

INTRO

Spring, 1966---Self-catapulted from Berkeley in the midst of political activism after four years at a nearby art college. At first I was heavily involved in all the unrest, loving it in fact, then I got tired of the conflict, police everywhere, the increasing split between students and cops, bars over the windows of stores along Telegraph. A lot was changing, fast...our local beer hub, the Rathskellar, had been a lodestar for the Cal community, but the mood had shifted there and elsewhere, as the ballads of the Kingston Trio gave way first to Dylan and Baez, then to Hendrix, Morrison, Joplin, and others. Across the Bay, the Fillmore and Avalon Ballrooms were ramping up with what would turn out to be some of the greatest music of the 60s. While in school I had sat in the quad when Bob Dylan held forth; likewise, Joan Baez, Neal Cassady and others. None of them were luminaries yet...Dylan sat with a pouty face talking to a friend of mine. Cassady was speeding on some drug or another, motor-mouthing a mile a minute. I had grown up in this area, but everything about its current chaos unnerved me. I longed to get away from the noise, and planned to relocate to Santa Cruz as soon as school was out. My friends warned me that Santa Cruz was the “drug capitol of the world.” Who were they kidding? Drugs were everywhere, especially in Berkeley. I had been going down to Santa Cruz since I was a kid; the only thing I wanted was to live by the beach. And I wanted quiet.

Driving down 17 through the mountains was, at least at that time, a delight...very little traffic, the giant redwoods separating urbanity from vacation-time. I found my house by the beach; actually I found several. It's hard to believe now, but rentals were available everywhere. Neither UCSC nor San Jose (not yet named “Silicon Valley”) were large enough to have any noticeable impact on housing or much of anything else. I ended up renting a cute, semi-dilapidated, beach cottage three houses up from Seabright (then known as Castle) Beach. My rent was \$55.00 a month, including utilities. When I left, my landlords offered to sell me the property along with its adjacent huge lot, for \$17,000. I demurred, proud that I was an unencumbered free spirit who could fit all her

belongings into a backpack----one of those decisions-you'll-regret-for-the-rest-of-your-life.

THE CATALYST

I assumed I'd be getting a waitress job somewhere; it was easy to live here---many of my friends worked at restaurants in some capacity, taking advantage of the rise in business during the summer months, then collecting unemployment during the winter. Also taking advantage of the free meal that generally came with the job; a real perk since a high wage was \$2.50---which gives a different slant on my rent. My best friend worked at Manny's in Aptos, and that's where I wanted to be. My boyfriend was into the flamenco scene there and Manny would often join us at our table after-hours for spontaneous "juergas." Manny's, the Sticky Wicket, and the Purple Cow were some of the very few cool places to hang outside the immediate Santa Cruz area. Instead, I got offered a job at the Shadowbrook which, although beautiful then and now, catered to the very prevalent conservative element; something I couldn't hack. Then a friend told me about a new coffee house that was opening downtown---the Catalyst. Downtown was dead back then; lots of long-gone businesses with boarded up storefronts. Just about the only thing alive was the Bookshop, Bubble Bakery, Tampico....and Ford's department store. The whole area gave off an "Invasion of the Bodysnatchers" vibe. Still stuck in the 50s, the Del Mar and Rio were the only theaters in town, and they showed the same movie day in and day out through the entire summer. Walking into the Catalyst the first time was like meeting long-lost friends: Al and Patti DiLudovico had lived on a houseboat in Sausalito but had relocated to Santa Cruz to begin a new chapter in their lives. Al was a huge huggy bear, with a great, wicked sense of humor; his wife Patti was the soft counterpart to Al's edge. Lots of people were put off by Al---his blunt, epithet-laden humor, his size, his face mostly hidden behind a full beard, his unforgiving attitude about bullshit of any kind, especially the version run by the freeloaders who started hanging out at the Catalyst as soon as it opened its doors. What they didn't know was the other side: the man who was a Quaker minister, who got up at 6am every morning to read his bible, or his commitment to helping the downtrodden. I loved both Al & Patti instantly. Another thing often forgotten at that

time was that the Catalyst was a co-op, run by a group of investors looking for return on their investment. Al and Patti took a lot of shit for how they ran it, but most of the decisions were out of their hands. After working there for a while I got to know all the investors; some were involved because they thought the Catalyst had the potential to be a very cool place; others just wanted a return on the buck. Although Al and Patti were the face of the place, they were constantly getting pushed from behind.

When I first began working there, about a month after it opened, there was word that Mario Savio, on the lam from Berkeley police, was camping out in the basement. This was feasible: there was a huge network of caverns beneath these old buildings. But I thought: Please god, don't let madness come down here. And it didn't, not until years later, and at that time it was known as UCSC.

The Catalyst was tiny when it opened---counter-service only with just a few tables up front. The deli was located in the small room facing Front Street---the Redwood Room, so named because of the split redwood bark panels on the walls. This stuff was immediately removed, probably because it caused welts on the skin of anyone who inadvertently brushed up against it. Later, the Fountain Room opened, and later still, the old ballroom. This was in the old St. George hotel, which still had residents---ancient residents, who would wander in for a cup of coffee, look around, and feel more lost than before. The place was falling apart, but it was startling beautiful even so. The Fountain Room had Saltillo tile floors, mirrored walls, and an enormous fountain in the middle of the room with a large glass skylight several stories overhead...a skylight that funneled soft, muted light into this room in the center of a hotel; muted, because it had probably never been cleaned since the day it was installed. The Fountain Room was connected by a small walkway to the early Bookshop Santa Cruz, owned by Ron Lau, and next door, Aries Arts. These spaces were the former Hip Pocket Bookstore, and they were dark. Smoking weed was not loose the way it is now; in fact, it was severely punished at that time, so it wasn't really a surprise to stumble across someone lurking in that indoor alleyway, taking a furtive toke. Tucked off another side of the Fountain Room was the bar---a small, intimate cave with dark walnut interior and an amber glass ceiling. Because there was no

money, of necessity Patti was the first bartender; later it was manned by Stan Fullerton, another huggy bear, this time a gruff one, who was an artist. Everyone in Santa Cruz thought of themselves as artists, but he actually was---a big, quiet guy, who never talked about himself and whose work I wanted badly to buy if only I could make enough money. He made Al seem almost diminutive. Stan was the ear for all the breakups, drug busts, and other problems of the day. He was silent for the most part, but served as a bouncer should the occasion arise; all it took was his presence and one look, and issues seemed to straighten themselves out.

Eventually, the Catalyst expanded into the Colonial Room. This spectacular space had once been the St. George's ballroom, but for many decades had been humiliated into serving as storage for County Bank records. The good news was that due to lack of use the hardwood floors were pretty much intact, as were the walls, which were decorated with wood nymphs dancing among flowers and greenery. The deli was moved from the small front room and took up a full wall in the Colonial Room. I worked split shifts---at the deli during morning and lunch service; then at night when the mood shifted to table service. I loved this time at the old Catalyst. Every morning Al would open the enormous wall of windowed doors that swung open to Front Street. Patti would put on mellow music---the Art of the Psaltery, John Fahey, sometimes Vivaldi. Although acid-rock was everywhere, the Catalyst at that time was distinctly bohemian. A stage was set up for poetry, book readings, chamber music and acoustic guitar concerts. Patti had been a traveling ballad singer/guitarist before meeting Al, and occasionally she sat in with performers.

The Catalyst was *the* hub for downtown Santa Cruz, with a huge mix of people---the generation ahead of me, this included Al & Patti and people in their age group---the Beats. People my age or thereabouts, the so-called hippies. The "suits" ---lawyers and admin from the county building across the river; gaggles of kids from various communes. Everyone converged at the Catalyst. I think it's safe to say that everyone who lived here during that time, and many of those who traveled through, stopped by for a cup of 25-cent, free-refills coffee, the great food, or just to check out the scene. The place lost money, particularly after Al tried to open a

satellite version of it, “The Kite,” on the UC campus. The investors got angry and accusatory; chaotic and hilarious things happened in the day to day operation of the place; personal dramas played out. But all in all, for the very brief time the Catalyst was in operation, the mood was vital, mellow and open. People who didn’t know the original Catalyst think that the place Russell Kane bought is the same thing, but nothing could be further from the truth. Kane wanted a club, a hot music scene, and that’s what he put in place. The ambiance was nearly the opposite of Al and Patti’s Catalyst. Many people felt that the name itself should have dissolved with the place.

In any case, to this day I think it was one of the best jobs I’ve ever had. I worked with great people, all of them. I only mention first names here because who knows.... for various reasons some people have chosen to put the 60s way behind them. Brock and Roger were the only two people who were on board at the Catalyst before I got there; we were all hired just as it opened. Later, when table service was added, Scott, Georgia, Cathy, Marilyn, and Karen became part of the crew. Sue, and later her husband, Dave, took back-up shifts at the counter once the business really began to roll. Diane, who had been at Manny’s and the Sticky Wicket, and later opened Zachary’s, made the chocolate crazy cakes in her home that we sold; Carli made the cheesecakes; this of course could never happen now, with food items and just about everything else so heavily regulated. All other food was purchased in the City, with Roger, stoned and naturally spacey anyway, trekking up there every few days in Al’s funky truck that was prone to breaking down on the side of the road. There are so many stories with each of these characters, fun, funny, poignant, occasionally tragic. Many of the players are now gone, so this serves as a fond salute to them all.

724 CALIFORNIA STREET

While I was working at the Catalyst during lunch hours, Ralph Abraham came in. I had heard a little about him; the town was small and he was a relatively new guy, notorious for wearing a shirt made from an American flag, and as a result facing off with the uptight dean at UC. Never a fan of “the establishment” I felt an affinity with his viewpoint before I even met him. Apparently Ralph

and his family were into macrobiotics, and he tried to convince me to get Al and Patti to agree to include brown rice as part of the deli offerings. This struck me as hilarious; the Catalyst food was basically NY Jewish delicatessen fare. I don't remember how that request turned out, but I was intrigued by Ralph. The head honcho at UC had labeled his household "musical beds," along with a few other pejoratives, yet when he came in with his wife and kids, he seemed reasonable enough. I had already spent some time in a couple of whacked-out communal-living situations, and his scene looked fairly grounded by comparison. We had some sparky flirtations over the counter, but it was all pretty innocent. That New Year's Eve my current boyfriend and I slathered our bodies with neon paint and danced onstage under black lights to a great amplified band. This was not new for me; while living in the Bay Area I had often danced onstage in various forms of dress, undress, or paint at the Avalon and Fillmore. The most important part of the 60s, to me, was---and still is---the music; I lived for it. This night was no exception: the band was fantastic, as was the whole evening. The place was packed with the big windowed doors flung open, letting reefer smoke waft in from curbside. Somehow that scene was a tipping point for Ralph and shortly after we ratcheted our flirtation up a notch. He would come to visit me at my beach house or we'd hang out in the beautiful secluded field, the vortex, at the University. I rarely went over to his house on California St. The big, rambling place was awesome; it reminded me of Jefferson Airplane's old Victorian in San Francisco. I couldn't get a handle on who was living there, other than the core group of Ralph, his wife Caroline, their two boys, and their beautiful golden retriever, Chester. People seemed to be constantly coming and going, mainly students I guessed. It was clear the place had taken a hit before he bought it, but little by little Ralph was attempting to make it habitable with repairs and fresh paint. Kids from the high school next door still congregated on the wrap-around front porch, but no one tried to break in and trash it as they had in the years when it sat empty. The kitchen was big and open, shaded by a huge walnut tree, and the kids rode their bikes right through whatever was going on there. The dining room was compact, with a formal feeling due to the built-ins that were always part of a place like that. A stereo system was placed against one wall, and next to it was Ralph's baby crib, filled with albums. There was always music playing, whether

there was anyone in the room, or even in the house. Most of the bedrooms were on the second floor, and were reached from the wide embellished wood staircase at the front of the house. Unlike downstairs, these rooms were filled with light from ornately trimmed floor-to-ceiling windows. It was hard to tell whose bedroom was whose, other than the kids, and maybe that's part of what had caused the dean at UC to have such a burr up his butt. Up a steep, narrow staircase off the second floor was one of the crown jewels of the house---a cupola that looked out across the entire town. Many a soft morning was spent on the built-in bench seats up there at the top of the world, welcoming the rising sun after an mda- or acid-induced hallucinogenic night.

Not long ago, Ralph and I had the opportunity to go back into the house when it was put on the market for sale by the current owner. As generally seems to be the case, I remembered most of the downstairs rooms as larger than they are in reality. The walnut tree was gone, the cupola still unfinished. Our old room was fresh and clean; I had forgotten that it, like most of the upstairs rooms, also had an incredible view of the city. The kitchen was sleek and modern and basically unrecognizable. The house had been restored, and beautifully so, but the memories live on.

In early spring, Ralph flew to England for a stint as a visiting professor at the University of Warwick. I flew over a month later, bringing his 6-year-old son with me. A couple of months later, Caroline followed, with their youngest son, and two of her friends. Our time in the UK deserves a book of its own; one someone else will need to write.

On our return, I moved into the Victorian with Ralph, since I had sublet my beach cottage to a friend for an indefinite amount of time. We came back to a house filled with students, overrun with fleas, and general chaos. Ralph and I took over a large corner bedroom on the second floor. I painted it pale yellow and put out the usual signs of the time: bed on the floor, madras bedspread and curtains, incense and candles, yarn gods' eyes, beaded necklaces on hooks on the wall. This was when things really ramped up at 724. The usual amount of people who came and went increased. Kesey would drop by with his whole group; they always conveniently showed up at dinner time. Joe Lysowski and his wife Wendy were

living in an RV in the driveway; unlike Kesey, they left a light footprint. DW, a brilliant, unbalanced former math colleague of Ralph, would appear, disappear, then reappear. Ram Dass came and stayed in our yellow room upstairs; that was the only time people walked around in a somewhat hushed manner. Caroline went down to Esalen and brought back new people. And always, friends from before our trip to England came to visit, to eat, to take a pill. On our return, Ralph had put white carpet in the living room, declared it a no-shoes space, and closed the door to the busyness of family activity. It was the de-facto sanctuary for group drugs, and many such sessions, mainly mda, took place on that soft carpet. This was not a free-for-all drug haven...at least during the time I was there, Ralph was predominantly a spiritual seeker. We somehow got a private audience with Chogyam Trupa in Berkeley; sat front row at Krishnamurti's talk in Santa Cruz. Ram Dass didn't stay with us for the "wow" factor, but for the spiritual interest. And Ralph had sponsored his veena teacher from London, Shiv Batish and family, to come to America; while they looked for their own place to live, they stayed with us, and their presence had an immediate calming effect on 724. This was all a good counterpart to Kesey and some others who would blow through the house with a lot of noise.

As for me, I had no interest in being part of the entourage of the family. I had met Ralph, joined him in England, and would have been perfectly happy if no one else had shown up. Particularly infuriating for me was the prevailing patriarchal attitude at the time, with Kesey's group, and Kesey himself, being a good example, although they certainly weren't the only ones. They would come to the house, hang out and proceed to pontificate for hours. Women, myself included, were expected to feed them, humor them, and sleep with them. I couldn't believe how full of themselves they were----this was not necessarily intentional; they had never had cause to question their sense of entitlement. Now, so many years later, it's unlikely women would be content to stay barefoot and pregnant; keeping the hearth fire burning; baking the bread. Why didn't the women speak up? Some did, but the women's' movement was nascent at that time. Certainly all my female friends had opinions about this, and so did I. I also didn't have much desire to jump in and participate in the philosophical ramblings they took so

seriously. I found their sense of self-involvement disgusting, and I began to fade from the scene.

ODYSSEY RECORDS

We were back from England, the Catalyst had been sold and was unrecognizable, Pacific Avenue had changed to Pacific Garden Mall, and I was hired as the manager for Odyssey Records. In some ways this was another dream job: music all the time, a free album with every paycheck, a great group of people to work with---Denis, Steve, Rick, Katie, Suzanne, Jimmy and especially Terry, my counterpart at the Monterey store. The owner of the store was into some shady stuff; we all heard rumors, none of us knew exactly what was true; none of us really wanted to know. Drugs were taking a hard turn; Jimmy OD'd on coke; a friend got part of her hand blown off when she was shot at trying to cross the border with pot. The mood on the street was very different from even a year before, nowhere near as light. While we were in England and trees were being planted up and down Pacific Garden Mall, Odyssey had moved from a tiny, dark space at the top of Pacific to a larger, brighter one next to the opposite side of the St. George from where the Catalyst had been. I'd ride my bike to work---the one Joe Lysowski had painted pink for me and covered with stickers. Someone stole that bike from in front of the store, but returned it the next day. Everyone was on the lookout for it, and only an imbecile would ride around on something that obvious. People tried to steal records, but given the size of an album it wasn't that easy to stuff a few in a sweatshirt. Steve or Denis would chase the culprit down the street; it was rare that anyone ever got away. Technically, as manager, it was my job to chase down a thief, but I made it clear I would never do that. So I got the worse end of the deal---I had to decide whether to call the cops or not. Lew Fein, best astrologer/best friend, had been in the previous small Odyssey, and he too moved to the new place. Every afternoon I made brown rice and veggies for the whole crew on a hot plate in a storage area in the back of the store. I had been into food in England and at 724, and continued it here. We were serious about macrobiotics, or so we thought. But macrobiotics is a balancing act, and there was no way that buckwheat could balance mda, so eventually that fell by the wayside. To this day I have low tolerance for rice and veggies.

I had moved out of 724 and was staying with Al and Patti until my own house was vacated by the person I had rented it to. Over at California St. someone, Caroline I think, got interested in a yoga school down south. I went once with the whole family, and then by myself. I decided to move down there; later Ralph's family moved down as well, but it was the beginning of the end for them. Not long after, the family unraveled, resulting in an ugly divorce. Too many boyfriends, too many girlfriends, too many drugs, too many options. Jealousy, power plays, drama---probably the same as every other epoch on this planet. The 60s were over. It seemed like they had lasted a lifetime, but it had only been a few short years.