

LOUISE LEONG

Curb Alert 1, 2018
Gouache on paper, 11 x 14



HUGH FOWLER

Reiko

I had been expecting a protest on one of the Bay Area bridges for a long time. It still surprised me when a group associated with Black Lives Matter shut down the westbound lanes of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge briefly during the MLK Day protest on Jan 18, 2016. Not that it finally happened, but that it had taken over fifty years. Back in the early 1960s, a small group of us had talked about blockading the Golden Gate at a small antiwar meeting in Berkeley. In the years since, I wondered why no other group tried it. Maybe others had talked about it, but they couldn't bring it off for some reason. When this blockade finally happened, it made me question, not for the first time, my actions all those years ago. That was near the end of 1964, when a lot of things seemed possible.

If we had gone ahead with the blockade, Reiko might have stayed with me. If my commitment had matched Reiko's, we might have had a serious, long-term relationship. There might not have been so much drama between us, but would that have been a bad thing? We were young and it seemed the world was spiraling out of control. The first year Reiko and I were at Cal, but before we'd met, the Cuban Missile Crisis made it frighteningly clear that the U.S. and the USSR were willing to go up to, and over, the brink. I remember listening to speakers in the plaza outside Dwinelle Hall at UC Berkeley in October 1962. I'd just started college a month before. Some of my professors were saying that California, with its defense industries and air force bases, would be a prime target in a nuclear exchange with the USSR. I was afraid my freshman year might be my last. We didn't know if we could change the world, but we knew it needed to change.

The Golden Gate Bridge has been, since it was opened in 1937, the major route into and out of San Francisco for everyone traveling between the city and the northern peninsula. This includes Sausalito, Petaluma, Marin, and the wealthy communities of Belvedere and Ross. This being the Bay Area, even the wealthy communities could be politically liberal—which is exactly what our planned demonstration counted on.

Since the Bay Area commute is already horrendous, any traffic jam on either the Golden Gate or the Bay Bridge to Oakland will seriously impact the whole Bay Area. We were planning to stop traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge, at least long enough to get our signs and banners out.