

OUR HAPPY PLACE

Long before Disneyland came into being and much closer to our home in North Hollywood, one place was the focus of all the happy times experienced by our family. It was not a resort, fun park or arcade. It was a restaurant.

It wasn't just any old restaurant, but one that fit any occasion. It just a few blocks away and served as a snack bar for quick lunches, had a fantastic dining room for formal occasions and a great drive in for midnight snacks. Hody's restaurant and coffee shop stood welcoming all ages and all occasions. It stood proudly at 6006 Lankershim Boulevard, on the corner of Lankershim and Oxnard,

I celebrated every birthday there as a child, complete with Hody's paper clown mask and a free chocolate sundae. We always reserved a long table in the main dining room for all the kids in the neighborhood and Mom made sure a special thank you gift was on every child's place setting.

When relatives came to visit from far away places like the chill of Chicago in mid winter, Hody's was the place that welcomed them to a good steak dinner. When Grandma and Grandpa came to visit on Easter, after sunrise service and a day at Descansco Gardens, which was our Easter day tradition, it was back to Hody's for coffee for the adults and an ice cream soda for me to wrap up the day.

On hot summer nights, when sleep was often hard because of the lack of air conditioning, Dad would round us up and pile us all into the old Hudson, usually along with a neighbor's child or two who were camping out in the back yard with me in one of our homemade "forts". In our Pjs and bathrobes, we would all go to Hody's drive-in for

cool root beer freezes, which was sort of a root beer-ice cream smoothie, a treat they were well known for. By starlight, we would be served in our car. We'd down our treats while Mom and Dad listened to Perry Como on the radio.

As years went on, my first real "car date" ended with a shared burger and soda at Hody's drive-in after a movie with the boy who would become my husband and the father of my daughters.

Later, with a difficult pregnancy, my mother drove me to and from my weekly doctor's appointments in the early sixties, and we always wound up at Hody's with a cup of comfort and gentle conversation that reassured me through tough times. The birth of my first daughter brought the family together for the last time at Hody's for a celebration.

Hody's coffee shop and restaurant came into being a year or so before we moved to our home on Lemp Avenue in North Hollywood in 1952 and lasted until sometime in the mid sixties. I don't know exactly when it died, but one day, I drove by and it was just a vacant lot. I was told that a fire ravaged the building and it was demolished, never to return. Eventually the land became another corner cutout fast food, gas station, mini-mall that decorate almost every intersection of the valley today.

But, to those of us who remember the grand old place with it's art deco façade, it will always be the home of birthday celebrations, lunch out with best friends, and the drive in that took me all the way from a kid in pajamas in the back of a 1950 Hudson, to first-kiss date and first baby. Hody's will always be a place that is part of the heart and soul of my experience growing up in Southern California and is entwined in who I am today and what the valley once.

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