

My trip to San Francisco

It was morning – I awoke and got out of my bed and on that day I wanted to do something special – something worthwhile – something interesting. It was Wednesday August 31, 2011, in San Jose. I wanted to go to San Francisco. Before I could go, I would plan an itinerary and I wanted to be sure I was well funded with enough cash for the journey. I went to my Wells Fargo bank branch in San Jose to make an ATM withdraw, forty dollars. I also had to make sure I had enough change for bus fare as it must be exact for the VTA buses. I came home and used my Compaq computer to summon Google Maps. It displayed the trip itinerary – the mass transit locations and times needed for the trip. The plan indicated three buses and BART would be used. I wanted to go to particular area in San Francisco, the Cow Hollow neighborhood at the corner Union and Divisadero streets. I was curious about this area in particular. I think it wise to stay away but my curiosity got the best of me.

I got ready to leave and checked to see everything is locked up. I took my wallet, watch and keys with me. I walked down the concrete stairs, wearing my Nike sneakers and a white windbreaker. I walked out from the well manicured landscape of the condominium complex to the Monterey Highway bus stop near the Capital Station parking area. I sat at the shrouded bus stop for twenty minutes. VTA Bus No. 68 finally arrived; I got on, pulled out the money and paid the fare. I took the 68 to First and Santa Clara Street which is the transit hub in downtown San Jose. I heard the bus driver's regular friends talk whom the driver was conversing with. I got off this bus; I waited for 20 or more minutes. I observed an African-American couple with large carry on luggage with them. I had thought they were heading for the airport. I walked a hundred feet to the fare dispenser and bought a round trip express ticket; as I did so, I received my change as one dollar coins, eight of them. I returned to the No. 181 bus stop and waited a few more minutes. The bus arrived, VTA Express Bus No. 181. The bus is called express because it cost so much more than regular buses. Express buses have much longer routes and have fewer stops; operating economics require the patron to pay more. The couple was relieved to know the 181 had arrived. They and I got on. This VTA Express Bus lives up to its name - Few stops; but in this case, one bad luck one. At a stop in Japantown a young man in his twenties got on and he had a chronic cough. The poor passengers on the entire bus had to endure it until the bus route terminated at BART Fremont station.

I got off the bus and walked the concrete walkway to the Fremont BART terminal. I saw the sidewalk vendors hawking their wares and some sold food and beverages – fruit, sandwiches, tacos and assortment of drinks. I was hungry but I wanted to dine in San Francisco. I approached and entered the two pivoted glass entry doors. The interior was dark and there was a musician playing a guitar; he played ballads and romantic themed songs. I walked up to the ticket machine. I found that it was awkward to use. After a minute, I figured out how to use it and determined the exact fare needed. I paid with my American Express credit card and the machine rendered a magnetically stripped ticket. I went to the pneumatically operated fare gate. I inserted the ticket; and in a flash, it grabbed it and spat it out on top of the stanchion. I got the ticket and the entry gate's two pneumatically operated flippers opened. And on the right, I walked to the escalator. I stepped on the threshold and engaged one of the escalator's treads and moved to the right to allow those in a hurry to pass me. I was now on the loading platform; I awaited the train to Daily City. I looked up to light emitting diode display for the latest information. Everyone waited patiently and I saw that African-American couple in my peripheral vision with their extreme luggage. The train arrived gracefully and stopped on the platform. The vessel's pneumatic doors opened and I entered one of the cars and the couple entered too.

The train remained at rest for a moment. I got comfortable in one of the aisle seats. The doors closed; the train started to move. I heard the surge of electricity from the electronic locomotive controller and the

train slowly began to move. The train moved toward Union City. I peered out the windows. The landscape was sparse until we got passed Hayward and got to San Leandro. I looked out from the window; I saw junk yards and the industrial areas with service firms of every description. I saw the cargo containers, cranes and trains of the shipyard. The train stopped at the Oakland Coliseum which also serves the Oakland International Airport. The African-American couple left just as I thought they would. BART began to move again. When it stopped at Lake Merritt, an Asian girl with bicycle enters. She wore a feminine floral dress, the best dressed on board. The other women wore tank tops, tattoos and poorly fitting denim. There was activity with all the new electronic devices, cell phones and electronic digital assistants. There were people on the train that were eating. They are prohibited from doing so by BART policies.

The train continued its journey making its stops in Oakland and finally it slithered into the Transbay Tube. It stopped at the underground Embarcadero station. The train crawled to a stop; the doors opened and I got off. The lady with bike got off too. The interior of the station was dim and there were ads on the walls. I found the escalator and got on it and went up two levels to a floor that was also dim. This area is called the concourse mezzanine. I walked to the exit gate and got my fare card from my wallet and inserted it; the flippers opened and I went through. I found my way to the street level in Financial District of San Francisco using the escalator. I was on the streets of San Francisco. I was on Market Street, facing the offices of the San Francisco Federal Reserve. I turned the other way and I saw brick pavement and the very beginning of the Market Street Cable Car Line. I saw vendors hawking their wares, flowers and food. I walked through the turnstiles of Grand Hyatt on Five Embarcadero Center. The interior was very clean and quiet and everything was in order. I used the restroom and left. "Oh! I'm so hungry" thought I. I searched for a coffee shop where I could have a real breakfast. I didn't plan my trip with enough detail. I searched the Justin Hermin Plaza and all the streets for the kind of restaurant desired. I was not successful. I ended up eating at the Posh Bagel. I had a ham and egg bagel sandwich and coffee. The sandwich was OK but the coffee was not good, it was bitter in taste. The establishment was in a mall at Four Embarcadero Center. I left the center and went to the Muni bus stop on Drumm Street. I sat and sat and sat; I waited and waited and waited. A lady came by and asked for the time and when bus 41 will show. I told her the time and told her that the bus had not come for some time. As for when it will come, I said, "That's what I would like to know." The Muni Bus No. 41 never shows. I went to the side of the bus stop and looked at the schedule; I squinted at the fine print. I learned that bus 41 does not serve at midday. And so I flagged a cab. It was 12:20. The Yellow Cab pulled to the curb and I got in the rear right side of the passenger car. I asked the cabbie to take me to Union and Divisadero from Drumm Street's Muni No. 41 bus stop.

The cabbie stepped on the gas and we went north on Drumm Street and he made a left on Washington Street going west. The cab made a right turn on Kearny Street heading north and going to Broadway. We headed west and into the Broadway tunnel for a few blocks. Daylight came again when we came to Hyde Street. It was a long ten block ride until the cab got to Divisadero. We went about a block or two to the corner of Union and Divisadero. The cab let me off and I paid him \$14.

I was now in Cow Hollow neighborhood of San Francisco. The weather was absolutely delightful. It was sunny, cool and breezy. The Cow Hollow is between the Marina District and Pacific Heights. It is just east of the Presidio. This is a quiet and relatively affluent section. I had a walk around; it was about 1:10. I headed west on Union. I was on the left sidewalk. I saw all the Victorian housing. Some of the Victorians were going through renovation. I saw the plumbers, electricians and carpenters. I saw another residence getting some brand new furniture. Was it a sofa for the living room? I looked down on the aging sidewalk; this neighborhood has been around for some time. The utility covers reveal names of utility companies that changed their names many times over the years.

I walked down Union taking in the sites. When I hit Baker, I made a left and went to the sidewalk on the right. Baker Street is steep and on the left side the cars are parked orthogonally. I slowly traversed the steep sidewalk; I got a physical workout laboring this hill. I reached Green Street and made a right. I saw the tall building on the corner of Green and Baker. It is eight stories high. The lower levels are masonry and the windows are secured by security bars. The purpose is unclear – Is it to keep the burglars out? Or, keep the bureaucrats in? I may never know. The higher levels have brick construction. The windows are many and small in size are covered with blinds, some of them are tattered. I turned right on Green Street and went toward Lyon Street. Midway, I crossed the street. I headed east on Green Street back toward Baker. I clearly saw the building on the corner of Baker and Green was the Russian Consulate. It was 1:44 PM in the afternoon August 31, 2011. At the curb by the left sidewalk there was an unmarked white shuttle bus parked in front of the consulate. And in front of the consulate there was iron grate fencing with an iron gate for the entrance to consulate. Just below the cornice of the building the Russian National Flag was in view. It had a red stripe on the bottom and deep blue middle stripe and a white strip on the top. What it means is not clear. But I think of it this way: The past, the present and the future. The red stripe represents Russia's troubled past where the people suffered tremendously under the rule of tyrants. The blue represents the present with all its problems and the white stripe represents Russia's hopes for a better future for her people. Overall the place was in good order. I saw the bureaucrats working in their offices on the fifth floor. The roof from street level did not reveal much, it is clear they have a shortwave aerial up there. I noticed at the entry gate at the consulate an obese man talking to someone. I continued my walk down Green Street to Divisadero. And, all the sudden a dark colored luxury sedan with diplomatic license plates took off. I was not able to see who they were but it appeared like an elderly man and woman were in it. I continued to Divisadero and crossed the street there. I walked Divisadero to Union, downhill. I returned to the corner of Divisadero and Union. Then I saw another dark colored sedan from the consulate moving down the Divisadero. Where was he going? I did not know. He was wearing a black trench coat and dark hat. He appeared pale and in poor health, maybe for all the years of drinking and sorrows.

I was in Cow Hollow, it was afternoon and there was still no Muni service for bus No. 41. So I walked the Union to San Francisco's financial district. I found I had spent \$14 on cab fare and I was a little low on cash. Walking down Union was fun. The densely packed housing was old and quaint. I saw people all around. There would be the healthy looking and provocatively dressed young ladies that would ask for dates. I knew what they are looking for. While a source of temptation, I resisted them. I found a bank branch and used the ATM to get money.

I was getting hungry. I saw this restaurant with the "big chef" decal on the window. I had a look at the menu and the prices were reasonable. So I had lunch there, La Cucina on Union Street. I ordered the Greek salad. It came with bread and water. The restaurant had a light blue canopy. The waiter was mute but he could take orders. I was able to relax and get off my feet. I spent a good 35 minutes there. I enjoyed the meal; I paid the bill with dollar coins from San Jose's transit hub.

I departed from the restaurant and started my travels to Van Ness Avenue. I saw all the shops including an interesting collection of antique cars. I saw an old Chord and Rambler. Chords are very rare. I headed south on Van Ness Avenue to California Street. California Street was hilly and it led me to the financial district. The tall buildings were in the shadows. Before I returned to San Jose, I had some coffee at Starbucks at One California Street. I had my coffee at the patio outside the store. I spilt some of the coffee on the table. I went back to the store and got some napkins and cleaned the table and made it much cleaner that it once was.

I walked to the Embarcadero entrance of BART on Market Street. I took escalator down to the mezzanine level and entered the fare gate. I took another escalator to the lowest level. And, there it was

crowded. I waited many minutes for the next train. It was late in the afternoon at the rush hour. I got on the train to Fremont. It was standing room only. The train departed to Oakland, I stood and held on to the overhead rail. I had to wait until I reached Lake Merritt Station before I could get a seat. I was able to get a good seat once again. It was quite a relief. I was tired and this gave me a chance to relax and reflect on my experience. In my proximity, I saw a lady doing some sketching of some fashion designs. The passenger behind me was enjoying music from his Apple i-pod. But for me, I had no digital devices with me except for my Casio wrist watch. And soon I was at Fremont. I left the station and the exit gate took my BART fare card and kept it. I exited the pivoted glass doors and walked the concrete walkway. The musician was still playing his tunes. I sat on the bench and waited for the driver of VTA Bus No.181 to finish his break. I entered the bus and shown the driver the round trip express ticket. VTA Bus No. 181 took me to San Jose.

End of Story