

There is something about the ocean in winter, something compatible with the thoughts engendered at the beginning of a new year. The waves roll in, the waves roll out, as they've done since before time began. And the years roll in and out, too, one after the other, marked in our ever-more-unreliable memories, and on the pages of our calendars.

Like most Butte County residents, when my wife and I have a yen to walk on a beach, we head to Mendocino or Fort Bragg, though it's a bit of a haul to get there. Getting to Half Moon Bay is a little quicker, and if you're thinking about a winter getaway to where the waves are rolling in, Half Moon Bay and environs can be pretty enticing.

I spent the first few days of this year in Half Moon Bay with my wife and my daughter, Sionann, who is visiting her folks from her home in Paris. We were guests of the **Beach House Hotel**, a wonderfully cozy and comfortable seaside destination that provided a nice change from our annual pilgrimage to the more northerly coast. It's amazing to find such a coastal estuary just 25 miles south of San Francisco, with tidal pools for exploring, and lots of charm in the local shops.

The **Beach House** sits on a perfectly located piece of ocean-view property, facing a little harbor protected by a breakwater. Look to the left from most rooms and you see the curve of Half Moon Bay, and the hills that embrace it in the far distance. For those of us who only get to the ocean now and then, the sound of the waves and the smell of the brine delight senses too long deprived of those particular sensual pleasures.

The weather was glorious once we left the valley fog behind. Though it seems counter-intuitive, January and February are prime months for good weather on the coast. Within moments of arriving,

we'd shed the sweaters and coats donned when we left Magalia and we were strolling the beaches of Half Moon Bay in shorts and T-shirts.

At nearby Moss Beach—a place we pretty much had to ourselves—the sea lions were out in force, thirty or forty of them sunning themselves while keeping wary watch on us as my wife took dozens of pictures. The tide was coming in, and the sea anemones welcomed it with rippling appendages. In a bad economy like the one we're currently experiencing, most of us can't afford more distant getaways, and for some, any sort of vacation is out of the question. But Butte County residents who find themselves in desperate need of a mid-winter reprieve from the familiar are fortunate to live so close to an entirely different eco-system, and an utterly different seaside environment.

Oh, and lest I forget, that coastal proximity makes it possible to get the freshest seafood available. Dungeness crab is now in season, and at Sam's Chowder House, the restaurant adjacent to our hotel, we had one of the best crab dinners I've ever tasted, with crab fresh off that day's boat, sweet and succulent and perfectly steamed. That dinner alone made the trip worthwhile.

Some readers of this column, especially those who don't agree with my politics, profess to worry that I don't have enough fun, and for that reason I'm too cranky about the continuing insanities, inanities and antics of the ridiculous right wingers who provide me with so much fodder.

It's touching that these readers worry so much about me, so I thought I should reassure them once again that I'm having a pretty good time for myself, whether I'm in Half Moon Bay, or visiting my daughter when she's back at her home in France, or even when I'm right here in Magalia. I had an especially great time

during that little getaway to the coast, and I share some of that good time with you because some readers might enjoy participating vicariously, or even deciding to make such a trip for themselves. I heartily recommend it, even though the fact that I had a good time didn't magically transform my attitude toward some of the politicians who are doing far too much to line their own pockets, and far too little to protect the future for younger people who might someday hope to enjoy a retirement something like the one I'm enjoying.

I had not quite remembered just how easy it is to get to Half Moon Bay, especially when traffic conditions are as favorable as they were for our trip. And I'd also forgotten just how far away it seems once you arrive. Though I lived in the Bay Area back when I was in college, and once again for a brief time in the '90s, my general attitude toward the place is fairly negative. I associate the Bay Area with too much traffic congestion, and too many people in general. But we made the drive to Half Moon Bay on a Sunday morning, and the traffic was extraordinarily light.

We breezed through in no time and, once we were in Half Moon Bay, the throngs usually found on beaches along Highway 1 from there to Santa Cruz were conspicuously absent. The ocean was mostly calm the days we were there, and the colors were exquisite—shades of pink, and blue, and purple playing on the surface of the water.

So, for those people who don't have much better to do each week than think up names to call me, or worry why I'm so cranky about right wing wackiness, perhaps a little getaway would do you some good, might give you a wider perspective on things, might even give you a life.

You know what they say, don't you? Life's a beach.