

# 'Long live the world we all dreamed about...'

Long John was a homeless vehicle dweller who embodied the spirit of the Diggers. He consistently sowed messages of peace. Long John dead? I can't get this to be real. Long live the world we all dreamed about and the world John was always, always creating.

by Linda Lemaster

*"I bargained for Salvation and they gave me a lethal dose..." — Dylan*

**N**ow I'm told Long John is dead! Found under the spanking new Soquel Avenue Bridge, near downtown Santa Cruz. Reported as the first local homeless death of this new century. I've known a lot of homeless folk, and I've been one way too often, but I'd never really thought of Long John as a homeless guy until the news his body was found hit the streets.

Long John was a vehicle dweller who embodied the spirit of the Diggers all the time. He wasn't a big talker, but his actions were uncanny and he consistently sowed messages of peace.

I haven't yet been able to accept my grief since last month they told me young Eddie Hicks was dead and his cohorts had abandoned him when he passed on, leaving him alone along the railroad right-of-way. Eddie, homeless since he was a teenager, used to play with and help look after my nearly grown son when the latter first started school. I'll always be grateful for his influence. Many memories together under the sky. My heart goes to his parents.

March 2000



Long John embodied the spirit of the '60s.

## IDEA

by Claire J. Baker

There's an unknown soldier  
to symbolize all the fallen in all  
the totally stupid wars.

And that's of course  
every war.

Why not an unknown homeless person  
laid to rest in a grand grave —  
(shelter at last)

where people would walk by  
and pay belated respect...

## MEMORIES COME...

by Claire J. Baker

In waves of windy birds  
sweeping away clouds.

Though you know not of this poem  
I feel you stirring as I write.  
I dedicate to you its air and fire.

In the turmoil of your tarnished epic,  
your slow fall from the mountain peak,  
as your Merry-Go-Round grinds  
unmusically, and it was not merry

know that I am here  
awaiting your return  
in waves of windy birds.

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(cont.)

Long  
Live...

Long John also was a guiding star for my amazing youngsters. He shared his hippie archives and incredible memories of the '60s with young and old, including my two boys. He was one of the few men I've ever seen who could adore this planet like a Mother, out loud. He was one hell of a cowboy, too — he had the guts to hang a six-foot-tall peace sign on the central common outhouse wall up on the mountain ridge one hot summer when everyone else had succumbed to high-noon, gun-toting, diarrhea-flu, broken-glass, grumpy, moody bullshit.

His bus was the most magical trip in the whole hippie world, from Georgetown to Haight-Ashbury. I was blessed to visit his rolling home, touching the crystals and icons of that halcyon era. Most people probably knew him from the Skyview flea market. He was self-contained and self-supporting, trading everything from comic books and psychedelic posters to giant quartz crystals to Mexican bananas.

A few years back, his big bus turned into a pickup truck with a cab-over camper. It sported a giant coolie hat that may have once been a bamboo chair, but was big enough to give a roof to the automobile that was his home, his cathedral and his vocation.

Then the truck disappeared, too. Friends report that Long John was reduced to the sidewalks after the Department of Motor Vehicles confiscated his license, then the vehicle because of unpaid fines. A fate befalling more and more people lately, according to civil rights attorney Kate Wells, who cites the spiraling costs and consequences to people who can't afford the courtroom extortion or the bureaucracy of the highways.

One of my most vivid memories is of that night from hell when Long John and my own best man had to put out a psychotic arsonist's Indian Summer forest fire with just four arms, two buckets and a bathtub tap. They were heroes in an impossible situation, both "thinking" with their hearts and "hearing" with their instincts.

Long live the world  
we all dreamed  
about.... (cont.)

So I can't accept this death concept. How could Long John be dead? This is someone I knew as very much alive and courageous as it ever gets, and how could he really be dead, really ever not be? He was one of those rare full-time hippies who never sold out.

I was walking home yesterday and it was raining. I had my raincoat, but I was too soggy and exhausted from pain to put it on. I had already spilled coffee on the pages of my new millennium appointment book that morning. Everything going from bad to worse.

One block more from the bus to my door; it was a block where Long John visited and used to park. In my bitter mind, remembering the last time I'd trekked there, I thought, "Imagine never again seeing a flower chain of colored chalk Peace Signs along this sidewalk." And I became self-pity. So certain I was in my despair I assumed all those Peace Signs

Long Live...  
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Long John drew must all have been washed away in the gloomy rain. I refused to look on the sidewalk and strode into the street, avoiding my feelings of loss.

And then Long John's Spirit hit me like a pop-up video in the shape of a perfect Peace Symbol, the exact same size as the ones I'd seen and believed mournfully were missing from the sidewalks. Drawn with a stick, into the patch of new street concrete. Despite itself, the City of Santa Cruz had provided a more enduring palette and canvas for John's message.

We need to stop berating, neglecting and attacking our men and youth and boys. It's getting them killed. Eddie Hicks, only 25 at his death, had been homeless since he was a teenager. He never even had a chance at the things most Americans take for granted as "normal life." Eddie's father once told me his son went to jail for 14 days when he turned eighteen, hoping to get a clean

Long live the world we all dreamed about..

(cont.)  
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slate from accumulating camping tickets. Some celebration of manhood.

Shouldn't somebody be sticking up for our guys? From my experience, way too many who are homeless or who are outdoor people are going down. So are the ones who live in their cars and vans, or who in any way walk with a different drummer. Or who just don't buckle down with the aesthetics of Empire.

What happens to our pacifists and sages? We don't get to meet conscious pacifists very often. Is this persecution and rejection the reason? Long John dead? I can't get this to be real. Long live the world we all dreamed about and the world John was always, always creating.

I wish we could bring our spiritual leaders and healers into the woods and along the tracks and under the bridges; and bring our best witnesses into the jails, nuthouses and newer, case-managed institutions. And create sanctuaries in every neighborhood. We're behaving like crowded lab rats, and we owe better to our brothers and our own children.

Contact Linda Lemaster, Housing Now!  
PO Box 1735, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.  
E-mail: lindashearth@hotmail.com