

'A' stands for  
'Aftermath'  
10/1/99  
By Neal Ross

Depending on who you talk to, last week's election was actually about anything other than a resort on the city-owned, 60-acre Upper Mountain Cemetery.

Secret subtexts included subversion of the planning process; distrust of the City Council; open space vs. economic and budgetary health; keeping things the same vs. making them better/worse; welcoming wealthy visitors; prohibiting wealthy visitors; whether or not we live in a "tourist town;" and what "tourist town" means, anyway.

These interpretations – and more – have passed across this city reporter's desk and through his ears since January, along with an even greater number of accusatory conspiracy theories. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "But that I am forbid to tell/The rumors of the paranoid citizenry/I could a tale unfold that would/Harrow up thy Valley/Freeze thy young businesses/Make thy two eyes start like Starbuck's from their malls/Thy knotted and combined community to part/And cause each individual hair to stand an end/Like vinestakes upon the sacred hillside backdrop."

But as much as I would love to toss grow-up darts at the lunatics edging and devaluing "both" "sides" of this extremely serious debate (you know who you are), I still have to work in this town. And anyway, I'd rather stick an uncomfortable bow on the now neatly-wrapped Measure A package and ask a fundamental question of pro-tels and no-tels alike:

Now what?

We either chased off the bad guys, or signed Sonoma's fiscal death warrant. Saved the Upper Mountain Cemetery, or kiboshed a free-money trough. Preserved Sonoma's much-vaunted "lifestyle," or perverted its political process.

I won't arbitrate these views, but instead offer a few of my own – from a unique perspective of having had no stake in the nine-month wonder beyond writing about it for a living:

- Everybody, councilmembers included, seems to feel that the City Council pretty much blew it on this one. But I have never seen five unpaid, hardworking people wish more profoundly that something go away, and be more bewildered and beset when it didn't. The trouble stemmed in part, I think, from Sonoma's relatively informal political climate. Maybe that informality is now a thing of the past. I hope not. Most of the time, I think it's a source of great civic strength. But if it's not tempered by a correct interpretation of the law, well...
- Seventy-five percent of the 3,491 people who voted last Tuesday decided that nobody should ever build a hotel on the upper cemetery. But that's less than half of Sonoma's 5,808 registered voters. When Measure A was before the council, some in the pro-tel

camp lobbied for an election, averring the conservationist sentiment of May's public hearings didn't represent the majority. Some no-tels countered that everyone who cared about the issue had already made themselves clear. It cost \$15,000 to find out.

- Much has been written about returning to civility now that the mud-fest is over. I don't think it's that simple – though most people comported themselves with conviction and grace, others, frankly, made me embarrassed to live here. In either case, neither “side” will soon forget who said what, and how loudly – nor should they, if they're to realistically deal with future events. To illustrate:

An old story once asked what happened to the *original* Ten Commandments, which Moses broke when he beheld the Israelites cavorting with the Golden Calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The second, intact set went into the Ark of the Covenant – but tradition holds that the shattered shards went in there also, as a reminder of human fallibility.

So now what? We pick up the pieces – and get back to work.