



The Hollywood lot I bought on the day I moved to Los Angeles, on my 33rd birthday, with no money down.

I drove to Los Angeles via Texas to avoid the spring snow storms and to see my family again. I arrived at Elizabeth's house in Los Angeles on March 27, 1986 with the intention of staying a few weeks to see what my prospects were in California. If I could not find work, I was going to move back to Texas to be near family. Everything seemed easy after the struggles and heartache in Colorado. I managed to make a little money in Austin selling art and doing a small home addition design job that I found through a gallery owner.

Elizabeth and I became lovers the first night, and potential business partners the next morning when she told me that she was interested in buying a piece of property and developing it. Because of my recently acquired architectural and development skills, she suggested putting up some money for a building lot for which I would do the plans and get it ready for permitting. We would then sell the package and split the profit. Meanwhile, I looked into doing special effects and matte paintings for film backgrounds in order to get back on my feet. Elizabeth had worked at Marvel

Productions, the company that produces Spiderman, so I applied there to become an animator. I had no experience in animation, but I was a quick study so I figured I would give it a try. Takashi, the Japanese head of the development department agreed to “digest” me at a starting salary of \$637 per week with the potential of going up to \$1000 a week by the end of twelve months (almost \$3,000 in 2025 dollars). It was also tentatively agreed that I would start work on May 1st, thereby cinching the decision to move to Los Angeles.

Elizabeth showed me a brochure from a land auction company and asked me to look it over. Most of the properties were out in the Antelope Valley, which was on the edge of the Mohave Desert. I had no interest in those, but I found a legal description of a residential lot in the Hollywood Hills, with a minimum bid of \$2,000. We went to have a look. We were stunned by the Hollywoodland location under the Hollywood Sign, but I could see why it had never been developed. For one, the road stopped just before the lot. Secondly, it had no utilities. Thirdly, and most problematic of all three, was that it was just off the end of Deronda Drive behind a chain link fence. The fence was to keep us from falling off a twenty-five foot granite retaining wall, which had a steep slope below that. The lot began two feet off the bottom of the wall some twenty-five below a dirt trail. We would need to rappel down the wall and the slope below that to be able to walk on any part of the property.

The street easement, on paper at least, was part of the original Mulholland Highway, most of which had since become the famous Mulholland Drive. The section had been graded in the 1920s, but never paved, but at least the retaining walls appeared intact. The wilderness had returned and had nearly obscured this disconnected portion of Mulholland, which was surrounded by Griffith Park.

The property was about two miles from the house Darlene and I had lived in at 2408 Hollyridge Drive. When I lived on Hollyridge, in 1981-1982, I had hiked or jogged past this lot on my way to the top of the mountain on many occasions and had mistakenly assumed that it was part of the park. When I looked at the plat map Elizabeth got from the auction house, I could see there were a few other undeveloped lots continuing on the overgrown easement deeper into the wilderness area.

I was especially impressed with a large flat lot that was two lots in. That property, pictured above, was nestled into a cul-de-sac formed by the canyon and the granite-faced retaining wall built in 1923, when the subdivision was first laid out. The

property was roughly pie-shaped and nestled in a cove, protected on three sides by cliffs in Griffith Park. The lot pointed toward the ocean, which was a strip of blue twelve miles away. I could even make out Catalina Island, moored in the haze fifty-two miles to the south.

In short, it was a dream property—secluded on what would could be a small gated street, in Hollywoodland, a charming, 1920s neighborhood for which the Hollywoodland sign was built long before it metamorphosed into the world-famous Hollywood Sign. The lot was surrounded by wilderness, with a large flat building pad and a view toward the city and ocean. Despite all these features, Elizabeth was not interested because it would require a 400-foot-long access road and she wanted a property we could flip without complications. She wanted to concentrate on the auction property at the intersection with the paved Deronda Drive, but said she would not mind if I pursued the other lot for myself.

I went to city hall in downtown Los Angeles to find the owner of record of what would later become 6030 Mulholland Hwy. I mailed a letter to the owner, Dorathi Bock Pierre, stating that I was interested in buying her property. Meanwhile, I started doing rough plans for the auction property, which would later be known as 6010 Mulholland Hwy.

On April 16th I headed back to Texas to finish up my business there in order to move back west. Elizabeth agreed to let me stay with her until I got an apartment. I arrived back in Los Angeles at 2 AM on my 33rd birthday, April 27, 1986. Liz showed me a postcard which had been sent to me, care of Elizabeth, from the owner of 6030 Mulholland. Around 10 a.m., I telephoned Ms. Pierre to discuss the lot. She was elderly with a cordial, upper crust, mid-Atlantic accent reminiscent of Eleanor Roosevelt. “Before we discuss the lot I must ask you something,” she said. “What sort of business are you in?”

“I’m an artist,” I said, “and a house designer.”

“Well, that is the right answer twice,” she said. “I might indeed be interested in selling you the lot.”

“What if I said I was a plumber?”

”Oh, goodness, the reason I asked you that question is because *Father* was an artist and so I always thought that an artist should develop it,” she said. “He worked with a famous architect for over 30 years. Because Father died before he could build

on the lot, I decided that I would only sell it to an artist or an architect.”

She cleared her throat. “The second thing to tell you is that I want a whole lot of money for it.”

“How much?”

“Twenty-five thousand,” she said.

The tax records showed that the two adjacent lots (6010 and 6018), also “land-locked” with no paved road or utilities, had sold only six years earlier, in 1980, for only \$600 each. However, real estate in California had just started to skyrocket in value. As long I could get all the permits, her price was reasonable, probably even a bargain. “I’ll be right over.” I said.

Dorathi lived in Sherman Oaks, in a small, pink Mediterranean house with a guest house where her housekeepers lived. The interior of her house was traditional and filled with objects that spanned the century that had arrived with her birth in 1900. Dorathi said *Father* in a regal manner that at once conveyed her bearing, her father’s importance to others, and the towering respect she felt for him. Her sculptor father, Richard W. Bock, had worked with that most acclaimed of American architects,



Dorathi Bock Pierre as dancer with choreographer Mikhail Fokin at the Manhattan Opera House, 1920

Frank Lloyd Wright. Their professional association lasted from 1897 until Wright left his first wife and their six children, after falling in love with Miriam Noel in 1914. Wright wanted Bock to move with him to Tokyo, beginning in 1916, for an extended visit to rebuild the Imperial Hotel. Bock did not want to disrupt his own family, so he turned down the commission. The separation affected Bock deeply, and he never worked with Wright again, but their friendship continued until Bock died in 1949. The Wright and Bock families had often dined together in Oak Park, Illinois where they both lived when Dorathi was growing up and this association affected her profoundly.

Dorathi's name ended with an "i" instead of a "y" because her parents did not want her to have exactly the same name as Dorothy in Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* book series, which was an incredible 39 years before the 1939 movie with Judy Garland was released. Dorathi was trained in dance. Around 1920, Dorathi became a ballet dancer in the Fokine Ballet in Manhattan under the famed Russian choreographer and dancer Mikhail Fokin. She later became the editor-publisher of a dance magazine as well as a press and public relations director for many theater and dance companies. She had been married to theater producer and manager Jacques Pierre until his death.

"When I lived on Hollyridge Drive a few years back I had often walked by your property," I said, "but at that time I had assumed the lot was part of Griffith Park."

"I also lived on Hollyridge when my father first bought that lot back in 1927," she said. "It was 2408 Hollyridge Drive—I can't believe I remember that."

"Wait, *what?*," I said. "I can't believe it either, because I lived at 2408 when I first saw your lot back in 1981!" I said. "I lived there because my girlfriend, who was also a dancer, found it for us before I moved here from Paris. That's just too weird. Are you sure of the address?"

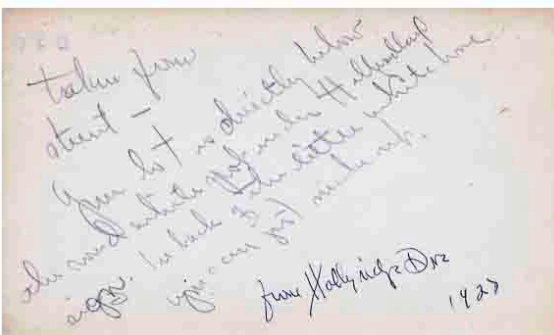
"I'll prove it," she said with a laugh and got up to get a box of old photos.

She came back with a yellowed photograph that showed the area in front of the house looking toward the Hollywoodland sign. (2408 Hollyridge is on the right, out of the sight below the street). On the back of the photograph was a notation to her father: "Taken from street—your lot is directly below the round white spot under Hollywoodland sign. In back of the little white house you can just make it out. From Hollyridge Drive 1927."

"I have the same photograph!" I said, completely flabbergasted at this point.



Above: Photograph taken by Dorathi Bock Pierre from Hollyridge Drive in 1927
 Below: Photograph I took in December 1981 from same vantage. 2408 is below street level on right. The Model A is in the same position as the Volkswagon bug.



Note to Dorathi's father (and me) from 1927

"Except I took mine in 1981. It's the same view, but in my picture the sign has been rebuilt from Hollywoodland into Hollywood."

She let me have the photograph, which I still have, and I was able to match up the photograph I had taken when I also lived there in 1981 and 1982.

“Seems like it was meant to be,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

“Not only that,” I said. “Today is my birthday, and I only moved back to L.A. this morning.”

“Well, happy birthday and welcome back.”

“Thanks, but I have to tell you that I only have \$35, so if I buy the lot it has to be under special terms,” I said.

“What do you suggest?”

“How about no money down, interest-only the first year, and then amortized over five years, with you carrying the note?”

“It’s a deal,” she said with a smile and handshake. “Now hurry and build it so I can see it!”

I had just bought the property of my dreams, on the first day that I had moved back to L.A., on my birthday, with no money down, from a woman who had been saving it “for the right person” for nearly 60 years.



John Casey and me at the same location! 1981

More than 27 years later, on December 1, 2013, I was re-writing this account when my almost-twelve-year-old daughter Sophie asked me why I was writing about myself instead of making up fictional characters. “Sometimes truth is stranger than fiction,” I said. “If I wrote this as a fictional story, it would seem contrived or just plain unbelievable. In fiction it is called a *deus ex machina*—Latin for a god outside the machine of the universe that just swoops into the plot to fix something.”

Certainly in my case in early 1986, having just lost two businesses and two loved ones, a *deus ex machina* would do just fine. I had also lost my home, gone through a break-up, been accused of murder, and only had \$35. I needed an improbable, lucky turn of events that would turn around my fortunes. And I got it.

I told Sophie this story for the first time, along with the far more improbable series of coincidences that followed. I showed her the 1927 and 1981 pictures side by side. But my daughter, who had learned to be skeptical at her father's knee, was only mildly impressed. She returned to watching videos on YouTube.

She was still absorbed in the videos, when a few hours later, I got an email from my high school friend, John Casey, who—totally out of the blue—included a 1982 picture of the two of us in front of the Mercedes I had imported from Europe. It was taken in front of same 2408 Hollyridge Drive where I had lived with Darlene, and showed the same view as the two photos I had just shown Sophie! I had never before seen this photo, and when I saw the suspenders I was wearing, and my weird experiment with a perm, I almost wished I had not.

Sophie was now impressed. But what is the explanation? Could it really be pure chance? Was the universe constantly bifurcating into alternative, more interesting worlds? Are quantum mechanical and holographic properties playing a part? Can trans-temporal slippage occur in an “All at Once” box universe? Was it caused by mini-wormholes or some other thing popping out of the machine of the universe? Whatever it was, I was rescued again by the *deus ex machina* that made my 27-year-old story relevant to the next generation. Furthermore, I have not yet revealed to you the strangest part of the story.