

untitled

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Ed was a big man with big passions, especially for pickle spoons. I first met him in London when I worked for Verso Books, sometime in the late 1980s. After the usual preliminaries, he asked if I could help him out with “an odd interest.” Verso was and is located in an alley in Soho, two blocks from a venerable spanking parlor (for mostly bankers), and around the corner from Paul Raymond’s notorious Windmill Theater. There are few interests however ‘odd’ that can’t be accommodated in the neighborhood. But it turned out that Ed was only interested in Victorian cutlery.

So we ended up spending a Saturday afternoon in the Camden Lock Market, lustily sorting through hoardings of tarnished toddy ladles, butter knives, crab crackers, preserve spoons, sugar sifters, basting spoons and all the other specialized implements once essential to formal dining in an ‘Upstairs, Downstairs’ world. Finally, after an hour or so of ransacking the stalls, Ed found what he assured me was an exquisite specimen to bring home to his wife Maureen. He was triumphant and so we went off to a pub to celebrate and talk about the restructuring of Los Angeles. Years afterwards, I’d whisper ‘pickle spoon’ and he’d laugh.

When you get to be my age, the landscape of memory begins to look a lot like an derelict street in south Chicago, and you have to struggle to recall what once stood in each abandoned lot. In my Los Angeles, it was Shelly’s Manhole, Papa Bach, the Pan Pacific Theater, Rhino Records, the Glens of Antrim, the Midnite Special, the Echo Park newsstand, Papadakis in Pedro, and so on. Each gone and thus another reason not to drive north. But LA without Ed Soja, without its Karl Marx? An intolerable thought, too painful for catharsis.