

"There Are Mountains"

There are no mountains around London. There aren't any around New York either. These are remarkable places to visit, but if you have grown used to being protected by mountains as I have after years of living in the San Fernando Valley, suddenly mountains seem indispensable.

It's one of those things you take for granted...like breathing, hunger and bad reality TV series concepts: the mountains surrounding the San Fernando Valley are inevitable. They are watchtowers, guardians and barriers. They are not lush like the mountains of the Pacific Northwest where I grew up; they are not ironic like the carved creations volcanoes made in Arizona where my parents now reside. They are simply what they are, which is why I love them.

Having said that, one doesn't often consider the real values that the mountains provide for the local inhabitants (notwithstanding the coyotes, rabbits and other indigenous critters who, if they could talk, would

probably be writing a far more passionate commentary than this one). For weather reports alone, one need only look above these trusted natural monoliths. To the east one can see all the smog hovering over Pasadena that has collected from downtown and know it's dry, dusty and airless out. To the south one can see the fog from the ocean rolling over the Hollywood area. To the west one can tell if rain is imminent or not (hint: probably not!) To the north...well, the north is the wild card, I suppose, from a weather standpoint. More realistically, the weather from this direction is wind generated by hordes of enthusiastic suburbanites climbing over the top of each other to commute HERE.

Residents of the valley "own" these mountains, if anyone does. I can't tell you the hours I've logged standing on the rooftop of my apartment building getting a 360-degree view and relishing this sense of ownership.

As a transplant from Oregon I spent countless hours commuting back and forth over the grapevine; the junction of the 405 and 5 freeways always meant I was nearly back to my modern life.

As an established young man I could almost feel the Hollywood sign

beckoning to me from the other side of the hills, though it was unseen, like an apparition or deity.

As I became more entrenched in the work force I spent many hours commuting to and from Pasadena and all points east. Frankly, the less said about that the better.

As I march begrudgingly towards middle age I find myself looking towards the mountains of the west and longing to cross them to get to the clean, mild beaches of Ventura County.

Of course, the mountains belong to no one in the end, even as they are there for us all to share. If you don't believe me, ask the dinosaurs who used to be tenants of the area.

I raise my cup to the mountains...if you think you haven't grown accustomed to them...go to London and see what I mean for yourself.