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Nonfiction
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Pam V.F.
EXCELSIOR DISTRICT

The Excelsior
One of San Francisco's Unknown Treasures
by Walter Jebe

You've all visited Union Street, Fisherman's Wharf, Clement Street, Noe Valley, North Beach and other popular San Francisco neighborhood trading areas. Far too many San Franciscans and visitors to our city are missing a very unique neighborhood shopping and people experience -- The Excelsior District.

Traveling south on Mission Street, you pass Army and about one and a half miles further down Mission you are about to treat yourself to one of San Francisco's unknown treasures -- a merchant and community neighborhood area which will delight all your human senses.

As you enter the Excelsior out of no where will appear one of San Francisco's most beautiful buildings -- The Jewish Home for the Aged. Set 200 feet back on a knoll of well manicured lawn and shrubs, the Home boasts a beautiful grand stairway fit for a royal coronation. The entrance is a Georgian-type structure with 4 tall columns and a peaked roof. So striking and grand is the Home's architecture that it appears suited to be a country palace for an emperor of a great kingdom.

The business area of the Excelsior is characterized best as a charming village of storefront businesses. Many Excelsior merchants are second generation and our business community offers a wide variety of products and services.

Some of the finest restaurants with reasonable prices can be found here. Joe's Fish Grotto at 4435 Mission offers the best bouillabaisse, Rex Sole, Crab Louie and other fish specialties in San Francisco (and at prices you will not believe!). Rocco's (Mission opposite Harrington) offers a breakfast fit for a King and I personally recommend their ham and eggs for anyone who has a hearty appetite and would like to satisfy it for less than \$3.75. Rocco's also serves the finest baccala, short ribs, homemade raviolis and old-fashioned rice pudding (like only your grandmother can make).

Kowloon (Mission at Theresa) is one of many Chinese and Oriental restaurants scattered throughout the Excelsior. All of them offer excellent food and at reasonable prices. Kowloon's is my favorite because you can order a selection of Chinese dishes without having to purchase steamed rice (more than you can eat) with every dish you order.

The variety of types of merchants you can visit in the Excelsior is unlimited. Adia Candies (now second generation) still makes their own chocolate (including white chocolate) and hand-dipped candies. No where will you find better candy than at Adia's in the Excelsior.

Farrah's Department Store can clothe infants to senior citizens at prices and quality hard to find anywhere today. And Buchner

Music offers the best selection of old sheet music in Northern California.

One of the Excelsior's pride and joys is Royal Bakery. Their magnificent French bread and old-style Italian cookies are shipped all over the country. Talk about a small merchant earning a national reputation. Royal Bakery is worth a visit to the Excelsior, if for no other reason.

Due to limited space I cannot name every business and restaurant in the Excelsior. However, as many customers of my own camera shop, Jebe's Kompact Kameras, have so often told me, "Our neighborhood business community is so diversified that it meets my every shopping need." Residents of the Excelsior rarely have to venture beyond our village of merchants to find any item they need to purchase.

The residential community of the Excelsior can be described in only one word -- international. If you wanted to select a perfect neighborhood to demonstrate exactly how our nation can call itself the "melting pot" of ethnic diversity, the Excelsior would be the perfect place to display. Our residents represent every nationality in the world. And what makes the Excelsior such a wonderful place to visit is to walk down the street and watch all these people with different traditions and ideas exchange their unreserved friendship toward each other. One excellent example of this friendship is the almost daily assistance customers offer merchants while shopping in one of our stores if a salesperson is having difficulty communicating with another customer because of a language barrier. I cannot exaggerate how many times other people who speak both languages offer to help

merchants explain products or services to residents who are still struggling to master the English language.

As you know, no neighborhood of substance or value is made up of buildings or businesses. It is the people who live and shop in the Excelsior that make our village the unknown treasure I'm writing to you about. And no where will you find people as friendly, helpful, or charming as in the Excelsior. Two of the Excelsior Branch Librarians can probably express this better than anyone I know here. Versa Cullen and Pat Smith have served library patrons in every neighborhood in our City. Versa describes the Excelsior as "real community with a small town feeling. People really appreciate what you do for them here. I have never heard the words 'Thank you' said so often and with such sincerity anywhere else." Pat has found the Excelsior to be "a warm neighborhood full of so many different kinds of people who somehow come together and have a fierce pride in their community. Living here seems to break down all the barriers between people. If only it could be like this everywhere in the world."

If you're wondering about the cost of living in the Excelsior, you are in for another surprise. Houses rent for \$600-1,000 a month; 3 bedroom apartments range from \$500-600; 2 bedrooms can be found for as little as \$400 a month; and 1 bedroom apartments rent for \$300 up. Where else in San Francisco can such rental rates be quoted?

The transportation system in the Excelsior is varied and extremely efficient. Only 10 minutes to Civic Center by Bart or 15 minutes to the Financial District is hardly a long commute. You can reach Union Square to shop in less than 15 minutes. And we have two Stations close to us -- Balboa and Glen Park.

Muni and Sam Trans buses traveling on Mission Street is frequent and can make whatever connections you need to travel to anywhere in our City. And our little Jitny Vans make travel to downtown less crowded for commuters who enjoy riding in small vans rather than crowded buses. Highway 280 is minutes away in the Excelsior and travel by car in our neighborhood is less difficult than most San Francisco neighborhoods.

Another treasure to be found in the Excelsior is our recreational facilities. I can say they are unequalled in San Francisco. We have Balboa Park with its indoor swimming pool and a soccer field where international games are often played. McLaren Park is second largest only to Golden Gate Park, and it offers a swimming pool, golf course, horse stables, an amphitheater, picnic areas and a spectacular observation tower. And our Excelsior Playground offers baseball fields and basketball courts for night use.

Crime on the streets of every city is of concern to everyone. I am delighted to report that our local police station is second from the bottom of the list of San Francisco police stations for crime statistics. And I assure you it is not because we have inadequate police coverage in the Excelsior. The Ingelside Station provides visible and efficient services to businesses and residents alike. They truly do serve and protect in the Excelsior.

Several years ago the Excelsior experienced a juvenile delinquency problem. Juveniles were using spray cans of paint, and graffiti was found in both the residential and business districts of our community. The creativity used to solve this problem still amazes even the most optimistic people I know.

Dan Sweeney, a member of one of San Francisco's most active and dedicated neighborhood groups, COMO (Communities of the Outer Mission Organizations), developed the fantastic idea of a mural to be designed and painted by our youth on a wall in our playground. Dan worked hard with the youth to excite them about this mural while COMO, The Excelsior Business Association, private individuals, and Mayor Dianne Feinstein made the painting of the mural possible. I cannot describe how much work and love was involved in this project. And it did not stop there. The following summer a mural was painted on a wall at Excelsior and Mission, and after 3 years the murals remain intact and the graffiti problem we faced has vanished from our community. I'm sure you can imagine the pride everyone in our neighborhood feels about these projects. It brought us all together -- young and old, merchants and residents, and it has inspired us all.

Come visit the unknown treasure of San Francisco. Enjoy an international village right here in San Francisco. One thing I can promise you is that you'll be welcomed with smiles from a "small town" neighborhood which has worked hard to be all it can be.

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JUL 3 1984

excelsior district

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