

SANTA CRUZ

From French-cut beaches to Pacific Garden Mall

By PAUL BEATTY
Sentinel Staff Writer

ON A DAY crystalized in sunshine, Santa Cruz is the second best feeling in the world.

From its French-cut beaches to its lounging "trolls" at the Top of the Mall, Santa Cruz is a stroll on the sunny, the slummy, and the funny sides of California life.

Street theater-in-the-round, acted out by new-wave punkers, reaping a rich reward in middle-class' glares; shoppers and shopkeepers trading plastic for plastic; attorneys arguing their latest briefs while women window shoppers read promises of "30 percent off all lingerie." Already at a bare minimum. A cameo appearance by an androgynous couple, daring to walk hand-in-hand. And always a moving, laughing backdrop of the young.

Santa Cruz belongs to the young.

We begin the walk early at the Main Beach where the sands are sprinkled

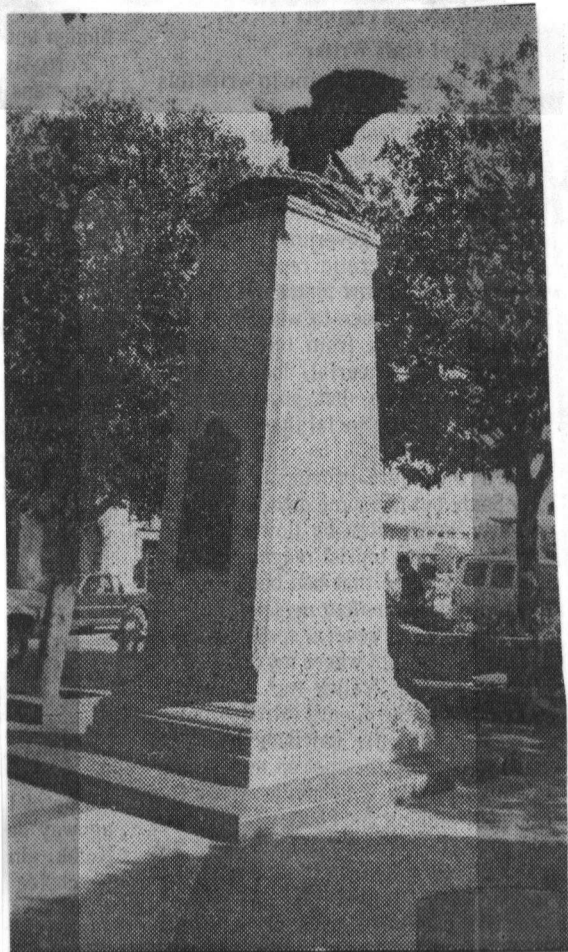
with bikini-striped lemmings from Santa Clara Valley.

Warm sand, where a young mom chases her ecstatic, droop-suited 3-year-old, in and out of the sun-stroked crowd, teasing the child, "Here I come. Here I come. I'm gonna getcha. I'm gonna getcha."

Her words echo down the beach where a dripping Adonis chases his giggling Aphrodite. "I'm gonna getcha. I'm gonna getcha."

Lifeguard Captain Rich Gould, perched on his stilted tower, watches over the sunseekers and the sea, and worries about a young man who's swimming out too far. If the winter waves kick up and no lifeguard's around, his life would depend on the surfers and strong swimmers nearby. People like Eric Graves, Brian O'Reagan, Eric Mitchell and Tim Morley who have gone into the sea and saved lives before.

Soon, the city will have a rescue team, they say.



Statue dedicated to 'soldiers and sailors of all wars.'

The sand burns as we run for the cooler concrete surface of the wharf.

"Monterey Bay's not a bay," whines a tourist from San Francisco, "It's a only a bight."

"And what's worse," says the pale cosmopolite, leaning over the rail, "this isn't a wharf, it's a pier. Look in the dictionary, a wharf runs parallel to the shore."

Who cares? we mutter. Wharf or pier, it's never been the same since Don-the-Hamburger-Man pulled up his ground steaks in 1983 and went home. For 20 zany years, Don De Amicis dished out humor with every hot dog — "a little ice cream on your hot dog, kid?" We lost Don when the city demolished his stand to build a humorless mall on the wharf.

The city's been messing around with the wharf for so long, workers from privately contracted firms know all the shopkeepers on a first-name basis. "Hi Ray, how's the new business?" one yells to former cop Ray Parodi as he opens the door to his new La Bella Vita Delicatessen.

Fresh crab is \$3.95 a pound today, and fish sellers in blue coveralls, sweaters and wool scarves, unload "local" fish from Idaho, New England, Alaska and one carton from Holland, packed with iced skates, we guess.

Parking meters, like long rows of eyeballs on sticks, stare back at the anonymous parking meter person who drives around in a little put-put, flushing pigeons and stirring up tourists with mementos from Santa Cruz.

We pass a row of restaurants — Miramar, Gilda's, Malio's, Hungry Pelican and the Sea Cloud — to stop at the old Dolphin at the end of the wharf for Boston chowder, San Francisco sourdough and ruby-red wine from Felton.

Fisherfolks at the rails, each one a lesson in optimism, watch gulls wheel in the clean blue overhead. Sea lions grunt among the grubby pilings.

A stuffed red rockfish eyeballs us from a boat rental shop as we head to the Boardwalk, its rides like beached sea serpents bleached to skeletons in the sun. The burnt-red casino, gold-touched over arched letter 'M's, offers a madhouse of kids training to push buttons.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Magic Carpet Motel on West Cliff Drive.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Pacific Garden Mall is a gathering place for punk-rockers.

A boy from the Philippines who was quick as a cat, named Vincent Leonine, used to draw crowds with his mastery of the racing car game.

Overhead, the Skyride slides back and forth carrying two riders doomed to live aloft forever.

Sentinel reporter Joan Raymond will never forget them.

During a power outage last spring, the Boardwalk had to rescue its Skyriders by using auxiliary power to carefully bring them back to earth. Hours after the rescue, Joan was taking a walk along the beach and noticed that two Skyriders were still up there, calmly sitting in their little space car.

She returned to the newsroom and called Boardwalk President Charles Canfield. "Why did you leave those two people on the Skyride?" she asked, thinking it would be a good idea to get their telephone numbers and to wring out their miserable experience for a news story.

Charles paused for a moment, then said, "Oh, those dummies."

His cavalier attitude shocked the hardened newswoman. "This guy will never be picked as Mr. Sensitivity," she thought.

Charles explained that what she had seen were manikins — Flintstone look-alikes — plunked aboard to attract attention.

Joan says she still wants them rescued. And, interviewed.

We start our walk to the Pacific Garden Mall, crossing Beach Street, lined with Moroccan motels — the Casablanca, Aladdin's Inn and the Magic Carpet. Around the corner on the Washington Street Extension — or Front Street, who can tell the difference? — is a sign left by Otto when he ran his beach rentals, pleading that we "Follow the Washington Senators."

Instead, we follow the yellow brick road, East to the El View Motel where we side-step to find the stairway to the mall.

At the bottom of the stairway, some weary soul has written, "WE NEED LOVE AND FOOD." Other graffiti dips into numerology to declare: "TV AND REAGAN EQUAL 666" — Satan's telephone number. Later in the Catalyst's restroom, we read "SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH, OR I'LL KILL YOU."

Down below, the San Lorenzo River is the "Little Muddy," but we dream it was once a clear, clean steelhead stream. Don't guess at what lives down there now.

Off the river path and onto the mall, coming in at a shrinking Auto Row where America's horsepower is corralled, to be unleashed by big buckaroos.

There's Donatelli's gelato nook where the proprietor insists American ice cream is flavored with air.

Past the Asti and Avenue bars and what used to be the Arrow Bar. The "Three A's," they were called back then. Many old-timers now talk of the "Two A's." The Arrow is now the Blue Lagoon.

Wander north, past the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union near the Pacific Gold and Silver Exchange and into the garden section of the mall where red-brick planters serve as seats and grow people and green things.

"I love it. It's the most 'dejlif' (wonderful) downtown area in the world. Except for Vejle," says a lady from Denmark basking in the golden glow of a filtered sun.

The Catalyst fits Santa Cruz like a glove — a skylighted chamber where we are keyhailed under a hanging rowboat while eating chili and cornbread. Over by the bar, owner Randall Kane is talking to a musician who this very night will deafen an entire generation.

A touch of grace is found upstairs in the bar and pool room where shooters like Jade Stokes coolly make their shots, and if we're lucky, Forrest Blocker, the beautiful lady in black, will prove it never was a man's game.

On the street, Big Donna pushes a shop-

ping cart that holds her home, and Montana Lynn wanders by, alone except for her silent guitar.

"Pretty Mama's" is the prettiest name for a store, and it's filled with women and a guy named "Chuck" who doesn't know what to do with his hands.

We're grateful the city passed a law against skateboards as one nearly cuts us off at the knees.

The city cop on mall duty is probably counting his days until he gets paroled back to regular patrol for the police look on mall duty as reporters look on the "Man on the Street" assignment.

The police say the mall is safe. There's a little petty stuff, but by nature, it is benign.

Santa Cruz is a town of activists without a local issue today.

A Yellow Cab driver laughingly helps an elderly woman into the Palomar Hotel, now under new management and headed for retail shops on the ground floor.

Warmed-over jazz from Cooper House lead by Don McCaslin pours over Dena Levey who sits behind Saint Luke's hot dog cart preparing a bagel for a local attorney who intuitively senses those hot dogs don't die when you eat them. Saint Luke was a healer, Levey's been told, and says, "I guess I heal hunger."

Four years ago, she had competition across the street. A popcorn stand run by a Hare Krishna disciple, who one day, without cause, was shot and slightly wounded by a 75-year-old man passing by.

A block away, street singer California Slim saw the shooting and said to himself, "I sure hope that guy with the gun likes my music."

Slim is still around. And, under his real-life name, Bob Rowe, teaches history at West Valley College.

Upstairs at Leask's, Samuel "Sandy" Leask IV keeps the family tradition going while down in his store window lie dismembered manikins, strewn like a riot in



Dena Levey is a fixture at the corner of Front and Cooper Streets at her hot dog stand.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

a nudist camp.

St. George guests pass the day tuned in on the mall's live MTV, and the passing parade of lunchers hits Zoccoli's at noon to pick up an avocado and cheese on rye and to say "Hi-ya" to John Mills who wants to talk to us about the local news.

United Cigar is a wind tunnel that blows everybody through at some time, except for the feminist demonstrators who got locked in until the police could arrive and stop the rending of Penthouse magazines.

The unofficial Mayor of the Mall, Gerald, tells us today, "The clock at County Bank is two minutes slow."

Gerald, a man of the streets for 17 years, is not an unusual political figure for Santa Cruz.

In the past four years, the town has had two socialist mayors, followed by a gay mayor. The present woman mayor, a feminist and a progressive, is a little dull in comparison.

Duffy's Deli is a joy for coffee and political gossip with Councilman John Laird. Neal Coonerty is pondering in his Bookshop Santa Cruz if he should run for council. He never quite decides.

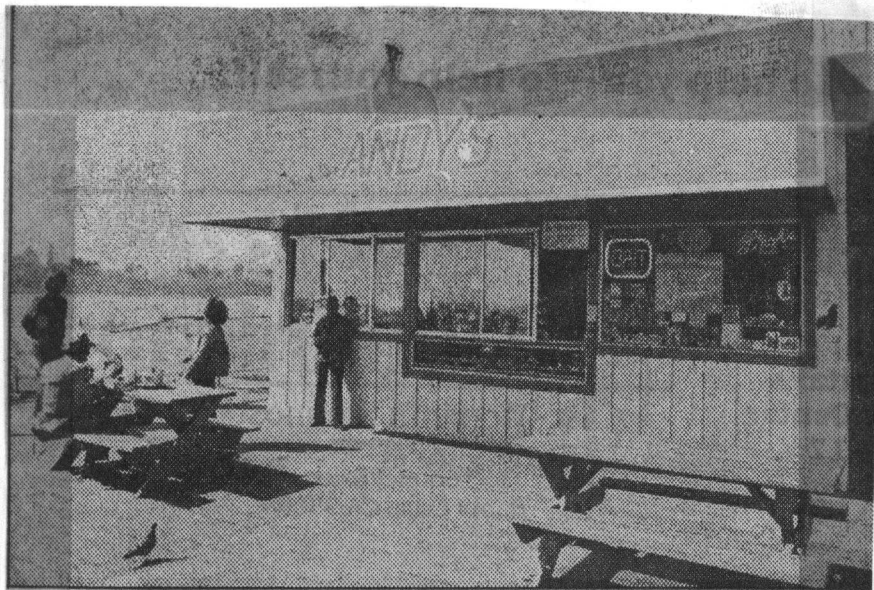
We've reached the top of the mall and in front of Plaza Bakery find a column commanded by an aerie American Eagle, cast in metal and dedicated to "the soldiers and sailors of all the wars." Except the sides we don't support in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Take your choice.

Across Mission Street, the city recently put up "sunrise to sunset" signs at Scribner's Park where the homeless hang out until they can slip off to their secret campsites. It took city workers two hours to plant the signs and the homeless wasted seven minutes uprooting and hiding them in the bushes.

The walk is over.

We turn and look back down the mall in the broken, golden light. Seeing its stores, its trees, its great variety of people.

We feel, as the lady from Denmark felt: "It's a deljig little town."



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Andy's restaurant - at the "end of the wharf"