

Thank You, Jesus

Built in the 1850's as a lumber town, the now quaint village of Mendocino sits atop the headlands overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the mouth of the Big River flowing into Mendocino Bay. Thanks to a 20-mile stretch of twisting road and hairpin curves through the foothills en route to the ocean, it is a long three hour drive from Sacramento. No one wakes up on a morning and casually says, let's take a drive to Mendocino.

Because of the preservation zeal of its inhabitants, Mendocino has remained more or less frozen in time. Some of the water towers, for example, are still original and even those that have been restored and now used for residential or commercial uses are made to look original. Even though updated, many of the original Victorian homes and mansions, small cottages, the Presbyterian Church, the hotel, the Masonic Hall, and the barns are still standing. One of the few sidewalks in the village is in the form of a wide boardwalk that stretches the full length of Main Street across from the headlands. As the name implies, most of the tourist commercial shops are located here. In fact, it is at the very end of this boardwalk, at the last store, which gives birth to this story.

Bonnie and I had finished a leisurely two-hour dinner while sitting in front of the roaring fireplace in the Grey Whale Bar at MacCallum House. Martinis, a bottle of Brutocao Merlot, scallops for her, hanger steak for him, peach melba and steamed Irish coffees. Thanks to Chef Alan Kantor, we were well satisfied as we slowly made our way down the inn's front steps to take our late evening walk along the headlands before we returned to our rental cottage at Packard House.

The weather was dripping with fog but mild enough to enjoy the walk. The boardwalk was deserted, not a soul to be seen its entire length. The stores had closed hours before. We clumped along knowing exactly the route we would take because we had walked it so many times for so many years. Creatures of habit. As we came up to the last store, I noticed a white station wagon parked in front with a driver sitting behind the wheel. Besides us, he was the only person on Main Street.

We stopped, this was our destination. We looked in the display window of Mendocino Jams & Preserves, but something had changed, the picture of Jesus was not there. For thirty years we have been coming to this window sometimes as customers, and sometimes only to window shop their wondrous display of jams, preserves and mustards, which surrounded the picture of Jesus. I turned to Bonnie, “Jesus is not here.”

With that observation, the station wagon door immediately opened, and a very tall looking man jumped out. With a flourish, he opened the back door of the car, reached in, and pulled out a large jar. Holding it aloft, triumphant and with two strides, he was close enough to hand Bonnie his gift, a jar of Olallieberry Jam. With this he said, “It is our tradition to wait for the last visitor of the day and present them with a gift.” Slightly dazed, almost in unison, we blurted out, “Thank you, very much!” Looking heavenward, he said, “Oh, no! don’t thank me, thank Him!”

With that, he was back into his car, then speeding down Main Street. We were alone again, silently taking in what had just occurred. Finally, looking back into the display window, Bonnie said, “Thank you, Jesus.”