

# 76 Years of Healing, Naturally

*Santa Monica Homeopathic Pharmacy treats what ails you*

BY ANDREW BENDER | PHOTOS COURTESY OF SANTA MONICA HOMEOPATHIC PHARMACY

**S**anta Monica Homeopathic Pharmacy has been a staple of downtown Santa Monica for 76 years. Yet it has continually evolved, sometimes by design, sometimes by necessity.

"My grandparents started the business in 1944," says owner Steven Litvak; it was called Santa Monica Drug Company then. "In the old days you didn't have just a pharmacy. You had a soda fountain, a convenience store, cigarettes, alcohol — you carried everything!" Gradually the store specialized in pharmaceuticals, but by the 1980s, he says, "My grandfather was tired of hearing customers complaining about side effects of medications."

So Steve, then filling in at the family business, suggested increasing the natural medicine inventory — and to his surprise, his grandparents went for it.

It was a big risk, he says. "We were selling about \$1,800 a day in prescription medication" (over \$4,100 in 2020 dollars), but "within about a year and a half, we made it up in sales of natural vitamins, homeopathic remedies and so on." That's when they changed the shop's name — "the word 'drug' didn't fit anymore" — to homeopathic pharmacy, for the natural remedies that help the body resolve symptoms of disease or discomfort.

As the business kept growing, Steve and his wife and co-owner, Kim, went back to school, at the LA branch of the British Institute of Homeopathy (one of their teachers was a physician to Queen Elizabeth), and studied other alternatives to conventional medicine.

They also grew their staff, from 6 to 20. "We only staff people who are overqualified," Steve smiles, experienced in various fields of alternative medicine (homeopathy, chiropractic, acupuncture, nutrition, and more) and state licensed where possible.

He says that reversing or helping to control a serious disease — from diabetes to hypertension to hepatitis — "is probably the most challenging thing I or any of the staff could do," but adds "I've always craved a challenge; the bigger, the better."

"We would get people saying, 'My doctor doesn't know what to do for me,'" or complaining of medications not working or causing side effects. "We'd find answers for them" — changes in diet, lifestyle or supplements. "And if we couldn't find the answer, we would know a practitioner who could."

That said, the pharmacy strictly prohibits any practices that could be life-threatening and refers patients to hospitals or conventional doctors for emergencies.

This spring, the store faced its own emergency, which nearly threatened its existence. It was already a challenging year, with shutdowns

from coronavirus and the passing in April of Steve's father and the shop's bookkeeper, Donald. Then, during looting on May 31, the

pharmacy was ransacked and Steve was assaulted and suffered a concussion. He has since recovered ("I knew what to take," he jokes), yet he and Kim considered throwing in the towel.

But before Steve knew it, the employees had cleaned up the store (10 hours and 1,000 pounds of broken glass later) and started a GoFundMe campaign that eventually raised over \$100,000. "We have to reopen," Steve said to Kim, "for them."

The resulting renovation has brought an updated look, but the focus on patients' wellness remains the same as ever.



Steve and Kim Litvak (center bottom) and the Santa Monica Homeopathic Pharmacy team.



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