

2022 ALEX ALBRIGHT CREATIVE NONFICTION PRIZE FINALIST

How to Support Your Daughter When She Moves to San Francisco

with photography by Paul Gempertline

BY LOCKIE HUNTER

Begin by calling her at five in the morning. Every day. When she answers the phone in a groggy voice, claim you forgot the time change. Enlist help from all of your family members. Start a morning phone call rotation schedule and keep it in a spreadsheet. Ask MamaSlight to call Monday at five a.m., Aunt Jan to call on Tuesday at five a.m., and so forth. If your daughter becomes too sleepy to go to work, perhaps she will get fired and return to North Carolina.

Tell her that you heard on Fox News that parts of San Francisco are going to fall into the ocean. Any day now. It's true. You think it was the Sean Hannity show. Regardless, it's one of those news shows. She should be careful.

Tell her that you heard that there is no clean water in San Francisco. It's true. She should be careful if she drinks any water in the city limits.

Tell her you heard on Fox News that in addition to Covid and the AIDS epidemic, which is rampant out there, Hepatitis C and even the *chickenpox* are making a comeback in San Francisco. It's a city full of disease. It's true. You would not be surprised if the Black Plague resurfaces in California.

When she says she has something important to tell you, tell her you have something important to tell her. Tell her about your garden. She needs to know about the wandering daylilies! They are propagating on their own, jumping to new beds, running away, invading the marigolds.

Decide to visit her.

When she picks you up at the airport, ask her if people don't wear bras in San Francisco.

Ask her if they sell hairbrushes in the stores.

LOCKIE HUNTER had three essays make it to the final round of consideration for the 2022 Alex Albright Creative Nonfiction Prize. Read the other two in the fall 2022 and 2023 issues of *NCLR Online*. The author serves as associate producer of the poetry and prose radio program *Wordplay* on 103.3 FM in Asheville and is a past recipient of a North Carolina Arts Council grant. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Emerson College in Boston and has taught creative writing at Warren Wilson College. Her work has appeared in many periodicals, including *Brevity*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, and *Blue Mountain Review*.

PAUL GEMPERTLINE retired from East Carolina University in 2022 after a career there, beginning in 1982 as a tenure-track professor of Chemistry, advancing through the academic ranks, and then, serving as Dean of the Graduate School from 2008 to 2022.

Ask her if she lost her razor and thus can't shave her legs properly or if it is the water shortage that Glen Beck warned you about. You *knew* he was right! Fair and balanced!

Take her to lunch at her favorite place. When the server arrives, with a pierced eyelid, speculate loudly as to whether the server had an unhappy childhood. Refuse to eat your meal, as you saw the sanitation license in the bathroom and you think someone hand-changed the score, from 30 to 90.

Ask her if she misses North Carolina. Ask her if she misses the luxurious green of spring and the dogwood petals that litter the sidewalk in front of your house. Tell her that speaking of litter, San Francisco is *full* of it. Awfully dirty. Point to a trash bag and shake your head in disgust. When she tells you that it is trash day on that side of the street, tell her you think that probably every day is trash day in San Francisco. Speaking of trashy, your daylilies are taking over.

She tells you the lilies should be divided and moved every four years. If they are not moved, their blossoms diminish, their roots become tangled and matted.

Tell her you know perfectly well how to care for your own garden.

Ask her why she prefers living among gay men.

Quote Leviticus.

Quote Leviticus again.

Tell her if she comes home you will help pay for her master's degree.

Tell her if she comes home you will help pay for a deposit on a house.

Tell her if she comes home you will pay for a new razor.

And a bra.

And a hairbrush.

“

Ask her if she misses North Carolina.

Ask her if she misses the luxurious green of spring and the dogwood petals that litter the sidewalk in front of your house.

When she points out the Golden Gate Bridge, she tells you it is constantly being painted, every day, like Sisyphus rolling a boulder up the hill. When the painters reach one side of the bridge they return to the other side where the paint has already begun to peel. Tell her that you have Sisyphian tasks as well. Why, the amount of weeding needed in the flower bed alone! The daylilies are taking over. It's a conspiracy. You keep dividing them, and giving them away, but part of you feels sad every time you give away a flower because you remember they were her favorite. These trashy little flowers. Not boastful like stargazer lilies, not polite like tulips, who simply turn their heads to follow the sun. Daylilies are gaudy orange. They could grow anywhere. Even in this ever-present San Francisco fog. ■

