

# down by the bay

BY ALFONSO FLORES AND  
HELENA WANG-FLORES

Well, it wasn't easy, but we did it. We left our home in Bolingbrook, IL for the Bay Area: the newest Laico addition to the Bay. My wife Helena started school in the beginning of August in Vallejo, CA at the Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine. In addition to having a Bachelor's in Psychology and a Master's degree in Hospital Administration from University of Michigan, her ambitious drive has landed her back in school again and I support her one hundred percent. I left my job in Illinois to be a travel nurse with my first assignment at Mt. Diablo Medical Center Emergency Room in Concord, CA. Being a travel nurse gives me the versatility to check out the area and work at different hospitals in the area. I came out to the west in June and stayed where else but the Laico Hilton -- Tita Malu's house.

Who hasn't stayed at Tita Malu's? I can't thank her enough for letting me stay with her for a month while I found a new "Home" for me and my wife, who was living all by her lonesome back in IL while I was here. My contract was to work 3 days a week, 12 hrs each day and that's full time. That left me 4 days a week to play! But first, I had to find a new home. Well, we were fortunate enough to find a brand new condo that was just finished being built in Vallejo, CA, the same town where Helena's school is. Not only was it conveniently located, but it also has a view of Mare Island, where Helena's school is, and also a view of the San Pablo Bay.

We moved here in August and left an empty unsold house in Illinois. My prayers were answered when after 4 weeks, a family saw the house while my mom was there cleaning and offered to pay cash for the house. The only problem was that they wanted to close in a week. It was a hectic closing but thanks to my mom and my lawyer, it was done.

Living in the Bay Area is so much fun. With studying 7 days a week, Helena doesn't get to enjoy it as much as I do. After I cook her breakfast, pack her lunch and send her off to school, it's play time for me. The Bay Area offers great cultural diversity which also can be interpreted as "so many kinds of food - so little time." I think this is the Asian capitol of the U.S. I was surprised to find so many Caucasians that speak Tagalog better than I do. Maybe even a little embarrassed.

Well, I do miss Illinois. I'm the first of Tita Nonon's kids to move out of the state. It's a life change to quit your job, sell your house, and move half-way across the U.S., but people do it all the time. I guess I can be thankful that her school was located somewhere interesting. Thank God it wasn't someplace boring like Wyoming.



## close encounter in nebraska

BY ALFONSO FLORES

While driving from Illinois to California, Helena and I had a close encounter of the worst kind. It was a beautiful drive, very scenic, and not one day of rain during the 3 and a half day trip with the cruise control set at 90mph in my black '98 Chevrolet Corvette. The route took us through Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, Nebraska, Nevada, and finally to California about 2300 miles total. Just like the ad says, "See the USA in a Chevrolet.." We certainly did just that.

It would have been an uneventful trip if the mishap in North Platt, Nebraska didn't occur. Driving at night, my main concern was deer wandering out on the road. It was late and we were about to exit to find a motel and call it a night, when I saw sparks coming from a semi going the opposite direction. I glanced at the sparks for a second and all of a sudden Helena screamed, "Watch out!" and then we felt a "thump" almost as if I had hit a raccoon or a rabbit. I asked Helena, "What was it?". She said she didn't know.

I exited and pulled off in to a gas station and held my breath to assess the damage. I almost lost it when I saw that half my right front fender was gone, part of the nose was gone, and a piece of the sidewall from my front tire was gone. Luckily, the tire wasn't leaking air. I asked Helena if she could describe what it was that hit the car since she saw it. She said it was round. The light bulb above my head lit up. I exclaimed, "That's why the semi was sparking". She was wondering what I was talking about because she didn't see the truck sparking. It occurred to me that the truck lost a wheel and the wheel crossed the I-80 median and hit our car.

So I figured he must be pulled over somewhere. We hopped back in to the car and went looking for him and sure enough we found him 2 miles down the road. He thought I pulled over to help him put on a spare. I asked him, "Did you lose a tire?" He said, "Yeah, did you see where it went?" I showed him where the tire hit and the damage it caused. He was very apologetic and gave us his insurance info while we called the State Trooper.

To make a long story short, we still drove the car all the way to California without any more problems and his insurance covered all the damages: \$3500 plus rental car for a month. Best of all, no one was hurt. The angels were watching over us because that truck wheel could have hit the windshield. Thank God it didn't!

