. The closest person grabs it and gives it a hard hook pull—the line whines. We got something! The nearest boy holds the rod and, with instructions, shouted, and cheers yelled, whatever struggled at the end of the line gets pulled onto the shore. Sometimes the line runs left, then right, sometimes out to the Bay, sometimes in towards the beach, as the creature fights for its freedom.

Minutes later, the beast at the end surfaces. A Leopard Shark! These run about two to three feet and give a good fight. David jumps in the water and nets the creature up and pulls out the hook, and he hands the shark to ET. The boy holds the meat-eating beast up high as passing sailboats yell congrats.

