

Growth Growth

The Urbanization of

By Scott Brookie

There are three red tomatoes ripening on the windowsill of the Laurel Street duplex where Derotha and Bill Tuskes have lived since 1965. The living quarters are not large; there is not enough room for all the food in the kitchen refrigerator, so there is another large refrigerator—and a shelf of canned food—in the bedroom. We sit at the kitchen table. A cockatiel eyes all proceedings from the living room, ball game chatters on the radio in the back-ground.

Derotha is 80, Bill is 70. "I pick 'em young," she says with a grin. Her husband shoots her a look.

"When we rented this place in 1965, it was \$65," remembers Bill. "When the landlady saw there were two of us, she raised the rent to \$70, to cover the water, she said." He laughs wryly. "The rent went up five dollars before we even moved in."

"Now we pay \$400," they both say, talking over each other. "For the same place."

Have they been in this place the entire time? "Of course we have, who do you think was here?" says Derotha. "Where else can we go?"

Why didn't they buy a place in the '60s? "Rents were too cheap," declares Bill. "Why buy a house?"

Why don't they buy one now? "Oooohhh!" says Derotha derisively, indicating that the question does not deserve answer.

"Do you realize," says Bill, "that a house today is \$125,000? Well, I could make a down payment."

"And it wouldn't even be that fancy," says his wife ruefully. "If we'd bought one back then, we'd be doing pretting good, huh?"

Thomas Stagnaro was born in a house on Laurel Street. Now, fit and easygoing—a patrician at 69—he lives across the street from the Tuskeses, three blocks from where he was born. His yard is impeccable and ordered; weeds don't seem to be a part of Thomas Stagnaro's world.

"After school, when I was about 11 years old, another fellow and I used to go up to Miller's Dairy to work," he remembers. "We delivered milk twice a day—once starting at 5am, and again after school, all raw milk, all in bottles. Past King Street, that was it. Bay Street was a dirt road. In the winter, a lot of the time you couldn't get up it. And you never saw another car." He reflects for a while. "The traffic is so bad now . . ."

Something is happening to Santa Cruz. The longer one has lived here, the stronger is the sense that things are changing. Overall, cities and regions alter and bulge and shift quietly, slowly. The differences sneak up on us. But suddenly, one day, they can jump out and shock. "Another antique store?" "But I liked that big tree!" "The freeway never used to seem this crowded." "Your studio is how much?"

The changes may seem elusive and hard to put a finger on, manifesting a concrete example only every now and then. But the things that are happening to Santa Cruz, many of them, are quantifiable. In 1930, the popula-



Condomania: The cost of decent housing is out of sight for many Santa Cruzans.

It is not a pretty prospect. More jobs over the hill with fewer housing slots . . . prices going up, availability going down, and no place to build.



As the county booms, the landscape more and more grows to resemble a parking lot.

tion of Santa Cruz County was 38,000. In 1970, it was 121,000; now it is approaching 220,000. A few decades ago, much of the land inside the Santa Cruz city limits was used for farming. Today, 90 percent of it has been built on. In the 1940s, an average house cost \$2,500. Today, \$135,000 will buy you a modest two-bedroom home.

What's going on here? Why are these things happening? The burgeoning campus on the hill is the most popular place to point an accusing finger, and certainly the university has had a very dramatic impact on the county.

"Things really began to change when the college came," remembers Thomas Stagnaro.

"The debate was pro and con, pro and con. The town was about evenly divided. Some people felt the town was too small for a college. Others said it means jobs. I don't think people realized it would get so big, or that so many people would stay on here."

Bill Tuskes is more blunt. "If the college had built enough housing for all the people they brought in, things'd be different. [Government] should've bound them by some rules, but they didn't. And the real estate people kissed their ass to get the college in here, because they thought they'd make bo-koo money. Real estate is the power behind all this."

Tuskes' intuition is a good one: the presence of UCSC has clearly made many real estate people very comfortable. In the last couple of years, the university has housed only 43 percent of its students, according to Doreen Schack, coordinator of UCSC's off-campus housing program, and a greater number of students will arrive in the fall. She notes that the vacancy rate in the Santa Cruz area is 1.8 percent; the rule of thumb holds that a vacancy rate below 5 percent is considered a "housing crisis." Furthermore, the same two-bedroom house Stagnaro talks about renting for \$25 in 1941 rented for \$345 in 1978 and now can go for anywhere be-

Santa Cruz County

tween \$690 to \$740.

But the university is only part of the picture, the part that's easier to see. Probably more significant, for example, is the information contained in a study done 10 years ago in Santa Clara County. The study reported that the cities there had "zoned in" an immense 325,000-unit housing shortage. Land taken up by industrial enterprise brings more money into a city's coffers than land with people living on it. It seems that city planners over the hill had opted for a let-them-live-elsewhere attitude, creating the work without creating living space for the workers.

The report noted that three counties could be expected to absorb the overflow of people: San Mateo, Alameda and Santa Cruz. It went on to observe that San Mateo has "little room left for urban expansion," and Alameda "is a more and more unwilling recipient" of residents commuting to the South Bay.

True to predictions, the number of jobs continues to outstrip housing over the hill at an alarming rate. As late as a couple of years ago, says H. Gurtuna of the Silicon Valley Research Group, it was still true that "for every three jobs created in the Silicon Valley, only one housing space is created." The Research Group, a UCSC unit with an international membership, investigates the social impact of high-tech industry. Although the dire warnings of the 1977 report were prophetic, the housing crunch over the hill is nothing new. Gurtuna traces the squeeze back to the 1960's, tying it to "the rise of electronics and the replacement of the agricultural economy" in the Santa Clara Valley. The Research Group also warns of a trend in the south county area, where Watsonville could become an extension of a "southeast corridor," and thus people at both ends of Santa Cruz County would be leaving in two directions to work in the San Jose area.

What does it mean? Clearly, it means crowded and expensive housing, as people unable to live near where they work over the hill surge into Santa Cruz looking for housing. It means that housing costs take up a bigger and bigger chunk of people's incomes. Arnie Fischman, executive director of Santa Cruz Community Housing Corporation, cites the federal government recommendation that a person should be paying a maximum of 25 percent of their income in housing costs. But in Santa Cruz, says Fischman, "the majority pay more than 35 percent, and it is not uncommon for people to pay 50 percent, especially seniors. He mentions some seniors "who are paying 100 percent [sometimes more] of their income in rent. Every month, they have to pay all of their income, and then dig into their savings, to make the rent."

Another thing the heavy pressure from the north means is congested traffic and pollution. The Santa Cruz County Planning Department estimates that, out of a workforce of about 113,000 people, 23,000 to 24,000 county residents leave the county to work every day—over a fifth of the working population. By far, most of these—about 17,000—go to Santa Clara County. The proportion of "out-commuters," as they are called in planning-ese, has increased 5 percent since 1980.

It is a world of difference from commuting patterns in the county a few decades ago. "When I worked at the cement plant [in Davenport]," recalls Thomas Stagnaro, "there were five other fellows from town who worked there. The five of us chipped in and bought a Model A Ford and we all went to work together."

"Now one of the fellows," he continues, "he



SCOTT BROOKER

Derotha Tuskes (pictured) and her husband Bill have lived in Santa Cruz since 1965, watching the rent on their Laurel Street duplex rise from \$70 to \$400 per month.

used to like to drink, that's the only way to put it. The highway didn't go where it does now, there were a lot more curves, and at Laguna [Street] there was a bar. A lot of times he'd want to stop there, and it would be half an hour or 45 minutes before we'd start for home again. We went along with it for a while, but pretty soon we put a stop to that. Now I see guys driving up to the cement plant to work all alone in their cars. Nowadays a fellow will just buy his own car if he wants to stop for a beer or do something else after work."

Stagnaro's example describes a culture that has rapidly learned to go its own way. It is the familiar story of a town undergoing a speedy change from "community" to "aggregation of individuals." Jeff Dunn, now in his 30s, was born in Santa Cruz, the descendant of a couple of generations of local Santa Cruzans. "When I was a kid, each individual community here had its own flavor," he recalls. "West Santa Cruz was very different from the east side. Live Oak, Capitola, Soquel—those were all very distinct, vibrant communities with their own local economies."

"If your kids are all growing up and working in town, you have more threads linking you together. If you work spread out all over a large region, there's no sense of localized interest."

The transition from local to regional economies is not peculiar to Santa Cruz, and it tends to bring with it an ever-increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. "Santa Cruz is a place where there's really two civilizations side by side in the same town," says Arnie Fischman. "One is people who work primarily in low-paying service jobs and pay a tremendous portion of their income to live here. They form a whole culture, almost a whole civilization."

"Then there's another group of people with high-paying jobs, living in homes that are very expensive, and that's a very privileged, relaxed

and high-consuming civilization. It's a very schizophrenic kind of community," concludes Fischman, "two poles, with not a whole lot in between."

Dunn has seen the two poles get further apart while he grew up. "Until the '70s," he remembers, "Capitola—down to the Esplanade—was still a semi-sleaze, summertime recreation type of a place, with bowling alleys and things like that. Capitola Joe's is a good example. It was a down-home type place—blues and folk music playing all the time, picnic tables—on Tuesday nights all the spaghetti and garlic bread you could eat, and red wine, for 99 cents."

"It was where Margaritaville is now," he continues, adding with a note of resentment, "a very upper-middle-class, bourgeois dining establishment."

It is not a pretty prospect. More and more jobs over the hill with fewer and fewer housing slots. The university continuing to expand. Housing prices going up, housing availability going down, and no place to build. Crowded traffic, crowded schools, and favorite haunts becoming forbidding enclaves.

"The bleak vision of the future," says Fischman, "is that the gap between those two civilizations becomes more pronounced. The lower income group hangs on with a very tenuous grasp. More and more of them have to leave. They're trying to keep from dropping off, they're hanging onto the ledge, their fingernails are bleeding."

Fischman has a partial solution. The Community Housing Corporation, of which he is director, has ambitious plans that include building low-income housing by Neary's Lagoon, housing that, he says, will stay low-income because it will be cooperatively owned. "The idea," he explains, "is that if you take rental property out of the cycle of speculative buying and selling—where you buy housing and sell it a little while later for a

profit—and bring it under the control of cooperative or other nonprofit organizations, there's no reason for housing costs there to increase in the future, except when the garbage rates go up or something." The Neary's Lagoon project is ambitious—140 units—but the corporation will help any group of tenants convert their housing to cooperative ownership.

Dunn thinks that a shift in the local economy is in order. "In the world economy," he contends "the countries that depend on tourism are the shit-eaters. I'm not so sure it's any different in Santa Cruz. We need less dependency on tourist dollars—I'm not afraid of light industry. If there's not *some* growth, people who live here now won't be able to make it. The esthetics will be a little rougher."

The rougher esthetics of light industry won't help everyone, of course, so what else is to be done? "At our age, nothing," declares Bill Tuskes. "But people your age, you've got to keep fighting those balloting things, like for rent control."

"It's terrible that we don't have rent control," agrees Derotha.

Glen Schaller of the Santa Cruz Action Network (SCAN)—a progressive political organizing group—chuckles. "I get asked so often, by people who've been here four years or so, why there's no rent control in Santa Cruz." In fact, Santa Cruz city's three rent control campaigns are infamous, or heartbreaking—or perhaps both, depending on your point of view. The first, in 1978, lost by 74 votes. The second, in 1979, lost by a little over 1,000 votes, and the third, in 1982, lost by somewhat more than that, all defeated, say advocates, by a combination of bad timing and enormous campaign expenditures by opponents.

Although many people have given up on rent control, there are plenty, says Schaller, who have not. SCAN, which takes on yearly projects, has just instituted a tenants' rights project. "In Santa Cruz, people earn interest on their security deposits. With the tenants' rights project, we'd like to make that happen in the other cities in the county as well," he says. "And we'd like to see just-cause eviction—so that people can only be evicted for certain specific causes." He is very open about his hope that this kind of tenant organizing could lead to stronger measures, perhaps rent control. "But if we're going to have another rent control campaign, it will have to be a responsible decision made by a lot of groups in the community."

Schaller is optimistic for the future as well. "If everybody here felt like they could help design the kind of city they want to have—and be listened to—we'd come up with a good plan." He ticks off a list: tenants, seniors, homeowners and so on. "I don't think people's visions for Santa Cruz are all that different. There's just got to be a way for them to work together."

Derotha Tuskes does not rhapsodize so readily. "Before we moved here, I used to dress up—high heels and everything—and go out on the town. What's there to dress up for here?" she demands.

"This is a one-horse town," Tuskes concludes, adding with mock incredulity, "and you kids *like* it!"

Thomas Stagnaro's feeling for Santa Cruz has the depth of someone who has seen nearly 70 years of changes in the area. "There isn't much wrong with Santa Cruz," he states, simply. "I go by the ocean once a day. Not many days go by when I don't see the ocean." He pauses. "I would never live anyplace else."