

By Hillary Hauser

Summerland

A love story.

"Summerland—where's that? Next to Fantasyland?"

This is what a New York magazine editor said to me over the telephone when I told him I'd just moved.

Nice guy. With his comment, occasional twinges I'd been having about relocating started up again. My move was hardly a quarter of a mile away, two stops down the freeway, so it was no big deal. Still, I couldn't help but feel as if I'd moved to Cucamonga.

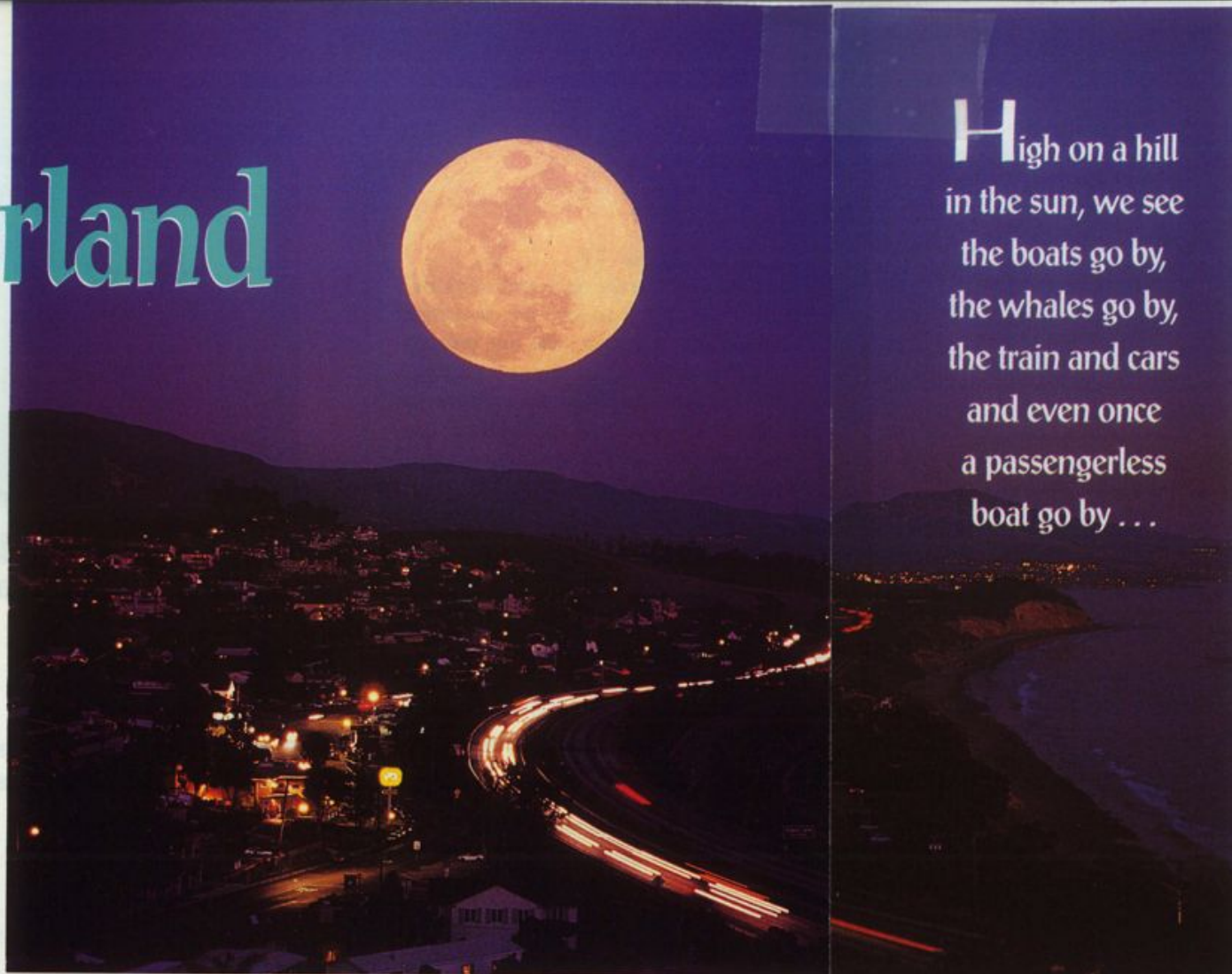
In fact, as I had prepared to move to Summerland from the little beach cottage in Montecito where I'd lived for 11 years, I'd gone outside one night and bayed at the moon. Like a dog. I stood on the little bridge from my house to the beach, looked up into the night and howled—to a big fat moon that did nothing but smile back.

My husband-to-be, Jim, and I had just bought a house in Summerland. Did I howl because it was the end of my single life? No. I had found the man of my dreams; that wasn't it. Was it that I'd always identified myself as a "Montecitan?" That definitely wasn't it.

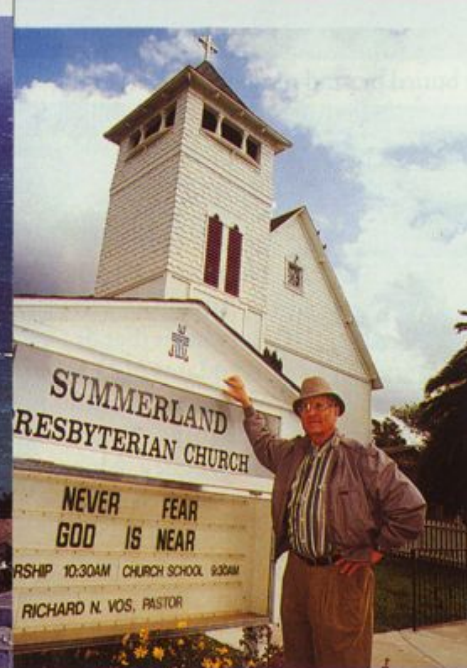
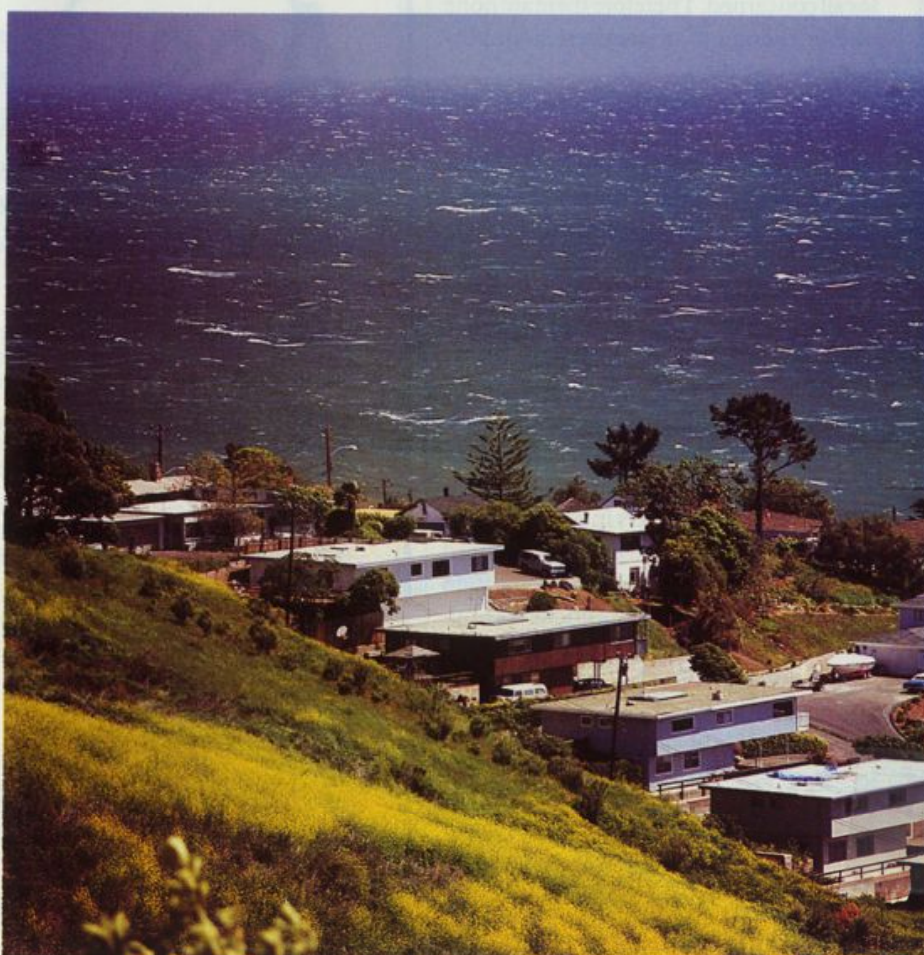
No. Baying at the moon is just a great thing to do. When you contemplate things that are permanent, like God and the moon's smile, the things that must absolutely change and progress, like your life, become not such a big deal.

Anyway, with his big white one-ton truck, Jim moved me out of that beach cottage in two days. I was now a Summerlander, if that is the right word.

I felt like a stranger in . . . in . . . Fantasyland.



High on a hill
in the sun, we see
the boats go by,
the whales go by,
the train and cars
and even once
a passengerless
boat go by . . .



Top: Moonrise over Summerland, a double-exposure. Left: A small town by the sea. Above: Rev. Richard Vos of the Summerland Presbyterian Church. Right: The author and husband Jim Marshall at their wedding on June 27, 1988.

I was immediately glad for the light, something I didn't have a lot of in Montecito. Our new house is high on a hill in the sun. We can sit in the living room and look out across the sea to Santa Cruz Island. The sun streams in through the skylights and sometimes we wear sunglasses at the breakfast table when we play Scrabble. We can see the boats go by, the whales go by, the dolphins go by, the train go by and the cars on the freeway go by. One day we even saw a passengerless sailboat drifting by. It was rescued later by the Harbor Patrol.

Occasionally we have seen urchin boats working offshore. Jim, an abalone/urchin diver, watches them through a telescope to see what they're up to.

It is a bird's-eye view of the world.

Every Sunday morning, and sometimes during the week, the bells ring from the tower of the little white church at the bottom of the hill—a symbol of the uncomplicated rural life we now live. The church hall is the community center of Summerland, place of all town meetings and where we go to vote. The resident reverend, Richard Vos, keeps everyone inspired with his weekly messages on the sign by the road. Soon after we moved in, there was a great love month: "Love is Kind," "Love is Not Touchy," "Love is Not Puffed Up," the sign told us.

Jim and I finally decided we were ready. We called up the reverend and told him we wanted to get married.

A kind, gentle voice. "When would you like to do this?" I could sense him leafing through his calendar—March? August? December?

"How about 5 o'clock?" we said.

"Well, usually we do some counseling . . . well, that will be fine."

We arranged to meet Rev. Vos at Lookout Park, Summerland's seaside recreation ground. We wanted to take our vows overlooking the sea—the sky above, waves below and bougainvillea all around.

And that's what we did—with only Caron and Billy, our witnesses, in attendance. Caron organized my whole wed-

ding in two hours, arriving at Lookout Park with a flower wreath for my hair, a boutonniere for Jim, champagne and glasses for a toast, and a cake. She had also bought me a black satin outfit for my honeymoon night.

Actually there was one other guest—Denise, who provided all the tears that go with a good wedding.

We danced, we toasted, we celebrated. We were married!

The girls at the Summerland Post Office are the mothers of Summerland. They take care of us. They have to. There is no mail delivery here.

"What, no mail delivery?" said my editor friend in New York. "What is this, a cow town?"

The post office girls—Carolyn, Pat and Sharon—are our connection with the outside world. They feed us our messages, our packages and the particulars of what's going on down the street. There is always something happening on Lillie Avenue, the main street of town, which roughly begins at The Big Yellow House restaurant on one end and ends at the "Home Made Sausages—No Nitrates" sign of the Summerland Market at the other end. Big events on Lillie Avenue have included a SWAT-team shoot-out at a nearby house (turned out to be a big mistake), and once a truck drove into the Sandpiper's big "LIQUOR" sign, which crashed onto the cab of a brand-new truck. And there is always big excitement in Summerland

every time a truck-and-trailer rig flips on the freeway, because all the north-bound traffic on 101 gets siphoned through town.

Next door to the Bikini Factory, Tinker, the jolly owner of Tinker's Hamburgers, told me his theory about the flipping trucks.

"Ghosts," he whispered. "Right where those trucks are turning over there used to be a house where they called up spirits. Don't say anything, everyone'll think I'm nuts. Do you want regular fries or curly fries?"

In 1883, about 35 years after Spiri-



CARON HOOTEN

tualism got its start in New York as a religious movement, H.L. Williams, a former Civil War major, bought the Ortega Rancho—1,050 acres from Sheffield Drive in Montecito to near Carpinteria.

H.L.'s wife, Katie, was an ardent Spiritualist, and H.L. became more and more interested in it. He decided to organize 710 acres of his property for a town where Spiritualists could live and develop their talents. He called the town "Summerland"—the spiritualist name for the place all spirits are supposed to go until called back to earth by a proficient medium.

Spiritualists believe that a person's life continues well beyond earthly life. In the early days of Summerland, proponents worked on developing a sixth sense enabling communication with spirits of the dead. Spirits would make themselves known by rapping and tapping on things, banging doors shut, turning lights on and off, or by creating sudden auras or gusts of wind in the room. At one séance, at the house that is now The Big Yellow House, one medium disclosed through "automatic writing" that Joaquin Murrieta, California desperado of the Gold Rush days, had buried gold somewhere in the area. The person who got this message dug holes all over looking for the gold—until the departed spirit advised that no good would come from finding it.

H.L. established a center for Spiritualist activities near the beach (where the parking lot for Lookout Park now is). This place, nicknamed "Spook Hall" by scoffers, must have really been something when Harry Allan held his séances there. According to *The Spirit of the Big Yellow House*, a little book written by Kim and Rod Lathim in 1975, Allan would do his best communicating when he was dead drunk. He would drink and drink until he passed out. Then, evil spirits, presumably absorbing alcohol from his body, would start knocking people around.

From time to time there are still reports of strange occurrences in various old houses in Summerland. Rod Lathim, now director of Access Theater in Santa Barbara,

also describes in his book his encounter with Hector, a ghost in the basement of The Big Yellow House. And a recent *Santa Barbara News-Press* article described the remodeling of an old Victorian house that continues to manifest strange happenings.

But for the most part, today's spirits of Summerland are mainly those that sit on the shelves of the Sandpiper Liquor Store.

One thing about spiritual matters: They tend to fade when money comes into the picture. In 1885, oil was discovered in Summerland, and H.L. was first in line to get it. Summerland grew rapidly, oil workers living side by side with those holding séances.

In a letter written in 1892, H.L. explained his reasons for pursuing oil: "... to secure the undoubted and immense mineral resources of the Ortega Rancho for the benefit of and to aid the promulgation of the truths of Spiritualism ..."

In 1892, about a year after Katie died, H.L. married Agnes Morgan, a widow. He died on Jan. 13, 1899, after falling into an abandoned oil well, and Agnes immediately moved into a favorite house of hers, what is now The Big Yellow House. On April 16, 1900, she married George Becker, who left his wife to join her. Becker developed offshore oil drilling techniques, and was in fact responsible for developing offshore oil drilling in general. He organized the Summerland Oil Company in 1925, and the race for offshore oil was on.

Today there is a small rock monument in Lookout Park that points up the inglorious fact that Summerland was the site of the first offshore oil drilling in the world. Unbelievably, there were 75 wells crammed along the short strip of Summerland coastline—on the beach and offshore in shallow water less than 10 feet deep. There

were two refining plants built farther up on shore. Today, if you look at photographs of this period, you cannot believe what a mess the place was—a jungle of Erector Sets in a sea of grime.

The story has it that wealthy Montecitans hated the sight of the offshore oil wells and the smell of oil that drifted their way, and they decided to do something about it: They vandalized refineries and started fires. When J. Paul Getty first drilled in the area, the vandals from Montecito poured concrete down his well, and Getty left Summerland in disgust.

In 1926 Max Fleischmann built the Santa Barbara Harbor and what the vandals of Montecito couldn't do Mother Nature did. With the movement of sand along the coast altered by harbor construction, tides changed and a series of severe winter storms washed out the Summerland oil structures. Over a few years the wells were completely destroyed.

Today you can still see and smell the oil that periodically washes ashore on the beaches of Summerland. Thankfully there are plans to eliminate the seepage problem caused by old oil operations. A \$500,000 oil industry fund administered by the state Lands Commission will be used to cap five wells that are leaking from rusty six-inch pipes that are buried by sand most of the time, both underwater and on the beach.

With the oceanic destruction of the oil wells, the oil business in Summerland began to fade. So did Spiritualism. History has it that descendants of H.L. Williams' family (notably Agnes' son Worsley Morgan) switched allegiance from Spiritualism to Christian Science. Christian Science was in fact credited for Worsley being healed of a drinking problem that became rather severe after his

Top: Postal workers Carolyn Gressman, Sharon Hicks, Pat Menard. Above: Brothers John and Mike Sullivan of Sandpiper Liquor. Opposite: Architecture, Summerland-style—a surfer's leg, Tinker's, and The Big Yellow House.



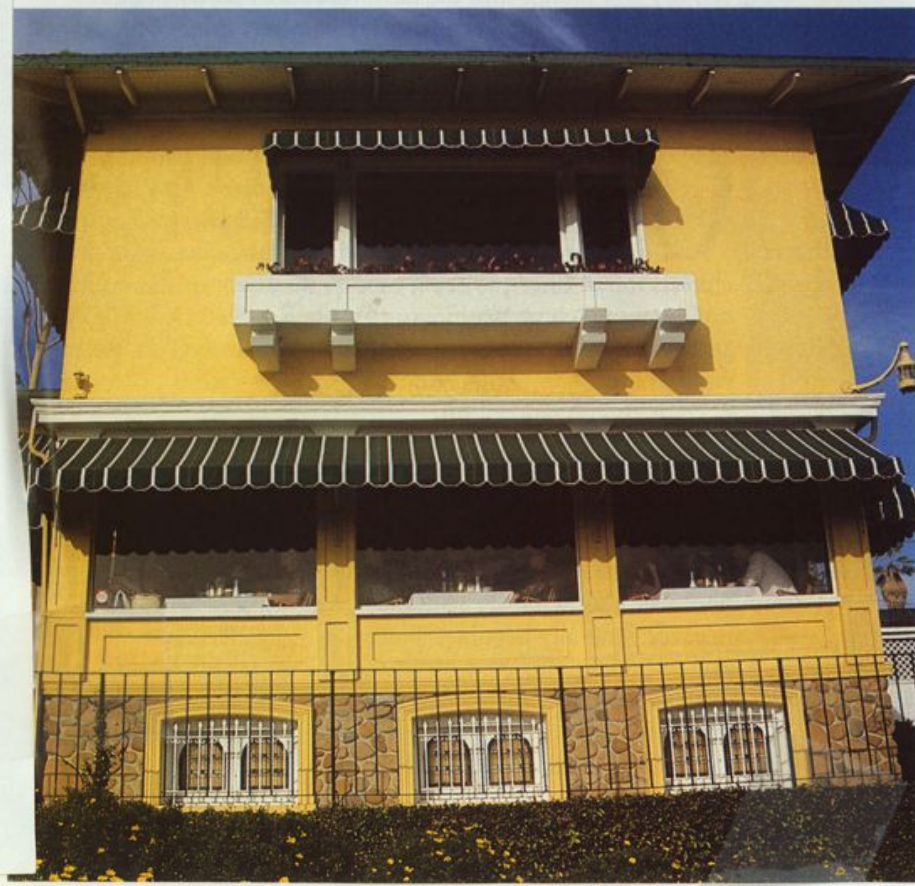
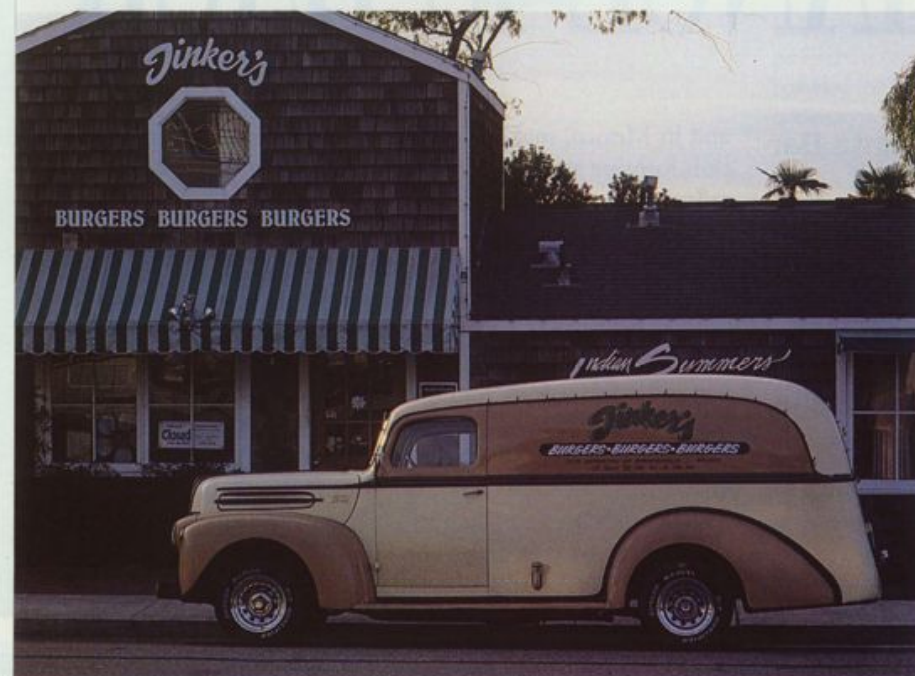
JOANN LEWIS



AL DANIELS



PHOTOS BY JOANN LEWIS



HILLARY HAUSER

oil business collapsed.

Perhaps there is a connection

tween the spirits of the past and the proliferation of antique stores in today's Summerland. Along Lillie Avenue there are for sale fabulous pieces of old furniture, crystal, silver, lamps, clothes, dolls, dishes and bric-a-brac from long ago. It used to be that Brinkerhoff Avenue was Santa Barbara's antique center. Not so any more. You can spend all day in Summerland browsing for antiques from one end of town to the other, stopping for a hamburger at The Nugget, Stacky's, the Summerland Beach Cafe or Tinker's.

The old combines with the new in Summerland's architecture. There are shacks and barns next to million-dollar stucco and glass structures. "It's the next Laguna Beach!" chirp the developers. "Bah, humbug!" growl the old-timers, who live in houses known by their oddities—a surfer's leg sticking out of the attic, Nixon's head atop a jumble of stuff in a front yard, or a wooden head sporting a bandanna and sunglasses atop a fence post.

Our house is a duplex built in the 1970s in the typical Summerland style—blue with white balconies. I decided to remodel the half we live in when Jim left for 10 days with a buddy to surf off the jungles of Rio Nexpa, Mexico (the first trip either of us had made without the other).

"Of course you have to do it when they're out of town!" said Sally Yater, who owns the Bikini Factory and whose husband Renny is a surfing legend. I had run into her at the post office, and she was trying to console my fear that Jim would kill me when he got back. "Our sliding door fell off the track the other day and Renny looked at it and said, 'It's fine! I see nothing wrong.' Of course you have to do it when they're out of town!"

I plowed ahead. In 10 days, with the help of my friends and professional carpenters, we replaced the ceilings throughout the house, along with the kitchen cupboards and cabinets, all the plumbing and lighting fixtures, and the carpet. We scraped, sanded, painted and wallpapered.

Down at Summerland Hardware, Gene Costantino put up with my daily hysteria. Daily I roared into this tranquil store shrieking about some disaster, and daily Gene figured out what to do. When Jim came home, he loved. Continued on page 101

Continued from page 35 it and was furious, too. He suggested I cut up my credit cards and then remodeled the rest of the house himself.

In any case, I now call Summerland Hardware the Summerland College of Remodeling. It is with deep gratitude that I think of their help.

I think this is when my transition from "Montecitan" to "Summerlander" became complete. I love the spirit that prevails here. There is a small-town spontaneity in Summerland that is rare and wonderful. During the holidays we threw a big party for our friends at The Big Yellow House, and everyone who came said they felt like they had come to their grandmother's house. And the last time I dropped into the Summerland Country Store to buy office supplies, I ended up sitting on the floor playing a sudden game of jacks with T.J. Glahn, co-owner of the store.

I am always up early, usually before the sun rises. When the rooster crows across the street I know it is time to take Skippy and Minke, our two schipperkes, for a morning romp. Sometimes we hike up to Whitney Avenue to watch the mountains behind Summerland turn from deep purple to mauve to orange. Sometimes we go to the beach and watch the polo ponies gallop by twos and threes toward us from a distant mist. Most of the time we go to a little beach just east of the Summerland beach houses and just run wild. We get back to the house in time for me to have coffee with Jim before he goes fishing.

At times like this I think of what my editor friend in New York said: Summerland *is* next to Fantasyland, though maybe not in the way he thinks.

This editor friend in fact called me up recently. He said he was making a business trip to California and wanted to drive up from Los Angeles for a brief visit. Great! I thought. Maybe I'll get another big fat assignment for his magazine.

He asked me how to get to Fantasyland. No, it's *Summerland* I said. Never mind, he said, what's the turnoff?

Now that I think about it, this person hung up awfully fast on me. And all I did was tell him the exit for Summerland was right after Santa Claus Lane. ≈

SANTA BARBARA CORPORATE CENTER HAS RAISED THE AREA'S STANDARD OF WORKING FOR A LIVING.

The Santa Barbara Corporate Center is a new business district located in the heart of the city. It features modern office space, retail shops, and a variety of services for businesses and residents alike. The center is designed to provide a high-quality work environment and to attract new businesses to the area.

The center is located in a prime location, just off the main highway. It is surrounded by other businesses and services, making it a convenient location for businesses and residents alike. The center is also designed to be a sustainable and eco-friendly building.

The center is a great place to work and live. It offers a variety of services and amenities, including parking, security, and a range of office space. The center is also a great place to visit, with its modern architecture and beautiful surroundings.

The center is a great addition to the city. It provides a high-quality work environment and attracts new businesses to the area. The center is also a great place to live, with its modern amenities and beautiful surroundings.