

Walking what was once ruined

Teacher creates audio walking tour of downtown Santa Cruz in the aftermath of Loma Prieta

By AUSTIN WALSH

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With the help of a class she led at UC Santa Cruz, a social documentarian has created an oral history of downtown Santa Cruz before and after the Loma Prieta earthquake. It was compiled from interviews conducted by the class, which captured the perspective of those who survived the temblor.



YAHM

Sarah Yahm, who now teaches in Vermont, used the stories collected from community members and city officials like former Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, City Councilman Mike Rotkin, journalist Bruce Bratton

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SARAH YAHM, social documentarian

and Supervisor Neal Coonerty to create a narrative walking tour. People may download the audio file from the tour's Web site, put it on an audio player and take the tour while walking through the streets that are being described.

Those interested in taking the tour can visit <http://santacruzafterthequake.wordpress.com> to download the audio file.

Yahm's tour takes the listener on a 45-minute walk from the site of the former Cooper House on Pacific Avenue and Cooper Street to the Town Clock at the intersec-

tion of Pacific and Water Street. "The notion is that basically you have oral histories of a certain place, but you listen to them on your iPod as you walk through them. You are literally sort of seeing your street through somebody else's perspective," explained Yahm. "You are walking down a place you have walked before, but you are hearing the voices of people who see in it a different way."

Yahm said she got the idea to do the tour when living in Santa Cruz as a UCSC graduate stu-

dent listening to people who had experienced the quake wax poetic about how beautiful downtown was before the rebuilding effort.

"I kept hearing when I moved up to Santa Cruz, people saying 'oh well you should have seen Santa Cruz before the earthquake,' and I got curious," said Yahm. "And I was like 'why is everyone talking about Santa Cruz before the earthquake like it was some sort of utopian heaven?' I wanted my questions about how Santa Cruz had changed after the earthquake answered."

When she began researching the topic last November, she was not aware of any efforts to commemorate the earthquake's anniversary. She and a class of eight students spent a summer session conducting interviews. The project was finished and uploaded

Tuesday.

Yahm, a native of New York, was in New York City the day of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. She compared the relief effort she experienced the days immediately following the attack to those described to her after the quake.

"In the time ... right after such a disaster, people's normal modes of interaction really collapsed and there was a public dialog among New Yorkers that I had never witnessed before. And so I was really curious, too, about that post-disaster period in Santa Cruz," said Yahm.

"I wanted to document that time when people have interactions they wouldn't normally have, and think thoughts they wouldn't

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normally have and think thoughts about what a town and community can be that they wouldn't normally have."

Yahm felt involving UCSC students in the project was important to establish a connection between the students and the history

of town they were going to school in.

"I really wanted to do this project with UCSC students because we come into the town, we may have never been there before, we don't know its history, and I think its really important we have a sense of the history of the place we are living in, and the community we are living in and a part of," said Yahm.