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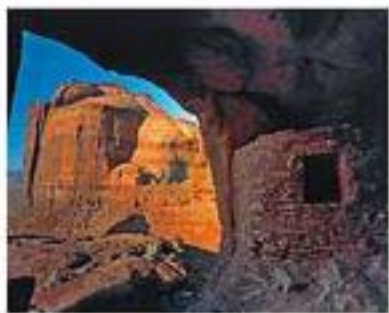
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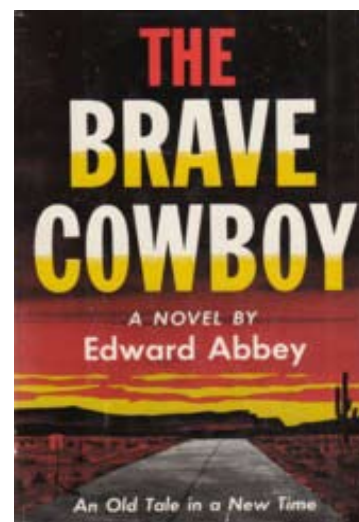
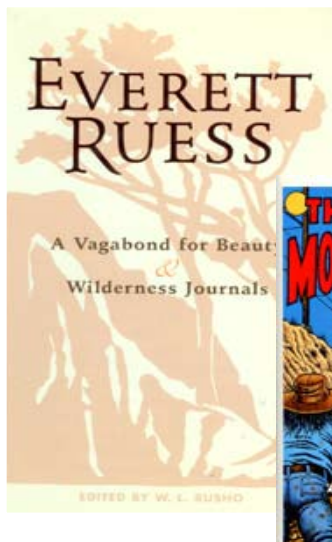
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POINT BLANK
THE HOUSE on ALMOND AVENUE
(You can never go home again)

Greg Gnesios

The little house on Almond Avenue was a quiet and welcome sanctuary when I most needed one. I rented it when I first moved to Redding, California in 1988 coming off the heels of an acrimonious divorce and a failed love affair. Clinging to a hillside on the west end of town, the 700' square foot bungalow had probably seen better days in a neighborhood now shabby around the edges. But it boasted a full basement where I could set up a darkroom, a roomy rear deck with a great view of Mount Lassen to the east, and a chunk of open space across the street marking the flyway of Benton Air Field.

It had been built in 1938 by a man who, like hundreds of other men at the time, was working to complete the nearby Shasta Dam. Its simple clapboard construction housed two small bedrooms, a narrow kitchen with a breakfast nook, a living room with a fireplace, and a bathroom so tiny that one could barely avoid stepping into the toilet bowl when exiting the shower. The detached one-car garage had long ago been converted into a small studio apartment which I eventually sublet to a single mom. For a now-single park ranger it was a perfect setup.

The long backyard descended in a series of rough terraces in an unkempt cover of scraggly lawn, dotted with fig and lilac trees. I spent many an hour lugging a lawnmower up and down its slopes, trying to maintain some semblance of landscape decorum. Most of my neighbors seemed to share a fondness for benign neglect of their yards, content to live with the impressive vistas of the Cascades and the rather ramshackle isolation of their neighborhood.

The house was also conveniently located only six miles from Whiskeytown Lake where I worked as the Chief of Interpretive Services for the National Park

Eventually we bought the house and spent three more years enjoying its simple pleasures and filling it with our own. Time and circumstance finally stepped in and moved us to a larger home in Redding and, not long after that, an even larger place in Northern New Mexico. But over the years we kept in touch with the old house, driving by it whenever we were in Redding and noting with approval the changes made by its current tenants. Until the last visit...



We pulled up to the Almond Avenue residence last month to find it boarded up and empty. The garden was dry and neglected. A notice on the window warned us to stay away. When I looked through it into the living room, I could see that the once wood-paneled walls were now painted purple. The master bedroom had been painted a garish orange with crude butterflies. In the back of the house, the collapsing rear deck was cordoned off with yellow tape. Graffiti was sprayed on its railings. We wandered around the place in a state of shock.

In a matter of minutes a neighbor poked his head over the fence. We introduced ourselves and asked what the hell had happened to our former home, and he obligingly filled us in. Over the years there had been a constant turnover of residents, some good, some bad. Seems like the last one was a 17-year old cocaine addict who had

been illegally leasing the house from his mom. A few weeks earlier there had been a wild party with over forty people running around and trashing the place. Now the house was in foreclosure. "You could probably pick it up for 25 grand if you wanted to", he said. But why would we ever want to?



Service. It was there that I met my future spouse Amy. By the spring of 1989 we had meshed our lifestyles together in the Almond Avenue house buying antique furniture and bookshelves for the interior and struggling to grow a garden on the exterior. We had one bedroom fixed up for my daughter Alison's monthly visits. On the Fourth of July we could sit on the wooden deck and watch the Redding fireworks show in the valley below. One hot summer night I photographed a spectacular lightning storm from that deck. And in the fall of 1991, we crammed our friends and relatives inside and outside the house for our wedding reception.



We drove back into town that afternoon and never looked back. But I always figured that if you put enough love and energy into a place, the good vibes would somehow live on within its walls and rooms. That the "better angels of our nature" would somehow imbue successive residents with the will and obligation to carry on the good work of sustaining an aura of quaintness and caring. But this is just the hopeless conceit of a man who values a house as a home. The little house on Almond Avenue was the right place for the right time, and now that time has passed. Until, perhaps, someone comes along who will feel its history, see its potential, and allow it to nurture and protect them as it did for me so many years ago.

GREG GNESIOS lives in Grand Junction, Colorado. His blog is: <http://redmesacafe.blogspot.com>