

The Hip Pocket Bookstore:

Downtown Santa Cruz in 1964 was a moribund remnant of its former glory. The two large hotels – the St. George and the Del Mar, were built to cater to tourists that took the “Suntan Special” train from San Francisco to spend weekends at the beach and boardwalk. The trains and the local trolleys were distant memories; tourists came in cars and stayed in motels along Ocean Avenue. They avoided downtown altogether, and why not, since it hadn’t recovered from the devastation of the flood of ‘56, when Pacific Avenue was under six feet of water and Santa Cruz’s Chinatown was swept to sea. The old courthouse on the corner of Cooper and Pacific was still the main county building. The new courthouse across the river was under construction, and most of the office spaces in downtown were leased by county offices and about to be vacated. 35% of the population was over 65 years of age, and the street seemed destined to become a ghost town. There were no bookstores, unless one expanded the definition to include the “American Opinion” store maintained by the John Birch Society on Soquel Avenue near Morrissey.

The Hip Pocket Bookstore with the Ron Boise sculpture over the door fit into Santa Cruz like an alien spaceship on a cornfield. It screamed for attention and certainly got it. In case the window displays, notorious photography shows, and Prankster events weren’t enough, the sales clerks at the beginning were Tony Maggi and Neal Cassady. Tony was a serious artist and a graduate of the University of Hawaii. Neal was of course a whirlwind, still doing “cartwheels” in his 1950’s style. I think the only way he ever got any sleep in those days was when he would spend a few nights in jail for traffic offenses. One of those stays was in the hoosegow around the corner, and at his scheduled court appearance Hassler and I managed to scrape together enough money to pay his fine and spring him out. Neal stood before the judge doing his jailbird shuffle, full of yes-sirs and no-sirs, all coiled energy waiting to be set free (and reminding me how apt Kerouac’s descriptions of him had been). Later we wished we hadn’t gotten him out, for that evening he was swept up in the famous raid on Kesey’s La Honda house. I can only imagine how terrifying that night must have been for him after his previous time in San Quentin.

Around this time a poster went up in the store for the “Acid Tests” and among the advertised attractions, Neal Cassady’s name was listed. It was an expectation that Neal was supposed to put on his Neal Cassady performance, which at times could be sad, repetitive, and akin to watching a trained bear. Neal has inspired many books and movies, and appropriately so, but there was a downside to it all, and the desire for fame appeared to infect many of the Prankster actions and attitudes.

After Neal’s death, Kesey wrote a eulogy which I’ve not seen since, and will try to paraphrase from memory. It was basically this: “Neal was driven to the cliff edge of madness by the burning grass fire of the American Dream, and rather than being consumed in the flames, he jumped – choosing to sort it out in the clear wind of a free-fall with no retreat.”

The Artist’s Cooperative:

There is a large house along the bend in the road overlooking Twin Lakes Beach and the lagoon. In 1964, it was called the Cupola Gallery, and was the home of the Santa Cruz Artists Cooperative. It was without the kind of eye-popping fanfare of the Hip Pocket; only a small sign gave any indication to what lay inside. I took to it like a moth to a flame. The artists were all people I had never heard of, but when I saw it I knew it was the scene that I wanted to be in. Among the artists were Don Thompson, Tony Maggi, Dave Teachout, Charles Wolters, Tom Allen, Bob Mosely, and a half dozen others. As luck would have it,

Don's wife Linda was handed an art supply store on Water Street. It was originally the high school graduation present for the daughter of Ed Phillipet, the owner of the Shadowbrook. She declined the option to finish off her teenage years operating a business. Ed brought Linda in to manage the place, and I worked as her sales clerk. There hadn't really been an art supply store in town, other than the small selection that was available in Colonel Trowbridge's Palace Stationers (which was then across the street from its current post-quake location). Don and I traveled to museums together, and they both taught me invaluable lessons about life and about many types of media. Virtually my entire paycheck would go back into purchasing materials for my growing obsession with painting and drawing.

From Linda and Don, I was exposed to a wider world of artists and of the old lefties in Santa Cruz, folks like Manny Santana and Al Johnson. I had also become friends with Tony Maggi and his fiancé, Cleo, and spent a lot of time at their houses. Eventually everyone would come through the door of the store – it was the first time I met Lou Harrison, then living in Aptos. One of my favorite customers was Steve Canty, who lived in the 7th Avenue house with Ernie Keller. Steve would show up with a blank check, hand it to me, and start piling up supplies by the door. When I had an accurate count on what numbers to write on his check, he would smile and leave without ever asking the amount. One of the more amazing people to walk in was Stan Fullerton. He was a painter and much more. His art was almost cartoonish, humorous, and instantly recognizable as his own. He drove a flat-bed truck customized in the same style as his paintings. He had a bushy moustache, smoked a pipe, and was a master at any craft he turned to, including woodworking and sculpture, always using the same personal motifs and always in impeccable taste. Santa Cruz was alive with so many creative people in those years – I felt we were living in the center of an unfolding new universe.

Don and Linda were from Sacramento, where each year there was a competitive exhibition at the Crocker Museum, called the Kingsley exhibit. Artists from all over the state could submit up to two pieces for consideration, and several of us in Santa Cruz did so. In the spring of 1966, Don and I both had pieces accepted for the exhibit, and drove to the opening. Some of the other artists in Santa Cruz were a bit miffed with me for entering it, since they had degrees and teaching positions, and their paintings weren't accepted, and I was a 17-year old clerk in an art supply store. I lost track of the painting that was in the show, but I do remember that it was created in one 3-day non-stop session. I don't think my style was particularly original, though if I had stayed with it I think I would have found my own voice.

Captain Outrageous:

In the spring of 1966, a benefit concert was held at the civic auditorium in Santa Cruz. Dick Smith and his wife were among the organizers, and he also provided the light show. The first act was Big Brother and the Holding Company, sans Janis – she was back in Texas on one of her first failed attempts to dry out. The headliners were the Jefferson Airplane. It was the original configuration of the band, and the concert was a few weeks before the release of their first album. Signe Anderson shared the singing with Marty, and Skip Spence (later to be a casualty of 60's chemistry) was the drummer. The band was all youthful exuberance and joy – the highlight being an exhilarating rendition of "It's No Secret." At one point the light show changed to a slide show, and there was one of Lysowski's photos of a Ron Boise sculpture. Dick kept it on the screen for a while – a poignant touch since Ron had died about a week before. Dick was an amazing character, and of course the dentist for most of us. A trip to his office was always a gas.

The Sacred Cow:

In February, 1967, a small group calling themselves “The Sacred Cow” presented a concert at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium. The bands were Quicksilver, Blue Cheer, and a group called “The Sparrow” before they changed their name to Steppenwolf. Jerry Abrams from Head Lights provided the light show, and the place was packed. It was a few days before Valentine’s. Phil Bliss, eldest son of one of Santa Cruz’s leading families, stood at the door with me and we passed out specially selected candy Valentine hearts, one to a customer. Dr. Monteith (local John Birch Society major domo) was outraged and ranting at the police to shut the place down. I think only Phil’s family connections and name kept them from succeeding.

In the fall of 1968, needing to come up with a way to pay the rent on our house in Zayante, a few friends and I decided to revive the Sacred Cow and put together a rock concert. I was able to book a couple of local bands (Snail and the Moonrose Forest) into the student union at Cabrillo, and our opening act was the first introduction of Tom Scribner to a mass audience. Tom played a couple of numbers on his musical saw, and thoroughly charmed the crowd. We did a few more gigs, including a benefit for the garden at Crown College, before I realized I wasn’t going to be the Bill Graham of Santa Cruz. During this time, I ran into Rich Novak, an important link between the music scene and the surfer crowd.

By that winter I had run into Max Hartstein and become caught up in his visions for the Paradise Pageant. He somehow persuaded me to rent the Portuguese Hall building, and we sent out a post card inviting folks to come and bring their instruments. Ralph helped with the organizing, but was unable to attend the event since it turned out to be the same day as his trial at UCSC (they had taken a dim view of his sartorial arrangement of the American flag). The hall made me hire police as security, and I recall somehow leveraging the issue of their full payment to the successful opening of the event (I hadn’t quite met all the terms of the contract with the hall). Just before the concert, Max attempted (unsuccessfully) to talk the police out of wearing their guns. About 400 people showed up, and before the evening was done, one of the cops was sitting in on the drums. It was the finale for the Sacred Cow.

Downtown:

There were always hip people in Santa Cruz, but the critical mass for a very magical scene was unfolding in those late years of the 60s. The university had opened, and the scene in San Francisco produced a wave of emigrants; many headed to Santa Cruz. Downtown still did not have the mall, but merchants were there to cater to the needs of the new demographic. Stores were adding incense and patchouli oil to the wares displayed near their cash registers. As people flocked to the town, we suddenly had all sorts of alternative clothing stores, an independent version of Indian Imports, numerous independent galleries, and the Staff of Life Bakery.

A small space on Cooper street, next to County Bank, was the first home of Odyssey Records. The owner, Rich Bullock, was a former manager of Tower Records in Sacramento, and it included a small room in the back that was to be a separate business – a bookstore specializing in the occult arts. This space was rented to an astrologer, Lew Fein, and his wife Estelle. As soon as I heard it was going to be there, I presented myself to Lew and asked him for a job. He declined my offer, explaining that he had no money to pay me, and I looked around dejectedly at his still unopened boxes of inventory. Since I wouldn’t take no for an answer, I went to the lumber yard, came back and built bookshelves, found an old PG&E cable spool to use as a table, and set up the shop. It was a sufficient audition for Lew to keep

me on. We stocked an immense range of excellent books. I would sometimes make pilgrimages to Shambala in Berkeley to supplement our stock.

Lew was an excellent astrologer. His readings were an insight to a person's character and their soul's journey. Astrologers, tarot card readers, and shamans of all sorts played an important role in the developing subculture. Over the years, thousands of people were aided by Lew's delicate application of his astrological tools. He is one of the unsung heroes who did so much to make Santa Cruz the wonderful place that it is today. Even through the next two locations of the record store, Rich created a space for Lew to continue his practice. Santa Cruz in the last years of the 60's was rich with spiritual seekers. Jeff and Wendy Love hosted a number of events at Bridge Mountain in Ben Lomond, and there was a prototypical Renaissance Fair in the woods that Spring.

Sometime over that previous winter I had seen a notice for an astrology class being taught at the "free university" and decided to attend a session. It was at 724 California Street, and that was my first introduction to Ralph Abraham. We had overlapping networks of friends, and for a time (during Ralph's famous trip to England that summer) I was living in the tower of the house. I think it was later that year that I introduced Ralph to Terry McKenna. We have slightly different memories of the event. I agree that I saw him standing in front of the post office, drove up in my red sports car, and said "Get in – there's someone you have to meet." 90 miles later we were in Berkeley, traveling up the steps to Terry's lair. Ralph remembers it as the Carlton house, and I remember it as the house on Tunnel Road.

Eventually, I moved from the bookstore to the record store, first for a year, then after a break for college, another 3-year stint beginning in the Spring of 72. Judy must have been there during the time I was in school, since our times there did not overlap. The store played a significant part in the evolution of the Santa Cruz downtown scene. Prior to Odyssey, the only place to buy records was Santa Cruz Music on Walnut Street, or at the Disco (big box discount) store in Capitola. Odyssey was in the right place at the right time. For a while it moved to the head of Pacific Avenue, where Richard also tried his hand at the audio business. The store there had a pentagram on the floor in the front entry, something painted by two deeply committed practitioners of the occult arts. They were friends of mine that I brought in to create it during an all-night ritual just prior to the store opening. In 72, Odyssey landed in the space that had been used by the Hip Pocket, when there still was the back door from the store leading directly to the fountain room of the Catalist. However, that story takes us past the 60's.