

The Most Gentle Residents of Westwood

The North Village of Westwood is characterized by a wild kind of life. Students walk back from campus at ungodly hours, the shady avenues of trees and mansions in adjacent Brentwood providing a false sense of security for an area not invulnerable to crime. Others party late into the night from Thursday until Sunday, the drunken walk back home made more perilous by sidewalk mattresses holding the rain of many rainy days and discarded furniture broken in ways unreasonably contrary to its conventional use. More often than not, the overlap of these two groups is rather significant.

A hub of this village is the apartment complex at 430 Kelton Ave. Artificial grass serves as a metaphorical red carpet, a red carpet that the once thriving Westwood is so desperately without, leading students into a pair of eternally wedged open glass doors and up an elevator to a rooftop looking over the West Los Angeles Area. It's luxury—the building owners make sure to mark it as such—but when one notices that the jacuzzi hasn't been heated since two quarters ago, and the elevator ride up may be one's last, the average person would be sure to think twice about visiting. However, for the inebriated, any building code violations are just small hurdles for the greatest post-midterm rooftop party.

Yet, this description is a disservice to some of the residents of this building. There is a form of nightlife that happens here—a party if you will—every day of the week: a frequency not even the college kids can keep up with. It happens rain or shine, and quite interestingly, this party thrives on rain. These participants are currently partying through the Coronavirus pandemic, and will most likely be partying into the aftermath. Some of you who are reading may be wondering: why are their actions not being reprimanded? Or others may be thinking: how can I join this party? Yet, the question I've left for both sides to ponder is: who is this group of social rebels?

I'll ease you in. The members belong to that which we call wildlife—not the wild life of college students, but wildlife, as in the opposite of flora. The members are animals—not party animals, but animals, what humans have for centuries tried so long to distance themselves from. They're not without social miscues or danger: sometimes they'll disrupt traffic, not unlike raucous students, or stay up later than is good for them. But, I'll give them a pass, because the instigators of Westwood's longest running party are the snails of 430 Kelton Ave, and they are the North Village's most gentle creatures.

Those who look closely at the building's yellow and green flower beds when night emerges will see these yellowish-green creatures crawling up the sides of the planter boxes and all through the dirt. When the party is over and people take pictures outside the building to hopelessly remember the time gone by, the careful-eyed will catch a glimpse of the flash, which poorly illuminates the photographed students' accumulated grime, caressing the sides and angles of the slimy snails. It would be a mistake to interrupt them and disturb their business, but to acknowledge their gentle presence around the chaos is to acknowledge beauty in the world.

The next time I walk up Kelton Avenue—I don't exactly know when that will be given the state of the world at the time I write this, but I hold myself to what I'm about to say nonetheless—I will make sure to stop by and pay my tributes to these soft strongholds of nature and wildlife in Westwood. And even if it's a hot day, and the snails give their party its seldom rest, to know that I've gotten to witness the slime on their skin with the person I made this zine with, whom I love and appreciate so much, is to know that my time in Westwood need not be defined by anything more than looking at wonderful insects crawling along concrete and dirt.