

LONGTIME CLUB OWNER NOTES CHANGES

PETER DELEVETT

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Murray Martin is listing southward on a bar stool, stubbing a finger at faces in a black and white photo.

"He's dead. He's dead. *He's* dead." A beat. "I'm half dead."

Murray has seen a lot of faces come and go in the decades since he opened Murray's Club on South Bascom Avenue. The bar turned 50 last week. Murray turns 87 next month.

His place isn't much to look at -- just the requisite pool tables, jukebox and neon signs -- but it's something of an institution in a town with too few of them left. Sam's Log Cabin shut down last summer after 77 years. And Murray has outlived his pal Henry Puckett, who founded Henry's Hi-Life in 1960.

When Murray opened Murray's Club, he charged 25 cents for a bottle of beer; highballs were 35 cents, or three for a dollar. Bascom Avenue was still called the San Jose-Los Gatos Highway, and Highway 17 was a glint in some traffic engineer's eye.

I ask Murray and his 74-year-old kid brother, Mac, what else was around when the bar opened.

"Prunes," they chorus.

Heart's delight

Murray Martin worked in a cannery after quitting high school. The job paid a princely 40 cents an hour.

He and his buddy Charlie Rose had ringside seats in 1933 when a mob lynched Harold Thurmond and Jack Holmes in St. James Park. Murray brought home a piece of the tree scored with rope marks, but his mother made him throw it out. Rose later became mayor of Campbell.

During World War II, Murray was an MP at Fort Mason, sometimes lugging reluctant soldiers onto troop ships. He and Mac inherited bulldog builds from their dad, a blacksmith.

They've heaved a few troublemakers out of the bar over the years. But by and large, it's a friendly place.

Murray thinks he's been able to stay in business so long because he bought the land along with the club. "Rent increases killed everybody else," he says.

But when he shuffles off to a back room, some of the regulars tell me the real reason Murray's has endured.

"They've helped people out, loaned money, given them jobs," says a whiskey-sipping gentleman named Chuck, who's been coming here more than 30 years.

There are already half a dozen cars in front of the bunker-like building when I show up at 2 p.m. on a Monday. By the time I leave at 4 p.m., there are more than a dozen.

Twilight

Murray only comes by every couple of weeks now. He can't find a comfortable place to sit anymore. A hip replacement a few years ago didn't take, and he has to use a walker.

As he holds court in a Naugahyde booth mended with strapping tape, regulars stop by and say hello.

One of them is Bill, an 84-year-old in a Disabled American Veterans cap. Bill used to tend bar at the club; he came back for the 50th anniversary party last weekend, went home and broke a rib.

Murray cackles as he tells the story. He points out Bill in another black and white photo, dishing drinks to people in jackets and ties.

Back then Murray's customers drank gin martinis and bourbon. Now, folks ask for fruit-flavored vodkas.

"Bourbon is way down," Murray says. "Jesus Christ, that's changed. Changed!"

A lot's changed, in the valley and at Murray's. I wonder what will happen to the place after the brothers are gone. Murray's been married twice -- or as he puts it, "I did a couple hitches" -- but never had kids. Mac has four kids, and grandkids too, but none of them work at the bar. "His wife would shoot him," Murray says.

So with nobody to inherit the business, Murray is playing out the string. He says he was offered a million dollars a couple years ago to sell the property to a developer, but he turned it down. "It's only money, for Christ's sake," he says.

Then he cackles. "I've got enough to get buried on."

JUDGMENT DAY WILL COME FOR ANTI-GAY GROUP

PETER DELEVETT

11/20/2002

Attention, Fred Phelps: You may be going to hell.

Phelps is the Kansas preacher whose relatives spent last weekend buzz-bombing Bay Area schools and churches with anti-gay protests. As they've done across the country, the Phelps gang carried signs with messages like "God hates fags" and "Fags burn in hell."

Phelps seems to think he has a direct phone link to God. Who's to say he won't be surprised come Judgment Day?

I hate to give Phelps any more of the publicity he so obviously craves. Yet I'm deeply offended.

I was raised a Christian, and I've seen too much bigotry committed in the faith's name. I grew up in Pensacola, Fla., a Bible Belt town where fundamentalists like Phelps blew up abortion clinics and murdered doctors.

Phelps' MO is the picket line -- which, ironically, he calls "love crusades." Gay film festivals, Al Gore, the Canadian Parliament -- you name it, Phelps and his entourage will show up to picket.

His claim to "fame" was picketing the funeral of Matthew Shepard, the young gay man beaten to death in Wyoming in 1998. While in the Bay Area, Phelps' family protested a play about Shepard's death that was performed in Newark, where a transgender teen, Eddie "Gwen" Araujo, was beaten to death last month.

Phelps' followers shrieked that Shepard and Araujo are burning in hell. The hate-mongers, one assumes, believe they are headed for a reward in the afterlife.

To me, that's not much different from Osama bin Laden promising suicide bombers they're going to heaven.

No gray areas

"The masses of mankind, if you believe the Scriptures, are going to hell," says Shirley Phelps-Roper, one of Phelps' 13 children, mother to 11 of his 52 grandchildren and an attorney for his 100-member church, Westboro Baptist.

Because God allowed the people killed in the Sept. 11 attacks to die, "You can bet the rent money that they all went to hell," she says.

By contrast, Phelps-Roper says nobody in her huge extended family has ever been struck down by tragedy. She takes that as a sign they're meant to deliver God's message of "wrath and vengeance."

Phelps-Roper is undeniably passionate. She's also right to note that her family's tactics differ little from those of some in-your-face gay advocacy groups like ACT UP.

But none of the Scriptures Phelps cites to condemn homosexuality quotes Jesus Christ. They're culled from Old Testament writings or the Apostle Paul, a military man.

Even if you don't believe in the divinity of Christ, it's impossible to picture a man who preached love as his central tenet using the word "fag."

Instead, Christ said things like "Judge not, that ye be not judged" and "Blessed are they that mourn." Something Phelps and company might keep in mind the next time they plan to picket a funeral.

Oral argument

"Show me one passage in which Jesus himself addressed homosexual relationships," says Jeff McKissack, a graduate of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Okla., who now heads an association of gay alumni called ORU-OUT.

McKissack, who lives in Dallas, earned a degree in theology and has read the Bible in the original Hebrew and Greek. He spent several years working and traveling with Roberts as a university administrator, then later came out of the closet in the mid-1990s.

Despite the school's proscriptions against homosexuality, McKissack still considers himself an evangelical Christian.

"I found out God's a whole lot bigger than I thought he was," he says.

So, what if the Phelps family is wrong? I asked Phelps-Roper. What if they're the ones headed for hell?

"If we're wrong," she replied, "then there is no God."

FOUR YEARS AND CHANGE IN THE VALLEY

PETER DELEVETT

3/27/2002

Four years and change. That's how long I've been in Silicon Valley, and though it's not a long time, a lot can happen.

Presidents rise and fall. Gangly high school freshmen bloom into young adults. And in that time, the valley has gone through its own growing pains.

My wife and I moved here from New Orleans, where I wrote about the shipping industry, the rusting heart of the old economy. We arrived just as the Second Gold Rush, a.k.a. the Dot-Com Boom, was ramping up. I imagined I could feel a palpable sense of energy as I drove past Netscape and SGI and Apple Computer. Creativity and relentless entrepreneurship were in the air, and we were in the thick of it.

Having left a city as famous for its corruption as for its cuisine -- my favorite New Orleans politician, a guy called "Hog Jowls" Munster, once directed a county paving crew to build a road through a rival's front yard -- we were pleasantly surprised to find elected leaders who were, by and large, competent and honest. We traded a jivin', high-fivin' mayor who chased the cameras for Susan Hammer, who exuded schoolmarmish seriousness.

Having heard a mugging take place right outside our window one Mardi Gras and having had a car stolen days after moving to the French Quarter, we welcomed after-dark jogs without having to look over our shoulders.

We grooved to discover a pastiche of ethnic restaurants, markets and worship places, a beautiful mosaic in contrast to New Orleans, where racial politics are almost exclusively black and white and the city's Vietnamese and Latin American populations keep to themselves.

Feeling queasy

Yet other things struck a strange chord. In San Jose and the Peninsula, we were surprised by the near-absence of black people, save for a few pockets such as East Palo Alto. And it was a rare occurrence, back then, to meet a native San Josean.

As time went on, I began to feel, well, self-conscious pulling up to cover millionaire-packed dinner parties in my practical little Toyota Tercel. We bought a red convertible. Silicon Valley, circa 1999, made you covet.

Milling around the very rich and those who wanted to be, I noticed people whose most desperate dream was merely to be middle class. As I covered non-profits and health care and education, I began to feel for -- and fear for -- the people clinging to the lifeline of a food bank, or wondering why their kids' schools were scraping by amid such wealth.

Crashing down

Then, of course, things changed. The week I started covering the tech beat full-time, the stock market fell, and it has yet to get up. Many of the dot-coms don't exist any more.

My rent, which had risen and risen again, dropped a bit as the lines of would-be tenants packed up to launch a new B2C venture: Back 2 Cleveland.

I used to be glad my wife and I carpoled, blowing past the crawl on Highway 101. The diamond lane was this boy's best friend, but on recent mornings, we haven't even needed it.

Things have changed in City Hall, too. Mayor Ron Gonzales, a Hewlett-Packard alum who swept into office promising to run San Jose like a corporation, has seen his stock tumble. When the sand shifted where he'd stuck his flag -- such as siding with Cisco against Calpine's power plant, and blocking new health care programs for uninsured kids -- he was forced to make deals with groups he'd previously dismissed.

The gold rush may be over, but the stories are just as compelling. Like it or not, the tech industry still touches every one of us who lives here -- either by its presence or its absence. Whether you're Old San Jose stock who remembers the Valley of Heart's Delight or a recent immigrant; whether your vocabulary includes phrases like XML and 802.11, or *buenos días*, or *chào ông*.

So here's to, as they say in politics, four more years. And plenty of change.

HIGH-TECH BIGWIGS FACE OFF GAME-SHOW STYLE.
HOW WOULD YOU FARE AGAINST CEOS, FOUNDERS AND A VC?

PETER DELEVETT -- Wiretap
8/17/2001

It's lunchtime in Palo Alto, at the bimonthly meeting of the Silicon Forum.

Instead of the discussion group's usual format -- a speaker, followed by small groups chewing over the issue du jour -- things are taking a light-hearted turn: a game show, with panelists matching wits over tech industry trivia.

There are some heavy-hitting contestants: Marimba Chairman Kim Polese. Propel Communications founder Steve Kirsch. Mitchell Kertzman, chief executive of Liberate Technologies. Kara Swisher, who writes the Wall Street Journal's "Boomtown" column.

There's venture capitalist Neil Weintraut, seated across from Richard Brandt, the former editor of "Upside" magazine. There's also Internet analyst and MacWeek founder Michael Tchong, as well as Jerry Kaplan, co-chairman of Egghead.com.

And there's yours truly, easily the most underqualified of the lot.

Tech trivia? I can barely turn on my computer. And today's competition is modeled after the runaway TV hit "Weakest Link," which I've never watched.

But what unfolds is a fascinating front-row seat to Silicon Valley history, remembered by some of the people who made it happen.

When Brandt gets the first question -- "Which company went public first, Yahoo or Excite?" -- I know I'm doomed. I don't know the answer (Excite), and neither does Brandt, who doesn't make it out of the first round.

My turn is next, and I luck into a fairly easy one: Name the CEO of struggling Internet holding company CMGI. "Uh, David Wetherell," I stammer.

Polese doesn't fare so well when asked which city Cisco Systems is named for. She finally guesses Sunnyvale instead of the right answer, San Francisco.

Nearly everyone in the room is stumped by the next question: Name an African-American venture capitalist. Even the audience can't come up with an answer, a sobering statement on just how far the valley has to go. (One suggestion, for the record: Frank Greene of Palo Alto's New Vista Capital.)

Polese gets more than her share of tough questions, like this one: "When was the first dot-com name registered?" The answer, believe it or not, is 1985, by Symbolics Technology.

In the second round, she's asked which Fairchild Semiconductor alumnus founded a valley VC powerhouse. "This is ancient history," Polese complains.

That might not endear her to her friends at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, which was co-founded in 1972 by Fairchild alum Eugene Kleiner -- and is a major investor in Polese's company. She's soon voted out.

I have my own Fairchild moment later in the round, when asked which famous company emerged out of Shockley Labs. My internal wiring malfunctions and I incorrectly blurt, "Intel," which was launched later by ex-Shockley-and-Fairchild engineers Gordon Moore and Bob Noyce.

Moderator Auren Hoffman, natty in a double-breasted black suit, can't quite provide the nastiness of TV's Ann Robinson, but Kirsch does his best to provide an irksome presence. Any time someone can't answer a question, Kirsch raises his hand with the enthusiastic smirk of a grade-school know-it-all.

At one point, Swisher threatens to break Kirsch's hand if he keeps raising it.

I'm amazed to have made it this far into the game, but things quickly take a bad turn. I flub the first name of BEA Systems co-founder Alfred Chuang, calling him "Albert."

I'm able to save face by correctly naming the venture capital firm where David Beirne is a partner (Benchmark Capital), but it's too late: Weintraut, Kaplan and Tchong team up to vote me out.

Later, Kertzman forgets the name of the former eBay executive who's running for California controller (Steve Westly). "I didn't give him money; that's my payback," Kertzman sighs.

A few of the questions are just plain mean. Swisher is asked to recite the value of pi to the fifth decimal, a tall task for a journalist. Kirsch happily rattles it off to 10 decimal places.

Shortly afterward, Kirsch helps vote out Swisher, who warns: "Anyone who doesn't vote Steve off isn't going to be in the Journal again."

Kaplan seems unable to concentrate, which may be because Egghead will file for bankruptcy the day after the Tuesday luncheon. Asked the name of Yahoo's new CEO (Terry Semel), Kaplan draws a blank.

But despite his inability to answer many questions, nobody votes Kaplan out of the game, leaving him and Kertzman to square off in the final round.

"You can feel the testosterone!" Kertzman shouts, which gets the biggest laugh of the afternoon: Kertzman is less Mel Gibson than Mel Brooks.

A tense back-and-forth follows, with each man on the brink of elimination. Finally, Kaplan blanks on the name of Netscape co-founder Jim Clark, and Kertzman collects applause and a plaque naming him the winner.

"It was interesting that the finals came down to the two oldest guys," the 52-year-old Kertzman tells me later. Maybe that shows the value of experience, I suggest.

"Nah," Kertzman says. "People just didn't want to vote me off because I was funny."