

OHHH My Orinda      Jim Benney 2024

I transferred from Park Merced kindergarten in San Francisco to Sleepy Hollow in Orinda when I was four.

On the hill behind our house I spent a lot of time crawling through the brush and sitting in the branches of the Buckeye tree with a nice view of Sleepy Hollow and the hills beyond.

When I was 11 or 12 I saw a big bear lumbering up through the brush below me. Nobody believed me.

A few days later the last known bear in the East Bay was hit by a car on San Pablo Dam Road by Bear Creek Road

I spent a lot of time roaming the hills and creeks.

There was never any fear of getting lost or hurt or not making it home for dinner.

There were 4 sports options, football, basketball, baseball, and swim in the summer. We never heard of Soccer.

We all could walk and ride bikes to friend's houses or to the school playground. Nobody ever thought about wearing a helmet, or your bike getting stolen.

In Orinda our parents were for the most part well educated doctors and lawyers and business people. It never meant anything to us.

They were all just parents.

In our world mothers were expected to take care of the kids and the home front and not bother the Dads at work.

My parents were both Cal Berkeley grads and the only liberal democrats in Orinda at the time.

They were fervent about us kids getting a good education so that we could always be learning in life.

Dr. Prlain was our Doctor. When one of us kids was sick he would come to our house and sit on our bed.

I never had any contact with organized religion.

When I started getting in trouble with the law in my teens Dad would call a judge friend in the middle of the night and I would get bailed out of Juvenile Hall or Jail first thing in the morning.

There were kids who were always getting into trouble.  
Often these kids were fun and entertaining to be around.

Ted Boyce was the Principal at Pine Grove Intermediate School. A great guy. He made friends with all the kids who were getting in trouble, many of whom maintained lifelong relationships with him.

Mostly, our parents drank and smoked. Parents would go out of town and there would be a party.

By late in high school drinking and fighting was part of the entertainment.

I got along with the tough guys, the popular guys, and the book nerds.  
And, most of the girls and teachers.

Orinda was really pretty idyllic back in the day. The weather between the bay and the central valley was usually just right.

We didn't know we lived in such a special world.  
It was safe. There were no police. We never locked the house or took the keys out of the cars.