

It was called - somewhat ludicrously - The Garden Spot, but we mostly called it the Garbage Spot. Nowadays all of Telegraph is a little sleazy, but at that time most of the sleaze stayed concentrated in that one place.

Somebody saw Woody there, scrounging food along with the street people, and told us about it. We were kind of embarrassed; we didn't like being associated with the street people, even through our dog.

Pretty soon Woody didn't come around much anymore. If you wanted him, you had to go down in front of the Garbage Spot, and if you didn't have any food to offer him, he didn't seem that interested in seeing you anyway.

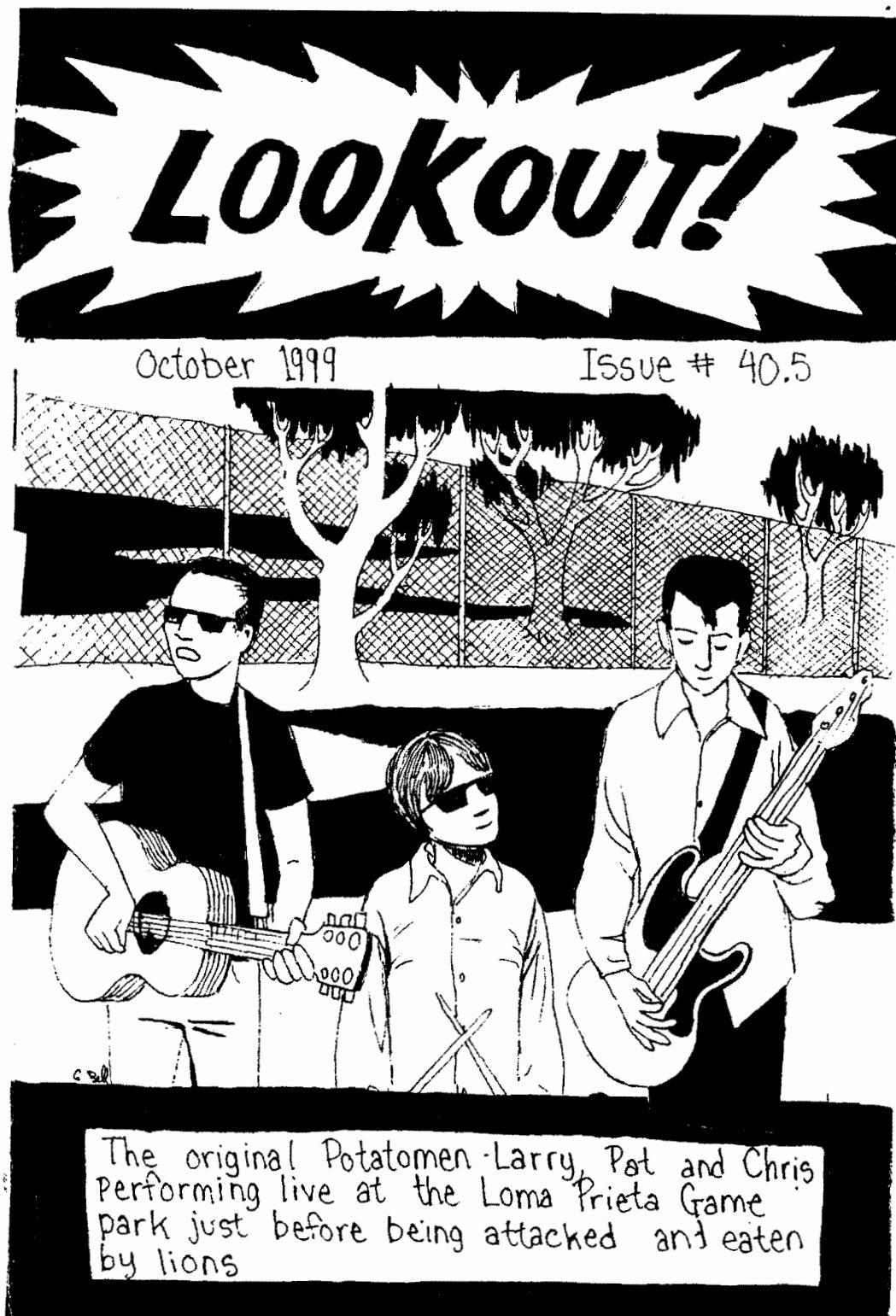
When he did come around the house, he had fleas, and smelled bad. Pretty soon people were leaving a bowl of food for him on the back porch and not inviting him in.

Woody died while I was out in Michigan. I can't remember how or why. He wasn't very old, but he'd had a hard life. Hippies weren't that big on vaccinations, so it might have been distemper or something like that.

Even though he and Woody hadn't been so close that last year, my brother was really broken up about it. He's always loved dogs, but he never got another one, and I don't think he ever will. Some acts are just too hard to follow.

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Send this to:





Hello again. Seems like a mighty long time, maybe because it is. Four and a half years have gone by since the last Lookout, and I was beginning to wonder if there'd ever be another.

For those of you who don't remember, or weren't around, I started this magazine in 1984 when I was living on a remote mountain top in Northern California. At first it was all about local issues like pot growers, bear attacks, and people wanting to cut down all the trees.

Gradually I started writing more about punk rock music, and that somehow grew into a band and then a record label which was to consume most of my life for the next twelve years. I found less and less time and energy for Lookout magazine, which originally came out (almost) every month. The last one, a

giant 10th anniversary issue, came out in the spring of 1995, and just about killed me.

It showed in the writing, too. There were a lot of good stories, but the exhaustion I was feeling in my life made it exhausting to write them and, from what I hear, exhausting to read as well. A couple months later I started compiling stories for Lookout #41, but it never happened. Pretty soon I was so busy with Lookout Records, which had grown from its humble beginnings in my bedroom to a multi-million dollar business, that I no longer had time to even think about producing a new issue.

By 1997 I was completely burnt on not just the record business, but the whole punk rock music and zine scene. I left Lookout Records and retreated into a long period of voluntary oblivion. I stopped going to most shows unless I knew people who were playing, and stopped reading zines except for the obviously obligatory ones like Cometbus. I managed - barely - to produce a bi-monthly column for Punk Planet, but often wondered what I was doing there: after all, I didn't even consider myself connected to the punk scene anymore.

Since then I've spent most of my time in London, which I still consider my main home. I've visited the States pretty often, but usually not for very long. I found Berkeley and San Francisco more painful than pleasant, too full of bad memories and frustrated dreams. The punk rock scene that once felt so exciting and full of promise seemed to have become a bad caricature of itself.

So what am I doing back here, you rightly ask? First off, I'm not "back," at least in the geographical sense. I came to Berkeley for a brief visit that got extended by a month when my father was taken ill. While here I attended the "Lookout Freakout," a series of concerts that was more like a family reunion, and began to rediscover my appreciation of both the music and people who had once been such a major part of my life. I got the new Cometbus (#45), which I think may be the best Cometbus ever, and I think that was the main inspiration: as long as I was going to be spending an extra month in Berkeley, why not have something to show for it?

So, for the first time in ages, I felt enthusiastic about writing and producing a zine. I decided to go back to basics, to do it on a small, more personal scale rather than the massive print runs of the last few Lookout zines. I still intend to resurrect the old format, including more political coverage, fiction, memoirs, all that stuff that Lookout came to be associated with, but for this issue, I'll be concentrating on music and local things.

I'll be on my way home to London as soon as I finish this, and won't be back in Berkeley till the spring, when I plan to put a new, full-fledged issue of Lookout, and resurrect the long-dormant Potatomen (more about that later). If you want to write me in the meantime, my Berkeley address will work, but it might take a while. There's always e-mail, too, but I like letters about a hundred times better. Anyway, here's where to reach me:

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I hope you enjoy the issue, and please feel free to let me know what you think.

Lawrence

Oh, P.S., and this part is important:

Despite the similarity in names, this zine is NOT published by Lookout Records and is all my own work. All opinions, information, and misinformation contained within are also my own.

And this is important too: the cover and other original art is by Gabrielle Bell
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Back To The Old School...

I've always tended to sneer at people who think they're somehow being more "real" by doing things the hard way.

Life is hard enough, I figure, that you don't need to look for ways to make it harder. And, come to think of it, we all do things, consciously or not, to screw up and complicate our lives, usually in the name of making them more "interesting," or, at the very least, avoiding boredom.

But what I was thinking of in particular was how people rebel against modern technology for what seems like no good reason at all. Sure, there are many aspects of modern technology that *should* be rebelled against, but someone, say, who insists on using an old-fashioned manual typewriter when a cheap computer could type, spell-check and format his work in half the time is just being cranky.

Or so I was inclined to think, but here I am writing the *really* old-fashioned way, with a pen and notebook, something I've barely done in what seems like decades. Of course by the time you read this it will probably have been fed through the word processor - my handwriting lacks both the artfulness and legibility of an Aaron Cometbus - but already I'm realizing that what gets written down here today is going to have a distinctly different character because of the tools I'm using / not using to write it.

It wasn't long after I got my first computer that I noticed it affecting the way I wrote. Because it was so much easier to pour words out onto the screen - or to make them disappear again - I tended to say more and think less. Just as bands and recording engineers famously figure, "We can fix it in the mix," I began to place less faith in original thought and more in skillful editing.

My old notebooks from the 70s and 80s are an unsightly, nearly indecipherable stew of crossed-out phrases and side notes to myself. Often I would linger over one word, writing in alternatives above and below it, coming back to it again and again before deciding which worked best. Some words or phrases were blotted out so furiously that I nearly put my pen through the page; others had a single line drawn through them so I retained the option of resurrecting them.

On the computer, when I've finished with a word, it's gone. A single keystroke banishes it to electronic oblivion, and a moment later I might have forgotten it ever existed. Too bad if it turns out to have been the perfect word on which to hang the entire story; on the screen everything looks perfect and

polished and my mind is already racing ahead, trying to keep up with a machine capable of digesting every fact I have ever learned in my life and spitting it back at me in the time it takes to turn on a light switch.

Don't get me wrong. I love computers. Much of what I've done in the last 12 years would have been difficult or impossible without them. I'm not about to give up e-mail or desktop publishing or even computer solitaire. But I'm beginning to see that when using such a powerful tool, the power doesn't flow just one way.

I first learned that lesson back in my factory days, when I tried to use a jackhammer that weighed nearly as much as me. One flick of the trigger and I went flying in the opposite direction. It was a good, practical demonstration of Newtonian physics, though my foreman didn't see it in quite those terms.

A jackhammer, properly wielded, lets even a 105-pound weakling tear through solid concrete, but that sort of brute force is laughably trivial compared to what any reasonably adept high school kid can do on a modern computer. Being neither adept nor a high school kid, I can't hack into the Pentagon and launch nuclear missiles, but I can do in an afternoon what took Gutenberg and his predecessors centuries to figure out.

What's my point, then? Oh, I don't know. Just that I'm sort of liking this old-fashioned way of writing, and that maybe I'll stick to it even after I get back home to my computer. It feels, well, more "real," and once again, it seems, I can't cock a proper sneer without it turning out to have been aimed at myself all along.

Idealpolitik

Principles are the last refuge of someone who knows he's lost the argument, or the first refuge of the man who knows he hasn't got one.

Pablo was laying out his vision for the perfect society: no private property, of course, communal living, complete personal freedom, yuppies and SUVs banished to whatever planet they came from.

"I know it's probably not possible," he said, letting the "probably" stand there stamping its petulant feet like the wish-horse on which all the world's beggars might one day ride, "but it's my ideal."

But what good are ideals, I demanded, if they have no chance of ever becoming real? Aren't you just condemning yourself to being the perennial beautiful loser? We both mulled that one over for a while, and, finding no satisfactory answer, went to drink beer instead.

The question stayed with me, though. My entire life - everyone's probably - has been a balancing act between the ideal and the real, and, at the risk of sounding too cutesy, trying to figure out which was which.

Easy answers, I've got a million of them. Give me a soapbox and I'll lecture till next week on how to solve every problem society ever had, and a few more it didn't even know it had. But ask me how I'm going to put any of those answers into effect, and the "easy" just walked out the door. With its hat on.

When all else fails, we turn to politics, and since most if not all things eventually fail (see Whatshisface's law of Entropy), politics looms rather large in our lives whether we like it or not. And, for the most part, we do not.

Because politics is where the lovely pristine rubber of our ideals meets the cold hard road of reality. The secret of world peace / stopping crime / getting people to flush the toilet after they've used it may be blindingly obvious to us, but persuading even a handful of people to agree, let alone do something about it, is like herding kittens into a dog show.

(Hint: with regard to that latter problem, Singapore's benevolent despot Lee Kuan Yew tackled it by placing alarms on public toilets, which go off whenever a hapless peasant new to urban ways leaves without flushing. Violators are arrested, heavily fined, and, from what I hear, seldom repeat the offense.)

The trouble is that politics always entails making deals, which is another word for "compromise." And compromise is the one thing that people with "principles" are most loath to do.

We all remember Henry Clay, or was it William Jennings Bryan, who famously opined, "I'd rather be right than President." Well, no, actually we don't, because he never got to be President. Hell, we'll never even know if he was right.

At the same time we've had no shortage of characters who'd rather be President than anything, and right or wrong never even entered the picture. The last several occupants of the White House spring to mind, not to mention whatever moral nonentity manages to get himself elected next year.

Only someone too naive to be living on this planet would believe a President could get elected without some serious wheeling and dealing. There's never been a saint in that office and never will be.

But what about the more basic levels of politics: the local school board or the neighborhood committee or the People United To Free The Grebe? Surely here there's room for purity and principle and the meeting of minds on similarly lofty plane?

Fat chance. The more noble the cause, the more quixotic the dream, the more prepared its proponents will be to rip each other's throats out over the fine points of how to achieve it.

The guy who wants something simple, to pave a road or cut down a forest or dump his toxic waste in Duckburg's drinking water is not burdened by lofty ideals. He knows what he wants and he knows how to go about getting it.

But take these characters who want to free all political prisoners and abolish world poverty and put an end to the drudgery of work: what they want is so far removed from reality that they might as well be trying to draw a definitive road map of the planet Venus.

Extremists on both ends of the political spectrum are wont to disagree among themselves, hell, with themselves, for that matter. But it's the leftists who have the real problem; while right wingers are mainly aiming to put the country back to the way they imagine it once was, left wingers are trying to turn it into something that has never existed and might never be able to exist.

Add to that the differing psychologies of the two groups: while right-wingers are absolutely certain that their way is not just the best way, but the only way, left-wingers are the embodiment of self-doubt, even, in many cases, self-loathing.

They can exhibit just as many delusions of grandeur as any closet Napoleon or Hitler, but at the core of their dissatisfaction lies a different sort of perception.

"Something is wrong with my life," it goes, "and it's society's fault for making me this way."

In other words, the right wing has its origins in an overinflated sense of its own importance, while the left wing presents a textbook case of low self-esteem. Yes, there's a point at which the two extremes meet and become one - rampaging "anarchists" and Hitler's street thugs differ mainly in the color of their shirts - and yes, I've veered off topic a bit, but I was having so much fun...

What I wanted to get back to is the notion of what we have to / can do to make reality even slightly resemble our dreams and ideals. Take crime, for example. Can I safely assume that most of us are against it?

Probably not. We'd be lucky if we could even agree on what crime is, let alone what to do about it. Whether it's the most petty offense, like the homeless guy walking off with a shopping cart, or the most heinous, say, a Ku Klux Klanner putting a bomb under a bus full of gay and lesbian schoolchildren of color, your response is going to differ widely based on where you're coming from.

If you're a right-winger, the shopping cart thief should have his hands chopped off while the schoolbus bomber deserves our sympathy because his Christian sense of decency was being offended. If you're a left winger, the homeless should not only be issued free customized shopping carts, they should be allowed to walk into any store in the city and fill them at will. As for the hate-crime bomber? Who needs a trial, just execute the bastard.

On the other hand, the oh-so-compassionate left-winger might say, "I don't care if that Mumia guy murdered ten cops, he deserves to go free because he's black," while the tough-on-shopping-cart-theft conservative sees nothing but solid business practices in a corporation that fleeces the taxpayers or consumers of a few billion here or there.

Is this all leading up to a message of cynicism or despair, some overly long recounting of "Don't vote, it only encourages them?" Not hardly; if anything, more than ever I embrace the radical center, that branch of politics that encompasses the crushingly mundane but absolutely vital task of finding and establishing consensus.

Getting schools built or stopping street crime or funding mass transit may not be as glamorous or exciting as abolishing global capitalism or returning America to the Indians, but you know what? They'll do a lot more for the average person's quality of life. Not to mention that you've got an infinitely greater chance of actually seeing it happen.

That being said, I ultimately come to a dilemma not too different from what I've been assailing in others, namely that I can see certain things needing to be done, but I'm not sure I myself could do them.

Take the sticky matter of violence. It's hard to deny that a certain measure of violence is fundamental to any well-ordered state. We may not like it, but there it is. Except for a handful of absolute pacifists, who as far as I'm concerned represent just another variety of religious extremism, everyone acknowledges that violence is sometimes necessary to protect or preserve life.

Take something as simple as stopping for a red light. Ultimately, it's enforced under threat of violence: if you don't pay the fine, a man with a gun will come take you to jail. And when someone is breaking into your house and

you call the police, you're essentially telling them, "Come here and use as much violence as necessary to stop this man from hurting me or my property."

Yet as much as I recognize this, as much as my tax dollars pay for it, I can't picture myself personally performing the violence that's done in my name. I'm ambivalent about the death penalty - I feel it debases society and there is always the chance of someone being wrongfully executed - but there are clearly some humans who are a lost cause and don't deserve to be here.

But could I actually pull the switch or sign a death warrant? I doubt it. I'm not even sure I could send someone to prison, even while knowing it would be a worse crime to let him continue walking the streets.

So I'm an idealist, too, apparently in the worst sort of way. I want to claim the moral high ground while tacitly approving of the not-always-quite-so-moral cops and soldiers who defend it for me. "One does not use good iron to make nails," said an ancient Chinese pedant with a similar disinclination toward responsibility, "and one does not use good men to make soldiers."

Thus has it ever been for philosophers and self-appointed tribunes of the people. Let others get their hands dirty with the actual work of governance; by dwelling strictly in the realms of the ideal, we avoid ever having to say "I'm sorry" or "Maybe we should try it your way..." Instead, we can live blamelessly and loftily, our discourse forever suspended between the twin poles of "What this country needs..." and "I told you so."

First Rain

People think it rains all the time in England, but that's not completely true. It does rain an awful lot, especially in the North and West, but in the almost Mediterranean (ha!) climes of London, we don't get that much more rain than San Francisco does.

And when you consider that London gets its rain spread throughout the entire year while SF gets almost all of its during the winter months, it would seem like London's a reasonably dry place.

But it's not, and that's because London - and Britain in general - gets a very special kind of rain. All right, it's not any wetter than the generic kind you get anywhere else (though somehow it manages to seem that way), but it's got its own special way of going about things.

There's a British expression, "bloody-minded," which describes a certain attitude, namely the tendency to do something for no good reason other than that it will cause the maximum amount of inconvenience and annoyance to others. Think of the guy who's driving 50 mph in the fast lane, and, when you flash your lights to indicate you'd like to pass, he slows down. Then, when you try to go around him on the right, he changes lanes in front of you and gives you a dirty look, as if you were some sort of menace to society.

Well, that's how British rain operates. It's not sensible rain like we have in California, where you can just set aside December and January and know it's going to be cold and rainy, with short days and long nights, so you can plan on doing mostly indoor things.

No, British rain is more like this: take last August, a month in which Californians would be writing angry letters to the government if there were more



than two cloudy days in a row. It was the day of the solar eclipse, the last eclipse that would be visible in the UK for something like 90 years. It dawned bright and brilliant, not a cloud in the sky. As the moment of the eclipse approached, a few clouds appeared on the western horizon, but that wasn't surprising; the British sky is constitutionally unable to remain completely cloudless for more than a few hours at a time.

But as the actual eclipse swung into action, so did the clouds: they came trundling and barreling overhead, taking over the whole center of the sky, in other words, exactly where the sun was. And just as the moment of maximum

coverage approached, and people all over London stepped outside to view the spectacle, down came a dismal sheet of rain. My friend Tyson, visiting from America, was out in the middle of Westminster Bridge; I, having lived there long enough to know better, was back in my living room watching the almost non-event on television. Oh, and of course as soon as the eclipse was over, the rain stopped and the clouds flew away as though they'd never existed.

If that doesn't give you the full picture, just plan a picnic or a hike or an outdoor music festival for any midsummer day, and you're virtually guaranteed to know what rain is all about. But it's not even the full-fledged, this-day-is-a-complete-washout sort of rain; it's more like the sun will come out and invite, nay, beg you to leave your jacket and rain hat at home while you come out to enjoy the splendors of nature. Then, as soon as you're an inconvenient distance from home, out come the clouds and down comes the floods of biblical proportions. The only way to stop it is if you go back home to get your rain gear, in which case it will return to being sunny and hot the rest of day while you're struck dragging your parka and/or umbrella around like a complete prat.

Anyway, this is all prelude to talking about the kind of rain that I love, the kind that in a good year turns up in late October or early November and changes California from an arid, tinder-dry wasteland into a sweetly scented, voluptuous paradise. Yeah, I know not everyone sees it that way, and some people go around with the idea that it's never supposed to rain ("Dude, this is California, aren't we like supposed to get our water from Oregon or something?").

With me, it's probably because I'm an October child, and with any luck the first rain of the season will come near or right on my birthday, as is happening this year. OK, I know it rained a bit back in September, but that doesn't count because a) I was away; and b) because we still hadn't had our sultry, smoggy, smoky Indian summer, when it seems like half the state might burst into flames at any moment, and a good portion of the state actually does.

That's the way it was most of this October; even in normally cool and foggy Frisco, people were going around in t-shirts in the middle of the night, and up in the mountains, you could smell the smoke from fires burning a hundred miles away. One night at Spy Rock, unable to sleep because of the heat and the millions of tiny, invisible spiders that seemed to have taken up residence in my bed, I wandered up the road to take a look at the stars.

Far to the north I could see a faint glow; some 60,000 acres of forest were going up in flames in Shasta County. Overhead, where usually a million or two stars are dancing and prancing in the endless sky, only the brightest and most persistent shone through the haze. I fixed my gaze on one, and almost jumped out of my shoes when I realized it was pulsating with color, going from green to blue to red to purple, almost as though it were some sort of semaphore signal giving me messages from across the universe.

Despite all my years spent with the hippies, I'm not of a particularly mystical bent, yet for a minute I could have sworn that the star was a living being trying to communicate with me. I stared harder, trying to figure out what it could mean, questioning whether, by living too many years in the city, I had lost touch with the magic and wonder of nature.

In the long-ago days, I might have been high on pot or something stronger and would probably been talking right back to the star, but it's been many years since my mind was in such an altered state, so I fell back on the more traditional

practice of Thinking About It. All right, I acknowledged, it's quite possible that stars are living beings capable of communicating with other living beings such as myself, but ultimately, wasn't it a whole lot more likely that it was simply a matter of faraway starlight being refracted by the thick veil of smoke that hung between us?

A lot more prosaic, true, but like most prosaic things, probably closer to the truth. Still, the beauty of it all was hardly lessened for having had a logical explanation. Kind of like the attraction of a pretty face or an eye-catching come-hither look at a late-night beerfest: sure, it's all down to Darwinism and the biological imperative, but in that bleary-eyed moment, it's all of eternity distilled into a swirling mass of desire that makes the whole world make sense, at least until the cold light of morning.

October wore on, like it usually does in California, an agonizing blend of jungle fever and doom-laden anticipation. One of these mornings, you knew you'd wake up and the sun-baked heat of summer would be gone for another year, replaced by the sullen, low-hanging clouds that hang about on the western horizon and then plunge inland with the life-giving rain that spells death to another year that once seemed so young and full of promise.

People run to the beach and up into the hills, or maybe they just laze about on Telegraph or in the cafes, trying to soak up the last bit of what's not really summer anymore, just borrowed time, just a respite, just one last chance to do and see and feel everything that you meant to do in those wide-open months of sunshine and light that once stretched out to the end of time, but now are closing in to a last few precious and fragile moments.

I remember one year, oh, it was way long ago, but it was a magical summer, the kind where you didn't even need to look out the window in the morning to know that the sun would be shining and it would be another day where it wouldn't make sense to do much of anything but go to the beach and lie there at the base of a cliff, listening to the waves crashing and the birds shouting and feeling every little grain of sand working its way into your skin as if the whole earth wanted nothing more than to make love to you.

It went on the way far beyond belief, through September and into October, day after day, week after week. Then one morning, with the temperature still pushing up above 100°, I noticed that the calendar read October 23, and I thought to myself, this can't go on much longer.

I was right, too. We went to the beach as usual that day, and all the heat and light poured down on us just like always, but by mid-afternoon there were some clouds peeking their way over the tops of the faraway waves, and before we left to go home, half the sky was covered.

By nightfall everything felt different, and it was; the trees outside our window, after a summer of silence, stirred into life; they tossed and sighed and moaned with... what was it - pleasure, reluctance, agony, resignation? - and by midnight the rain was thundering down on the wooden shingles. It was impossible to sleep, but of course there was nothing else to do with such a hypnotic sound enveloping us, and we woke late in the morning to a new world, green and wet and damp and full of a different sort of promise.

We didn't know it yet, but the second雨iest winter in California history had begun, just like that, from summer to winter in a single night, and from then until May we watched the rain come down and the mud sliding across roads

and down hills and the mold and fungus crawling up the walls in the damper regions of the house. There was one torrential storm where we were terrified that the whole hill beneath us would give way - at least a hundred other houses collapsed into rubble that night - but when morning came and we looked out on a whole town under water down below, and realized that - this time, at least - nothing was going to happen to us, I put on my parka and walked out into the storm.

The rain was still falling - not falling, really, that sounds too passive; what it was really like was one of those high pressure showers that you get in the better class of hotels, and it was warm, tropical, as though it had come straight from Hawaii (which, the weather forecaster later told us, once the power came back on, it had). I liked that rain, I couldn't help liking it, even though it had disrupted and even destroyed the lives of so many people. It was like looking up to heaven and being bathed in pineapple juice.

There are years, too, when the rain doesn't come, or only comes in tantalizing fits and starts, years when all of California doesn't turn green for the winter, but instead just grows dustier and browner and everything looks like death. Trees that have been there half a century or more shrivel up and keel over, flowers that weren't supposed to bloom until spring come out in mid-December, their pitiful shrunken blossoms looking about as if to say, "What am I doing here?" until they give up the ghost.

Years like that make Californians antsy for the first sign of rain come fall, and if it gets into November or December and everything is still dry, they start feeling pretty edgy. We had one drought of seven years, and by the time it ended, it was getting too easy to believe that California was dying. You don't notice it as much in the city, but in the country, oh, it's sad, no, beyond sad, it's like watching someone very dear to you waste away from an incurable disease.

By comparison, when the rain comes early or right on time, there's a feeling of incredible peace that sets in, as if everything is right with the world. That's the way it's been the last few years, and it looks as though that's how it's going to be this year as well. October was hot, all right, but by the last week of the month, you could feel the change coming. The day before my birthday, clouds hung around most of the day, sort of toying with the land, but by evening they were getting serious.

I sat here writing, and heard a loud cracking and crashing sound. I went outside and found that half of the tree in front of the house had suddenly broken off and fallen across the yard. It was crazy, really; there was not a breath of wind, no rain yet in sight, nothing to explain why this enormous limb had come tumbling to the ground with no warning. If anybody had been standing underneath, it would have killed him.

Who am I kidding? If anyone would have been standing around in front of my house with his thumb up his ass, it would have been me. But for once I was actually indoors doing something constructive, i.e., writing this story, so I was spared. I went outside to survey the damage, and knew in that instant that the rain was on its way and summer was over. By nightfall the wind had picked up, and just before midnight, the rain came pouring down.

When I came out again, just as yesterday turned into my birthday, I was instantly soaked. I waited - foolishly, I suppose - under another tree, for Kristina to come collect the Dawson's Creek video I was saving for her. My sneakers,

full of holes from a summer of scuffing along over hot pavement, filled up with water, and I was amazed to see that the street had, in a matter of minutes, turned into a river.

It was the best birthday present I could have asked for. Some people think I'm crazy for being in love with the rain, but to me it's no different from being in love with life. Tomorrow morning the sun will probably be back again, but its light will be paler, calmer, resigned to the winter that lies ahead. The air will feel so pure and clear and gentle, and the earth will be sending out strange and beautiful smells. Everything will be new and different and full of possibility, exactly the way it should be on a birthday. Nice job, Mother Nature.



Around The Emerald Triangle

It seems mostly like a dream to me now, the Emerald Triangle, even after so many vital years of my life spent there. When the Lookout first started getting read by people in other cities and states, I would often be accused of making up stories. The day-to-day goings-on of Laytonville and Garberville and Boonville

and Eureka seemed fanciful enough, and the Wild West-like adventures of Spy Rock and Salmon Creek read like transmissions from another time or dimension.

It was all real, of course, and there was so much more that I missed or forgot or thought it best to ignore, but it's mostly memories now, memories so strange and ghost-like that I find myself dragging out old photographs and magazines and keepsakes to assure myself that they really happened.

Much of what goes on in the Emerald Triangle is invisible to the casual observer, even more so to the occasional visitor. A few shabby excuses for towns strung like dusty gewgaws along the sinuous curves of Highway 101, a sudden plunge into a redwood cathedral that punctuates the miles of clearcuts baking in the midsummer sun, some time-warp tie-dye hippies crossing paths with rednecks who wouldn't look out of place in North Alabama, beat-up old trucks and sleek SUVs that reek of marijuana dollars, and most people zoom through here in an afternoon and don't even notice that much.

Unless you know someone up there, there's no point in heading off onto the back roads. At certain times of the year, it would be very foolish to do so. You could drive for miles over bone-jarring tracks that masquerade as roads, and never see anything beyond clouds of dust and the occasional anonymous driveway. What goes on behind the impermeable curtain of manzanita and madrone and oak and Doug fir, you can only imagine, and you probably wouldn't even come close.

There are scenes of unbelievable squalor and unspeakable luxury, whole families living in windowless trailers and single potentates ensconced in redwood palaces. There are hardscrabble, hard luck Dogpatches and verdant oases where cool water splashes over polished stones beneath trees that were already old when America was being born.

And you can always go down to the sea, to the toytowns of Mendocino and Ferndale, to the sometimes brutally real towns of Fort Bragg and Eureka, to the staggering, almost frightening rock cliffs that look like eternity itself and yet every winter crumble to bits like so much papier maché. You can watch the fog and the rain roll in from a thousand miles away and swallow up the lights of Arcata and Trinidad and Point Arena until nothing is left but a dull golden glow to suggest that real human lives are unfolding and unreeling and unraveling somewhere within the murk and gloom.

You could write poems about it, songs about it, you could stand on a mountaintop high above it and cry your eyes out over the majesty and horror of it all, and still you wouldn't be able to put your finger on just what it is that makes this land a place apart from all others. I spent ten full years, and parts of many other years in the midst of it, and barely scratched the surface.

Eureka

The last time I was in Eureka was for a funeral. If you know Eureka at all, there's a certain morbid appropriateness to that. Even on its best days, when the sun shines, when some of the newly painted Victorians seem to sparkle with possibility, there's always an undercurrent of doom and disaster to this town. Indigenous peoples typically believe that certain places are just plain cursed. Bad feng shui, if you will. Clearly Eureka is the sort of place they were thinking of.

Nonetheless, I've long loved Eureka, with an unreasonable and irrational passion. Just to walk its sad old streets can give me more joy, albeit the melancholy, beer-soaked sort found in a tragic country tune, than an uproarious party or even uproarious sex. Don't ask me why, because I don't know, and if I did, I wouldn't tell you. There are only a few of us who "get" Eureka, and we'd prefer to keep it an exclusive club.

I stopped off there for an evening and a morning on my way back from Portland this September. Didn't see a single person I knew, which figured; everyone is always either moving away from Eureka or lying low, pretending they're not really there.

But it was pleasant, in a new, unexpected way; for the first time that I could remember, there was a tenuous sort of upbeat feeling in the air. It was probably just my mood; I was glad to be back in Eureka, glad to be on the road, and just like people you haven't seen in a long time, towns can look better when you haven't been putting up with their day-to-day crap for a few years.

All right, I'm a sap and I'll admit it. There are places in Eureka that can make me cry from just thinking about them. All the times I've spent on the dock at the foot of F Street, looking out at the bay and that weird fisherman statue, just about anywhere in Old Town, at least the parts that haven't been overtaken by boutique-ification, which, come to think of it, doesn't leave much. The people were friendly too, which seemed like a change, but again, maybe that was just my mood.

I remember when I devoted most of an issue of Lookout (#38) to Eureka. I was full of high hopes, optimistic that the closing of the pulp mills would lead to a renaissance, that the town that looked like it had been designed by artists and dreamers would finally become a mecca for real artists and dreamers instead of a last resting place for the flatulent underbelly of the American underclass.

But Eureka's a heartbreaker. It draws you in with its illusion of beauty, or with its illusion of the beauty that you're positive lurks just beneath the tatty surface, and then it laughs in your face. Or, more likely, kicks you in the face and then laughs.

Some of my Eureka friends died, many turned into junkies or drunks, the ones that could move away and made uneasy jokes about where they had escaped from. I walked down 4th Street, in the shadow of the monstrous new jail, seeing ghosts disappear around every corner, wanting to try and catch up with them and knowing I never could.

Someday, I keep telling myself, I'll go back there and we'll spend some real time together, just Eureka and me. We'll get to know each other all over again, and Eureka will surprise me by saying, "You know, you were right, I've decided to grow up and be a nice city, a happy city, a beautiful city that takes care of its people and cultivates its excellence instead of paving it over."

But that wouldn't be Eureka, would it? That would be some other town altogether, one that never existed, or if it did, only lived over some rainbow or in some tender lullaby. Still, the people of Eureka actually had gotten together and stopped Wal-Mart from unloading one of its hideous box stores on top of its priceless Old Town; maybe, just maybe, they were finally coming to see just what a jewel in the rough they inhabited?

No, probably not, the cynic in me said; they probably just thought that Wal-Mart wasn't big, gross and hideous enough to measure up to Eureka

standards, and were holding out for a slaughterhouse or toxic waste dump. But enough joking at Eureka's expense. If it weren't so lovely, so lovely without having a clue, it wouldn't ever have had the power to tear me up inside, a power it still has and manifests every time I round the bend and see that idiotic nuclear plant (disused) and those stinking pulp mills (disused), and the endless strip of garish neon stretching across what would otherwise have been a pristine expanse of North Coast splendor.

What's a guy to do? Eureka, I know you don't care, but I love you anyway. Go ahead and break my heart all over again.

Berkeley Bits

Much of what I say elsewhere about San Francisco holds doubly true for Berkeley. I love this town; it took me in when no place else would have me, and yet I can't walk or bike through its streets without being simultaneously amazed and appalled at what it's become.

Amazed, I suppose, that so much of old Berkeley has survived, albeit in a debased form. Appalled for much the same reason.

I spent most of 1998 and part of 1999 away from Berkeley; it was the longest I'd been gone since some time in the early 70s. When I got off the BART one bright spring day, my first reaction was, "Well, it looks almost exactly the way I left it." My second reaction was, "Unfortunately."

Of course I'd grown used to the constant noise and bustle of London, and downtown Berkeley seemed like a ghost town by comparison. The streets were so wide, so empty, so devoid of life, apart from the usual beggars and people wandering about talking to themselves.

But that's all relative; Berkeley is positively teeming compared with most midsize American cities, and not everyone is either a spare changer or nuts. I hadn't gotten two blocks before I started running into people I knew (yes, I do know a few people apart from spare changers and nuts), and some of Berkeley's charms began to re-insinuate themselves into my consciousness: the wealth of vegetation, the relaxed, easy-going atmosphere, the bicycles going every which way, the sun so warm on my face at a time when most of America and Europe were still in the deep freeze.

Nothing much had changed on my block either. The cat-lady's garden was still going crazy, climbing up sidings and poles, hanging out over the sidewalk, and making my house look like an escapee from the Blair Witch Project. Across the street the Winchester Ghetto House was still in a state of simultaneous demolition and construction, and the Grand Auto yokels were busily revving engines, testing car alarms, and banging things together to see how loud a sound they could make.

There were flowers everywhere, normal flowers and flowers that looked like they were from another planet. The roar of traffic from University Avenue might as well have been the dull thud of the ocean on some faraway beach, and for a brief moment I found myself asking, "Why would I ever want to leave all this?"

Berkeley is full, perhaps too full, of people who have asked themselves the same question and answered, "Um, I don't." Thanks in part to rent control and

also to the enormous inertia acquired by those who haven't stopped smoking pot in 30 years, things change far more slowly than they do in most cities. Guys who graduated college back in 1969 and might normally have moved on are still living in the same student apartments because they're still paying 1969 rents, and who can blame them?

Well, I certainly can't, especially since I'm in one of those rent control specials myself, and probably will be until it either falls down (which may not be far off, since it hasn't been painted or repaired since the Carter Presidency) or is bulldozed to make room for condos. The students next door pay something like six times as much rent and look at us as though we were occupants of some exotic game preserve, which in a way I suppose we are.

In fact, I think "game preserve" or "wild life refuge" would be my metaphor for Berkeley as a whole, just as "theme park" is my prevailing image for San Francisco. Forms and ways of life that could not possibly survive in most cities still flourish here, but no matter how well hidden the fences or how carefully maintained the habitat might be, it's still, in essence, a zoo.

Still, zoos are not all bad, especially for the animals who live in them, particularly if the alternative is to be hunted down or exploited in the wild. Many indigenous Berkeley species are too delicate and fragile to survive in more demanding environments, and who's to say that at least some small part of our urban landscape shouldn't be set aside to preserve the wandering, shell-shocked detritus of the last several countercultures so that future anthropologists and tourists can marvel at their strangeness and diversity?

But while I'm on the wildlife motif, I can't help being reminded of Orwell's Animal Farm, which also seems a useful analogy for Berkeley, or at least for how it is governed. I'm really showing my age here, but I can remember when the city was run by (shock, horror) Republicans. I don't know if any self-confessed Republicans still live in Berkeley, but if they do, it's certain that they would never be allowed anywhere near City Hall.

Electoral battles in Berkeley are generally limited to the left, the far left, and the raving lunatic left, so you would think that after a couple decades of this, the city would be a showplace for living Marxism, but what you've mostly gotten is a mudpuddle scramble over which pigs are most equal of all. There is a never-ending abundance of Caring and Compassion, buttressed by hundreds of millions of dollars spent on every social program imaginable, but at the end of the day, we've got more homelessness and more crime than ever.

All the affirmative action and outreach programs haven't changed the fact that Berkeley's white kids go to the best universities and Berkeley's black kids aren't going much of anywhere, and City Hall itself, while staffed by a veritable Rainbow Coalition of diversity, seems horrendously challenged by such fundamental urban tasks as repairing the streets. But question any of this, and you'll quickly hear that it's the fault of Reagan or Bush or Clinton or NAFTA or global capitalism or institutional racism or anything and everything except, god forbid, any shortcomings on the part of the warm and wonderful visionaries who guide Our Fair City.

I think my last vestiges of faith in Berkeley politics were effaced an election or two ago when candidate Kriss Worthington (by all accounts, a nice guy, but whatever...) was asked what he considered the most important issue facing the city. Would it be jobs, housing, homelessness, crime, development, the future

of the university...? No, wait for it, it was "keeping the free box in People's Park."

This particular vital issue may have receded from memory since then, but let me refresh you: at the time the city and/or university was proposing to remove the free box from the Park because it had been taken over by a posse of thugs who threatened and intimidated anyone who questioned their right to first choice over goods deposited there. The People's Park fundamentalists, who oppose any deviation from the status quo with the intellectual rigidity of Iranian ayatollahs, screamed bloody murder, and, of course, the last time I looked, the free box still resided in People's Park, as did the various drug dealers, muggers and desperate characters who make that particular block an extra special zoo within a zoo.

Before you go off on me, it's not that I want to abolish the Park, or would even dream of doing so. But as with so many things in Berkeley, to suggest even the slightest change is tantamount to advocating total destruction. Right now the Park functions, as it has for many years, as part park and part homeless refuge, failing to do a good job in either regard. "But it's a Berkeley tradition," they cry. Right, and if similar thinking had obtained in the 19th century, we'd still have slavery.

Being away from Berkeley all summer caused me to miss, with no particular regret, was the whole KPFA uproar. Even without taking sides, I don't think I would have enjoyed it, since KPFA is located practically across the street from me, which meant my neighborhood was turned into a rather noisy battleground.

I haven't listened to KPFA in years, probably not since Maximum Rocknroll was canceled, though that's not completely true. On a warm night, with the windows open, I can't help hearing the Multicultural Musical Experience, a program dedicated to the seemingly unassailable premise that people of all races and ethnicities are just as capable of producing unlistenable dreck as are good old fashioned whitebread Americans.

No doubt there are still some worthwhile programs on KPFA, but it's hardly worth wading through the various ravings and tedium that I can only imagine are the result of affirmative action for the mentally and emotionally challenged. KPFA long ago became mired in the worst sort of identity politics, the kind that unquestioningly embraces crooks and incompetents provided they are of the right race, gender and sexual persuasion, and rejects any idea, from freeing the slaves to the Declaration of the Rights of Man, if it might ever have been entertained by anyone associated with the Dread White Male.

Do I overstate the case? Surely, but that's my job, isn't it? I'm a journalist. But do I overstate the case any more so than the self-serving ideologues who've gained a stranglehold over a station that once was one of America's most powerful outlets for new and creative thinking? I doubt it.

And I further doubt that it's possible to salvage much from KPFA. Either it will continue to degenerate into a Stalinist version of NPR, or it will be sold to one of the media corporations that currently control about 90% of the radio outlets in the country. I can hear it now: just as KFOG gives us Classic Rock, the new KPFA's format will be Classic Leftist Rants. On the other hand, will anybody notice the difference?

Many of you will have visited New York City, right? And even if you haven't, you've seen it on TV and in films so many times that you've got a pretty good idea what it looks like.

In fact, New York is probably one of the most instantly recognizable cityscapes in the world. Which leads me to ponder what on earth this particular dingbat (I wish I could remember her name) was thinking when she denounced the city's proposed new General Plan as "the full-scale Manhattanization of Berkeley."

Was someone suggesting that the Campanile and the Power Bar tower be replaced by the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center? Was Shattuck Avenue to become the West Coast Wall Street and Telegraph the new Times Square? Would the placid precincts of Parker Street and the sleepy quarters of Old Dwight Way soon be clogged with gaping skyscrapers and honking taxicabs?

Not quite. Somebody had merely suggested that building multi-story apartment buildings on some of the city's major arteries like Ashby, College, and University Avenue might be a good way of providing much-needed new housing while minimizing negative effects on the environment.

Sensible urban planners everywhere have begun to recognize that more densely populated city centers are an ideal antidote to the suburban sprawl that is devouring farmland and turning America into a car-choked mini-mall of social and cultural alienation. And even though much of Berkeley looks suspiciously like any other suburb, albeit not so well kept, official city policy has long been to encourage mass transit, walking and bicycling, and to discourage automobile use.

So it would be a no-brainer to build new housing on existing corridors, convenient to shops, workplaces, and public transport? Well, anyplace but Berkeley it might be. Berkeleyans are completely in favor of ecologically sustainable development, completely in favor of more wholesome social structure and living patterns. Just as long as it's not in their neighborhood.

Almost no new housing has been built in Berkeley since the 1960s, and if it weren't for the aggressive efforts of developers like Patrick Kennedy, probably none would have been. On the plus side, much of the city's traditional character has been retained. On the not so plus side, there's nowhere to live, and some sections of the city are only slightly better than slums.

It's not as though University Avenue was some sort of Champs D'Élysée whose timeless architecture and stately promenades needed to be protected against the depredations of greedy builders. It's lined with vacant storefronts, gas stations, empty lots, and some sections of it are downright dangerous. It's hard to imagine how some new three and four story apartment buildings could be anything but an improvement.

But in the debased rhetoric that passes for political discourse in Berkeley, that adds up to "full-scale Manhattanization." Oh well, at least maybe we'll finally be able to get decent pizza and bagels. What next, stores and restaurants that stay open past 11 o'clock?

Music Can Make You Stupid

I can't do the kind of gossipy scene reports I used to do. I've been away too long, I've lost touch with so many people and places, and, most of all, for a while after I left Lookout Records, I almost stopped listening to music.

So what I write about this issue is going to represent a very limited, narrow perspective: in other words, don't come crying to me if your band or your friend's band didn't get a mention. I probably don't even know they exist.

Anyway, one of the most exciting things for me lately was the Lookout Records "Freakout" over Labor Day weekend. It was as much class reunion as music festival, and I spent as much time catching up with old friends as I did watching bands. But I did get to see some dazzling performances, including the return to action of **JESSE MICHAELS**, fronting **COMMON RIDER**.

It was the first time Jesse had been on stage with a band since the last **OPERATION IVY** show in May of 1989. I took lots of pictures, trying to capture Jesse in mid-air during one of his patented leaps off the kick drum, one thing that hasn't changed a bit since his Op Ivy days, and as soon as I get the film back, we'll see if I succeeded.

Onstage as well as off, Jesse comes across these days as calmer and more reflective. That's not to say his performance lacks intensity or passion - not by a long shot - but the energy isn't quite so frantic or, to coin a phrase, "hectic" as it was with Op Ivy. Anyway, from the way the kids responded, you'd think he'd never been away. It was a joy to see him back where he belongs, doing what he does best.

Jesse tells me that he and Common Rider will be doing more recording during the coming year, and very likely some touring, too. Also, it looks as though he may be doing a solo record as well. More news to come on that soon, hopefully.

Backing Jesse in Common Rider were **MASS GIORGINI**, **DAN LUMLEY**, and **ZAC ZOINKS**, whom you'll also recognize as 3/5 of **SQUIRTGUN** and **SCREECHING WEASEL**. Squirtgun haven't been too active lately, but Screeching Weasel continue to crank out the product, and, in one of those rare exceptions to the rule that bands get steadily worse the longer they hang around, have just made one of their best records in years.

There's been a lot of carping that "it's not really Screeching Weasel" because the now-departed **DAN PANIC** and **DAN VAPID** were such an integral part of the band's sound, but at the same time, Screeching Weasel is **BEN WEASEL**, and no matter how many members come and go (I lost track long ago), that's not going to change.

With that in mind, the reason the most recent release, "Emo," marks such an improvement over the formulaic pap of their last couple outings is that Ben's obviously been doing some soul-searching and reflection that prompted him to write some of the most introspective and deeply personal lyrics ever heard on a Screeching Weasel record. Combine that with a willingness to take some musical chances and you've got a record that echoes, though doesn't quite surpass the twin triumphs of "My Brain Hurts" and "Anthem For A New Tomorrow."

I noted as much on the Lookout Records Com Center (www.lkout.com) and got back a none too friendly e-mail from Mr. Weasel himself. "I don't

know what you're up to, Livermore, saying nice things about me," it read in effect, before going on to denounce me for all the crimes against him and humanity that he's been denouncing in the media for the past couple years now. He wound up with, "And don't you DARE come back at me with one of your point-by point rebuttals." So I won't, apart from my usual, "Oh yeah, well what about your mama?"

Speaking of one-man bands, albeit better-natured ones, I dropped in on **JOE QUEER** in his native New Hampshire habitat, and found him in excellent form. He took us on a tour of his fishing boat and told tales of his adventures on the bounding main. If you're interested in what's up with **THE QUEERS**, their current incarnation will be back on the road this fall, though there's no new record planned until next year, and when it does come, it seems like it will be a return to the harder, punkier, old-school Queers sound.

As most of you will have heard, the Queers' original drummer **HUGH O'NEILL** died a tragically premature death due to a brain tumor, and is much missed and mourned by all who knew him. Longtime bassist **B-FACE** left the band last year, and is currently touring with the **GROOVIE GHOUlies**, who might as well not even have a home, they're on the road so much.

But the Queers carry on, though Hugh and B-Face are clearly missed in the same way that Panic and Vapid are from Screeching Weasel. I caught the latest edition of the Queers in London last spring, and had to admit that they sounded tighter and more polished than ever. And the kids were going krazy, which is ultimately what it's all about, isn't it?

Meanwhile, back at the Lookout Freakout, for me the other highlight besides Common Rider was **THE SMUGGLERS**. This must be the 15th or 20th time I've seen the Smugs, and they just keep on getting better. If there's a more exciting rock and roll band working today, I haven't seen or heard of them. OK, I'm sure there are bands, garage bands in particular - **THE MAKERS** come to mind - who might surpass the Smugs in sheer intensity and chaos, but the Smugglers have got way more going for them than just a wild and edgy performance. They also throw in wit and charm and well-crafted songs, which make for the kind of combination I don't think I'll ever get tired of.

Great news about the Smugglers, too: bassist **BEEZ**, who temporarily fell victim to some tragic delusion that at 34 he was too old to rock and roll and left the band, has come to his senses and is now back in the saddle, more manic and crazy and beautiful than ever, ratcheting up the band's adrenaline-fueled performance to levels even I would have once thought unattainable. And speaking of levels, mild-mannered **GRANT LAWRENCE**, the Clark Kent of rock and roll front men, continues to rise to ever higher ones as well. How he can go from the shy and diffident (well, he is the quintessential Canadian, after all) persona he manifests offstage (well, at least until he gets at the booze) to the wild-eyed tiger-by-the-tail sensation he turns into the minute the lights go up and the band starts rolling will probably remain one of the universe's impenetrable mysteries.

Speaking of Grant, there was a sweet little scene after the Smugglers' triumphant appearance at the Great American Music Hall: the soft-spoken superstar turned into a starstruck fanboy as he was introduced to the legendary **EL VEZ** (known in a former life as Robert --- of the **ZEROS**). Mr. Vez, looking extraordinarily natty in the sort of sharkskin iridescent suit that all the

best dressed wide boys - yours truly included - sported back in the early 60s, was there to see **PANSY DIVISION**, whose similarly sharp-dressed drummer **LUIS** had just completed a stint with the El Vez band in Europe. There's talk, by the way, that El Vez might be supporting **MORRISSEY** on one leg of his current tour.

As for Pansy Division, they continue to amaze for at least two reasons. The first is that they've gotten so incredibly good, having finally gelled into a powerful, hard-driving four-man lineup that barely resembles the thinner, almost indie-pop sound of Pansy Division's early outings. **PA TRICK**, their (relatively) new lead guitarist, has almost single-handedly turned the Pansies into a hard rocking outfit capable of dominating any stage, and Luis, well, he's the answer to every band's prayer - a drummer who not only has the beats pouring out of both head and heart, but is wholeheartedly committed to the songs and the meaning behind them.

There's that old joke about how most good drummers are from some sort of barely human species that needs to be kept chained up in the basement when you're not performing or recording, but Luis gives the lie to that particular canard: he's witty, literate, and - now this is *really* rare for a drummer - the best dressed of the bunch, though bassist **CHRIS FREEMAN**, with his myriad cocktail dresses, is no slouch either.

Still speaking of Luis, though, congrats go out to him and his sweetheart **SETH**, who recently celebrated their first anniversary. Seth is making waves of his own with **PANTY RAID**, in which he's teamed up with **IAN** and the - is she old enough to be called this? - legendary **JANELLE**.

Anyway, I said there were two amazing things about Pansy Division - well, probably more, but there's only room for two in this column. The second is that they're still not incredibly famous. Even if they weren't pretty much unique as the voice of gay rock and rollers everywhere, they're just plain a great band. I think part of the problem might be that they got pigeonholed early on as a one-trick pony, a cute but essentially lightweight novelty act with naughty lyrics about gay sex.

There's nothing lightweight about them now - not only is the music harder and more complex, but the lyrics have gone far beyond the "Cocksuckers Club" and "Fuck Like Bunnies" scene. As my friend Michael observed, "Singing about gay sex is a good way to get attention, but they've moved on to something way more radical: gay love."

But the sad fact is that they actually got more attention in the early days, mostly for their sassy lyrics and the fact that they were one of the very first bands to not just openly identify themselves as gay, but to flaunt it at every opportunity. Now that they're a truly excellent band that happens to be gay and to sing about gay themes, they seem to be slipping between the cracks (and NO, I didn't mean any innuendo by that, and no, I don't have time to go searching for another metaphor).

My theory is that the one thing standing in the way of massive success for Pansy Division is that they still haven't managed to reach what should be their obvious audience: there are millions of gay people who still don't know they exist. The conventional wisdom is that mainstream gays are only interested in fluffy dance music and endless clubbing, but I don't know where that's written in stone. There was a gay punk and rock and roll scene way back in the 70s; The



Grant Smuggler smooching with Seth Panty Raid at the Lookout Freakout. Watch out, Grant! Isn't that Luis sneaking up behind you with a meat cleaver?

Stud was one of the first clubs in Frisco to regularly feature glam and punk. It's the first place I heard both the Ramones and the Clash, for that matter.

Besides, nowadays, all sorts of clubs, gay, straight and mixed, feature Britpop, indie and punk at least some nights; why, then, are Pansy Division still stuck in the mostly hetero pop-punk ghetto when even the **OFFSPRING** and **GREEN DAY** can regularly be heard in gay clubs? What I figure is that the Pansies shouldn't be afraid to mix some catchy dance beats with their rock and roll, and I'd recommend that they go for a sound somewhere in between the **GO-GOS** and **BIS**, both of whom figured out to fire up dance crowds without losing touch with their rock and roll roots.

Speaking of Bis, I've seen a lot of them lately, both in the UK and America, and like very much how they're developing. It's still a bit weird to see them rocking away without benefit of bassist or drummer (it's all programmed beats), but hey, given some of the rhythm sections I've had to work with, who can blame them for learning how to do without? Most recently I saw them at the Coachella Festival in Southern California, where they were opening for, among others, Morrissey, **BECK**, and **PERRY FARRELL** (the latter was seriously yucko, though I'm probably in a minority there; I've thought all his bands were crap, going right back to my first and only **JANE'S ADDICTION** gig in January 1987).

Bis were kind enough to get me backstage, where there was an abundance of free food, drink and shade, in contrast with the main grounds of the festival,

where the temperature sat around 110° at midday. I'm not normally a big festival fan; the only other one I've been to in recent years has been Reading, and I was expecting the worst from Coachella: I mean what kind of idiot puts on or goes to a festival in the middle of the desert during what's often the hottest time of the year in Southern California?

But it turned out to be a really pleasant surprise. The setting was incredibly beautiful: a kind of date palm oasis surrounded by mountains that turned an opalescent purple and orange as the sun sunk toward the west, and an almost complete lack of the idiots and yobbos you'd expect to find at a festival featuring the likes of **RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE**. Of course we were there for indie day and didn't stick around for the testosterone fest of **RATM**, **TOOL**, etc.

We didn't even stick around for Beck; actually, once we learned **JOHNNY MARR** was not, as had been rumored, going to be playing guitar for him (as post once held by one of the Bay Area's more unlikely pop stars, **LANCE HAHN**, of both **CRINGER** and **J CHURCH** fame). We watched the **CHEMICAL BROTHERS** for a while, but I'd seen them do almost exactly the same thing a few weeks earlier at Reading, so we packed up the car and headed north again in the middle of the night, the only time that California's Central Valley looks almost terrestrial and bearable.

We did get to watch Morrissey do one of his stingily short sets for a relatively small but fanatically devoted crowd of fans, about a third of whom were hardcore Hispanic. Others have been noting this curious phenomenon, too: just what it is about Morrissey fey and acutely English stylings that cuts across the cultural divide to reach a crowd that - at the risk of falling victim to stereotypes - often looks like they'd be more into the low rider and gang banger scene?

I remember a show a couple years ago where I found myself accidentally bumping into a guy about twice my size, covered in tattoos up and down his arms and neck, and basically looking like he'd just got out of a long stretch in San Quentin. Oh oh, I thought, and added half a dozen more oh ohs when I realized he was surrounded by about ten more guys of similarly thuglike appearance. But the most disconcerting thing was that this seriously scary-looking fellow was sporting a Smiths shirt, and not just any Smiths shirt, but the "This Charming Man" one, with a naked man sprawled across the front. Most of his buddies were dressed likewise.

"You wear those shirts down in the barrio?" I found myself thinking. On second thought, I realized that if I was as big and tough and mean-looking as this bunch, I'd wear anything I damn well pleased.

Anyway, it's no secret that I'm a big Morrissey fan, even if I haven't been in a street gang for the last 35 years or so, but I haven't been too thrilled with him lately, either live or on record. During the last shows I saw, in 1997, he seemed to just be going through the motions, and the song selection was pretty crap too, mostly stuff from his none too inspired "Maladjusted" and "Southpaw Grammar" albums. At the Coachella gig, though, he was at least halfway back to his old form, and emphasized it by throwing in a number of classics from both the Smiths and Morrissey eras: "Is It Really So Strange," "Meat Is Murder," (!?!) "Last Night I Dreamt Somebody Loves Me," "Hairdresser On Fire," and "November Spawned A Monster."

He actually seemed to be enjoying himself, too, which not the case on the '97 tour, when I suspected him of angling for a new career as the poster boy for the Clinical Depression Foundation. Of course Morrissey's always been stereotyped as the Crown Prince Of Misery, but in the Smiths and early solo days, there was always a leavening element of wit and self-mocking humor to his desperation. Some of that seems to be coming back now, and it's a welcome sight.

OK, OK, I know many of you only want to read about PUNK and are getting mightily pissed that I'm going on so long about something that's anything but... (though it never ceases to amaze me how many punks and emo kids are closet Smiths fans, even if they'll only admit it when they're drunk or feeling especially, um, vulnerable). So what could be more *punk* than one of Frisco's first and finest bands of that genre, the **AVENGERS**? True, it wasn't the "real" Avengers, but it was close enough: the other musical highlight of the Lookout Freakout was seeing **PENELOPE HOUSTON** back where she belonged, belting out her classic punk anthems with a group that was half old school (Penelope and the original Avengers guitarist) and half new (Dan Panic and **JOEL READER**).

I've always thought Penelope had one of the greatest and most instantly recognizable voices in punk rock history, right up there with **DEBORAH HARRY**. But while last year's **BLONDIE** reunion was a bit of a disappointment for me - the tunes were there in all their glory, but much of the raw energy that made Blondie so great in 78 had been replaced by glitz and polish in 98 - the Avengers' set transported me straight back to the Mabuhay circa 77: Even some of the same assholes - or maybe it was their kids - were doing their best to make a misery of the pit.

It was a real testimony to the transformative power of rock and roll: the minute Penelope took that microphone into her hand, the years fell away. She's been doing the moody, introspective folk music thing the past decade or two, and I could never get very into it, because it seemed like she just holding way too much back, trying too hard to be "mature" or "grown up" and ending up looking too much like someone's mom trying to relive her college days.

But not with the Avengers, no way. With each song, she got younger and stronger and more impassioned. While Debbie Harry (who, to be fair, is at least ten years older) resembled a rather sexy grandmother at her reunion, Penelope was a sassy little punk girl all over again. True, she wasn't sporting that '77-style spiky croptop that probably launched a thousand punk hairdos, and long green hair is definitely more of a 90s thing, but it was all about the way she moved, and the smile that kept sneaking across her face after songs like "We Are The One" and "The American In Me," a smile that said, "Damn, this is fun!" It was a smile I never saw when I watched her folk music set a few years back.

After the show, she was hanging out at the back of the GAMH, and I went and stood by her, wondering if I should introduce myself, wondering if I should tell her how if it hadn't been for seeing her band back in '77, I probably never would have gone on to start a punk zine or a punk record label, how ironic it all was that here she was, 22 years later, recording for a label that in a really big way she initially inspired without ever knowing it.

But her experience of Lookout Records is all about the people who run it now, so my own history probably wouldn't mean much to her. I'd seen her

talking in interviews about **CHRIS** and **MOLLY** and how cool she thought they and their label were, and while it was a bit odd to see it referred to as "their" label, that's what it is now. There's a whole new set of bands on Lookout now who were put there by Chris and Molly and who probably have only a vague idea of who I am - or, more to the point - who I used to be. So, rather than go through some whole convoluted explanation thing, I just hung around and watched Penelope talking to the fans, taking quiet satisfaction in the way it all worked out and being glad that I could have had some small part in it. Maybe Penelope will end up reading this and say, "Who the hell is this guy, anyway?" To which I can only reply: "I was that dork in the front of the pit with my mouth hanging open at just how great the Avengers - and you - were." You didn't know who I was in 1977, and you still don't in 1999, but you've been part of the soundtrack to my life for longer than a lot of people have been alive."

What else? The Lookout Freakout wound up on Monday afternoon in some strange place called Castro Valley, which is about ten miles southeast of Berkeley. I didn't realize until we were getting off the freeway there that despite having lived in the Bay Area over 30 years, I'd never, ever been to Castro Valley.

It was not hard to see why, either. "Downtown" Castro Valley is a dismal strip of gas stations, mini-malls, pool halls and bad restaurants. Feeling adventurous, I decided to set out into the unknown wilds of Main Street to find some film for my camera.

I asked the guy at the hardware store where I might find some, and he gestured down the road. "There's a Long's Drugs about five or ten minutes in that direction," he said, looking at me as though I were some kind of idiot for not knowing where you buy film. But when he *really* gave me the "What is your problem / are you from this planet?" look was when I asked him, "Is it walking distance?"

"Walking? What's that?" Well, no, he didn't exactly put it that way, but you could tell he was deeply suspicious about anyone who would seriously consider walking any farther than from the parking lot into the mall. He probably called the police the minute I left. "Hello? Police? Better send the SWAT team. There's somebody *walking* down Main Street!"

As it happened, all the police were otherwise occupied, though, guarding the miniature golf course where four or five hundred pop punk kids with dangerously colored hair and frighteningly pierced noses had converged for what had to have been one of the cultural high points of Castro Valley's mostly nonexistent history. You would have thought rioting or revolution was about to break out, but eventually even the cops relaxed under the broiling sun (safely ensconced under Berkeley and San Francisco's fog layer all these years; I never dreamed that people actually *lived* in places like this; I thought it was just something you had to drive through to get to LA).

Meanwhile, speaking of broiling, I continued trudging eastward along Castro Valley's main drag (with the emphasis on "drag"), finally locating the promised drug store after what at least an hour-long slog across what looked uncannily like America (Berkeley, on the other hand, is not likely to be confused with America). Some gang-bangers idling on the bench out front looked at me with bewilderment: um, like where did this guy come from, I didn't see a car come up?

Oh, all right, enough Castro Valley bashing; to tell the truth, it wasn't that terribly different from where I grew up, and I turned out all right, didn't? Didn't I? Um, hello?

Meanwhile, I had managed to miss half the festivities back at the golf course (the ones I had been planning on taking pictures of, natch), but I got back in time for the Common Rider set, and also for an impromptu reunion of the original, acoustic version of **THE POTATOMEN**, featuring **PATRICK HYNES**, Chris Appelgren, and myself. It was great fun while it lasted, but it didn't last very long; the owner of the golf course (another self-appointed music critic, no doubt) pulled the plug (not literally, of course) and demanded that we stop playing immediately, since it was past 6 o'clock. We only got to do three of our planned seven songs, but oh well.

Earlier, the **HI-FIVES**, just back from a grueling cross-country journey, turned in a blistering set, and so did just about every other band that had played the previous shows during the weekend. Apart from the music, there was free miniature golf and free pinball, though the sensible ones among us occupied ourselves by searching for the one commodity that was not in ready supply: shade. Once again, I question: how can people *live* in a place like that? I suppose permanent sunstroke eventually addles the brain so much you don't even notice where you are anymore.

I'm a fine one to be talking about addled brains, anyway, as far too many friends and family members have been quick to point out. I think I'd better move on quickly to some other news and views, as this zine is meant to get printed in about three hours and I haven't even written half of it yet. I had a nice night at Gilman Street in early October; it was my first time there in a year or two, but turned out to be one of those weird times when all sorts of people you haven't seen in ages come crawling out of the woodwork (I suppose that's what they thought when they saw me, too).

I hadn't been there two minutes before I was grabbed by **BRIAN EDGE**, who was one of the folks who helped start Gilman Street back in 1986 and 87. He's putting together a book on Gilman and was hoping I'd contribute to it; while we talked, I spotted half a dozen of the truly old school crowd who could be seen there almost every night the year the club opened.

I realized later that many of them were there to see **HERS NEVER EXISTED**, a band featuring the legendary **KAMALA** (of **KARNAVORES** and Screeching-Weasel-wrote-a-song-about-her fame) and **CASSANDRA**, who is one of those people I know but don't really know (as in, I know who she is, but I have no idea if she knows or cares who I am).

Headlining that night was **AT THE DRIVE IN**, who many of the younger kids had been raving about. I was a bit underwhelmed; undeniably their show was intense and action-packed, but too much of it seemed to rely on nothing but intensity and action. At one point I was thinking that if that singer threw the microphone in the air and caught it one more time, I'd be tempted to jump up on stage and wrap the cord a bit too tightly around his neck.

But hey, they were having a great time, and so was the crowd, and the only thing that really put me off was the whole retro-70s feel to it, as though they were trying to channel **IGGY** by way of the **NATION OF ULYSSES** and **THE MAKE UP**. And those white boy Afros... Too many bad memories for

me, there, buddy. Some people romanticize the 70s with all their swinging sex and drugs and naff hair styles; to me they're a nightmare I'll spend the rest of my life trying to escape.

In my further quest to be open-minded to today's exciting and hip youth culture, I also journeyed across the bay to see **THE PROMISE RING**, who were quite good, really. Their singer was a funny fellow (and seemed to realize it), sort of a self-deprecating cross between **LINT** and **IAN MACKAYE**. The serious sweater-wearing emo set might be a bit put off that the Promise Ring have gone a lot more poppy of late, but I have no complaints about that at all. Opening for them were **BURNING AIRLINES**, fronted by that **JAWBOX** fellow. Jawbox never did much for me, too East Coast math rock for my liking. Ditto for Burning Airlines.

Before I finish this up and head down to Gilman for the **AMERICAN STEEL** record release gig, I should give a mention to some of the bands I've been seeing in London this past year. One of my favorites is **MARINE RESEARCH**, which on one level represents another reshuffle of **HEAVENLY** and **TALULAH GOSH**, but which now has staked out its own distinctive territory and looks set to be heard a lot more widely than those other two bands ever were (though if you don't go out right now and buy every Heavenly and Talulah Gosh record ever made, you're wasting your life away). **AMELIA** still has the most beautiful voice east of the Atlantic Ocean (**ROSE MELBERG**, of course, still holds the crown here in the west). **PETE**, always a delightful guitarist, seems to have climbed to a whole new level of excellence, which he's also been demonstrating with his other band, **THE FAMILY WAY**, a - how should I put this? - slightly eccentric aggregation who are great fun and additionally benefit from the wondrous **DELIA** on guitar and vocals.

I'd tell you more about the lead singer, who has managed to insert large bits of **JARVIS COCKER** and Morrissey into his already very distinctive stage persona, but, um, I can't remember his name right now...

Delia's also playing drums for **ACTION TIME**, a moddy-poppy 60s go-go sort of thing with gospel overtones, yeah, that about sums it up. Or not. I've already mentioned Bis, while I'm in that vein, but switching to quite a different one, there's **THE TONE** (I refuse to write it as "The 'tone,' the way they do, cuz I think it looks kind of, well, never mind. I just like it better as "The Tone").

The Tone often get ribbed for sounding uncannily like **THE CLASH**, and at first I joined in the teasing, but after seeing them ten or so times this year, I'm thinking that what they're doing is more akin to building on the Clash tradition, sort of like what Screeching Weasel or the Queers did with the Ramones. There's also a bit of **RANCID** influence going on, and boy did I get in trouble with the punk purists when I said I thought Rancid at their best were every bit as good as the Clash (having seen both groups in their prime, I think I'm entitled to have an opinion).

Of course maybe my memory is fogged by age, or maybe I'm just trying to piss off the old farts, but frankly, I thought the Clash went downhill pretty fast after "London Calling." And also, maybe my opinion is skewed by seeing that godawful appearance **put in at Glastonbury. I turned on my TV and saw someone who looked very much like Mr Strummer - and in fact**

turned out to be - singing "Tommy Gun," backed by what sounded a twelfth-rate Clash tribute band. At least two die-hard Clash fans told me they nearly cried at the sight and sound of it. Now if he'd been smart and gotten The Tone to back him...

All right, enough for the UK now, except to put in an obligatory mention for the dual wonders of **WAT TYLER** and **HARD SKIN**, both of which are anchored (literally as well as figuratively) by that enormous talent, Mr Sean Forbes, who is also head honcho of the spectacularly obscure **RUGGERBUGGER RECORDS**. Both bands play rarely, Hard Skin hardly at all, but do not, I repeat, do NOT ever miss an opportunity to see either of them.

Back in Berkeley for a quick roundup of bits and bobs of mostly useless information: by now you're probably aware that there's yet another new **COMETBUS** zine (#45) on the streets, and in my opinion it might be the best ever. Just don't tell **AARON** that he's even *better* than Kerouac now, unless, of course, you like to get kicked.

Aaron's also in about a hundred bands, most of whom I can't even remember at the moment, but **CLEVELAND BOUND DEATH SENTENCE** come to mind; they have a rough and raw, back to basics sound, and even can be forgiven for having yet another song about Benicia by the Bay. There's also **HARBINGER**, which also contains (how did I ever get this far in a scene report without his name coming up?) **ROBERT EGGPLANT**. Mr Eggplant, by the way, tells me he's compiling an anthology of the greatest hits and misses of **ABSOLUTELY ZIPPO**, and that it was already up to 400 pages. Perhaps we're talking Encyclopedia Zippo here?

MAXIMUM ROCKNRROLL continues to flail in the wake of **TIM YOHANNAN**'s tragic death; it's still got the traditional format and the traditional idealism, but really seems lost in terms of direction. Of the old standbys, only **MYKEL BOARD** and - I don't know if he's been there long enough to be an "old standby," but he's definitely old - **GEORGE TABB** remain. Meanwhile, **JEFF BAILE**'s **HIT LIST** is massive and growing by leaps and bounds. Luckily it only comes out every two months, because there's way too much in it to read in one. **PUNK PLANET** has grown too, and between the two magazines, much of the territory that MRR used to have a monopoly over is covered.

And, still dwelling in a parallel but fascinating universe, is **KENT McCLARD**'s **HeartattaCk**. I only pick it up once a year or so, and I've never heard of any of the bands, but somebody must have, because the readers fill most of the magazine with their opinions and knowledge about them. Still no bar codes, though the last issue I saw had a raging discussion about whether this restriction still had any meaning in 1999.

Yes, I could go on forever, and seem like I'm in danger of doing just that, but now I've *really* got to finish this up. So to all of you who didn't get mentioned, or who think my opinion sucks, or just want me to shut up, write and tell me about it. Next time it could be **YOU** in the big bold print. Or **ME** sporting a big black eye for talking just a little bit too much shit.

Woody The Incredible Three-Legged Wonder Dog

Woody wasn't stupid, just stubborn. If you accept the AA definition of insanity, that of performing the same action over and over again but expecting a different result, you might say he was off his rocker.

That's how he became a three-legged dog. It wasn't that he didn't know cars could hurt you. Even after his accident, he was always having close calls with cars. I saw him get hit two or three times, just glancing blows. He'd look at the driver indignantly and keep on walking through the traffic. He just didn't give a fuck.

He didn't literally have three legs, but he kept his crippled rear leg tucked up under his body so it looked that way. He could still use it for balance and steering, and he could run almost as fast as a normal dog. He didn't usually bother running, but he'd make an exception for the police and the dogcatcher.

Technically he belonged to my brother, but by the time he was two or three years old, half the people in Ann Arbor and Berkeley thought of him as their dog. He'd commute back and forth between the two cities as regularly as the hippies did, so you'd never know for sure where he'd be.

More than once he just hopped into a van full of people heading across the country, and after a few days someone in Berkeley would say, "Hey, anybody seen Woody lately?" Then we'd hear from someone in Ann Arbor, "Oh, I just saw him on the Diag." How he'd gotten there would be anyone's guess.

Then, a few months later, usually when the weather was turning cold back east, you'd run into him again on Telegraph, and he'd give you that mournful look that meant "Got any food?"

Woody was kind of like that Woody Allen character, Zelig, in that he had a knack for always turning up in the middle of big events. When John Lennon and Yoko Ono did their benefit show for John Sinclair, there was Woody, sleeping under the stage.

He saw more rock concerts than all of us combined, I think. Even if none of us had tickets, he'd go meandering in and stroll right up to the front. I don't know if he liked the music or the crowds, or if it was just that there was a lot of free food to be had.

Once he helped a whole bunch of us crash a sold-out Grateful Dead show. We were trying our usual technique, all running together at the line of security guards with the idea that at least one or two of us would get past each time.

But it wasn't working. There were too many of them. Woody joined in the fun. He'd run up and down the row of guards nipping at their heels as they were trying to shove us back out of the hall.

Finally they got so pissed off that they started trying to catch him. He'd have a whole line of guards chasing after him, then suddenly he'd reverse field and they'd run into a group of guards coming the other way. It was total chaos, better than Laurel and Hardy and the Three Stooges combined.

We saw our chance and took it; while the guards were occupied with Woody, we went tearing into the arena. Someone saw us and yelled "Get those motherfuckers!"

I turned around and saw twenty red-faced goons tearing after us. It wasn't going to be pretty if they caught us.

Suddenly Woody came streaking to the head of the pack. He did a deft little maneuver through the legs of the first guard and sent him sprawling across the floor. Two or three more tripped over him, and while they were picking themselves up, Woody led us up to his favorite spot in front of the stage just as the lights went down.

In 1972 the hippies managed to get a majority on the Ann Arbor City Council. One of the first things the Council did was to lower the penalty for possession or sales of marijuana to a \$5 fine. People were already wearing t-shirts that boasted we were "Dope Capital of the Midwest," and this pretty much made us dope capital of the USA.

Since in most places you could get put in prison for 20 years to life for marijuana, this was big news, and the TV networks came to cover the Council meeting when they changed the law. Naturally Woody was there, and he made one of his more memorable entrances.

Just as the TV lights went on and the mayor began to speak, Woody walked across the floor in front of the entire audience, right up to the table where the mayor was sitting. The mayor kept on talking, trying to pretend that everyone was listening to him instead of snickering at this funny-looking dog, but Woody wouldn't be upstaged.

One of the advantages of having a permanently lifted rear leg is that a dog is ready to piss anytime, anywhere. And that's just what Woody did, treating the leg of the mayor's table as if it were a tree or a fire hydrant. It brought down the house. They still passed the marijuana bill, but it was kind of anticlimactic.

Another time Woody used his lifted leg to maximum effect was on a devastatingly hot day in the summer of 1973. Richard, Woody and I were hanging out in the stone church on E. Kingsley, near State Street. It was really pleasant in there, at least 20 degrees cooler than outside.

Richard was dressed - barely - in one of his virgin whore outfits. He still had his long red hair then, hanging nearly to his waist. Seen from behind, it would fool anyone into thinking he was a woman. He was wearing a sort of bra-like bit of silk tied around his chest, and a pair of cutoffs so brief that his cock and balls flopped out the side.

For some reason he decided to lie down on the altar. I don't mean the altar where the priest stands, I mean the raised bit where he does the mumbo jumbo. Richard was lying there semi-naked, a long-stemmed rose in his teeth, and surrounded by some candles I had put there, when the priest and a couple of elderly parishioners walked in.

It was one of those awkward moments when nobody knew just what to say, but Woody broke the tension by doing his urination trick on the corner of the altar. While the priest was trying to recover from that, Richard and I gathered ourselves and strolled out of the church with as much dignity as we could muster. Richard added, "Bless me father, for I have sinned" as we went out the door.

I wish the story of Woody had a happier ending, but back in Berkeley in 1974, he fell in with a bad crowd. There was a whole gang of people and dogs that used to hang out in front of a little market on Telegraph, just north of Haste.