

We Need A Hero

BY HERBERT BEAFORD

drive down Hollywood Boulevard on any given day and you are sure to see some familiar landmarks. You know what we mean. The El Capitan Theater, the Hollywood Wax Museum, Ripley's Believe It Or Not Odditorium, and the Walk of Fame just to name a few.

But one colorful fixture of the historic thoroughfare is quite noticeably missing lately: the costumed superheroes.

"It's like they pulled the heart out of Hollywood," says Christopher Dennis, a local actor who has spent the last 19 years portraying Superman in front of Grauman's Chinese Theater where he meets thousands of tourists everyday, who pay to have their picture taken with him. Dennis tells us, "I started this on June 10, 1991. I'm a Christopher Reeve look-alike and I love the Superman character." Dennis encouraged about a dozen other actors to join him back then, and before long The Incredible Hulk, Batman, Spiderman, Darth Vader and even Wonder Woman impersonators were on Hollywood Boulevard welcoming people from across the globe and making great tip money in the process. "We all loved the characters we played and loved meeting people," he says.

But five years ago things started to go downhill. "It became a free-for-all. Before we knew it there were 89 costumed characters on Hollywood Boulevard." And according to Dennis, many of them were only out to make a quick buck at the expense of tourists. He says, "A lot of these



characters got very aggressive. No one is required to give you a tip, but I literally saw one character grab a person and pull them into a souvenir shop and demand money! That's assault!"

The Los Angeles Police Department obviously got wind of incidents like this and on May 28th they forcefully removed all the costumed characters from Hollywood Boulevard. "At about 7 o'clock that night the police pulled up in eight patrol cars and took everybody to jail. We all knew there were some bad seeds out there, but the cops must have said 'let's just go out and arrest everyone'" Dennis claims.

Ever since that night Dennis says that any costumed character who shows up on Hollywood Boulevard is either given a warning or immediately carted off to jail, which he feels is excessive and unlawful. "According to our Constitutional right as entertainers we have a right to express ourselves. Our rights were taken away."

The superhero ban also took a major toll on Dennis' personal finances, confessing, "I rely on making the money out there to feed

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myself, my wife, and to pay the rent." He had to pick up several extra acting gigs and odd jobs just to make ends meet.

But just like Superman, who fights for what he knows in his heart is right, Dennis is back on Hollywood Boulevard, boldly wearing his blue tights, red cape, and big "S" on his chest. He says, "I took a few weeks off but I have to stand up for what I believe in. I don't think they have the right to arrest us." And surprisingly, LAPD officers have not bothered him, possibly due to his "star status" within the community. "I'm somewhat of a local celebrity. I've been on the 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' show 96 times and I was featured in the documentary film 'Confessions of a Superhero' in 2007," he says.

Dennis also says he's contacted the police to find out just who was behind the superhero sweep, but nobody will give him a straight answer. "It just doesn't make any sense to me," he confides.

Right now Dennis is the only "superhero" who's brave enough to challenge the Los Angeles Police Department. But he hopes others actors will eventually come back, with the help of city officials. He tells us, "I want to organize a union with a small group of ten characters, who are all working actors, who are all professional and who all are respectful of tourists. It's a business out there. There's got to be some sort of equilibrium to this that benefits both the city and us." ●



PHOTOS: STEVE MOYER