

## **L.A.ouder Than Life**

By Ana Tajder

In a sense, Los Angeles can be said to be a surprisingly quiet city. This is because it is so suburban – a patchwork of quiet neighborhoods with a shopping mall or a collection of restaurants and shops splashed every now and there.

The City of Angles sleeps a lot. It goes to sleep early and gets up late. Bars and restaurants will empty around nine or ten and so will the streets. The hum of an 18-million-person city will turn into mysterious peace just occasionally disturbed by a stranded helicopter. Nights are quiet and long – the hum will reappear long after the birds are awake, around eight.

But the reality is, Los Angeles is louder than life.

Where there are people, there is noise. And in Los Angeles, there are a lot of them. Restaurants tend to be over-packed and always play very loud music so guests must scream to understand each other. And, sorry but – women here tend to have uncomfortably shrill voices. A couple of days ago, the lady sitting to my left spoke in such a loud and strange tone that my left ear started humming and hurting. I was scared for my hearing. It gets so serious sometimes that I will enter a restaurant and decide I am not able to dine in such an aggressive noise.

The same goes for bars: Painful. I went to a roller derby game, all excited about finally seeing LA Derby Dolls playing. It was so loud that after two hours, I had a near physical collapse. I ran out, aware that if I stayed in there, I'd either faint or get a nervous break down. I felt like a punching bag for Mike Tyson after a two hour practice jag. Shops play music. Malls play music. Cars and motorcycles can be so loud that your eardrums threaten to pop. And there are sirens that make the earth tremble. People talk loudly – even when they find themselves (probably by accident) in a quiet restaurant. Teachers in dance classes turn the music up till the floors are shaking. And then scream over the music.

And then there is the gardening. Mowing machines. Weed whackers. Leaf blowing machines. The secret rulers of Los Angeles: The city of manicured gardens needs an army of well-armed gardeners. Every morning, in one or more neighboring gardens, there is a very loud machine running. For hours. Noise that will penetrate your veins and bones and brain. There is no escape.

It gets worse: L.A. cinemas. They are the reason why I bought my first earplugs ever. They are so loud that even with 32 decibel reducing earplugs, I can follow the movies without any problems. The problems start with action scenes. There are no plugs to fight action scenes (and nobody makes movies without action scenes here anymore). The action is so aggressive and the surround systems so powerful that your seat will shake and your lungs will vibrate till they hurt. It's a physical attack.

But why?

I ask myself this every time I leave the cinema. Why all those explosions, chases and special effects jumping around the mega screens. I know we have always needed entertainment, magic and getaways – they help us to feel alive.

But attacking the human senses to the point of pain and numbness is not entertaining. It is more like a cheap drug. A knockout drug. Instead of taking you into magical spheres and opening you for new experiences, those movies will hit you till you're dead.

And dead we are in L.A. With entertainment louder than life, we are losing our ability to hear life at all. Even at night, when it gets very, very quiet again, we are already too deaf to listen.