



Submitted Photos

Matt Love's loft in the Pearl District of Portland in the 1990s.

LONG, LONG GONE

Author recalls move from the city to the coast

By MATT LOVE
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A couple of months ago, my ex-wife Cindy Popp mailed me a Polaroid of the loft I once owned in Portland's Pearl District and where we once lived. (She apparently found the photo in an old book of ours.) I am so glad she sent it to me because I have very little recollection of who I was in those days and I think it's important I be reminded every now and then what Portland once meant to me.

Today, I can hardly believe that I used to own a loft in the Pearl District and actually got in the ground floor of that whole gentrification movement in the mid-90s. During that time, I virtually never went to the beach, owned a dog, or really understood the special attributes of living in Oregon. I was very much a man of the city and derived my entire cultural life from seeing live music in the three or four rock 'n' roll clubs that existed back then.

I bought the 860-foot one-room unit on NW 10th and Hoyt in 1995 for roughly \$40,000. (That is no typo.) I was one of the first to buy a loft in this era and it wasn't one of those faux units built in the coming years that began to fall apart when hard rains came. This was a historic building and the property taxes were frozen for 10 years. My mom helped me buy it with a \$5,000 gift. My mortgage was \$292 a month and that included most of the utilities and cable! I was double paying the mortgage every month and could have owned it in three years. I was set for life in Portland with that condo.

Look at this loft's interior! I had a custom-made wood-framed platform bed with a walk-in closet. I had a restaurant booth for the kitchen area and a teak, stand-up bar from a military vet who shipped it all over the world. I painted the entire interior and floor with bright Mediterranean colors that belied the natural colors just outside my window, the window with a grand view of a rag factory and Interstate 405.

At some point, I became fed up with Portland and myself in the city, and decided I needed a drastic change at 33 years of age. Frankly, it felt last ditch.

When I escaped Portland to the Oregon Coast in 1997 to reinvent myself as a writer, I rented the loft out for \$500 a month. I felt bad making money on it. I hated being a landlord and sold it in 1999 in three minutes for \$120,000, paid off Cindy's student loan debt, and helped finance my journey to becoming a writer.

That loft is worth about a million dollars today. Yes, I'd be a quasi-millionaire today. I'd be the Squire of the Pearl and would have never written a word for publication or become the kind of teacher that would honor my parents, easily the two best teachers I've ever seen in the classroom.

Selling that piece of urban concrete was the best thing I ever did. I have never regretted it. It liberated me and gave me a cushion. I invested the profit in Cindy and myself to become

a writer and pursue the only dream I'd ever had as a youth or adult. I covered some of this ground in my 2010 memoir called "Gimme Refuge: The Education of a Caretaker," but the story is so much richer now and I suspect there are a lot more people in Portland who felt as I did in 1997. The city seems almost unbearable to me whenever I visit anymore, which isn't often. The only reasons I do make the drive in are to promote my books or see my parents. I miss the old gray cheap slow irony-free Portland, but those days are long, long gone. I've moved on.

As I examine that photograph of the loft, I know letting go of that Portland life and forgoing the money of that investment was the ultimate answer to my success as a becoming a writer and a better teacher. And as I recall, it wasn't that hard of a decision.

Matt Love teaches at Astoria High School and is author and editor of 14 books. They are available at coastal bookstores, through www.nestuccaspitpress.com and local libraries.



The author and his dog, Sonny, enjoy a sunset together.