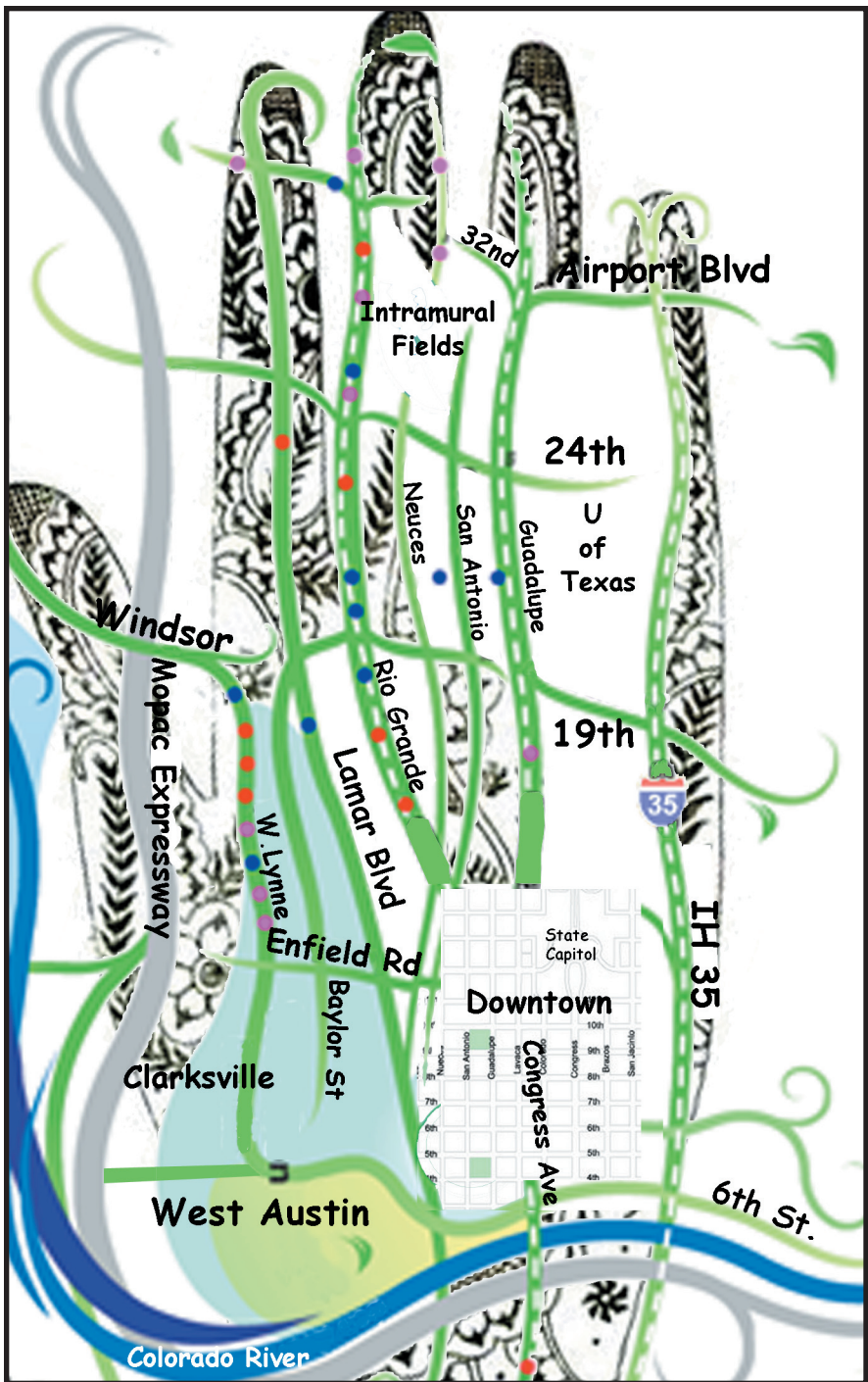


The
Indigenous
Tribesmen
of
Neverland



The Signed Hand House of Chance and Love

Alive and Well in Austin

It was raining down in Texas, falling down heavy that spring. It was the 30th year of my life and I was expecting some great mystery to unfold, but circumstances were anything but auspicious — they were tough. I was trying to get back on my feet from getting busted on the farm. I had once been a science teacher in college, but had been revisited by the unfulfilled restlessness of my youth and once again gone bumming around the country, hitchhiking and trying to be part of various utopian / creative / spiritual / healthy / artistic scenes. Now, compared to the material progress of the people I grew up with, and went to school with, I was slipping down the shadow path to a shoeless oblivion. Oh well, don't mean to be dramatic, it wasn't that bad. I had thought to get rich and have a freedom garden against the paraquat scare, and it grew into a huge marijuana farm operation and it got busted, and after I got out of jail, I had like 11 cents to my name and was homeless. I had to engage in various forms of couch-surfing and crashing at various friend's houses in a sort of indentured servitude labor exchange. Some kind of reckoning was required. My lawyer had to get paid, and the only job I could get was a tile setter's apprentice and I was grateful for that. Thus I had the money to put down the deposit and rent this great flat at the back of the big house at 1100 Baylor Street in Austin when it came available.

Our community of domiciles there was just off Lamar and within walking distance to down town. The layout of the big house and its associated little houses scattered around it and above it, occupied a hill, so that from any one of the houses you had a superb uninterrupted view of the skyline. Yet the

denizens therein were all screened by a forest of big old trees overhanging, so that you felt hidden and kind of invisible behind and under them. And in them too, for some of the trees had whole adult sized tree-houses, with verandas and swings in them. What's more, those tall (higher than an elephant's eye tall) reeds on the south side in front of Juliet Hapsburg-Bourbon's studio were so thick that no one but little pygmy ankle-biter children could possibly get through there. Yes, it was kind of wild and overgrown and shaggy, the way we liked it, all densely set about with trees and climbing vines and circuitous rock walks and stone steps with slab seats and grottoes set in great temple walls made of big white bricks quarried from the same place where the university got theirs, with little paleontological shell life forms in them. Talbot got all this masonry, left over from landscaping jobs or that he bought.

It was one of the most interesting places of the many I had lived in Austin as a struggling student and bohemian slacker in that liberal college town, known as an oasis "Cambridge of the Plains" set in the capital of what could sometimes be a redneck hellhole state. While living there with a house mate named Wild Bill, I had a young girlfriend, Laura who was still in high school at the time.

I was the last to rent there, I signed my name Walker Underwood to the lease for the big two story flat in the back of the big house. The flat was a run down fixer when I got in there and I didn't have a stick of furniture, just rolled out my sleeping bag on the floor in that big room up the stairs. The kitchen cabinets around the sink were pretty much rotted out from the leaks. I had a funny little blues song about it running through my head and would sing it sometimes, in that high falsetto voice of The Cream: "I need to find a washer, to stop up the leaky faucet of my doom. Gotta find me some kind of washer, to stop up the leaky faucet of my doo-oom."