

Anthony's America 8: Hollywood at 35, Buddha's Belly, Jewish Seders, Rodeo Drive Plastic People, LA Tar Pits & Tigers



After travelling down from Mendocino - stopping off at Sacramento - I reached Hollywood on my 35th birthday. That's a pretty cool thing to say. So cool, in fact, I'm going to say it again and use italics this time: *I reached Hollywood on my 35th birthday.*

Before this, however, I stayed in Santa Barbara again; I loved it there last time and I'd arranged to do couch surfing with a girl living near the university campus. Except, I got there and she told me, on her doorstep, that her housemates didn't want to do couch surfing anymore! Making me homeless that night. After I told her she could have let me know *before* I set off (chastising her in the most patronising British teacher-like fashion I could muster), I went to a hotel.

I spent the next two wonderful, relaxing days mooching around Santa Barbara drinking, eating spicy food, going to a gorgeous farmer's market on main street (eating juicy strawberries as big as my hand), watching films and considering whether or not to take myself to the city's "Gentleman's Club" - Spearmint Rhino - for my birthday.

As everyone who knows me will swear, I'm an incredibly innocent and naive British man (cue dirty laugh: *fnar-fnar*) and have only been to two seedy [horrible] strip clubs in my life. But never a "Gentleman's Club". It felt like a good idea as a birthday treat, but it never happened. I drank way too much Mexican beer and went back to my hotel instead to have a hilarious skype chat with my friends Heather and Emily in Mendocino. That was far more fun than watching tanned, naked, big breasted, long legged, stunning girls writhing around in front of me. Er...?

After Santa Barbara came Los Angeles, where I am now. But, before I get to Hollywood I must mention one new cultural experience I had before I left Mendocino: a Jewish Seder.

Heather is a LA-born Jew and she asked me if I would like to experience something traditionally Jewish. As you're no doubt aware, Jews don't celebrate Easter, they hold a communal dinner with family and friends - as part of a ceremony called The Seder - instead; this marks the beginning of the Passover holiday.



The semi-formal Seder represents the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in ancient Egypt. It involves people sitting at a long table, taking turns to read from the *Haggadah* - the book that summarises the story of the Israelites' suffering as they left Egypt.

But the gathering also involves eating. And I mean, *A LOT* of eating. I may not be Jewish but, luckily, I'm a big fan of eating.

There are different courses of food served in between the *Haggadah* readings that each go along

with the Seder Plate; a symbolic dish with six special foods on it, each one representing a different part of the Israelites' Exodus story. And, so, for your education (and mine), I will now regurgitate Wikipedia (well, at least I'm honest) with what those six types of food are and their meanings in Jewish history:

- *Maror and chazerot* - two types of bitter herbs representing the suffering of Jewish slavery in Egypt. The herbs are usually horseradish and romaine lettuce.
- *Charoset* - a brown, pasty or crumbly mixture of fruits and nuts representing the mortar used by Jewish slaves to build Egyptian storehouses.
- *Karpas* - a non-bitter vegetable such as parsley, celery or potato that's dipped in salt water. The vegetables represent the coming of spring and the salt water the tears of Jews shed during slavery.
- *Zeroa* - this is a roasted lamb bone symbolising the sacrifice of the lamb in the Temple of Jerusalem as part of the korban pesach. The lamb is part of the meal on Seder Night.
- *Beitzah* - a roasted egg representing the korban chagigah - the festival sacrifice - offered in the Temple of Jerusalem.
- Jews often also include an orange to represent the fruitfulness of Jews and marginalised people all over the world.



I did very much enjoy the Seder - even when I had to read out parts of the Jewish story to eighteen other people I'd never met. And, even though I'm not a massive fan of this type of formal ceremony of remembering traditions and history, I did really enjoy the experience and the people I met there; so many givers.

In the UK, we have a lot of 'Remember Our History' ceremonies (the only one I truly adhere to is Remembrance Day in November for the war dead) and, although it's good to learn lessons from the past and thank those who sacrificed their lives, I think dwelling too much on the past can also create trouble in the future; an over indulgence of recalling pain and suffering seems to me to stir up negative emotions - such as hate and anger - making it harder for newer generations, living now, to begin a fresh and clean-slate approach to the world, rather than one clouded with thoughts of revenge.

Transferring past pain and suffering to those living in the present seems forever self-defeating; it is a cycle that needs to be broken by communal understanding and forgiveness. On all sides. I realise that, if I'd lost a loved one in a conflict, I may be phrasing this differently, but I still think that forgiveness - it may be the hardest thing to achieve in any life context - yet it is always the most rewarding for everyone involved emotionally and physically.



But enough of this! Let's get back to Hollywood. Whohoo! Oh, what a dichotomous world of dark and light I live in.

So, as I said, I arrived on my birthday and spent the entire day looking for places to live temporarily. Some were apartments in West Hollywood, others were in Santa Monica, but I finally settled on a lovely house in Marina del Ray (this was after a woman in West

Hollywood demanded \$1500 up front at 10pm in the evening before I moved in - 'sure, love,' I said and promptly left). The place I'm staying at right now is owned by a 50-year-old woman with two kids (they don't live at home anymore). She's a hairdresser, it's a spanking clean house with cable, wi-fi and a swimming pool and sauna right outside the front door.



I hardly saw the place, though, for the first four days I was in LA as I worked at the AFCI tradeshow; an international gathering of movie locations managers. This was at the Civic Auditorium on Main Street in Santa Monica. I represented the California Film Commission and our stand was - irony of ironies - next to the United Kingdom film commission's booth.

I went to say 'hello' to the UK people and have a chat about what was happening in the British film industry, but they all seemed pretty miserable as their flights had been cancelled for a week (because of ash spewing out of the erupted Icelandic volcano, Eyjafjallajökull) and they couldn't get home. So I left them to it, glad I was doing film liaison work for California.



And, talking of film liaison, lots of the commissioners went out two nights in a row during the tradeshow. The first night to an asian-fusion restaurant with the intriguing name of *Buddha's Belly*, and on the second evening to an Italian place called *Buca di Beppo*. This was a fun, bizarre place with pictures of Nuns in bumper cars and the Mona Lisa with breasts, where the desserts were bigger than my head and where the waitresses sang happy birthday to me whilst I blew out an italian-coloured candelabra. You can watch a video of that [here](#).



I had a great time at the tradeshow and with everyone, including when I went for a tour round LA with the lovely Charla (film commissioner for Imperial County which is next to the Mexican border) and her friend Beth. We hit tourist hotspots, first visiting the La Brea Tar Pits. These are ancient methane-filled mini-lakes in the middle of a park next to Los Angeles' skyscrapers. It's an unearthly juxtaposition of busy, modern roads and racing cars with black tar-filled puddles that cough up the fossilised bones of Mammoths and Sabre-tooth Tigers.



There is an excellent museum at the La Brea Tar Pits ('La Brea' means 'tar' in Spanish) full of huge, extinct Bison and Mammoth skeletons, films showing the Tar Pits' history and a working palaeontologist's lab. Like the man-child I am, I love museums, and really enjoyed myself here learning about a deeper historical part of LA that didn't involve movie-making.

However, we did move straight on to that side of LA afterwards as we drove to Hollywood Boulevard to visit Mann's Chinese Theater. The

first thing we encountered was a Michael Jackson look-a-like and a man with a loud speaker shouting 'come on the celebrity tour that takes you to the house where Jackson died!'. Ah, Hollywood, it's so classy.

So, after putting my hands in Tom Hanks' hands (in the concrete outside the theatre, you understand, he wasn't just standing nearby with his hands out), we left for the everso ridiculously posh Rodeo Drive.



Now, I've never been one to understand clothes labels or girls' shoe labels (I mean, what exactly is a Jimmy Choo?), so I was a little taken aback by the oozing money pit of the short Rodeo Drive. The stores are so lavish that it would make a Sheik quake with jealousy.

The next day, I met Debra and Monique for a final farewell breakfast at the wonderfully rustic *Urth Cafe* in the arts district of downtown LA. This was my final week of being Debra's intern, representing the film office of Mendocino County. It was very sad to say goodbye to Debra (although I know we'll keep in touch as I feel she's as much my friend as boss) as I feel she has helped me so much, and provided me with so many opportunities, in the past four months. I'm so grateful to her and everyone in Fort Bragg.



And so now I'm in Los Angeles. The home of films. What to do next? Do I just stay for a month and see how I like it or do I try and get a job? Part of me feels I need to stay here, do more of the writing I so desperately came to America to do and - at the same time - make the most of the other opportunities on offer here before I have to leave. And already I do seem to have opportunities coming my way. Just what they are, I will keep you posted on later, as they're being worked on.

So that's all you're getting for now. As usual, to see all the wonderful pictures that go with this part of my USA adventure, click [here](#). Until next time dudes and dudesses, stay well. Wink.