

Lee Quarnstrom

The Charm Of Live Oak

I FEEL kind of sorry for my friend Jim. I figure he must have a lot of aches and pains, because he's always heading out to Live Oak to some massage parlor or other. I guess he must suffer from lower back pains or a crick in the neck or something, considering all the rub-downs he must be getting at those massage places.

But this column isn't about Jim and his physical problems. It's about Live Oak.

Now, some people think of Live Oak as that place in the county where massage parlors proliferate. Others think of Live Oak as a bastion of conservatism, both political and religious, the home of elderly Grange activists fed up with taxes and the county planning department, the site of fundamentalist church assemblies fretting about sin and communism. Still others think of Live Oak as a squalid, seedy, run down urban Appalachia.

I got to know the area in 1968, when I worked as a mailman for nine months or so, and discovered dozens of lanes, roads and dirt paths that people in Live Oak live on. I found secret streets leading off of unknown avenues, places where English is spoken with a distinct Oklahoma accent, areas where outsiders are as welcome as James Watt at a Sierra Club picnic. I found bizarre trailer parks (unconvincingly called mobile home parks; just as unconvincingly, trailers are called "coaches") where people keep life-size little girl dolls in the front window—and *change the dolls' clothes daily*. There are few things as startling as driving a U.S. Post Office truck around a corner and seeing an almost, but not quite lifelike little girl doll with an arm frozen in mid-wave, staring blankly from a trailer window.

One thing you learn about Live Oak, if you pay attention to local politics, is that Live Okies are fiercely independent when it comes to government interference in

their lives. They think of county planners, for instance, the way hillbilly moonshiners think of "revenooers." The attitude of the typical Live Oak resident is "anybody can do anything he wants on his own property."

Now, if you owned a piece of land in Live Oak and wanted to build a 300-foot-tall structure shaped like a giant duck, you'd find that your neighbors would be behind you 100 percent.

"Yep, a man's got a right to build a 300-foot-tall duck on his property if he wants, that's what I say," would be the typical response from your next door neighbor.

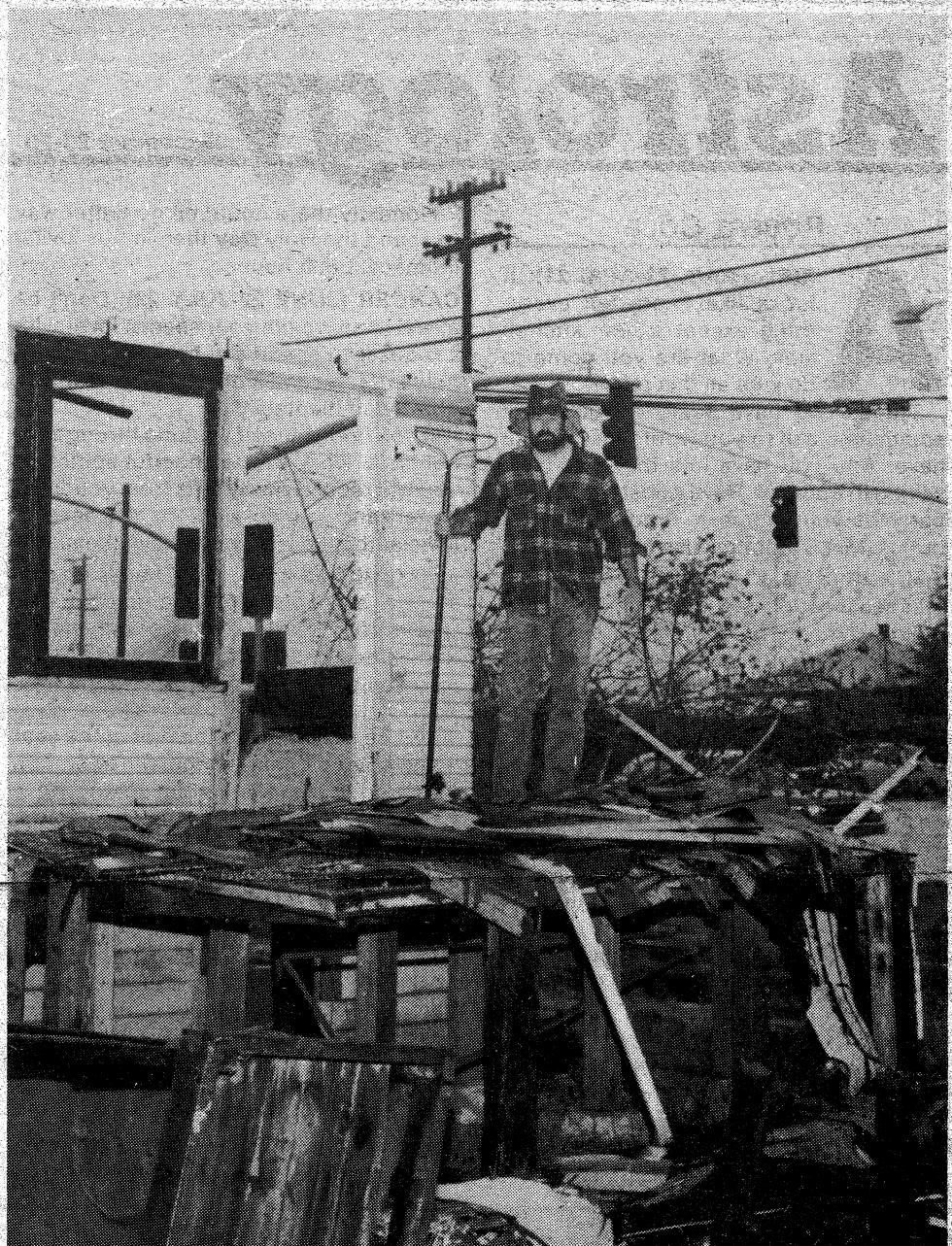
And damn, a big duck like that might spruce up the neighborhood."

People do things in Live Oak that they don't do in the more conventionally settled neighborhoods in Santa Cruz. For instance, they tend to raise rabbits and chickens with greater abandon than do people in Pasatiempo. There are even horses and goats in Live Oak, animals you rarely find, say, at Shelter Lagoon.

Live Oak residents frequently like to work at home. That's why you find so many businesses operating out of living rooms or "guest houses" or garages in Live Oak. And people there don't seem to complain about the machine shop next door or the guy over the back fence who stores broken Volkswagen engines in his yard. They don't seem to mind the little factories and storage yards and nurseries down the block.

They don't seem to mind the fact that cheesy apartment complexes and condo projects are filling in the space between their homes and the trailer parks. They don't even look twice when a development on Brommer Street calls itself the Seaside Apartments, although the sea is actually many blocks away.

And Live Oak people actually don't give a second thought to the fact that their main thoroughfares—Brommer, Seventh Avenue, 17th Avenue and Capitola Road—



MODEL: SID HULL PHOTO: GREG PIO

are not only lined with eyesores but are extremely hazardous for pedestrians who have to walk along their edges. Better to have eyesores and some danger than to allow the hated planning department bureaucrats into the area.

Actually, this is the way things should be.

There should be a place in every municipality, in every county, where people can do damn near anything they want to do, a place where Libertarians can feel right at home, a place where you can, for God's sake, erect a 300-foot-tall duck in your back yard if you get the urge.

If people want curbs and gutters and sidewalks and nicely landscaped median strips and underground telephone and electric lines, let 'em live in University Terrace or someplace more "civilized" than

Live Oak. If they want to live without having to hear roosters crow in the morning or without having to look at mini-storage compounds over the fence, let them move to Westlake or the East Side. If they don't care for the sight of sunlight reflecting off the Airstream trailers next door, let them find housing in Carbonero Estates.

Of course, the one thing that Live Okies don't really tolerate well is the massage parlor business. I guess the Libertarian attitude that a 300-foot-tall mallard next door is fine and dandy falls by the wayside when massage parlors and dirty book stores enter the picture.

But gee, if there weren't massage parlors in Live Oak, where would my pal Jim go when he gets that ache in his muscle? •