

From: [The Hub Cyclery](#)
To: [West County Gazette](#); [Gary Helfrich](#); [Lynda Hopkins](#)
Subject: A writing
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EXTERNAL

This piece of writing, which is so heartfelt, came with permission from one of my Facebook Groups for The River. It's a tad long, but it says a lot. The writer has given permission to share. I hope that you do. I hope that at least a couple of people read it all the way through to see the heart in it, and whats at stake allowing the STR's to be so prolific and invasive to our community, as well as the sale of the beach to a private resort that excluded so many, when it used to be a hub of local life.

Phil Weinstein is in Guerneville, California.

20 hrs ·

Can a town lose it's soul?

A small town is not unlike a river. It needs a constant source of water, a influx of nutrients and a rejuvenation of life all working together in proper balance for it to prosper. If not, the water becomes stagnant, the water levels lower, turning toxic, life moves away, or fades and the river ultimately dies. During the course of a river's life, it can change so much that it is hardly recognizable from what it once was and remains only in name. Is it still the same river or something new and different entirely? Does it become the Ship of Theseus?

Since it's inception the town of Guerneville has gone through many transformations and metamorphoses. But few things have always remained true and constant. One being, and that most small towns experience, a sense of community. Being low in population most people know each other or know of each other. They experience many of the same trials and tribulations together. They participate in the same parades, festivals, holidays and celebrations. They shop at the same stores, drink and share stories at the same watering holes. Their children share the same schools, sports teams, hike the same hills and learn to swim at the same beaches. History and memories are shared and passed down and new ones are created together.

Secondly, Guerneville's diversity stands out making it unique and special. It has always had a reputation not just in Sonoma county, but in Northern California as a eclectic melting pot of diversity. It attracts all walks of life. It attracts misfits and outcasts, young and old alike. It attracts those seeking adventure, and those seeking the peace in nature that the river and the redwoods provide. For the better part of the last 50 years it has

become and remained a heartbeat of the LGBTQ community. It is a town that not only accepts diversity but celebrates and embraces it. It is a place where every man, woman or they can walk down the street feeling safe, loved and respected in the community they chose to call home. From the Guerne family, where the town gets its name and still resides within its borders, to transplants from other parts of the world, from rich and poor, country folk and children of the earth, be it white, black or brown and every religion, all have come together to help shape this town to what it has become today.

Lastly, being consider a local is something that is earned. Long standing residents have faced flood after flood after flood. They suffer through cold dark wet winters, some living in summer cabins never designed to live in through such times . They face paying higher prices on household goods and products, and have to drive further than most to obtain goods that cannot be obtained locally. They face mudslides, falling trees and widowmakers, and now wildfires is another threat one must face yearly. All that being said, there is River pride in their hearts. Most, if not all has faced the stigma of being a Guerneville resident. When outside the borders of town, revealing where they live to strangers, who has not been told “oh you are one of them” -“one of those River people” or “River Rat”. Despite the clothes they may wear, the car they may drive, the house they live, in or how much money is in their bank account. But no shame is shown, River pride runs deep. It strengthens their souls, toughens their skins, it is worn like a badge of honor for all to see. Call us what you want, we are Guerneville, Stumptown, G-Town, G-Ville and Guerne-Vegas, We are River and we are proud!

All that being said, is it the people, the memories and the history that defines a town? Can a town have a soul? Is that a living tangible thing? Over the course of the last decade the town of Guerneville has experienced a shift. It was subtle at first, barely even noticeable but has grown quite apparent over the last few years. As old businesses and resorts closed new ones emerged or changed hands. They brought prosperity, economic growth and jobs to a struggling community. With that growth however, raised property value. In most cases that would be a good thing, however this has come at a cost. As housing prices sky rocket many locals have been priced out. Many hard working blue collar couples and families cannot compete with the the wealth of people outside the community buying up every home that comes on the market. Many if not all of these homes becoming vacation rentals.

I ask this. Is a community not affected when a man and his husband who have owned and lived in their home for over forty years not know who their neighbors will be on any given day? Is it fair that a single working mother of two pray that her landlord will renew her lease because the home is more profitable as a Airbnb? What is more important to a town, when a first time family of four buys their forever home, or when someone from out of state gets a email saying that their reservation has been confirmed? Does a dwindling long term residency even matter? When school enrollment drops and schools

close, is that outweighed by that fact that small business boom? Does it mean more when a third generation resident looks at a stretch of river and says “I remember when I was a kid” or when someone from Los Angeles says “ I can’t wait till we swim here this summer”? What is fairer, when someone gets up at the crack of dawn to throw down a towel and claim a spot by the river, or when someone pays top dollar to reserve that same spot and they may not even show up to use it at all? Does any of it matter in the long run?

Is it better when small businesses and owners of vacation rentals decide what is best for a community rather than Long-term residents and full-time homeowners?

When the former outweighs the latter does a town cease to exist, instead becoming a theme park catering to those living outside its borders rather than the dwindling population of those that lives within?

Can a town have a soul? Was it ever there to begin with or was it just a dream? Is the town of Guerneville a small example The disparity this country is now facing between the haves and the have not’s? How often does small communities face this question, and how often does the sale of a beach, the unofficial heart of a community be the factor that decides this question for you?

Claire Fetrow
The Hub Cyclery
Cotati, Ca
www.thehubcyclery.com
707 795 6670
check out our Facebook Page!
<https://www.facebook.com/thehubcyclery>

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