

Healing ritual for a battered mall

Crowd gathers for wake to mourn lost downtown

By JOHN ROBINSON
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SANTA CRUZ — More than 300 people gathered Sunday night for a wake and a street party for the Pacific Garden Mall.

The event was billed as a healing ritual to overcome the loss and disruption of community life left by the earthquake.

Beating drums and burning incense, the crowd marched around the mall, pausing to stare into the lonely holes where buildings once stood and to fasten ritual offerings to the chain-link fence that now surrounds the downtown area and keeps most everyone out but demolition workers.

The bright tapestries, flowered streamers and poems that blossomed on the fence were in contrast to the sawed-off stumps of trees and dirty concrete of the mall as it is today.

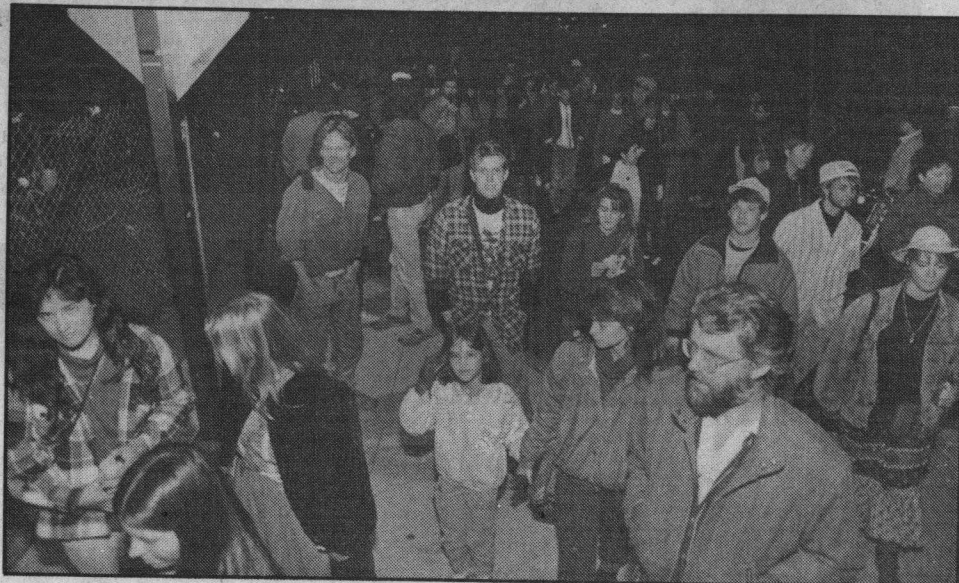
The crowd swelled into the street, stopping traffic as the parade moved down Front Street on its way around the mall.

"It was the the brightest thing I had," construction worker Jeff Rockwell said, as he fastened a 15-foot streamer kite to the fence. "It's like Santa Cruz, battered by the wind but still flying."

Outside Ford's department store, a violinist played a gypsy dirge as a man held a white orchid up against the fence, near the place where Catherine Trieman died when the roof collapsed upon her during the quake.

Others lit candles, placing them on the ground as offerings to an altar of rubble and to a huge crane, left in the street, with its job of tearing down the rest of the department store only half-completed.

"We need this kind of ritual to end the grief," Sylvia Paris said. "When I look out (at the razed buildings) I see death and loss. We need to have a religious service, like a funeral service for the loss. But while we have lost a lot, it has brought us together and given us a tremendous sense of community."



The crowd hung streamers and flowers on the fence surrounding the mall.



Photos by Dan Coyro

Some beat drums, playing dirges for the all that was gone and music for what still remains in Santa Cruz.

It may have been a mourning for the mall, but the mood was not completely somber. It was more a spontaneous Santa Cruz street party.

"How could I not come down here for this (event)?" Cabrillo College instructor Laura Kliewer said. Kliewer was standing across from where Bookshop Santa Cruz once stood.

"Everyday I pass the mall on my way to the Metro (station) and I stop here to give

my energy and prayers for the mall. It was a very special place for me."

Kliewer was offended by some news commentators who said that the heart of Santa Cruz was torn out in 15 seconds when the earthquake hit and the mall walls fell.

"This is still a beautiful place," she said. "Two days after the quake we held a party with all of our neighbors. I was working

with the Red Cross and was with some people from out of state. One of them said, 'You people in Santa Cruz are so strange. You just had a major disaster and you are throwing parties.'"

As the group paraded through the now-derelict heart of the city, shining flashlights over the damaged buildings, it seemed more like a celebration of a new beginning than a mournful wake for the end.