

Dispatches from the late, great Haight

How I Got There in the First Place

The lowest SAT math score in the city of Portland, Oregon for 1964 turned out to be my ticket south. After high school I had desperately wanted to join the east coast smarties at Reed College. I tested well for language skills, but forgot about the numbers game: alien territory for this beautiful mind. But you've got to cover that part of the scholastic equation too. I was heartbroken and after we figured we couldn't afford Bard, which had, for some reason, deemed me okay for simple admittance, read: okay, but no money, buddy, it was my blessed parents who suggested San Francisco State College.

San Francisco was not unknown territory. I had been hitchhiking back and forth with various friends since I was 14 searching for beatniks and romance. Of course, the road was a lot safer then, although my best friend Bill Adie and I almost got done in, or at least molested, by some strange country dude who started to look like a salivating wolf after we had driven a few miles. Bill had the sense to ask to stop for a pee at a roadside gas station (there was no freeway in those days) and we never got back in his battered black '56 Chevy. He just looked at us menacingly and roared off, but not before saying he would be back with some "friends." We hid in a field until nightfall and caught another ride. Being lusty young men at the time, we thought about getting it on with some nearby cows--we'd both read the e. e. cummings's instructional poem--but they looked awfully big up close and we had no stool.

I already knew San Francisco a little having rented a fleabag room right off Broadway in North Beach the summer of 1963. My uncle and aunt lived in Berkeley on Yosemite Drive and I planned to stay with them before finding my own place. It was my uncle who hipped me to the Haight-Ashbury. He said that beatnikism was dead and to forget about North Beach. That the scene had shifted to this new neighborhood near the Fillmore and Golden Gate Park. The new cool young people were called "hippies," he said, in a not very complimentary tone. It would be closer to SF State anyway, which was hell and gone, way past the Avenues, out to the ocean and south. My uncle was the one who taught me never to refer to the City as "San Fran"--strictly a tourist gaff. Call it "The City," he said, "The right people will know what you're talking about."

I found a room-sharing notice on a housing bulletin board and moved into 810 Oak Street with two guys who were both going to grad school at State. Lou Engle was from Chicago and David Roth was, coincidentally, a recent Reed grad. They were nice guys, but straight-ahead dudes wrapped up in their grad programs, so we didn't commingle too much. I do remember a couple of great rides out to school on the back of Lou's motorcycle. Roaring down that long grade from the top of Twin Peaks down Sloat Boulevard all the way to the sea was a real rush. Lou confided in me about his great dilemma of the moment--loyalty to his beautiful soul-mate girlfriend back in Chicago versus getting it on with a new squeeze he had met at school. He was very torn up about it all, but what can you expect from a nice Jewish moto-head psyche major from Chi Town? Guilt, guilt, guilt, and then guilt sprinkled with guilt. He eventually sent for the Chicago girl friend and, after seeing her in person, I knew he had made the right choice. Boingo-boingo! They eventually got married.

But aside from occasional inter-apartment encounters with the guys, I was on my own and a little lonely. Then I met Sam Q. Spencer in my Russian class. We hit it off. Sam, a few years my senior, had been around: U of Chicago, the Army, New Mexico, North Beach. At 24 he was a seasoned head, rolling

toothpick thin joints (this was the Chicago conservation style of joint-rolling, because in those days weed was muy scarce in the city of broad shoulders.)

Sam turned me on to my first joint in his place at the bottom of Fell Street where it came off the freeway ramp. Weed had been offered to me in high school but I had been too scared to try it. I had been laughed out of the room at the time, but held onto the quaint notion that smoking weed was something you did after high school. Well, this was after high school, and with that excuse gone I waded in nervously--not too sure of what I would find. My fears were quickly allayed. Euphoria!! Happy, Happy, Happy!! I had none of the paranoiac thoughts that developed later on. Back then, it was just plain wonderful. I rolled around on Sam's dining room floor, laughing my head off at some quip he or I had made. Probably not that funny, but the happy hysteria went on and on. And my, my, did the ice cream taste great after we hit the street and went to the local corner market for a pint or two.

Sam and I became quick friends and are still, after more than forty years. One day in Russian class I asked about his weekend plans. He told me that he was going to try some acid over the weekend. This was going to be his first real "psychedelic" experience, except for some peyote he had had in New Mexico while in the army. It sounded very exciting, although I had only heard rumors of this new Uberdrug. I saw Sam back in school on Monday and pressed him for details. He was taciturn but I got that it was a fantastic experience, and I was ready to get in line for my dose ASAP. Those were the early days of the acid revolution when it was still quasi-legal. If you were lucky, you could buy little vials containing a Windex-blue liquid, shipped directly out the back door of Sandoz Laboratories, Switzerland. But my date with Mr. Big was still a little ways down the line.

I did develop a girl friend at that time. Joanne Kramer was a warm Jewish girl from LA with several nice warm Jewish girlfriends. She and I didn't last very long, probably because I didn't know what I was doing in bed, but she did manage to turn me on to her friend Gale Russell who was living in a two-story former boarding house at 1360 Fell Street. I immediately liked the place with its teeny cozy rooms and oddly configured floor plan. Plus the rent was nothing. I was ready to move out of my pad with the grad boys and sink my teeth into the youth scene at a pad right at the base of the Haight. A room opened up, and in I went. At that time old Russians still lived there. Remnants from the old the boarding house days. They smeared black Cyrillic crosses in charcoal on their doors to keep out the evil spirits--Jews and long-hairs. They were true believers who peered suspiciously from behind chained doors at the new invaders. I used to tell 'em: "Ya Rooskie Knyaz (I'm a Russian prince)." "Oh, well then, have a bowl of borscht on us, but please just don't blow that evil smelling stuff under our door," their frightened eyes said. It was only a matter of months before there wasn't a Russian left in the house. Maybe they went up to Geary Street where the piroshkis were fresher and safer. Or maybe back home to Petrograd. They were soon replaced by young upstarts arriving from everywhere to make the scene, because the Haight was the place to be in 1965.

Young Hal Abroad at Collegio Francisconio

After the disappointing news about Reed, Bard, and twelve other schools that I didn't get into, I was ready to chuck the whole idea of college. I would go to sea like my father. Ship out, see the world, travel young like I had always dreamed. Then, with some real life under my belt, I would figure my next move. My parents were having none of it. I still see them both, Rose and Bernie Leopold, and my father's pal, Asher Ettinger, the principal of the Hebrew school where my father taught late afternoons, painstakingly trying to talk me out of my wanderlust. Their proposal was a two-year commitment, and they had found the

perfect place: San Francisco. Then I could decide what to do. Their hopes were that I would love school, stick it out, and graduate. And having inherited a semi-scholarly bent from both of them, why wouldn't I? Then I would be off to med school, where I would train to become a shrink. Well, maybe not med school, with those math grades, but at least psychologist's shingle. That's what they really saw as my calling.

It was a conspiracy for sure, and they brought in Asher, an Israeli sabra (native), desert raised, who had busted me for pea shooting at Hebrew school, as the enforcer. That quietly threatening Bedouin mien mixed with his Israeli/Russian accent and startling blue eyes always sent chills my way. On the nicer side, Asher was the first vegetarian I had ever met. Raised in the Negev eating only hummus, falafel and other non-meaty things, the meals at his house were a glorious revelation.

We sat at our kitchen table. This was an odd affair, a picnic table, with regular picnic benches. Lots of room for my many extended family members, who were always showing up for my mom's excellent cooking, and for the hubbub of socializing which happened in our kitchen. You could get at least ten chawzers (Yiddish for unabashed over-eaters, read: pigs) around the big brown thing. It didn't seem weird or funky. My mom had so much style she could pull it off, and besides every meal was like a back yard date, alfresco.

I fought hard for five minutes, rolled over, and agreed to their terms. Major financial support (I would still need to work of course), care packages from my mother's kitchen sent with some regularity, and a reassessment after two years. After it was over we ate some cake to seal the deal. I detected a quiet hum of "mission accomplished" emanating from Asher, Bernie and Roseabella, as her Italian sculptor friend, Sylvana, called my mother. They didn't have a clue into what vortex they were sending me. Had they known what was about to break loose in San Francisco, they would have bought me a steamer ticket on the spot. Or my father would have ironed my picture onto his old merchant seaman's card. "Ship right him outta here. Now!" would have been their collective cry.

I arrived at school ready to suck up all the book learning they could throw at me. I would follow in my dad's footsteps and be a French major. I would study philosophy, Russian, world lit and maybe even another language. I was ready to make a go of it, despite all earlier reservations.

I loved my classes and the whole SF State milieu. I was sure my wonderful Algerian professor teaching a French lit survey course was actually Albert Camus' brother, but I was too shy to ask. There was peace and mental stability throwing ones' mind back to the "le Moyen Age," reading poetry and prose of the distant past. The world disappears when you go deep into the well. I stuck with M. Camus for the entire year, which ended with Andre Malraux. Alas, we never got to his brother's work. Maybe that would have been year two, but by then I was long gone, down the rabbit hole. I still have those great French lit survey books, with many lovely illustrations, and my scribblings in the margins.

For History of Philosophy we had a young professor on leave from Yale. A real smartie who worked out of a little brown volume covering the early Greeks: Herodotus, Heraclites and some other Aegean dudes. What I loved about this guy was that he would actually diagram the master's logic problems, like geometry or math puzzlers, up on the board. Then I could actually see what they were putting down. It was like a happy thunderclap. I got it. I wasn't such an idiot after all. All I needed was to see it. Hmm, I hadn't been so bad in geometry, maybe that was the key. I had to see it to get it. (That epiphany from long ago was quickly forgotten, but has been recently revived.) Near the end of the course came the big Kahuna of philosophical logic knots. He laid bare Descartes' famous "I think therefore I am," a complex little logic ditty, now lost on me. But hey, I got it then. I was so happy.

The generals Popov, Romanov and Smirnoff coexisted none-too peacefully in Guspodean Malenkov's large, primordial head. He was my first-year Russian teacher and fighting his demons as best he could. This Russkie émigré had a great flair for teaching the mother tongue, and a way with the morning vodka bottle that would have left Bukowski in the dust. Riveting recitations and ramblings greeted our shiny 10 a.m. faces. But we loved the bear dearly, and besides this is where I met my dear friend, Sam, earlier described. Sam was simply rounding out his multi-language mania. He was already in deep with the SF State Chinese department. They were his real suitors, and this Russian class was a minor flirtation. As time went on, we bounced along through a couple of newly minted professors. One was a lovely hunchback named Guspozha Svoboda, a real scholar whom we liked a lot, and then a Ms. Kasoobova, a soft round, sexy "rooskaya devoshka" who took a fancy to both of us (platonically, of course, although I could see she was really sweet on old Sam).

We were Mutt and Jeff to the Russkies: odd dogs from the steppes of Haight-Ashbury land--the outer limits of civilized San Francisco. To be viewed, enjoyed, but never physically petted or held too closely. One evening we went to a winter Holiday celebration at Mme. K's apartment, joining the other gals and guys from class. Sam and I had dropped just a wee bit of Owsley's elixir because we would be continuing on to a Fillmore Auditorium freak-out. Let's just say the Russian teacakes were dancing across the Czarist silver platters, and the company was a complete laugh riot--the return of the uncontrollable laughing jag. Can you say your face is melting "po rooskie"? Luckily that was beyond my ability. So who could blame their reticence about holding us too close? But that was near the end of our go at mastering the mysterious Slavic tongue with all its shch's and shzzzz sounds. But at least we could roll our Rs in our throats. I could never hack the French tongue acrobatics.

I also took a string bass class from Charles Siani, a dapper Italian gent who played with San Francisco Symphony, a real opportunity of which I didn't take full advantage. A couple years later, I took from him again at his condo in Tiburon. One day I brought my wife at the time, Linda. While I was upstairs getting warmed up practicing scales, the dapper signore Siani was busy chasing Linda around his kitchen, trying to cop a feel and a kiss. He did look a little flushed when he came upstairs to begin our lesson. Linda laughed it off as we drove back to Mill Valley. Such are the hazards of middle-aged men making passes lovely young things--derisive comments and a laugh-off. His young wife was employed by the college in some executive position and was a raving beauty herself. Charles was just trying to live up to his reputation as a dashing roué. Better luck elsewhere I say.

SF State was a hotbed of radical politics in 1964. Tables, with political groups from Trotskyites, SNCC, CORE, the WEB Dubois Clubs, to Maoists and sub-Maoists, were neatly lined up in front of the cafeteria. And then there were common riff-raff pothead San Francisco types hanging out there too. I had to walk a gauntlet of rival hawkers of left-wing ideology to get myself a sandwich. Demonstrations were organized, rallies planned, and weed sold, all within a 50-foot radius. I bought my first \$5 matchbox right there, and made contact with the San Francisco branch of the W.E.B. Dubois Club, within ten minutes and 50 feet of each other. I had been a member of the Club--the youth arm of the Communist Party--up in Portland, but I made contact with this southern branch right there and then. It turned out to be a telling recruitment from both angles. I was presented with the two paths--one of interior-soul searching (read: self-indulgent) and goodtime weed smoking, or selfless political hard work for just causes. You can guess which one I decided to swing with.

Westward Ho!

I remember sitting at my tiny desk on Oak Street contemplating my two new discoveries: weed and the orgasm. I had just had my first experience of the latter with someone I barely knew, quite unexpectedly, in Portland on New Year's Eve 1965. I was eighteen years old and what the medical profession with kindness calls a "late bloomer." My body had a long time catching up to my adolescent desires, but now I was ready to enjoy full-throttle what I had been wishing for years. Hey, I can do this all by myself was my thought staring at the matchbox, and I meant both activities. No need for details, but it was a happy discovery.

I boiled myself yet another dinner of Top Ramen, poured a glass of Martin and Rossi vermouth--the cheap wine of sophisticates and village idiots--and thought about my move up the street to 1360 Fell Street. It was going to be good to get away from David and Lou and be on my own for real. They were like older brothers, peering at me from around corners, making sure I was behaving. Actually I don't really think they cared what I did. I was still going to school like the dutiful son, but in my heart of hearts I knew it was only a matter of time before I would get out from under. (As it turned out I was indeed the dutiful son and finished out the rest of the year.) I sat at my desk, smoking a joint of weak weed, drinking my vermouth, feeling the excitement you can only muster at eighteen: life was too good to be true and this would go on forever.

1360

Ten blocks west at the base of the Panhandle stood 1360 Fell Street. The building can be described in many ways but it always reminded me of some squat, poor man's tugboat--listing slightly, but still proudly combing the harbor for small craft in need of a temporary nudge somewhere, anywhere. The fog would blow in from the ocean, run the length of the Panhandle, and cover Fell Street in a gray mist. Then 1360 with its wide front stoop would be enveloped in fog. You could imagine you were entering some strange ship as you stepped in, greeted by an unusual double-wide staircase leading to the top floor, floor two. Just up the street on the Panhandle were beautiful four-story Victorians lining both Oak and Fell Streets; the typically gorgeous San Francisco post-1906-earthquake dwellings for the upper-middle class. But here at the funky end of the Panhandle, across the street from a rundown Safeway and the Department of Motor Vehicles, was this very poor step-child of Victorian glory; a plain, grey two-story boarding house with barebones accommodations and almost zero charm.

My room was on the second floor, midway back and stage right, about the size of two queen-size beds, with a gas burner located in a narrow alcove the width of a walk-in closet. There was a sink, a small brown gas heater, a window that looked out on nothing much, an air shaft off the "alcove/kitchen." And that was it. Bathroom across the hall with bathtub was shared by the tenants on my side of the building. The building manager was Norman Stubbs, a lanky dude with boxcar glasses, long stringy hair, black beard and a tendency to play congas deep into the night in his extra small-cell of a room. Who could tell him to shut up? He was the boss of the place. Norman did play his congas in the Panhandle and at the Blue Unicorn. He was a real odd ball with no friends that I knew of. His brother, Gary Stubbs, the Haight's first major entrepreneur, would soon to open the famous Psychedelic Shop, the first head shop in the universe, up on Haight Street. A big sprawling market of weed pipes, bongs, Indian bedspreads, bangles, finger cymbals, incense, and the occasional carved side table. Probably the first of its kind.

I got busy setting up shop--thumb-tacking prints on the walls, putting up my single hi-fi speaker and hooking up my record player. I even tacked an Indian print bedspread above the bed to create a colorful canopy. By the time I was through I was ready for the neighborhood. But what exactly was this Haight-Ashbury neighborhood I was in such a hurry to move into?

When the Haight Belonged Just to Us

In early 1965 the hip contingent was relatively small. A few souls hung around Haight Street or in the Panhandle, but the community of heads was still small. The Haight was a working-class neighborhood with a slightly Russian bent. Most of the stores and bars on Haight were regular places, with a couple of anomalies like the faux Near Eastern bar, Aub Zam Zam (still there) and Andy's lunch counter, a Russian diner serving steaming bowls of borscht and piping hot piroshkis. A bowl of cabbage beef borscht and a deep-fried meat-and-egg filled hand grenade would keep me going for eight hours. Many is the time, high on something, but low on bucks, that me and my friends plopped ourselves at the counter, ready to be mothered by the former mothers of Mother Russia--those zaftig rooskies. Andy, the man himself, collected the cash. He would look a little askance at the longhairs who began collecting at his lunch counter, but he liked all the new business.

And the old Donut Shop on Stanyan Street, open late, became a hangout. It was a great place for the late night munchies and had a decent jukebox. Of course, most all jukeboxes were great, because of the pop music revolution--Motown, Stax, the British invasion, and Dylan. The era of "She Wore Blue Velvet" was a fading. In 1965 there was almost no bad music on the radio. Amazing!

In those early days you could shoot a giant hairy cannonball down Haight Street after 11 pm, and you might hit three or four people hanging out on the street. There was no place to go, except to the bars, but they were strictly off limits. Not our territory at all--risking a possible ass whuppin from one of the locals. All the gatherings took place in the pads or at the Blue Unicorn coffee house on Hayes. For some reason I hardly frequented the Unicorn. Most of the get-togethers were indoors with friends, smoking, laughing, listening to sides, far away from public scrutiny. Later came the dance halls, but in early 1965 there was an occasional glimpse of a band rehearsing at 1090 Page, a large communal house, or a trip to North Beach to catch some live action at the Coffee Gallery. The first live music event I ever went to was a benefit for the San Francisco Mime Troop in the Spring of 1965 or the early concerts thrown by the Family Dog at the Avalon Ballroom off Van Ness.

Time to Make New Friends

My girl friend Joanne was gone by then. A little down in the mouth, I soon found new friends to hang out with. My best friend Bill from Portland was constantly going back and forth from Portland to San Francisco. He would get the itch to come down, or some friends in Portland would be doing a 12-hour drive to San Francisco and he would hop along for the ride. In the dead of winter they would barrel over the mountain passes in southern Oregon, pretty looped on uppers. Bill swore that more than once a giant elk attacked their car in the night. The elk turned out to be road signs they nearly ran into on their raggedy trajectory.

One sunny California day Bill and I were sitting on the statue at the base of the Panhandle. From a distance, we glimpsed a figure playing a wood flute, stutter stepping towards our perch like a mad Irish

leprechaun. He fluted his way up to Bill and me with a bob-and-a weave. I had seen this cat prowling around the Park and on Haight Street, but didn't know his name. We started talking about the weather or the coming acid revolution, and we got on like clockwork. From that moment Jim Thurber became a fixture in my life. Turned out he wasn't just a fluting fool, but a talented young poet and freakster, out for adventures in the skin and spirit trade. As cute as an Irish jig, Jim had a certain magic about him. The ladies loved the lad for sure, but all us guys were mad about him too. There was a certain forthright friendliness and kind-heartedness that just flowed out his silver dollar sized blazing baby blues. We went up to my room right then and smoked a joint, the three of us, to seal our friendship. You might just say hi to some people you met in the Haight next time you saw them around, and then there were some people you never really said goodbye to. Jim was in the latter camp. Then Sam met Jim and they bonded over poetry and trout fishing. The beginnings of a real scene.

Eurydice and Her Magic Circle

Through the mists, a memory arises one crazy evening that set the tone for what was happening in the Haight late 1964. Rumor spread my way of a grand party being thrown on lower Haight, across from Buena Vista Park. It was billed as Eurydice's birthday party. Eurydice?

I could only vaguely associate the name with Greek drama and the movie Black Orpheus. I don't remember how I got entrée to this exclusive gathering of Haight heavies, but from the moment I entered the three-story Victorian apartment, I was floating on one of those buoyant clouds that sweeps you along when you are young and witness to something almost magical.

Eurydice turned out to be the most beautiful black woman I had ever laid eyes on. All I remember is her short-cropped Afro, her round face; a perfect visage right off the screen from Black Orpheus. (Probably where she copped the name.) She was friendly and welcoming, although she had never seen me before.

It was her "birthday" party, but nothing was provided. No food, no cake, no booze. Oh, maybe a little beer and wine in the kitchen, but this was a strictly BYOP affair. Yeah, you got it--a "whip out the goods, start rolling, and everybody gets high" scene.

The three-story apartment was huge, and in each room, people lounged around on chairs and sofas getting high. Some rooms were noisy with party conversation, others dimly lit and quiet, with half-slumbering bodies strewn about. There was a whole other scene on the roof--joints and fags glowing in the night air. There's nothing like a roof party up on the Haight-Ashbury knoll, as the fog rolls in from the coast. Nothing like it.

I walked like a somnambulist from room to room, from floor to floor, totally agog at this huge gathering of the Haight-Ashbury hipsters. Maybe I recognized a few folks from SF State. But who were these people? In retrospect I know I had just walked into the core of the scene. The hip happening poobahs of the new San Francisco. How I got there is a mystery.

It was at this shindig that I laid eyes close up on these dandy-looking types whom I had occasionally seen walking around the Haight. Three or four guys, decked out in twenties/thirties garb. Thrift store fashion mavens who knew how to throw a look together. White pants, striped jackets, a straw hat or ancient baseball cap, they looked like they had stepped out of the Saturday Evening Post circa 1925. They were, it turned out, the Charlatans, one of the first rock bands to come not only out of San Francisco, but born of the Haight itself. They had real cachet and aspired to an early Rolling Stones sound. A little hard, but also lyrical and folksy. They were minor celebrities. A little older than me, and they definitely knew the beautiful Eurydice. I was awed to be at the same party with them.

This was the first of many wondrous night time scenes that unfolded for me in the Haight. The large Victorian apartments were perfect for shoe-horning in tons of people. Their fourteen-foot high ceilings allowing plenty of head space.

I never saw Eurydice again. On the street, in her house, in a shop. Maybe she had just flown in for a moment to act as an early inspiration for us all. Whoever she was, I can never forget her and that first big Haight-Ashbury party chez ... Eurydice. A month or so later Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn got busted high up on a rooftop at a similar Haight-Ashbury bash. It was all over the Chronicle's front page. Maybe Eurydice had struck again.

The Gang's All Here

Fell Street was starting to pick up steam as a magnet for crazy galoots of many shapes and sizes. All the Russians pensioners fled, and new faces kept coming in. There was Barbara Schlosser, a studious good-hearted gal from Philly via Reed College, a bit older than me. (Almost everyone was older than me back then, and it was always a pleasure to be the youngest face in the crowd--a sensation I haven't had for quite awhile.) Polly, also a recent Reed graduate, wore a heavy dose of Jungle Gardenia as she made her midnight rounds.

Phil and Joann moved into the front upper right apartment, a little roomier than the side places. They had just moved from some San Francisco suburb. Joann worked at an insurance company downtown. Her friend Donna also worked there. Donna Dogs was a Haight Ashbury knock-about who brought with her several German Shepherds and a covey of hangers-on and young drifters. Among them was Jerry Butterfield. He would later supplant Phil as Joann's number one, kicking poor Phil to the curb, and running off with the prize eventually to LA with some of my cash as seed money for a new start.

I had seen Jerry months earlier in the Panhandle with hot chicks in tow. (Jerry seemed to have a posse of women back then following him around.) Longhaired, shades, skinny, very cool, he traveled with guitar like a folk singer in the Dylan tradition. He had looked a little unapproachable, but interesting, behind the shades. I was happy to meet him at close range in Joann's room. Jerry was an excellent rockabilly singer who knew scads of country music. He had actually seen Buddy Holly and Eddy Cochrane while growing up in Albuquerque. Dad in the Air Force, mother an excellent amateur painter. Jerry played and sang old Buddy Holly tunes, and Johnny Cash. I especially like "I Still Miss Someone," an old Johnny Cash song I adopted for my own.

Gail and Walter Dusenbery turned up one day, renting a small place on the second floor. They were an interesting couple, handsome and wise, it seemed at the time, and again, a little older and more with-it than me. I liked hanging out in their place. Walter burned wonderful Japanese incense he had brought back from Japan on his merchant seamen jaunts to the Far East.

We got high in their cozy, arty pad, blowing gage and riffing like crazy. One night I made up an entire folk ditty as a riverboat captain. It just flowed out of me channeled from my days on the Missouri with Mark Twain. Then we would head out into the night for some party or deli run for a BBQ chicken sandwich or a quart of ice cream.

Gail was a poet. She was writing and private. I clocked her as a scholarly type who, like Sam, needed quiet time to marshal her energies and productivity. Me, Bill, Jerry, and the other nitwits--we were constantly wound up and on the go. Not much time set aside for internal reflection. We would catch that self-realization thing at odd moments, swinging from high wires like jungle monkeys over the neighborhood, landing on a perch at some random destination, not knowing or caring exactly how or why we were there. Pawing the turf like buffalo, smelling the air around us full of pot, sex, and the cool Pacific Ocean airflow. Jim Thurber floated through both camps: a swinging monkey, and, along with Sam and Gail, a Zen Center habitué.

Over the next several months the Haight really exploded, finally hitting critical mass in late '65. Not the blowout siege that was to follow, but just enough kids to make it feel like something really big was accelerating under our feet. More parties, more people on the street, more dope smoking, more new friends, more action everywhere. Haight Street was alive with the sound of finger cymbals, gurgling bongos and knots of people just hanging out and rapping. Very few folks had to live on the street. Plenty of friendly crash pads open for overnights or even extended stays. The community ethos was about sharing and it seemed to work until there was just too much for it to handle.

I was swept away in the excitement, the raw energy and the newness of it all. I remember talking to Jim or Jerry and saying, "Man, we're in the middle of a revolution here. This is historic almost like 1917. It's a real revolution!!" Nods all around, because that's what it felt like: a goddamn youth revolution. And it was all confined to the neighborhood. By then we rarely ventured outside of the Haight. My San Francisco was defined by Fillmore Street through Golden Gate Park, and from Market to Fulton Street running south to north. You had everything to sustain you right in that quadrant: food, shelter and a community equipped to handle all your spiritual and physical needs. Why leave home? This was our territory, our province, our magic kingdom. It belonged to us.

Midnight Ramblers

Nights were never dull on Fell Street. As was happening everywhere the hip and the restless gathered en masse, bed partners were a constant swap meet. Attachments were formed like temporary hands, held for a moment, let go, re-formed, then dropped again, as the mood or moon struck. It was a lucky time for those interested in pursuing fleshpot crackerdoodledom. No real STDs to contend with, except for the occasional case of the clap or the dreaded crabs. Yeast infections were often in the news. Pregnancy was the only physical consequence of multiple couplings, but that didn't seem to happen much. The pill had taken away some of the potential pain of the unbridled funhouse. Of course, the mental anguish of lost loves, hurt feelings, could never be eliminated even though the ethos--a mainly male construct that the girls tried hard to follow--minimized the virtues of permanent partnerships in favor of our full throttle omnivoristic desires. And so I was the lucky recipient of some blissful midnight creepings, either on the

prowl myself, or having a lovely visitation laid at my doorstep. I made an honest attempt to get better at “it” for the satisfaction of all involved. Counting backwards from 75 seemed to help forestall an early out.

Into the Sugar Pot

I can't really recall how I got into the weed business. I try to remember who turned me on to the whole concept, but nothing comes up--a telling brain misfire in itself. But after I decided not to go back for that “committed” second year, I told my parents I was working at the Post Office. They didn't have to send me anymore dough. It seemed a likely story because Sam and other heads were always “getting on” down at the SF Post Office, at least for the holiday season. It wasn't until I got busted a couple of years later and went to work at my uncle's plywood store, showing the judge I wasn't such a bad guy after all, that I held a legit job. No, I made my living working the underground pot trade.

I would buy kilos of bricked up Mexican weed held together with sugar additive and wrapped in pretty colored cellophane. I would get my hands all sticky tearing the bricks apart. I would cut up the kilos into ounces, and then sell lids to friends and the ever-widening family of heads, and, on one fateful occasion, a nark, who looked all right but was no friend of this hapless hippie entrepreneur. It started innocently enough, but the money came a little too easy, and my reputation grew as a Haight-Ashbury pot kingpin. This was so far from reality that when I heard myself IDed as such, I laughed all the way to the courthouse steps. And I did take stupid risks. One day I met my connection on some street corner. Got into his car and proceeded to buy five or six bricks. He wouldn't give me a ride back but dropped me off a couple of blocks away. I had to carry the goods back home. I had on a long winter overcoat, so I hugged the packages against my body and waddled like a giant human penguin back to 1360.

If anyone had been watching, and I'm sure they were by then, they would have pegged me as a shoplifter, or a pregnant revolutionary. But everything was so free and easy then that I would have sold to anyone who looked hip and had the cash. Big mistake.

Bad Medicine, Bad Boys

At some point, several of my new friends started flying down the crystal highway. To feel like Superman, able to stay on your feet for days at a time, was the natural outcome of the scene. Who wanted sleep when there was so much to be done? So much to think about. So much to do, do, do! So much to be really, really busy about.

Crank, crystal methedrine, in its purest form since Herr Goering poured it into the Wermacht's soup pots on the Russian Front, invaded the weed world, knocking all contenders to the side. My friends were up for days, rarely stopping for a meal; running around the city high, or looking to cop the next bag or paper. They would finally “crash.” The origin of the word comes from meth heads up for days, then falling down into a two- or three-day slumber.

There was a legendary dealer who lived in the city, drove a big black panel truck and was known only as “Uncle Milty.” A nicer, more world-weary, and somehow avuncular dude you would never ever meet. Uncle Milty's product was the gold standard. His journeys into town were looked forward to with great anticipation and a whooping celebration would break out when he finally made the scene.

My role became the Jewish mother of the gang, feeding and caring for my high-flying pals. I never got

into meth myself. It terrified me and I was quite happy in middling psychedelia with a little acid, peyote or psilocybin. Meth cut a devastating swath through my small circle and it took years for those lucky enough to survive to make it back to real life. Many people just went nuts, and wound up dead, or institutionalized with their brain permanently on fire.

And Now in the Other Corner, Ziggy the Junkman

Heroin was a pretty far shore in my circle. While my close associates were doing speed, heroin was still off limits, with good reason. For us the “addict” was personified by one dude named Ziggy who was always leaking body fluids out of his ears, nose, and throat in a constant state of liquid withdrawal.

Ziggy (or Siegfried as his mother, a devout Wagner fan, had named him) was a mutant force of nature. Powerfully attractive in a very weird way, but ultimately a menace to himself and others. An outcome of junk madness. A redheaded Jew charmer, a burn artist, who stole, conned and ravaged the Haight and all points on the San Francisco compass. I would have loved to have twisted off that curly red head of his to see what was burbling away down in there.

God, what an ugly mess of primal urges, with a lot of cunning and frothing thrown in. You suspected he wasn't really human at all, but some wild street dog that had drifted up from the New York sewer system all the way across the country, never coming up for air. (Yes, they all connect, if you go down far enough.) With that permanently scratchy hoarse voice of his, I figured he was a reincarnation of a Ukrainian shtetl super-heavy, a free-basing Tevya. He had those mad Jewish messianic blue eyes which only happen when natural-born Ashkenazim get crossed with Siberian wolves. Sometimes they go to the Yeshiva and become rabbis, but more often they go mad, especially when they've been pulled out of their natural environment by the winds of war. I'm sure Ziggy's grand-pappy and mammy had fled the pogroms just like mine.

And I certainly can't leave out his most loyal second, Mme. Judy. Small and old at 35, with a harpy's eye and a crooked nose, she was Robin to Z's bat-shit routine. But because she was a girl, you felt sorry for her, even though she was part of the burn squad and would do anything for her man. But when it came to the big payoff fix, Ziggy always went first, no matter who had done the spade work.

He made off with my antique Gibson L12 a couple of times. I had to traipse all over town trying to track it down through multiple changing of hands. Ziggy and craggy Judy tag-teamed the innocent pot and LSD buyers in the Haight for a weekend of kicks and cheap thrills. We called their routine the Ziggy and Judy Show and they starred on Haight Street almost every night.

One night in the front apartment at 1360--on loan from someone who had unwittingly consigned it to a bunch of madmen--and after a heroic all-day effort, Ziggy had scored some dope with a capital “D.” We were all assembled in that apartment, as Ziggy brought the needle towards his streaked but powerful forearms. He cried out with true religious fervor, “THANK YOU JESUS! THANK YOU JESUS!” I thought that odd. He was obviously a Jew. But perhaps he swung both ways, or had joined the Berkeley Junky Jews for Jesus support group?

I'm sure both of them are long gone but you never know. He was a cat with nine lives for sure. Maybe I should Google him under “classic burn artists.”

Our Most Illustrious Guest

I remember the image like it was yesterday. I am back from SF State. I throw open the big front door and run halfway up the stairs, just happening to glance to my left. Norman Stubbs the house manager is sitting in the lower front apartment talking to a very familiar looking guy. I stop in mid step, back up down the stairs, and see Allen Ginsberg sitting at the table with Norman, in deep negotiation. I had heard Ginsberg was around, just back from his legendary trip to India. And there he was in the flesh. I staggered up to my room in shock. Here was one of the saints of the beat generation, a true idol about to move in right down from my airshaft.

Sure enough the next morning the chanting and finger symbols signaled the beginning of a few months acquaintance with the great man and his entourage. This consisted of Peter Orlovsky, Julian Orlovsky (Peter's schizophrenic brother), and a kid we called Little Stevie. Little Stevie wound up hanging out a lot in my room, taking crystal orally, and working on a completely illustrated version of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. He was a pretty good artist too. The guy who would be in and out of Fell Street long after Allen had hit the road East was Neal Cassady.

I found out recently that Gail Dusenbery had met Allen at Gary Snyder's place and had told him about a vacancy at 1360. My first encounter with Allen's crew was walking in on Peter in the communal bathtub. He was wearing his tam-o'-shanter in the suds, but that was it, and a very handsome and arresting dude he was. He unabashedly asked if I knew where he could score some junk. Peter had gotten pretty strung out on opium in India. I demurred, since I really didn't have any idea, but Peter was very friendly. He didn't hold it against me.

I got to join the Ginsberg traveling show and had many cool encounters. Bob Dylan came to town with his band during the Mr. Jones era. He knew Allen from earlier days, and bought Allen a state-of-the-art portable Urher tape recorder. Michael McClure got an autoharp. Allen loved that tape player. We would walk up Market Street, in those days full of cheap movie theaters and workingmen's restaurants, while G. gleefully recorded porn theater barkers and general passersby. Recording voice on the street was uncommon back then. The novelty sent Allen into giddiness.

We made our way up to Chinatown, and the four or six of us had a huge meal in an upstairs back alley joint I knew about. Years later I met Allen in Portland. He told me that he had first dictated his famous Wichita Vortex Sutra into the Urher, lying on his back in a Kansas cornfield. A couple of people who should know, tell me that was an imagined memory on my part, but hey, I pluck out of the grab-bag sieve that is my memory as best I can.

When Dylan played at the Masonic Auditorium in San Francisco, Allen took me, Little Stevie, Peter, and Jim Thurber on comps furnished by Mr. Bob. Stevie and I sat front row center next to Joan Baez. We queried her, because we were young and silly, about her drug intake. (Obviously, what drugs she took would be a measure of how hip she was.) She replied that she wasn't into anything at all, but enjoy a good tranq once in awhile. I remember Stevie and myself, with nineteen-year-old superiority, thinking "Well, that's kind of square, isn't it?" We dope snobs were pretty intolerant of those who weren't down with the current psychedelic/speed scene.

It was a great concert of course. Dylan at the piano was practically swallowing the mike, mimicking fellatio every time he hit the refrain, "Do you, Mr. Jones?" He got the point of the song across quite nicely.

Later that night we went to an after-concert party at Bob LeVigne's studio in the Mission. Lots of fun, but only quick sightings of the mysterious Mr. Bob who was hung up in a special back room huddle, reportedly smoking weed and taking speed with several Hell's Angels who had made the scene with Ken Kesey. He would break for air occasionally and walk around the party in the huge loft, then after a couple of minutes, head back.

Another big scene I attended with Allen and company was in a loft down on Howard Street: The San Francisco Mime Troop benefit. I rode in the VW van with Stevie, Allen, Sam, and Peter, an ex-ambulance driver, who was always the designated wheelman. We stopped by the poet Phil Whalen's house somewhere on the other side of the Haight towards Twin Peaks. Mr. Whalen sent his regrets, so we arrived at the event which had been put together by the Mime Troop's manager, Bill Graham. This was the first music concert event of his career. The room could not have been bigger than 50'x100' and was probably smaller. On stage the Fugs, in from New York (many east coasters converging in San Francisco at this exact moment), the Jefferson Airplane, the Mystery Trend, and Mother Earth all played. Stevie had given me just a lick of some crystal off butter knife he was using to cut up the stuff, as we had left Fell. I had never done speed, and man was I flying. The whole evening went by in about ten minutes. I just kept peaking and peaking, loving everyone and everything around me.

As we left the party a wispy blond girl was standing on the sidewalk, her blue eyes as big as saucers. She looked more stoned than anyone I had seen that night, and that's saying a lot. I was in a super garrulous mood (gee, I wonder why?) and asked her, "Wow, what did you take?" With a slight tilt of her head, "Romilar," she said in a reedy whisper. Man I thought, I'm not sure that's a good thing or a bad thing. Romilar it turned out was a high-octane over-the-counter cough medicine, full of belladonna or something crazy. Jim Thurber was briefly into the stuff and developed what he called the "Romo" walk--a bent-kneed simian sway that got you from one place to another, while feeling everything from ground to sky was encased in warm Jell-O. I tried it once and that was it. Not my kind of fog.

The penultimate event of the Ginz's stay on Fell Street was the Halloween party we permanent residents collectively threw. Allen's gang had little to do with the planning or execution, but they helped make it the most legendary bash of collective Fell Street memory. I'm not sure if we conceived it as a huge, middling, or small affair, but it grew into a monster of party with people pouring into little ol' 1360 by the boatload. Most of us kept our rooms open for public use, because, aside from the extra-wide stairway, there was no place for people to gather.

Sorry, memory fails for more detail, but a blur of faces, jubilation, and the tumble of youthful madness all around. Late in the evening we stood on the cornices of the front stoop and harangued strangers to join the melee within. The critical mass roared on for a couple of hours--quite long for a steaming, rolling, pot-boiling communal fiesta. By the time the cock crowed the next morning, Allen had, like a Buddha saint, rescued Barbara S. from a bad acid trip (why she dropped under such a siege of strangers I don't know), presented his bum for all to proclaim A-Okay, and generally acted as a kindly elder statesman, muse, and party dog of the highest order.

I awoke the next day to the sound of Allen's chanting wafting up the air well. Such a reassuring sound. And no bad head because not much alcohol consumed.

I don't know how we got on the subject, but Allen once laid out his whole homosexual deal at its most sound and basic level: "Why should I make love with a woman when Peter will suck my cock all night long?" he said. Hmm I thought, that makes sense, but then maybe he was overlooking a few things.

Allen was a kindly mentor, and several of my friends were drawn into his lair at 1360 for a brief flirtation. When he kissed me good-bye as he got into the front seat of the white VW van to drive back to New York via Kansas, I felt his warm beard all around my face. His soft lips on mine broke through his thick mustache, and I thought, this is nice and for a moment I understood the attraction.

It was a little heartbreaking as the van pulled away into traffic up Fell Street, heading east across the Bay Bridge. Bill Adie, who had been around through the whole "Ginz" visitation, turned to me and said, "Wow!" We were lucky to have been around one of the great people of our time. A real mensch whose kindness and enthusiasm for what was good in the world resonated with all of us. A saintly dharma bum who blazed the trail we were all trying to follow. (Imagine eating peyote in 1955 in San Francisco. Do you think there was another soul even remotely doing the same in the entire city? You were out there all by yourself. Like jumping out of plane at 10,000 and hoping the chute opens, that takes real guts.)

Tales of Neal

No memory piece about those wiggly times would be complete without a remembrance of the original wigmaster, Neal Cassady.

I first laid eyes on Neal at an anti-Vietnam war rally Berkeley with Sam. We heard Norman Mailer make the famous speech where he encouraged everyone to turn stamps upside down on all letters and parcels. Neal was maniacally trying to park Kesey's Merry Prankster bus. He was quite out of his mind and thrashing about in that Neal-only style. We exchanged a few words about something. I had no idea who he was, but I was struck by his driving excellence as he wrestled that huge whale of a vehicle into a tight parking spot.

Neal was traveling with Kesey at the time, part of the Merry Prankster set, and he popped up at 1360 to visit his old pal Allen. When I saw him later at 1360, I thought, "Gee, I know that guy from somewhere. Oh yeah, right, big bus, Berkeley."

Allen was thrilled to see him but at times he grew weary of Neal's frenetic speed-driven pace. So Neal found his way up to my room for a more sympathetic ear and place to crash. Plus, he had all my speed freak friends to pal around with, "to go into the starry dynamo of night looking for a happy hit of crystal," to misquote Sir Ginz.

Neal was strictly an oral man when it came to speed. I never saw him stick a needle in his arm. Maybe that would mean he had crossed over to some dark place, or maybe needles just scared him. But he had a nice strong tongue that licked up as much as you could feed him. He would settle for dropping pills if he had to.

He would pop up to my room with a couple of kids in tow. He'd commandeer them and their car to go on dramatic speed runs all over the Bay Area. They would hang on for dear life, but inevitably Neal would return without them. I would ask, "What happened to the so-and-so twins?" and he would make some remark that they just couldn't keep up, which was absolutely true. Even at forty Neal was a bat out of hell who could run circles around kids half his age.

Maybe it had to do with his physical presence. He had the body of a hard-muscled boxer, a handsome chiseled face, blue eyes and very powerful arms. I once saw him in Palo Alto at an Acid Test, with the rest of the pranksters, flipping a hammer like he was Thor or some demonic demi-god. He flipped that hammer for hours as the legendary Warlocks played loud and hard.

Neal was one of the great rap artists of his day. Because he had been at it so long, his train of thought bounced and pitched from decade to decade. Depending on how amped up he was, his pace could be so turbo-charged it would be hard to follow. But if you listened really closely, there was always a beginning, middle and end to his supersonic story telling. It was like trying to catch a Schoenberg twelve-tone row on the fly. You had to listen with great focus, but it was always there. Maybe he would start talking about where he had been in the past 24 hours, then skip to a New York rooftop in 1952 with Kerouac, then back to a dozen other scenes, each reference clarifying the preceding statement in a great drive of ever-accelerating words.

I once asked him if he had ever written any of these marvelous raps down, “No, I am a poet extemporator!” he thundered. And he was right. It was the purest “of the moment” prose poetry I’ve ever heard. Fearless, totally egoless, and totally egotistical all at once. A force of nature.

Like other speedsters Neal would eventually crash. I availed my pad to him on many occasions. Of course, Neal could be a pain when you were trying to catch some Zs and he would be at your door at 4 am with a couple of those baleful kids.

His main traveling partner at the time was Anne Murphy, his girl friend of long standing. I’m not sure why she put up with him exactly. He didn’t treat her very well and they would have volcanic fights which would sometimes end in mean sex. (Sam clued me into their bedroom routine after they had followed me to Cole and Carl and were crashing in a walk-in closet adjacent to Sam’s room.) I remember Allen yelling at Anne to stop nagging Neal to death. I think she was hoping that after their decades on-and-off, Neal would do an about face and settle down to live a normal suburban life. She too was out of her mind.

But she was attractive even at the old age of thirty-eight. One night the three of us were crowded in my double bed to get some shut-eye, when a huge fight broke out between them about their never having sex anymore. He said something unkind to Anne. To get back at him, she told him that she was going to screw me right there in the bed, right now. (Yeah!) Neal said, fine, you blah, blah, bleep, bleep . . . put on his pants and slammed out of the room. I turned to sexy Anne lying next to me. “Oh boy, my lucky day has finally arrived, now’s my big chance to do it with Anne.” I was just about to reach over for her, back storms Neal into the room, making all these apologies to Anne, and, before you know it, they’re asleep. I was disappointed, but I hadn’t even got close. It was all part of some strange routine they had,

I must say I really loved Neal, in the same way I loved Allen. Both were saints to me. They did the heavy lifting for us Johnny-come-latelies. In a way, without them there would have been no me. No me living the boho life, always perched in the now, not worrying about next week or next year. They had always been on a crusade against the predictable.

The last time I saw Neal I was in a car driving up Market near Castro with my father. Neal was racing the exact opposite direction towards downtown. He was on another fireball mission for sure, and he never saw me. My father was on a mission too, a mission of mercy for me. And I felt not a little guilty that, even though I loved my father to the ends of the earth, I wished I could have been in that car with electric Neal, heading at brake-neck speed for points unknown.

Not long after, during a period of great inconvenience, when I and other lads were confined to a preset area, Rodger Grimsby the local San Francisco newscaster came on the tube. Jokingly I almost said, but at least thought very loudly, "Rodger Grimsby, always the grim reaper." Exactly then did Rodger proceed to announce, "Neal Cassady, age 43, was found dead this morning by the railroad tracks in Mexico. His cause of death seems to have been from over exposure to the elements." I couldn't have put it better.

LSD Mends Fences, Makes New Friends

The anti-war movement came out of the East Bay. San Francisco had organizers too, but my memory is of going to Berkeley for demonstrations. The civil rights movement lived mightily on both sides of the Bay, with the Mel's Drive-In sit-ins, which had happened just before I got there, and then with the emergence of the Black Power movement in Oakland and San Francisco. (By the way, am I the only person who actually went to the March on Washington in 1964 on a SNCC bus and fell asleep during Blowin' in the Wind?)

The anti-war demonstration that I remember most clearly was in Berkeley, with Ginsberg at the front of the march. We marched down Shattuck all the way into east Oakland, past Shalimar By Jimmy, a local soul club whose name and neon sign I will remember forever, and then snaked back to central Berkeley.

Hells' Angels, united with other blue-collar head busters, taunted us along the way--patriotic Townies vs. white Berkeley liberals. A sign I was carrying got ripped out of my hands by one of those ferocious dudes, but we kept on marching. Allen got into a verbal exchange with a group of them. He was trying to engage them peacefully, but I don't think it worked.

But here is the curious upshot. Kesey was entertaining the Angels down the peninsula at La Honda and brokered a peace meeting there. Allen, the Angel's Sonny Barger and Free Wheelin' Frank, Kesey and the Pranksters all dropped acid together. After that, the Angels were drafted into the peace movement and acted as our protectors on the demonstration trail. The next march was completely different. No hecklers to speak of, and a motorcycle escort from you know who. The Angels provided security for hippie events from then on, until, of course, Altamont, where the real nature of the beast reared its ugly head. All this because of Kesey and Allen, and a little Owsley, way out there in La Honda.

The Heat Was On

After Allen had packed up and gone, an old friend from high school, one year my junior, moved into his apartment. Kathy Wadsworth was a wild child given to doing wheelies on her motorcycle around Washington High in 1963, smoking across the street at the bad kids' hang out, and generally rebelling against any and all. She had a wonderful spirit of party. I knew when she moved in there would be a continuum of high times. Kathy had a bellowing laugh and a raspy tobacco-coated voice. Sam and I were into Macrobiotics at the time and I remember cooking that heavy yeastless bread in Kathy's tiny kitchen because she had an oven, one of only two in the whole building. Kathy eventually got pregnant and had an incredibly cute, fair-haired daughter named Anna whom I used to call Hagisburst, after an imagined little Nordic sprite. Kathy was very dear to me. She was also instrumental in my leaving dear old 1360.

I was happily dealing weed at this time and had even tried to put together a dealing consortium with my close friends. We were young capitalist romantics who wanted free dope, money, and a little respect in the Haight. We were supposed to get red handkerchiefs to wear or carry, but never happened. The idea probably came from Ron O'Day, AKA Mr. Style, a fallen angel from a wealthy Peninsula family who had joined our merry band after visiting San Francisco for his ROTC service. He would show up at 1360 in his Marine dress, a duffel bag filled with his hip attire, change his clothes, and proceed to do the speed thing with the guys.

The syndicate model seemed like a good one. We were all friends trying to get by in the cold world of drug commerce, so why not pool energies and form a commune? I fronted the operation initially with my successful weed business. We were going to post signs all through the Haight and Golden Gate Park: THE NOVA GANG IS HERE! inspired by the pink Watts riots BURN BABY BURN stickers plastered on every lamppost from the Fillmore to the park. Boy, were we on a trip. The stickers also never materialized.

The enterprise lasted maybe a week. Those who were into the white powder shot up all inventory. I myself was sticking to weed, and leaving powders to our resident experts--basically everyone but me. Then he who shall remain nameless got paranoid and burned the rest of us. The air went out of the balloon. We lost the brains of the operation to Los Angeles where he set up a similar and more successful replica. This put an end to our little capitalist Haight-Ashbury experiment. We had tried to be good American capitalist, but, alas, nights of voodoo magic and filmy fog, i.e. the old speedomatics, did us in.

Fell Street Exodus

So back to the point of all this. One day Kathy and I were sitting on the Fell Street stoop shooting the shit when she noticed a white panel van parked right across the street. It looked suspicious. We decided to investigate. When we got right up on it, we noticed a small hole on the side and a camera lens being quickly retracted. Kathy started screaming and chasing after the van as it slowly pulled from the curb and drove up Fell. Cursing the cops in no civilized terms, I knew I had to get out of 1360. The jig was up. There were periods in the Haight when the word went out, the heat is on, a real effort is being made by the authorities to curtail dealing and using. This was one of those times. I remember Sam's sage words of advice about how to conduct oneself during those rough seas: "Don't make any new friends." He said this with a poetic certainty. I didn't know it, but I had already made the wrong new friend and was going to pay the price later on.

Sam and I decided to move in together in a nice two-bedroom apartment at the juncture of Cole and Carl Streets, a few blocks south of Haight Street. I set up shop with a limited number of callers. Sam was studying Chinese and writing poetry, getting high. We had a big black German shepherd Sam brought from his last abode, named Sohn, the Russian word for "dream." It was great to have a dog around. We were eating macrobiotically, and living much more privately and peacefully than I had at 1360. You know, times of mysterious LSD voyages to inner space, and major freak outs on same, buzzers going off at 2:30 am when customers who don't believe you're serious about the store hours insist on disturbing your well earned rest. Occasionally smoking some new stuff called DMT, and throwing rotten pumpkins out our window, down onto the N Judah streetcar that ran in front of our building. Quiet times all around.

The Boys in the Band

One afternoon, walking down Cole towards Haight, not at all in any altered state, a rush of well being and utter happiness flooded over me. The ecstatic feeling appeared almost out of nowhere. My life seemed wonderfully perfect at that exact moment.

I read a handbill posted on a telephone pole. "Haight Ashbury Orchestra forming," it read. "All interested musicians meet at 406 Ashbury"--a location in the Haight. Why not? What did I have to lose? I was "earning a living" and had plenty of free time. I had always wanted to play in a group. I had studied, piano, guitar, and, most recently, string bass, in high school. So I went to the apartment. It was on the first floor. Bay windows looked out on to the street. There were probably eight or ten musicians gathered in the room. The guy who was organizing the group introduced himself. He was younger than me, a very pretty kid, with lot of enthusiasm and real passion for the enterprise. His name was Bobby Beausoleil. He explained that the Haight was coming into its own as a Mecca for new culture and the youth movement. It was only natural that the Haight would have its own orchestra. Right? We all nodded our heads. Bobby whipped out a tune he had written, "The Trees Are Green," a simplistic well-meaning hippie ditty with a half-nice melody. I joined in the chorus singing, "The trees are green, the trees are green, the trees are green . . .". I was charmed by Bobby. He had a handsome rakishness, and his determined ego made me feel he was going to accomplish whatever he set out to do.

Bobby and I became friends. We went down to a huge music store on Market Street, with a giant basement full of modern, and obscure, arcane instruments. Bobby marveled at the weird array of bowed antiquities. I bought a Czech flat-back bass for \$300 since I was pretty liquid in those days.

Bobby or the violinist, David LaFlamme, got a line on an abandoned lumber warehouse on Page and Clayton in the upper Haight. This was the perfect rehearsal space--an old lumber yard with huge wooden swinging doors, like an old cowboy fort. Inside a slightly dank but huge warehouse space. It would be perfect.

Initially there were twenty of us rehearsing at the lumberyard. A potpourri of instrumentalists, some pretty good and some quite awful players. Bobby was determined to let nature take its course and see how it would all turn out. Who would stay and who would go. And sure enough, one by one, as if by some divine natural law, the ones who were supposed to go, left. I remember a particularly good flute player named Neal with deep-set sad eyes who could really blow. But soon he was gone too. We were left with a core of good players, although I can't really count myself. If you play the string bass, you're more than likely to get the gig. As it turned out we all had a similar vision of what the band should be about.

There was David La Flamme on violin--a child prodigy from Salt Lake City whose wife Linda played excellent classical piano. They had been gigging as a duo, playing schmaltz at various straight-laced love nest bars around town. Linda was a lovely and talented pianist whom David was going to dump pretty quickly, after he fell in with the pot-smoking Haight Street crowd. On a soon-to-be-electrified oboe was Henry Rasof from LA, again, a classically trained oboist who had moved up to San Francisco in search of adventures. He sure got those in spades. I don't know how we recruited this next cat, but Terry Wilson must have heeded the clarion call and came to a rehearsal in the cold warehouse. Terry was a Detroit transplant with a young four-year old son, Markie, and an excellent jazz drummer who had played in Charles Lloyd's band back in Detroit. Terry was a great musician and taught us all a lot. He and I became pretty close--we two especially enjoyed the weed-world and jazz.

Bobby played guitar and electrified bazoukie, a long-necked Greek instrument. Bobby had great hustling energy and the good looks to back it up and had already become a Haight-Ashbury fixture, walking around in a black top hat, long overcoat, with his snow-white Malamute named Snofox. Bobby's cherubic face and long straight hair made him look like Lord Ascot's disreputable brother who had marched straight out of 19th century England and into the Mediterranean sunshine of 60's San Francisco.

Bobby may have been a golden child from sunny Santa Barbara, but he could grate on you big-time because he was so fixated on making whatever he wanted to happen, happen. Nice to have on your side, but a real pain in the ass, especially when it wasn't your interest he was hustling. He developed a bad reputation in some quarters for arrogant pushiness and self-proclaimed importance, and a social gracelessness which was a manifestation of the latter. "Bummer Bob" was the moniker some people had laid on him and unfortunately it stuck.

But Bobby was great in his way. He was the initiating force of the band and was constantly out hustling to get us gigs. His life took a tragic turn when he moved to LA and got in with a bad crowd. A real tragedy for everybody as it turned out.

We had no vocalist and that was intentional. Our idea was an improvising free-form instrumental group which would explore different strains of music from the classical, jazz, and Arabic schools. We were an early, eclectic, "world music" with extreme psychedelic tendencies, band. We named ourselves The Electric Orkustra. A poet friend, whose name escapes me, gave us a fine motto: "Light Shows for the Blind." We had bumper sticker made with our photos and the "motto," although almost no one we knew had a car.

As far as the music, we all had input. Terry brought jazz tunes like Nica's Dream (Horace Silver), Blues March (Benny Golson), a tune called Bombay Calling by the tenor saxophonist Vince Wallis, who had played tenor on the hit Rockin' Robin back in the '50's--a wonderful Indian-influenced jazz tune. David reworked classical themes and came up with several tunes like one we called Samuel's Barber, based on a theme from the American composer, Samuel Barber. I contributed a bass riff à la orientale which became an Arab style number we called Camel Crossing. We all threw in our ideas and wrote things together. We even played a couple of tunes given to us by Nick Gravenites, the great Chicago bluesman, who wrote the famous tune Born In Chicago for the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Nick had written a rock opera and was delighted to find someone to play his serious stuff. You could say we gang-raped practically every musical genre save Country Western.

Bobby was good at getting us gigs. For a while we had a weekly Sunday afternoon show at the Cedar Alley Coffee House, part of an arthouse movie theater off Cedar Alley near Polk Street. Bobby created and put up posters all over the Haight. People actually showed up. We played the Glide Memorial Church with a bunch of other bands, and also a Christmas Eve concert at a church in the Mission. And eventually we even landed a gig opening for the Sir Douglas Quintet at the Avalon Ballroom.

Of course we were all out of our minds and fairly insane on stage, submerging ourselves totally in the music. We tried hard to listen to what was going on at that very moment, so we wouldn't sound like a cacophonous scream fest. We were usually quite stoned of course. We played the New Orleans House in Berkeley for a week and had some interest from a record company who sent an A&R guy up from LA to check us out. All those LA sharks were after the next new thing to come out of the San Francisco. Maybe we would be the next big deal.

We came off the stand, completely sweated out and foaming at the mouth from an hour's musical gymnastics, reeking of the smells we'd brought back from our visit to the camel-dunged oasis in the Sahara desert. I immediately started babbling at this record guy who quickly whips out some Binaca, and says very sincerely from behind huge styleless glasses, "Son, would you like some liquid sunshine?" Huh? At first I thought he was talking about some new Acid from down south. Then I looked down at the small ampoule he was handing me. He was telling me that I stunk and he could at least take care of the breath part. It derailed my rap and the guy faded out the door, back to L.A.

The other brush with a real recording opportunity happened when we were playing for a week at a Mafia-owned rock club out on Mission Street called the Rock Garden. We were opening for Buffalo Springfield who were recording for Atlantic. Someone convinced Ahmet Ertegun to come and hear us play. But not at the club. After the gig we went to a small house way out there in South San Francisco, where the 1940s tract houses grew. About 3 am a long black limo pulled up and out popped the Man. We played a couple of tunes in this tiny living room. Then he excused himself and left. A man of few words, especially when he wasn't too impressed. And that was the end of our potential recording career.

A few tapes remain from the Glide Memorial concert, which Bobby sent from his jail cell to a guy in Switzerland who produced an actual LP of the gig. You can buy one on line. Not very good, if I say so myself, and not just because it was poorly recorded. But, look, we had a wonderful time together, playing and trying to make a go of doing something very different, i.e. crazy stuff and no vocalist. We stayed true to our aesthetic. One our last gigs was at the Both/And club on Divisadero, the famous jazz club where I had seen Ornette and Ike and Tina Turner and the whole revue, on their postage-stamp sized stage. And there we were, playing our little hearts out on a Monday or Tuesday night.

I came off the stage and practically stumbled into alto sax player, John Handy, who was making a big name for himself after eclipsing his old boss, Charles Mingus, at the Monterey Jazz Festival. He said, "There something going on up there." I couldn't tell from his inflection if he meant something good, or something bad. "Paranoia strikes deep, into your heart it will creep creep creep."

The band fell apart after Bobby became involved with the underground filmmaker and above ground nutter, Kenneth Anger. A wonderful, flamboyant cultivator of the young and feckless, who seduced Bobby with visions of filmatic greatness and a large banana. Anyway the band did appear in Bobby's first and last cinematic debut, in Kenneth's *The Invocation of My Demon Brother*. The film was to premier at the new Straight Theater on Haight Street, a real big Haight event, but everything came crashing down when Bobby, in a spat with Kenneth, stole the only print of the film and took off. Poor Kenneth was left screaming tearfully, "I want Donovan. Where's Donovan? Donovan, Donovan!" at the top of his lungs

Yes, when Bobby was a bum he was a real bad one. It was shortly after this incident that he left for L.A. to meet an even bigger asshole and a worse fate.

I Go Down

While all this Orkustra stuff was happening, off stage and out of sight another drama was unfolding. What I didn't know was that the sighting of the white van in front of 1360 was the follow-up from a sting that had already happened. In that same front room apartment where Ziggy did his Thank You Jesus dance, I had sold a kilo of weed to a nark.

Do I remember the incident? When I saw the guy in court a year later, sitting at the prosecutor's table with a shit-eating grin on his face, bidding me a sarcastic lilt, "Hi, Jaime," the dude did look vaguely familiar. Of course, now he looked like a nark with short hair, suit and tie. Back when he made the buy, he had long hair (which I sure hope was real, because I would hate to think I sold a kilo to a guy wearing a rug), and he was wearing the garb of the day. I found out they had issued a secret indictment with my name on it: sale of a kilo to an agent.

So one day after leaving Cole and Carl, bobbing around the Haight killing time before an afternoon rehearsal, I arrived at the lumberyard. Posted on the door was a note that was to the point and deeply chilling. Scrawled on a small white piece of paper it read: "Jaime don't go home." That was all it said, but that said it all.

The cops were sick of me doing my thing and, after six months of giving me lots of leash without piercing my so-called "operation," they had decided to roll up my scene. Or maybe they were just bored that day, took an old warrant out of a file cabinet and said, "Let's go get this guy, he's been having too much fun."

I wasn't home when they called, but Sam, cup of green tea in hand, answered the door and two notorious narks, both of whom later did time themselves on corruption charges, burst into the apartment and arrested poor Sam. Obviously, I wasn't there, so they decided to wait to nab me. Well, they had a field day, because all afternoon my customers would ring the buzzer downstairs. The narks would ring them up, arrest them on whatever trumped-up charge they could, sit them down at our round table, and wait for the next fool to call.

They found some pot, but totally overlooked a 300-count bottle of Bayer Aspirin with 250 mgs of pure Owsley acid invisibly dropped on each pill. Ingenious, no? (I had just recently expanded my inventory to include acid because of increased customer demand.) But how could the narks know. It just looked like a big bottle of aspirin.

(A few days earlier Harry Monroe, a merchant seaman poet living at 1360, had come over to buy some weed. He had a headache and, before I could warn him, he popped three seemingly innocent aspirins. He spent the next six hours staring into a small book of Van Gogh's painting--the crazy Arles years. Harry, with his toothy grin and weathered seaman's face, said h'd had a wonderful time visiting France.)

The cops finally gave up on my coming home. Bobby, Jerry and Joann, Sam of course, and a three or four others were all hauled off to jail. After a day or so in the hoosegow, were ORD--released on their own recognizance.

Now here's a perfect example of why Bobby was often called Bummer Bob. The very next day, Sam, Bobby and a couple of others were sitting around in that Cole and Carl apartment. I'm not sure why any of them save Sam were there, but Bobby finds some overlooked weed, rolls a joint, and lights up while people are screaming at him to get rid of the stuff, don't be an idiot. Sure as shit the cops are at the door, push their way in, and re-bust everyone. They take everyone downtown, again. Now that's a perfect Bummer Bob story.

On the Lam

I, of course, never did go home again, but fled to my girlfriend Susan Jacobsen's small apartment on Haight Street. We had recently gotten together, so this was a little awkward, but I was secretly happy

because I had really begun to dig her sexy ways. None of my friends could stand her bossy arrogance, but to me she was funny and interesting. I got none of her patented hard side until much later.

There was not a moment to lose. I quickly enlisted Susan in a daring rescue mission. Maybe a month before, I had bought a special kilo of super weed for the band's use only. It was to be our "get-high-and-play-like-banshees-outta-hell" secret soul sauce, so we could play in sync, grooving together on the same weed cloud. Same communal weed, same communal musical mind, I reasoned. I had purchased this kilo of light green, absolutely perfumed Michoacan ambrosia one night, with Terry Wilson in tow as my co-taster.

Terry had a car then and pulled into a parking slip on Haight Street. We went upstairs, tested a joint, made the buy, went back into his car and started to drive away, to discover that we were both lost. Terry thought he was back in Detroit. I had no clue where I was. That's how strong that Michoacan weed was--and I had a whole paper bag full of it. I figured it would last the band at least a year. All we needed was to roll one of Sam's skinny Chicago-style joints to all get really blasted. Terry and I had unwittingly "ODd" by sharing a small joint just the two of us.

I had stashed this key of superweed on the back porch at Cole and Carl, in an old built-in icebox. I asked Sam if the cops had checked back there. He didn't think so. I had to get that weed! I would get that weed!

So late that night Susan drove me up to Cole and Carl in her sister's old and very conspicuous '38 Chevrolet coupe, and parked down the block. Up the back steps I snuck (I was such a weed hound that I still get chills at the thrill of it all, as I write this forty years later!), opened the ancient icebox, and voila! There it was, safe and sound--my stash of chartreuse stalks resplendent with perfect buds of the most pungent perfection. The very best that money could buy. Back down the stairs, out the little passageway to the street I dashed, and away we drove. No problem, and we did have the key for the next six months or so. We had all smoked a joint before that gig at the New Orleans House when that LA record company showed up. That's why I probably came off as insane to the guy. I was totally blasted out of my gourd. That weed turned out to be a real deal killer in the end.

The End is Near

It happened quick. Suddenly there were hordes of kids, then came hordes of adults looking for the kids, or looking at what could happen to their kids, or just looking at the kids.

Sam and I were walking down Haight Street in late 1966 or early 1967. It was the weekend. Word about our little Eden had hit the national consciousness only a month or two previous. As far as the eye could see, from the top of Stanyan Street at the park's entrance, all the way down past Masonic going east, were cars. Bumper to bumper, cheek to jowl, tour bus to tour bus, all moving in ghostly slow motion up Haight Street, windows rolled up, with pinched-up, curious middle-American faces peering out at us.

I felt the fear and fascination rolling out from the floorboards and the hoods and the trunks of the station wagons of these American families. Their eyes registered disapproval. But was I just projecting? Maybe I was the one who was really afraid of them? And on that day, that first weekend of the onslaught, I said to Sam, very simply, "It's over."

The fortress had been brooked and America had gotten in. There was no panic, just a sigh of resignation. The idyll on our private preserve was never meant to last long. All those new arrivals, coming from everywhere the young and restless were running from, had blown our cover.

Time to Move On

Well almost time. I wasn't going anywhere for awhile, not out of San Francisco, anyway. Damn it, they weren't going to push me out of my own neighborhood . . . uh, were they?

Shortly after the invasion began in earnest, I had lost my license to sell patent medicine and fairy dust. I had to find a new way to make ends meet. I was in the Orkustra but we sure weren't making any money. Always the eternal hustler, I decided to make miracle gas out of Haight Street exhaust fumes. I began selling the Oracle and the Berkeley Barb, the two alt-newspapers, from car to car, as the slow train inched up Haight Street

You could make a lot of money in a weekend. I was a non-threatening type who encouraged folks to roll down their windows and buy a piece of the landscape. Here was this longhaired, but friendly, smiling guy, coming right out of the diorama, almost into their world, lips moving, words emanating. The museum had come to talk to them and they liked it.

I especially enjoyed winking at the teenagers leaning way out of the back windows. I was a siren, beckoning them to come back, after they had dumped their parents at the motel or were free next weekend to take a bus up from Redwood City.

They too could take part in the *Le vivre gallant!* They too could their eyes ripped open. They too could live life a la *vagbondo!* They too could become...a hippie! I really got off talking to the kids and making like a small time *Pied Piper*. Shit, I should have shut up. I may be responsible for a few of the shattered lives that followed the total demise of the youth culture.

One day I was plying my favorite spot, right at the nexus of Haight and Stanyan Streets, where the cars had to turn right or left, or drive over the curb and into Golden gate Park. It was a great spot right to sell papers, right across from Bob's Big Boy. I was out there mid-street doing my thing, bantering with tourists, when this guys comes up from behind and puts his hand on my shoulder. It's a very large San Francisco police officer who wants to kill my business, telling me that I have to quit standing in the middle of the street. I have no chance to make a buck selling from the sidewalk! I have to be front and center, that was what made it work. And what difference does it make?--the cars are traveling at almost no pace.

He gives me a warning, "If I catch you out here in the street again, you're going to jail," which was a couple of blocks away at Park Station, the local cop shop. He was big, wore blue, and had zero sense of humor. God knows I tried to cajole a laugh. Nothing doing.

Okay, I think as I see him walk off down Haight Street. I'll just wait few minutes. When he's out of sight, I'll continue my god-given American free-and-fair trade. He's going, going . . . Ah, yeah, he's gone. I can't see him any more so back out onto Stanyan I go.

I'm out there for a couple of minutes, and suddenly I feel more than just a friendly pat on the arm. It's a vice grip on the shoulder, not too far from where the neckbone meets the shoulder bone. It's him, and he's

really mad. "Where were you?" I squeak. "Bob's Big Boy ordering a burger and watching you, you so-and-so. And you're going to jail," he sputters.

Now jail is one place I really don't want to go to, because, with the bust at Cole and Carl in the recent news, I am not sure of my status way down in the bowels of the SFPD.

I'm scared crazy. He still has his hand cranked on my neck, and he's pushing me towards the station. In the background I hear my loyal fans yelling to leave the kid alone, probably an auditory hallucination. As we get to the middle of Stanyan (he had pushed me onto the Haight Street sidewalk for the roust), I make a bold decision: I'm going to run for it. Yes? No? Yes? Yes. After all he's big and portly, and way over thirty, and I'm skinny and only twenty and I'm pretty fast. I make a break for the park clutching my valuable papers to my side. I run and run and keep on running. I can hear him yelling at me, and he almost catches up, but no, he has to let me go. I'm in the backcountry now, and with not a breath left, I fall into a patch of magnolia bushes, hit the dirt, and wait and wait and wait, and wait some more. Nothing. I wait fifteen minutes and the coast is clear. I make my way home to the Sanchez Street where I am living at the time, wishing I were back running my indoors store again. Too crazy out there, as I try to relax, sitting back and gathering my thoughts, with the help of a little calming aid.

I tried to go legit and look what happened. I was forced to move my entire operation to Fisherman's Wharf for a few days and then I was back on Haight. Maybe the guy had a coronary and had to be Medivacked to San Francisco General, or maybe he knew it was time to hang it up if he couldn't even bust a skinny hippie for selling newspapers. I'll never know, but I never saw him again and I was so glad.

Stay out of banks

Susan and I had moved up to a little piece of paradise on a hilltop on Diamond Street above the Mission. The beautiful house overlooked the entire city, with a palm tree and exotic cactus in the front yard. Jim Thurber and his girl friend Susan, later wife and mother of his children, were in a big hurry to leave town. It may have been speed-driven, but they needed someone to move in right away. They were bound for some real adventures, which included a trip to Mexico, being busted at the border for drugs in El Paso on the return, skipping out on bail, fleeing to New York, and winding up in Santa Cruz doing their time in drug rehab.

Susan Jacobsen and me, Terry and little Markie, and a recently separated David La Flamme, all lived together in this huge luxurious pad for a short while. Rehearsing and playing our little gigs, I had curtailed sales operations by then and was living on some accumulated cash.

One day I ran out of money. I had a savings account with about \$50 at a Haight Street bank so no harm in collecting my dough. I innocently waltzed into the bank to withdraw my money leaving Susan parked outside in the Chevy. I stood at the teller's cage for a long time. Then some guys in suits came out from behind the counter and walked up to Phil Lesh, the Dead's bass player, who was in the next line over, and asked, "Are you Leopold?" "No," he says, a little suspicious of these two straight guys in suits.

What comes next is so unbelievable, I can't believe it actually happened. Relieved to see that some action was finally being taken on my account, I raised my hand like a kid in class, and called out enthusiastically, "I'm Leopold!" Yes, whatever you are thinking, dumbkopf, imbecile, idiot, pee brain, dunderhead, moron, you are absolutely right. They were undercover cops whom the bank had been instructed to call if I ever

showed my punk face there again. Like a fool I had obliged. My three or four months of being a fugitive from justice came to a screeching halt then and there.

They whisked me out the door passed a horrified Susan. I yelled "I'm being arrested. Call my uncle Henry," as they pushed my head down and into the unmarked narcmobile. They took me downtown, teasing me all the way about my stupidity, to the infamous San Francisco Hall of Justice, shot my mug, and threw me in the clink. I did a couple of days until my uncle bailed me out. It had taken a little longer to get me out because the judge was pissed--he didn't like my mug shot. In a critical instant, I had decided to play it sunny rather than somber, and he resented me smiling into the camera.

Put out to Pasture or How the Communist Party Saved My Ass in Jail

I was a red diaper baby. My mom was in the Communist Party in New York City and it got a little hot for her during the early 50s, and since her mother was out here, we emigrated to Portland, a very hostile backwater. I was raised in a swirl of left wing meetings, fundraisers, demonstrations, and political organizers who stayed at our house as they passed through town. It was a heady scene. Fighting against HUAC, trying to free Morton Sobel who had been convicted with the Rosenbergs, and marching, marching, with a radical ex-East coast Jews and good old rabble-raising Presbyterians, Methodists and Unitarians from the mid-West. It was a very warm and loving circle. At least, that's how it felt as a kid.

My mother made her red Reed College politico friends promise that they would not recruit me into the Party. But, of course, kids will be kids, and they did anyway. But it was all in good fun. Then an infiltrator from the FBI in our little cell broadcast my name in some red-blooded American publication. My mother hit the roof. Oy! It just occurs to me now why Neal Cassady would introduce me as "my little Communist." I must have let on about my big political past, and it amused him, so the nickname stuck. Or maybe it was just the beret I was wearing at the time. Slave to radical chic. Anyway I was proud to be his little Communist.

The youth section of the Party was called the W.E.B. Dubois Club. So I was recruited into the youth club, too. I could never keep up with the discussions on dialectical materialism, Marx's 19th nervous breakdown, or Engel's medical problems, but god knows I really tried to become a commie intellectual. I just didn't have the brainpower for it.

When I went to SF State in 1964, I briefly joined the DuBois Club on campus. This very nice Italian girl took me under her wing for the five minutes I was involved, and that was the extent of it. Then down the rabbit hole I went into the foggy bottom of the Haight.

Flash way ahead: I was doing my six-month sentence for pot sales at San Francisco County Jail in San Bruno. I was up in the general population, with the peons, eating slushy mush and chicken gizzards, doing yoga and reading the Bible for kicks. One day this jailhouse heavy comes up on my tier and calls out my name. At first I'm scared. He's one of the prisoners who actually runs the place. (The warden was a notorious lush, and the captain of the guard was a mean, lazy bastard; so it fell to the old time cons to keep the place greased and running like the British rail system.) But then this heavy mentions the name of the girl from the W.E.B. DuBois Club at SF State. Do I know her? Yes, I say. Well, she's my sister, and she's asked me to look out for you. So come on, pack your stuff, you're moving downstairs.

Now this is at least two, if not three, years, since I've had any contact with the sister. I have no idea how she knew where I was, but she had sent her older brother, Gino, a jazz drummer who had played with

Billie Holiday on her last tour of Europe and was doing time yet again for junk, to rescue me. Yowssa! He didn't have to say it twice. Click, click went the lock on the tier door and away I went.

Immediately I was moved to the privileged section on the first floor. No cell anymore, it was all barracks style. Suddenly I was eating like a king because all the top kitchen workers lived there. And I had the protection of these heavyweights. When I call in the rape of a hapless hippie up on the tiers, I need that protection. The rape happened while I was pushing my library cart up and down the halls passing out books. The rapists put out the word that I was dead meat. When they found out who my "friends" were, they backed way off.

San Bruno had had an actual library room that inmates visited, but since we had gone on semi-permanent lock down, I took my books on a rolling cart and delivered them door-to-door. Shitkickers--westerns--were a big favorite with all the old timers. I got the library job because my dad came to see me and let the warden know that he was watching out for his son. Thank you dad. My poor parents. They were horrified that I was doing time. Not from any shame, but they feared for my safety.

But isn't it weird that the Communist Party knew I was in jail? Maybe my mom put out the word? Who knows, but it goes to show that being involved politically can pan out later on down the road. Those commies. They probably know right now that I'm typing this and will poison-dart me on way upstairs to bed. This could be it. Well, you'll have proof if you never hear from me again. Which is probably for the best.

Epilogue

I got out of Jail in May of 1968. Susan who I'd thought had hung in there with me, through my time, picked me up outside the prison gates, drove me back to Sanchez street, did her duty with a welcome home screwing and promptly left. I found out that she'd had a new boyfriend and was on her way to Italy before the week was out. I couldn't really blame her. Hormones, coupled with the no harm, no foul addition of the Pill made it easier to get into new emotional messes.

Fairly, but not completely devastated, I drove up to Portland with Ron O'day and a couple of other Haight Ashbury vagabonds in Ron's 1956 Oldsmobile. We all lived near Portland State College in a run down apartment. Somehow the speed shooting Mr. O'Day became the manager of the entire building giving the owner his god given name as Mr. Strangeways and the guy bought it. I remember Ron laying on his back reading Dune, staring at one page for at least an hour when I got and turned out the light. He looked startled and yelled at me, "Hey! Don't do that I'm reading!" One of the last times I ever saw Mr. Strangeways.

I spent the summer in Portland and in Baker Oregon where I lived out in the woods with other hippies all working as extras in the movie Paint Your Wagon. I put together enough money to take a steamer from New York to Italy in pursuit of the lost Susan. I made it to New York but soon realized my folly, made a call to San Francisco and was invited to play bass with a new band of gypsies.

This I did and had some success in the ensuing four years. But that's a whole other chapter. We'll leave it here for now, remembering that any resemblance to the truth of these matters is born of an era where memory erasure was all the vogue.