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Los Amigos de Sotel! ~ Friends of Sawtelle

By Esther Medina Garcia
Chairperson, Los Amigos De Sotel

Introduction

Some of the adults who were once the teens and children filling Sawtelle Center with their laughter, creativity and excitement began getting together for reunions a few years ago. Some people weren't receiving high school reunion notices since they were pulled out of school to help at home or work before graduating, and many friends from their old neighborhood were being left out. Thus, ***Friends of Sawtelle*** was born.

An eight member committee has been connecting with old friends and helping look up people and spread the word. Each year the group's size has grown, and now each August dozens of people show up to connect, catch up on the year and tell stories from growing up together in the Sawtelle neighborhood.

One of the founding members of ***Friends of Sawtelle***, Esther Medina Garcia, wrote a wonderful historical peek into the times for those coming to the reunion.

Historic Information:

In the late 1940s, '50s and early '60s - in an era when most of us grew up in - Sawtelle was a town bordered on the west by Centinela, on the south by Pico Boulevard, from the north by Wilshire Boulevard and the east by Sepulveda Boulevard. Later, in the 1950s, Sawtelle was incorporated into West Los Angeles, however, on the old maps you can still see the name ***Sawtelle***.

Sawtelle had its own Police Department, Fire Department and a beautiful library on Santa Monica Boulevard. There were two movie theaters: the Tivoli and the Nuart. We had an elementary school a few blocks from Santa Monica Boulevard, right on Sawtelle, named Nora Sterry (formerly Sawtelle Boulevard School).

The popular stores that were frequently visited by most of us were the Boulevard Store, Bear's Department Store and Monroe's Hardware store. Anyone remember the "Q" or the "Lucky U"? *smile* On Sawtelle Boulevard, there was the popular Mexican Store owned by the Cruz's. The other Mexican store was across the street from Nora Sterry - on the south side - owned by the Batista's.

Far down Sawtelle there were many Japanese Stores. To mention a few: the popular Yamaguchi's variety store and next door was a famous pool hall that we were told never to go near. There was a fish market, two drug stores and several gas stations. We must mention all the Nurseries on Sawtelle - Sally Garcia's family owned one, Irene Ariaz's family owned another and the big one on Olympic and Sawtelle, owned by the Patina's. The OK Nursery was a little farther west from Sawtelle. I don't know them all, but there were plenty. *smile*

Images added thanks to the *Pinterest* website: West LA 1930-2000



Opening Day at the Sawtelle Library, 1956



Mario's Barber Shop, early 1950s

Everyone knew where Cotner Avenue was located - a large population of Latino families lived on that street or near there. There was a little area that was affectionately called, "The Raga". On wash day, you could pass by and see why. *smile*



Sawtelle Center, Sisters of Social Service, circa 1950s

In the 1950s, for so many teenagers, the popular hangout after school was the "Center" on Sawtelle run by the Sisters of Social Service in St. Sebastian's Parish Hall. It kept many of us entertained and busy.

(Please see attached memories from some of the children and teens of Sawtelle Center)

Once teenagers left Emerson Junior High, they migrated to "***Stoner Park***" on Stoner Avenue. It appeared every one of every age were there enjoying themselves at one time or another, day or night. We had a few clubs, both for the guys and girls. Does anyone remember the W.L.A. Angeles, the Falcons, and the Lobo's? How about the Ember's, the Falconettes and the Teardrops? The latter was a large girls club who met once a week, at night, at Stoner Park.

Note: In 1932, the **Gardener's Association of Sawtelle** – also called the **Bay Cities Gardeners Association** - volunteered their time, materials and labor towards the beautification of Stoner Park. This included maintenance and improvement of the landscape including the garden and trees.

Images from the Pinterest website: West LA 1930-2000



The Sawtelle Food Market, circa 1950s



Joe Ortiz worker at La Fleur de Pico, West Los Angeles, circa 1950

As time passed, the Pico Boulevard Strip became very popular. It was filled with all types of night clubs featuring live bands you could dance to. A haven for young people who wanted to have some good clean fun. There were all types of music, take your choice: The Playhouse, Scotchman's, The Swinging Doors, Kismet, the Guys and Dolls, La Cita, and other bars like D&E's or the Arsenal if you didn't want the loud music.

After hours, many met for something to eat at the Nuway on Bundy Drive and Pico Boulevard. They had the best chili dogs in town. Or if you just wanted a cup of coffee and sit around the fire pit and talk to everyone coming out of the night clubs....very romantic. If you wanted to have a full breakfast, Max's on Sawtelle and Pico Boulevards was the place.



*Redlegs Baseball Team, late 1950s,
Stoner Playground*

Background Information for Los Amigos de Sotel (the Friends of Sawtelle):

During the '40s and '50s, many were pulled out of school to help out at home. Hard times were everywhere. Many friends mentioned with regret that they would never receive a reunion invitation, for many did not graduate. They wanted to see old friends, and except for a few people who were still in contact with close friends, how do you contact the rest?

Thus was born the *Friends of Sawtelle (Los Amigos de Sotel)*. An eight member committee has been contacting old friends from Sawtelle and letting them know about our annual reunions.

We have friends coming from all over. As far east as Connecticut, Arkansas, also north from Oregon and east Texas, Nevada, New Mexico and Colorado. Many are from Northern California and Southern California. We're getting bigger and better each year. Please feel free to browse on our website for other fun items and pictures.

Tu Amiga,

Esther Medina Garcia
Chairperson
Los Amigos De Sotel