

## **One Year After The Crash, Santa Monica Is Still Healing**

by Thomas Brennan

Bodies broken and injured and bleeding on the ground! That is the image that got us!

For our country, the last three years have been the most violent three years since the height of the Viet Nam War. But with the sanitized, disembodied coverage of the early stages of the Iraqi War, the one thing we hadn't seen live on Los Angeles TV until a year ago, was American bodies broken and injured and bleeding on the ground.

It took searing images from the horrible car accident in Santa Monica, California, on July 16, 2003, to let us know, again, how precious and fleeting life is; how fragile our physical bodies are.

I am a Santa Monican. It is where my business is and where my home is.

It is this town on the coast of California that is the most accurate microcosm of America today, and a barometer of extremes that can truly be called American.

This is the city where Stan Laurel lived and Britney Spears has moved. This is the city where O.J.'s civil trial convened and where Bob Dylan opened a coffeehouse. This is the city where Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda thrived. This is the city where church groups campaign to feed the homeless. This is the city where the Chamber of Commerce campaigns to deny raises to the workers at the lavish beachfront hotels. This city has given us movie stars as diametrically different as Shirley Temple and Dustin Hoffman. Santa Monica High School was used as James Dean's school in "Rebel Without A Cause." This is the city where Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe hung his hat and where Gidget hung ten.

This city even puts up with Ed Begley, Jr. (we have a sense of humor--but just don't bring Woody Harrelson in).

In this city of opposites and contradictions, there have always been certain zones where even the upscale movie folk and the cardboard-sign toting homeless can co-exist in harmony. The over-accessorized Humvee next to the wobbly-wheeled shopping cart. One of those zones is a tradition of commerce that is Americana to the bone--the Wednesday Farmer's Market on Arizona Avenue.

The Farmer's Market is that serene village scene that connects us as a tribe. "A continuity," as the late Santa Monican John McGiver said in "Breakfast At Tiffany's." An unpretentious

gathering of all kinds of people, coming together to buy and sell fresh fruit, flowers, and vegetables in the open air. A Farmer's Market is a celebration of our ancestral past. Like a barn-raising, a volunteer bucket brigade, or a harvest dance, it is the last remaining vestige of Non-Corporatized, Non-Super-Sized America.

Last year, for natives of Santa Monica and tourists alike, to see that pastoral scene torn and gutted by all the wreckage a motor vehicle can do at fast speeds was like receiving a knife in our collective gut. And then came a quick coastal rain on that strange, humid Wednesday afternoon, falling on the wounded and the rescue workers alike, forever imprinting the poignancy even more.

But as a microcosm and as a living town, Santa Monica has tried its best to make sense of the tragedy and to heal. We still send all of our best wishes to the families of the victims, and pray that we have learned enough from the accident that, at least, with physical barriers in place at the edge of the market, and the reasonable request that competency-tests be made mandatory for very elderly drivers, we've started to take steps to prevent future accidents. We are also proud that as a city, we haven't run from the various issues involved in the case nor spent the year since in endless blaming. And we are thankful that for our community, the Farmer's Market continues as a tradition of place and belonging that every town in America should have.

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