

Tales From The Road :Bright lights, big city, L.A. glitz

by Leah Lubin



Need to get away quickly? A few days off, don't want to spend too much money (or even if you do)? Los Angeles is where I recommend you go. Here is our tale of the three glorious days my husband and I just spent there.

First of all, we had a major reason to go there. My son, Daniel Raim, was having a premier first night party for his documentary, *The Man On Lincoln's Nose*. It was being held in a large auditorium at the American Film Institute where he had graduated nearly three years ago. The main subject of the film was art director Robert Boyle, a long time teacher and department head of art production at the American Film Institute.

So how best to get to Los Angeles? While most people fly, I say drive. A six-to-seven-hour journey, if you leave in the morning you'll get there in the early afternoon, in time to rest up for the evening— and you even get to keep your car. With delays in flights, renting a car, and leaving LAX, driving just makes more sense. You should take food for the road and eat that. Leave dining until you get to Los Angeles where the choices are better. During the last couple of hours, the scenery becomes quite placid, but calm in a way, maybe the last peace and quiet your mind will get. So relax and enjoy the ride. Half an hour before you arrive in the big city, there is a spot where I recommend you stop. Take a few minutes and enjoy a clean place to wash up at the California Department of Water Resources Vista del Lago Visitors Center at Pyramid Lake on Interstate 5.

Back on the road, you are soon facing the beginning of L.A. traffic, and it never gets better until you finally leave the city. L.A.'s low point is its freeway driving conditions, but since we are only on a visit we blend in as best we can and don't complain.



As for accommodations, it's good to know where you're going to stay and why. If you don't want to go out of the way, and enjoy staying at glamorous places with the possibility of running into a famous face, try the Beverly Hills Hotel or Chateau Marmont. We were looking for a different experience. On our last trip, the American Film Institute said, "Try the Hollywood Hills Best Western on Franklin Avenue." When we went to check it out, we found a few interesting things about the place we immediately liked. First of all, it's like no Best Western I've ever seen before. In fact, this older building, run by the same family for the past three generations, has its own personality. Outside the building corridors and parking lots, there are many murals on what must be every wall in the building, different Hollywood films and movie stars being the theme. The artist is a hotel employee who is encouraged to paint and show off his skills. We found the view from our window overlooking the Hollywood sign and midst rolling hills and rooftops to be quite charming. One more note: The hotel lobby sports a great coffee shop with really good food.

After a late lunch, we went upstairs to rest and get ready for the evening events. At 7 p.m., we entered the American Film Institute's campus in Hollywood. The beautiful campus on Western Avenue was built on a hill with charm, and has an old time feel. Most striking is the energy, people hanging out in interesting looking groups, props and even a small but busy film crew. It has the laid-back ease of modern glamour and filmmaking history all rolled into one. The evening, a warm one for January, found us making our way to the Mark Goodson screening room and lobby to see a group of around 200 people gathering. Filmmakers and well-established friends were the core group of the evening. I quickly realize that filmmakers minus "the stars" makes for more informal and relaxed atmosphere. There was a buzz in the air, especially about the upcoming film, but also as expected, about the various projects and films the gathered people were involved in.

Robert Boyle, 91, was holding court as he sat in the auditorium greeting guests, fellow filmmakers, and what seemed to be at least a few female fans. You might wonder how he could still be teaching and running a department at AFI at his age. I can tell you this riddle I still haven't worked out. Al Nozaki, looking amazing, a beloved American art director of Japanese descent, 100 percent blind, also 91, sat next to Robert Boyle and greeted people in his own way. Harold Michelson, an Academy Award nominated art director for *Star Trek*, *The Motion Picture*, and his wife Lillian, Gene Allen from *My Fair Lady* fame, floated by. Also, art director Jim Bissell from *ET* fame was there that night.



The evening was started off by Sam Grogg, Dean of the American Film Institute, who stood before the darkened curtain and introduced the audience to the many famous people sitting amongst them. Seeing the film for the first time on a big screen and watching it receive a healthy applause from the audience, including people with nowhere to sit but the aisle, was exceptionally exciting. Coffee and cookies followed the movie, along with time to share and talk. I observed Lillian Michelson, a petite blonde, playing the role of getting people to meet and talk to each other. A great evening was wrapped up at Robert Boyle's daughter and son-in-law's Hollywood Hills home later that night. An interesting home, it was built originally by Howard Hughes for his silent screen actress mistress along with the secret escape exits from one of the bathrooms.

Day two started with breakfast at Millie's, an artsy hangout in the more Bohemian part of L.A. known as Silverlake. Food okay, but atmosphere and stress release factor excellent. We decided to take up Lillian and Harold Michelson's offer of lunch at DreamWorks. DreamWorks provides a home for the Lillian Michelson Research Library which is an amalgamation of 7,000 plus books, 100,000 periodicals, and over one million clippings all available for the use of filmmakers, writers etc. DreamWorks also provides three high standard meals for their employees every day for free, and as much espresso or coffee drinks as you can drink, plus free life drawing classes to make sure their employees are happy and continue to be good artists.



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The day was rounded out by a sushi dinner at a restaurant on Venice Beach complete with a late-night walk on the water's edge. With sand in our shoes, we returned to our room, happy but tired.

Day three, our final day, started off with breakfast in the Hollywood Hills Coffee Shop off the hotel lobby where every inch of their wall space was covered with some celebrity face or another. On to our big event of the day, we were off to the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts to view the "Made in California Art, Image and Identity 1900 - 2000" exhibit, a great art show well worth catching. That evening, a drive down Melrose Avenue for eye candy, the Sunset Boulevard, always a "must see." We ended up at Canter's restaurant on Fairfax Avenue. Good Jewish food that is hard to find in the Bay Area. Next morning, home.

Footnote:

Director Daniel Raim has received an Oscar nomination for the film *The Man On Lincoln's Nose* in the short documentary category.

Further information can be found at

http://oscar.com/nominees/bios/docshort_lincoln.html.