

Chapter 16

RELATIVE CALM

As Jan Heidt began her second term as Mayor we began to consider the redevelopment of downtown Newhall. To a lot of people redevelopment was a dirty word. The process had been abused by many cities, and inevitably tenants who enjoyed paying low rent in rundown neighborhoods would resist any efforts at upgrading a community.¹

Redevelopment was financed by tax increments. That is, if an area were to redevelop, all the new property taxes from that area would be used to pay for the improvements. This meant that the county, school districts and special districts would give up some of their possibly increases revenues so the tax increments could finance redevelopment. Thus they lost no revenue, but did not benefit from any increases.

When some cities abused redevelopment, the other levels of government spoke out, and got laws passed in Sacramento to level the playing field. Thus we had to negotiate with the other governments about what we could include in our redevelopment.

Meanwhile we were in negotiations with the cable television companies to bring live coverage of council meetings to the public. There was concern about the gadflies playing to a wider audience. David Cochran of the Democratic Club wanted the greater community involvement he thought the coverage would bring.²

We had to keep reminding the public how the bidding system worked, and that we were required to buy from the low bidder, even if he might be far away. We bought three trucks from Fuller Ford in Chula Vista for \$50,255, who beat Autoline Brokers in Newhall's bid of \$53,807. Fuller Ford must have been getting some special prices from the manufacturer based on their continuing success at selling vehicles to governments all over the state. We were asking residents to shop locally, and wanted to set an example, but could not.³

Placerita Canyon Road became an issue. Residents were upset about the potholes, but the city could not fix them without accepting liability for the privately owned road. No one thought much about the road until a motorcyclist suffered an accident and sued the city. The city won because it did not own the road, which was narrow, winding and hard to maintain. This meant the homeowners had the liability, and they wanted to close the road. If the city were to take over, the road would have to be widened and straightened to meet public standards, destroying the neighborhood.⁴

Leon Worden, who was my son-in-law at the time, was writing a series of "Klajic Facts" letters to *The Signal*. Malia Campbell was unhappy with his activity, and wrote a letter protesting his "despicable character." It was true that Leon lived in Northridge and worked in Santa Barbara at the time, but his heart was in Santa Clarita. The letters made me feel uncomfortable because I felt some people would see me as orchestrating them.

I finally asked Leon to stop the letters, which were quite factual, in spite of my reluctance to interfere with his freedom. He said he would stop six months before she ran for reelection.⁵

When the issue of affordable housing was raised I supported the idea that low-income people should be able to buy a house at a reasonable price. One of the reasons housing was expensive was the fact that the price included over \$35,000 in infrastructure costs. "There should be no impediment to the American dream of home ownership," I said. I was then quoted as saying, "I am not interested in people who want affordable housing to rent." I did believe that owning a home gave people a real stake in the community and I wanted to foster ownership.

Based on these statements, quoted by Doug Alger in *The Signal*, on February 16, columnist Dwight Jurgens took me to task. "Crank it back a notch, councilman, the world is made up of many species – contributing renters and arrogant politicians among them." I was upset. I did not believe Alger had quoted me accurately and asked Donna Grindey for a verbatim transcript of my remarks. I sent the transcript to the papers and asked for a correction. It was not forthcoming. I could have stated the facts, that in some apartment houses with as many as 200 units there were less than half a dozen registered voters. There was nothing like getting a property tax bill to stir interest in participating in city life. However, Dwight Jurgens controlled the ink supply, and I was not going to fight with him.⁶

We debated cable access. I wanted the council meetings to be televised but the churches in particular did not support a public channel because of lewd shows on such channels elsewhere. Dan Hon wrote a stirring column in support of free speech and the First Amendment.⁷

Footlight Follies was produced at Hart High School auditorium in March, 1993. Daughter Denise sang the showstopper from "Little Shop of Horrors." Her daughter, Kylen, who did not know that her mother was in the show, was sitting in the third row. When Denise started to sing, Kylen, aged 2, yelled, "That's my mommy!" and started climbing over the seat in front of her to get to the stage. I had never heard Denise sing a solo, and was very proud.

In April I raised the question of someone from the council attending the IULA conference in Toronto. No North American city had ever joined the International Union of Local Authorities and I felt that membership might pay off very handsomely for our economy. Jan Heidt gave me a courtesy vote, but the rest of the council formed the majority to turn it down. I understood that council members did not want to be accused of junketing, but felt that all we had to do in that regard was to put a cap on city funds being spent on conference attendance.

Staff brought the issue of changing street names to us. The problem discussed was the Valencia Boulevard-Soledad Canyon route, which was the biggest but not the only example. Jill Klajic and I were quite willing to look into bringing some uniformity to street names, but George Pederson said, "I just want to kill this right now." Jo Ann Darcy and Jan Heidt joined him. Tim Whyte ran

a column in *The Signal* on April 30 speculating about why we voted the way we did. “Councilman Carl Boyer was open to the idea, too, but I don’t have a witty guess or a juicy piece of background information to make his position more interesting.” Tim did not know that I had attended the University of Edinburgh for a year. The Old Quad of the university was on South Bridge, which was about two blocks long, but the street went on for miles. Every few blocks it changed names. I had a hard time finding the Old Quad the first time because all I had was a city map with no index. Now we rely on the *Thomas Guide*.

On May 27 the story came out that Jill Klajic was raising money for her reelection bid the following April. Two days later the *Daily News* ran a headline, “Klajic not fined for errors in financial statements.” I knew nothing about the complaint to the Fair Political Practices Commission by Leon Worden. The commission found the infractions to be “minor in nature and inadvertent.” I felt they were very minor. Avoiding trouble with the FPPC is a major problem because of all the details involved. They make it very difficult for a grass roots politician to do anything without spending a lot of campaign time and energy dealing with extra regulations and paperwork. The big money people can hire attorneys to deal with the FPPC requirements, but the grass roots politicians have to do it themselves.

I caught flak the same day for insisting that the council should get a raise even though the staff would get none. That was easy for the columnists to distort. Councilmembers were getting about \$729 a month, and at least some of us were making the job a full time effort. The law prohibited us from getting more than a five per cent raise in any year. Many years public employees got a raise better than five per cent, and I believed that if we gave up our five per cent the increment in later years would always be figured on the lower salary. However, I was informed later that we could pass a raise later which was equal to five per cent per year.⁸

Many did not realize the effort we put into the job, and did not know that councilmembers were getting less than a third the pay of the next lowest paid city employee. There were a great many fine people who would not run for the council because they could not afford to serve. When government prohibits some from serving by offering extremely low pay that leaves public office open only to people who are independently wealthy.

We were trying to help some folks from Ventura County set up a farmers market in the city, and when we could not find a good location we moved to offer the city hall parking lot. Newhall Land informed us that would be a violation of the CC&Rs, that city hall had been built on Newhall Land property and thus was subject to the Codes, Covenants and Restrictions. I did not appreciate this at all, but with hindsight can say that Newhall Land did the right thing in working to preserve the integrity of the Valencia CC&Rs.⁹

We adopted a \$49.7 million budget, about \$3 million less than what we had planned. The recession was hurting, but even more bothersome was the fact that the state required our budget to be done on time while the Legislature would not

agree to a state budget on time. Since the state budget had tremendous impacts on city budgets we were just guessing at what we should do.¹⁰

The Signal raked the city for filing a lawsuit against the Newhall County Water District without announcing it in open session. Under the Brown Act a city has the right to deal with lawsuits (or pending lawsuits), land acquisition and personnel matters in closed session. I had once taught in the Edgewood Independent School District in Texas, where I exposed a common practice in land acquisition, local style. The superintendent would mention it to his secretary, who would mention it to her brother, who would buy the land and then sell it to the school district at a nice profit. Sometimes the transactions came so close together that the last one was recorded in Bexar County before the first one. The less said in public about land acquisition the better. Personnel matters are closed to protect the employees, who can waive their rights and open any action to the public. Taking suits public could result in inflammatory statements which would result in the suit going to court at great expense, rather than being settled sensibly.¹¹

Ed Schullery, in one of many letters published in *The Signal*, came out against new roads. "A new road is an open-sesame for developers to march in, spread some money around and start the over-building cycle all over again." Jill Klajic had opposed Metrolink, the new commuter rail system, for the same reasons. The Southern California Regional Rail Authority was developing Metrolink, but expected the cities served to help with building stations. It did take a noticeable amount of traffic off the freeways, but Jill argued that if we gave people a way to get to work in Los Angeles, more people would move to Santa Clarita. I felt the solution was to work through the general plan without amendments, and insist on quality development with new infrastructure.¹²

A neighborhood in Canyon Country, Fair Oaks, was swamped by problems resulting from an excessively high water table caused by winter rains. Sewers were backing up and streets needed repairs. A disaster area was declared. The Federal Emergency Management Agency helped the city to install pumps that would transfer the water into the river nearby. However, it was a very trying time for a lot of the residents, who lived with the problem twenty-four hours a day while the wheels of government turned slowly.¹³

On August 22 John Green wrote a column about how John Drew and Jill Klajic had deceived *The Signal* by writing letters to the editor and signing other people's names to them, or having those people sign their own names. "Klajic acknowledged that her reelection committee is involved in a letter-writing campaign, and that she's 'very, very sorry.' Drew, on the other hand, wasn't quite as forthcoming."¹⁴

Some Valencia residents came to the council asking for a traffic light on McBean Parkway. Our traffic people told them that putting in a signal would take from forty to fifty-eight weeks because of government red tape. Each signal is custom designed and installed. It takes ten to sixteen weeks to have a consultant design a signal after a process of gathering bids and making sure the competing

bids meet the criteria for a specific signal. Traffic light poles are custom built depending on the street configuration, the number of lanes and the number of lights to be hung; this takes three to five months. The installation process is the quickest, at two to three weeks. I suggested we put in some “deer crossing” signs immediately to get the public’s attention to a problem of speeding in an area where children were trying to cross the street to get to school. Bahman Janka, our traffic engineer, said we could not do that because there was no wildlife hazard. I refrained from pointing out the obvious.¹⁵

Meanwhile Chris and I were being reminded there were things more important than city government. We had attended a meeting at church with Cris Embleton, the founder of Healing the Children, and had volunteered to be foster parents. One day we got a call. Two children were coming from Colombia for open-heart surgery. Would we take one? On Columbus Day we met the Avianca flight coming into LAX, and were introduced to Karol Melo Valencia, 2, and Ruben Hinestrosa, 5, both of whom arrived with Dr. Luis Rivas, their cardiologist. Ruben went home with Joe and Janet Garcia, and we took Karol.

Our new two-year-old had no energy; she was a year overdue for her operation and would not have lived many weeks longer. The surgery was a success, but her recovery was not easy. Many nights we were awakened when Karol’s monitor went off. About three weeks after her operation, however, I enjoyed the greatest thrill of my life. As I came home from teaching (for the time being I was not going directly from school to city hall) I heard Chris say, “Here comes Poppy!” Karol came running across the house and flew into my arms! I knew she was well. On November 12 she flew home to Cali with Dr. Rivas. Our hearts were broken, but we did get letters, and later e-mails and Facebook helped. Photographs helped us have confidence that Karol had a bright future ahead.¹⁶

Eleven years later I was able to make a quick stop in Cali and visit Karol’s family. Her father, a shoemaker was kept in near poverty by Chinese competition, but the family was intact and the five children had managed to stay in school. Karol was proud of her certificates of honor.

Ruben’s case was much harder. He survived very complex surgeries and was given a lot of physical therapy. While Healing the Children has nothing to do with adoptions, Ruben, who was out of an orphanage, was eventually adopted by a couple in Oregon. I saw him a few years later, and he was making great progress.

I was frustrated with the inability of the people of California to shape a government fit for the twenty-first century. George Carvalho, who was very active in the League of California Cities, asked me for input on the question of Local Government Budget Restructuring Principles. I knew that work on restructuring budgets would be worthwhile, but vented my feelings in a letter to our City Manager, dated September 12, 1993.

First, we need to consider fundamental change in state government rather than only at the local level. While I personally tend to believe that a State Constitutional Convention and serious consideration of the

idea of splitting the state are necessary, I would heartily endorse unfettered informal brainstorming at this point if every aspect of government was on the table.

We are entering the twenty-first century with a nineteenth-century constitution. The system does not work. Initiatives proposed to fix the system are so heavily encumbered with restrictions against change, once adopted, that we will be less able to solve problems in the future. Can we even consider facing an estimated population of 64,000,000 in 2020 with the present structure? If not, why not get busy fixing it now?

Second, while we may be spending too much money on elections I am not sure what that point means. I believe we should elect fewer officials but require runoffs so those elected will at least have won a majority from those voting. Incumbents are easily reelected in many jurisdictions where only a plurality is required against many challengers, many of whom feel they must make outrageous charges against government to be heard at all.

The number of special districts should be cut dramatically. This form of government, generally hidden from the people, creates significant problems.

The size of governments is a major problem. Perhaps if cities of a specified size could become independent from counties, as they are in Virginia, this would help (if we can solve the annexation process problems). Otherwise we should look at putting limits on the population of any county (and perhaps cities as well [here I meant requiring counties or cities to divide when they hit a limit]). In addition, Assembly and Senate districts are so large they are beyond the control of the voters. The perception of government will never change until government is small enough to allow officials to sit down and resolve problems within an intelligent process of public participation. Perhaps a 120-member unicameral Senate should be considered if California is to be maintained as one state.

I began working on the issue at the local council level, and placed the question of major work on the state constitution on our council agenda. The item had been referred to intern Jennifer Jones to research. She did an excellent job, pointing out that our California constitution had been adopted in 1879, had followed the outline of the Iowa constitution because someone at that convention happened to have a copy of the Iowa document with him, and had been amended about 500 times since. Our city council had adopted unanimously a resolution in support of major work on the question.

The League's Revenue and Taxation Committee was a body of about thirty-five members which met four times a year. George Carvalho had asked me to apply for a presidential appointment to the committee so that Santa Clarita could be represented. At one meeting I made a remark about how the constitution did not address the problems between state and local governments properly. To that

one member said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I made no further remarks that day, but asked Senator Davis for a box full of copies of the document, which contained in any given edition from 117 to 134 pages, but by 1999 had grown to 153 pages.

At the next committee meeting I passed out a copy of the Constitution to each member, along with a list of some of the weird things in it. For several meetings we hassled over details, but finally I got the committee to pass, not without some opposition, a simple resolution calling for a shorter, simpler constitution. I never dreamt that on the floor the entire League would pass it unanimously.

I spent October 18, 1993, in a meeting of the Local Government Commission's Government Restructuring Task Force in San Francisco. I did not really have my mind on the proceedings. That was the day Karol was having open-heart surgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center. Chris was awaiting the outcome of the surgery alone.

However, I had pushed the LGC on the issue, and did not feel I could fail to show up, even if I was on the phone with my wife a large number of times. Karin Strasser Kauffman, a former supervisor of Monterey County, convened the Task Force. The minutes record that we agreed that we had to look at basic structure, a major revamp of the system. Everything should be examined, even if it meant those of us who were elected officials would see our positions disappear. Our three major concerns were the public's lack of understanding of, and faith in, government, the growth of and growing duplication in government with resulting finance problems, and concerns about equity and social issues.

We had to find complete solutions, rather than trying to fix things incrementally. We had to convince the public that government could handle money well. We had to educate the public. A recurring theme was that California should not dismantle its civilization because of the economy. Local government is the foundation of the system.

As a follow up I wrote Sharon Sprows, the Policy Director for the LGC, with some discussion items for future meetings. They included restructuring California as a federal-type government, with the counties and cities to have specific powers, a slate system for the election of governor and lieutenant governor, and a new constitution so there would be no "dead letter" provisions. Further I suggested that the constitution should contain no static numbers, but that percentages and scales would be acceptable. I pushed for the elimination of detail, renumbering the articles, and allowing people the right to change boundaries. I suggested unicameralism, apportionment by formula, fair pay for public officials, and four-year terms for all legislators. I wanted decent funding for staff and auditors, feeling strongly that a poorly staffed legislature reacts in ignorance. I suggested limiting recall, and the appointing of some of the governor's cabinet. I wanted annexations to be based on equity, rather than dominated by the county, or LAFCO.

Meanwhile I had worked with the California Contract Cities Association, where as an officer I had more credibility, as well as the Local Government Com-

mission. Thus when the League passed the resolution I could say rightly that all the statewide organizations of cities had backed it unanimously.

At the League of California Cities' annual meeting my call for a shorter and simpler state constitution passed unanimously. Apparently those who had opposed change in committee recognized the enthusiasm behind the yes vote, and decided to keep quiet.

Indeed, a week before the final League action Governor Wilson signed into law a bill by State Senator Lucy Killea (I-San Diego), establishing a twenty-three-member commission to analyze the state's fundamental law and make recommendations to the Legislature.

Gail Foy (later Ortiz) pitched a story on my efforts to the press enthusiastically. The *Los Angeles Times* ran the details on October 23. *The Signal* and the *Daily News* never mentioned it.

I attended three meetings of the Constitutional Revision Commission. At the first one I spoke very briefly during the public comment period asking the Commission to think "outside the box" and come up with something worthy of California in the twenty-first century. Don Benninghoven, the Executive Director of the League and a Commission member, told me several times over a period of months that several members kept referring to what I had said.

Two years later it was obvious that they had done exactly that.

Their recommendation to the Legislature contained a provision that would have allowed local people a process to establish their own areas and organize local government essentially from scratch. For example, people from the Santa Clarita Valley could have assembled with people from Ventura County to put on the ballot a measure to create a new county and city structure.

Unfortunately the outcry against the revisions was immense. When the California Contract Cities Association found out about them a majority of the members shouted down any effort for approval. The local politicians would not hear of anyone taking away their turf, and possibly their jobs in the smallest cities. There was no vision, no willingness to risk building a better government. The Legislature never acted on the Commission's findings.

On the local front, an area of progress was downtown Newhall. The city hired Jeff Oberdorfer to facilitate planning for revitalization. We were making progress, but some of the landlords were not involved, and some of the tenants did not care. We could not expect everyone to be enthusiastic about the change that was coming.¹⁷

In November election season came upon us. One thing *The Signal* always did right was to tell people how they could file to run for office. With our own city the process was simpler. A candidate had only to talk with the City Clerk between 113 and 88 days before the April election, and then follow simple directions.¹⁸

When I went to the National League of Cities conference in December of 1993, it was as a member of the International Municipal Consortium. I was hoping to lead Santa Clarita into a position of leadership internationally. Of over

450 cities in California, 199 had sister cities in foreign countries. Twenty-one had four or more sister cities. All it took was a few people who were willing to volunteer their efforts to maintain a relationship, and to travel at their own expense. I could imagine the cultural and business benefits, and was interested in finding a city in a country like India or the Philippines, which were underrepresented in their relationships with the United States. I knew we had a number of people from those countries to form the backbone of our efforts. I also hoped that we would join the International Union of Local Authorities, the worldwide organization of local governments. I was very happy to be part of a small delegation traveling to Tena, Ecuador, in November 2001, to participate in the signing of our first sister city agreement.¹⁹

On December 14 we passed an ordinance limiting smoking. A lady named Donna Pugh came to see him to ask for smoke free work places, and explained that she had health problems because of second hand smoke. I felt she deserved a hearing, and that led to the ordinance. Dwight Jurgens was angry, and chalked it up to politics. The only thing political about it was that Donna Pugh was a front person for John Drew. She got in my door. John Drew was the one person on earth who was not welcome in my office.²⁰

There was a stillness in the air. I guess most of us were simply waiting for the January 14 deadline to pass, so we could see who would be running for the City Council in the April election.

¹*Daily News*, Jan. 30, 1993.

²*Daily News*, Jan. 24, 1993.

³*Daily News*, Jan. 28, 1993.

⁴*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 31, 1993.

⁵*The Signal*, Feb. 14, 1993.

⁶*The Signal*, Feb. 16-18, 20, 23 and 26, 1993.

⁷*The Signal*, March 18, 1993.

⁸*Daily News*, May 29, 1963, and June 2, 1963, and *The Signal*, May 29, 1963, and June 11, 15 and 23, 1993.

⁹*The Signal*, June 9 and 12, 1993.

¹⁰*Daily News*, June 24, 1993.

¹¹*The Signal*, June 27, 1993.

¹²*The Signal*, July 11, 1993.

¹³*The Signal*, July 15, 1993.

¹⁴*The Signal*, Aug. 22, 1993.

¹⁵*Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 4, 1993.

¹⁶*The Signal*, Nov. 20, 1993.

¹⁷*The Signal*, Oct. 28, 1993.

¹⁸*The Signal*, Nov. 21, 1993.

¹⁹Sister Cities International, *1993 Directory Sister Cities, Counties and States*, 1993, and *Sister City News*, Fall 1993.

²⁰*The Signal*, Dec. 15, 1993, and *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 15, 1993.