

BOOK II

VIETNAM: DANCING TO THE MUSIC OF THE MOVEMENT

God said to Abraham, “Kill me a son.”
Abe said, “Man, you must be puttin’ me on.”
God said, “No”; Abe said, “What?”
God said, “You can do what you want Abe, but
the next time you see me comin’, you better run!”
Abe said, “Where you want this killin’ done?”
God said, “Down on Highway 61.”

— Bob Dylan, “Highway 61 Revisited”

And there before the Holy Vessel, dancing
with girt-up robes, the humble Psalmist moved,
less than a king, and more, in his wild prancing.

— Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* (X, 61-63): Shocking the
public with his breach of decorum, King David dances in
religious ecstasy.

Chapter 1

**GETTING TO WOODSTOCK: THE ANTI-WAR
CULTURE AND THE WAR**

By the time we got to Woodstock,
We were half a million strong.

— Joni Mitchell, “Woodstock”

What was the meaning of the gathering of the tribe at the Woodstock Music and Arts Fair in August 1969? A columnist in a Chicago newspaper called Woodstock insignificant, sniffing that no one declared a Sousa nation when a hundred thousand people came to John Phillip’s Sunday concerts. Farmer Max Yasgur called it inspirational, praising the mistrusted “kids” who camped on his land for showing the world that there could be “three days of fun and music...and nothing but fun and music.” And counter-culture gadfly Abbie Hoffman called it historic, proclaiming “the birth of the Woodstock Nation and the death of the American dinosaur” on behalf of his Youth International Party — a party as in a moveable feast of YIPpies, not as in rules and duties.

But these adults were just projecting on us what they thought the world needed: the columnist, some peace and quiet already; Max, the mutual respect that could calm troubled waters; and Abbie, a generation of Babylon’s servants who would function as human monkey wrenches. The true Woodstock was far too complex and contradictory to be found on this simple continuum from entertainment to brotherhood to revolution. Woodstock was an ending as much as a beginning, a separation as much as a union of the counter-culture and the anti-war movement, and a demonstration of the difficulty of translating the music into not just rejection but action. It was not the dinosaur but the Movement that died with the end of the Vietnam War. Indeed, the dinosaur killed the Movement, absorbing it in a way that softened the beast’s aggressiveness, but only for a while.

We weren’t “half a million strong,” if that meant half a million people with a commitment to joint action. Despite growing cynicism, most people at Woodstock wanted to “do some-

thing” about the System that perpetuated war, racism and poverty, but they were too busy gaining independence to submit to any leader’s plan. But if Joni Mitchell’s estimate was high for joint action, it was low if it referred to the number of young Americans who were part of the anti-political political consciousness that was represented by Woodstock, a consciousness that rejected the prevailing culture and the war. For every naif who was there for “nothing but fun and music,” there were ten angry young men and women in America who had already rejected the System’s values, if not its demands, and who were at Woodstock in spirit if not in body.

We couldn’t explain our position too well, because the schools and the media were apologists, limiting our information and giving the System’s perspective a normalcy it didn’t deserve. We simply sensed that Johnson and Nixon and their generals and spies were murderous liars. We could hear it in our music, which told us subliminally but certainly that these vendors of the culture of death should never get their hands on the children of the culture of life. We could see it in the televised contortions of presidential mouths as they debased sacred words like honor and freedom and appeasement and aggression and, most frequently, democracy. (Nixon soon revealed his democratic character on the Watergate tapes, and Robert Caro revealed Johnson’s for him fifteen years later in a biography that showed him stealing his election to the Senate in 1948.) The millions in our larger Woodstock Nation had one thing in common, and that was being members of the Vietnam Generation, people whose lives would always be defined by the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement. It may seem strange to some readers that an analysis of US foreign policy would start at Woodstock; to me, it would be strange if it didn’t.

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Like nine out of ten men in the Vietnam Generation, I didn’t go to Vietnam. I didn’t have to; it came to me. The cries of fear and pain from the death march of young Americans and Vietnamese of all ages gathered into a dense storm that jumped the barrier of the Pacific and burst over America. Our house was shaken, weakening my father’s faith in the institutions to which he had dedicated his life. I took a direct hit, the hopefulness of the Movement being transformed to bitterness by our apparent weakness before corporate power and public complacency. By the war’s

end, my father was dead and I was broken, and the generation that wanted to change the world was lying stunned in the wreckage of its dreams.

Vietnam was the prism through which the Movement saw America. We believed instinctively, correctly, that the cause for this tragedy could be found in the culture, and so we searched scathingly through everything that was supposed to define America. Norman Mailer captured this mood just by juxtaposing a book's title, *Why We Are in Vietnam*, with its content, a story of an all-male hunting expedition in Alaska in which Vietnam is not even mentioned until the last page. Vietnam was also the prism through which we saw our families: the life of the honest citizen who raised children, paid taxes and gave to the United Way and the NAACP, and had scraped together money for a house, a car, modest vacations, and a country club was an affront to those being napalmed by the same system. Preparing yourself for a life like that was like aspiring to be one of Kitty Genovese's quiet neighbors, or a "good German."

Youthfulness was one casualty of the war. The awareness of what my country was doing was a constant, gloomy, enraging presence that made me old and cynical almost before I was ever young and naive. To enjoy classes, sports, or dates was to be a fool for the System. For a brief moment in American history, white youth experienced a taste of black youth's alienation, in which success is a degrading act of collaboration with your oppressor. White students were not, as one of the slogans said, "niggers," since the dose of humiliation, attack, and murder to which we were subjected was too small and irregular a quantity of the black share to be of the same quality. Many of us were, however, Ralph Ellison's Invisible Men and Women where it counted most, in our minds. At first, fighting the war culture created a bond of vitality between us, but as the war dragged numbingly on, the bond became chains of powerlessness. The promise that had wafted through the air, a blend of the innocent optimism of all youth and the insistent altruism that we uniquely proclaimed, was polluted by death.

At the core of the Vietnam Generation are those who saw or felt the carnage of war. It is a surprisingly small core: only a third of the 27 million draft-age males joined the armed forces, only a third of those went to Southeast Asia, and only a third of

those, the one million combat soldiers, were in a position to see themselves, friends, enemies, or civilians ripped apart. For that million, both government propaganda and anti-war rhetoric must have seemed obscene in their attempt to give meaning to insanity, as the noble speeches did to the hero of A Farewell to Arms:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it.

The next level out from the core includes the millions of people, many of them soldiers, whose friends or relatives were killed or wounded. I am not one. It was a working-class war, and I'm from an upper-class family. The only person I knew who died in Vietnam was a feeble-minded "hood" who got caught running freight trains off their tracks by changing switches in the Ithaca yards, and was given the same obscene choice by his judge that Jimi Hendrix and so many other young men have been given since the dawn of time: jail or the army. Then, there is the level of people, of whom I am one, who didn't go to Vietnam but somehow felt it and absorbed it. In "Song of Myself," Walt Whitman claimed:

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch,
burnt with dry wood, her children gazing on,
The hounded slave that flags in the race,
leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat,
The twinges that sting like needles
his legs and neck,
the murderous buckshot and the bullets,
All these I feel or am....
Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels,
I myself become the wounded person,
My hurt turns livid as I lean on a cane and observe.

Just so did many us who escaped by virtue of class, gender, or luck feel some of the victims' pain, rage, and powerlessness. Our souls were lacerated by the moans of US and South Vietnamese soldiers dying with little belief in their cause and North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front soldiers dying with more belief in theirs, but all still dying, lying in the mud, riddled with sharp metal, life oozing out in frigid drops despite the clammy heat, all dehumanized into the singular as commanders radioed in the body count: "We got three GI, four ARVN, two NVA, beaucoup VC here." We felt our little bit of the lasting horror of the peasants slaughtered at My Lai and a thousand other deadly encounters with the foreign giants; of the partisans turned over by US officers to South Vietnamese soldiers for torture, screaming at their fate that was known to all present; of the thousand residents of Hué murdered by the NLF for suspected links to one enemy and of the thousands of residents of dozens of cities murdered by William Colby's Operation Phoenix for suspected links to another; of the families fleeing the ever-expanding free-fire zones where fire and iron descended arbitrarily from the skies; of the village women who were raped by US and allied soldiers and of the city women who sold their bodies to Americans to feed their families.

The final, faintest level of the Vietnam Generation is the majority of my peers who simply went on with their lives, aware of the war but not consumed by it. Even this group shares with the others something that has not defined a generation since the Civil War, the concept of divided loyalty. Whether or not we opposed the war and blamed the culture for fueling it, we believed that to be a legitimate position, whereas generations for whom war was a mission (World War I), a clear-cut duty (World War II), and an unavoidable chore (Korea) could not accept Americans opposing an American war. Our divided loyalty was reinforced by the civil rights movement, which imprinted on us the troubling notion that "law and order," even if approved democratically, are not as important as the underlying values of justice and freedom. Those of us who opposed the unjust war abroad and the unjust peace at home burned with a need to tell the world that we were not complicitous. In 1898 Emile Zola expressed his anger and alienation at his *System* by shouting, "J'Accuse!" In the 1960s, we expressed ours through our music.

In 1965 Bob Dylan merged folk music, the music of protest, with rock n' roll, the music of personal freedom. WHAP-BOOM! Drummer Bobby Gregg sat down at his kit in a New York studio one spring afternoon and with a rap on his snare and a thump on his bass, just a little flick of a wrist and a flexing of an ankle, started a revolution. Gregg powered a pick-up blues band as it felt its way for six minutes, meandering at first and then muscling in with more and more certainty, through a poem that Dylan had just put to music as "Like a Rolling Stone." It was an immediate anthem, the embodiment of a generation, the greatest song in American history if greatness is measured in impact as well as quality.

The song owed its magic to three white Jewish kids, but it was black as night, a new soaring branch in the tree of American music that is rooted in black experience and black ambivalence. Dylan (born Zimmerman) had learned his sneering, drawling vocals from the blues singers he had driven for hours to hear as a teenager in northern Minnesota. Mike Bloomfield added the stinging guitar lines of the Chicago bluesmen who had tutored him. The signature organ part came from Al Kooper, a local guitarist who had sheepishly packed up his ax after hearing Bloomfield warm up. During the hubbub of some equipment changes, Kooper sneaked back into the studio to toy surreptitiously with the pulsing power of the Hammond B-3 organ, which had become the crown prince of black jazz in the late 1950s. Dylan heard the traces of Kooper's simple overlay to the song's chorus during the playback, and ordered the engineer to boost it into overdrive in the final mix.

It was a bitter song, a ballad of revenge on people who not only conformed to America's expectations but incorporated them into their souls. "How does it feel," Dylan moaned aggressively, "to be on your own, with no direction home" to be a dehumanized winner in the banal, evil sweepstakes? "It was like swimming in lava," Dylan said about the time he sat down to the piano and heard the words of his poem singing to him, "in the utmost of slow motion." Indeed it was, and he threw into the lava the people who "dressed so fine, threw the bums a dime," who had "gone to the finest schools," and who "ride on the chrome horse with your diplomat," just as Dante threw corrupt politicians into

burning pitch in the circle of hell he reserved for the fraudulent, searing and enveloping them with their own guilt.

All these people who “used to be so amused, at Napoleon in rags and the language that he used,” were adrift but didn’t, couldn’t know it. If you were one of them, “you got nothing, you got nothing to lose. You’re invisible now, with no secrets to conceal.” Dylan’s targets here were not the naturally blind, the old folks he had often disparaged, but rather those among his own peers who put blinders on voluntarily. Like Dante with his violators of the public trust, Dylan was enraged by his peers precisely because they had made a commitment to be different. Those who betrayed themselves by retreating to the comfort of familiar mores had betrayed their compatriots all the more. Dylan lacerated them with sharp words just as Dante had demons take pruning hooks to the grafters when they tried to come up out of the pitch for a breath of air.

The words of the song were complicated, their meaning obscure to the young people who rushed to buy the record and gave Dylan his first and only Number One hit. But as John Lennon said, you didn’t have to get Dylan’s words, since it was the way he sang them that mattered. The anger, the disgust, the weariness with society’s fraud, the refusal to take part in it; all came through loud and clear, powered by the wall of sound behind his new music. Dylan’s rock n’ roll wasn’t as literally political as his folk music, but as biographer Anthony Scaduto points out, paradoxically it was far more potent, since it led American youth down the path it had feared to tread: the path of simple rejection. Folk purists longing for more of Dylan’s explicit calls to arms called his move to rock a sell-out, but it did more to radicalize the world than all the protest songs ever written. Like black English, the music that led to Woodstock was a pointed act of exclusion, a way of talking to each other without the enemy understanding. The lyrics were almost unimportant. The real talking was in the sound of the instruments and the voices, demanding to be heard with all their rough edges and intonations.

The head and neck injuries Dylan sustained in a motorcycle accident in 1966 put him out of commission for a few years — and in some ways, forever, since he never regained his essential certainty. But the avalanche he had started roared on, crashing through the peaceful village: rock n’ roll was now a rebellion

against the war, the culture, and the System, whether or not the songs mentioned politics at all. Art is rarely as dangerous as artists and their targets think it is. Had Hitler not attacked “degenerate” art in the 1930s as part of his campaign to rally Germany behind him, the average person would never have been exposed to the works in question. Similarly, with his attack on “obscene” art fifty years later, Senator Jesse Helms brought the work of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe to more people than the artist could ever have imagined. But in the 1960s, the artists and authorities were briefly right: rock n’ roll was dangerous to the state, and especially to its war. Pop music soon reverted to entertainment and romance rather than subversion, until black rap slammed into a sleeping nation in the 1980s.

There was always a whiff of counter-revolution in the music, raising the risk that sex, drugs, and rock n’ roll were becoming our bread and circuses, but the music’s message that personal freedom was incompatible with political authority easily outweighed this effect. Cops and bureaucrats didn’t rock; the troops in Vietnam lived on the nastiest, angriest, most counter-cultural rock they could find, and woe to the brass who tried to take away their tunes. A dichotomy coined by the Rolling Stones — “It’s the singer, not the song” — shows the link between personal and political revolt. The personal revolt of the singer had been hinted at in the 1950s by beats like Alan Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac, but had become clearer as the benign consumerism of the ruling culture of their generation gave way to the violent resistance of the ruling culture of ours. It was a proud cry of rage: “I am alive and kicking, I am not defined by you old folks and your fucked-up system and values, I am energy and justice, I am the singer, I’ll create my own experience and not just slide into your boring maw.” The political revolt of the song meant: “War, prejudice, and poverty are protected by complacency, so complacency must be challenged as much as the wrongs themselves; we refuse to support your machine, and if that doesn’t change things, we’ll jam it up ourselves.”

Celebrating the singer was a necessary first step, but not everybody took the next step of acting on the song. The singers were subversive, but to be revolutionary they had to be organized behind one song, and organization smacked of throwing off one set of cultural rules just to accept another. The anti-war move-

ment that stunned America and helped end the war did so with the active assistance of only a sliver of the Woodstock Nation. Its leaders despaired, since they saw dissolving before their eyes a vision of young people organizing to demand change in every hamlet of America. But like scientists trying to examine gravitational force, the leaders were too close to the power of the phenomenon to assess it. The personal revolt of the tens of millions in the Woodstock Nation laid the groundwork for the few millions who actually took to the streets against the war, and the few thousands who stayed to join other political causes. Our music was, as the Rolling Stones sang, splashed upon a stone, but there was so much of it that furrows were created to channel the flood in the right direction.

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Sex, drugs, and rock n' roll...What were the roles of the first two parts of our mantra in the counter-culture that culminated at Woodstock? The music was an affirmation of the senses and the possibilities of life — which didn't include suburbia or law school. Sex and drugs provided just as intense an affirmation, but where the music linked you to your peers and so promised at least indirect political action, sex and drugs were almost entirely personal, almost anti-social. New York's "swinging singles" clubs aside (which weren't our generation's doing), there never was much free love (which was our doing) being performed in groups in the 1960s. And as for drugs, well, while alcohol makes people want to link arms with their suddenly wonderful neighbors and either sing or go beat up strangers together, dope makes you want to sit back and groove on the rainy day in your mind. Interaction with others is too complex to undertake with a head full of good grass, let alone substances farther up the food chain, like opium-tinged hash, mescaline, LSD, and the big sleep, heroin, which makes people act externally like suburbanites even though they claim that the inside of their minds and body are rushing around like spit on a hot griddle.

So taking a trip on Dylan's magic, swirling ship wasn't political, except that by being illegal it gave you one more reason to "watch the parking meters," to mistrust any authority but your own. Still, drugs were educational for our generation, sort of our equivalent of high school in that they helped form a common set of experiences and showed the amazing possibilities of life out-

side the war culture....assuming you took enough time between adventures so you could even remember the previous one. We were criticized for using drugs as a crutch, as a sign of our emptiness. And these criticisms were correct. We were empty, since, as the Jefferson Airplane sang, the truth had been found to be lies, the ruling culture had failed the country and us, and so we did need a crutch. When Dylan sang in Mr. Tambourine Man, "Thy ancient empty street's too dead for dreamin'," he was singing about our parents' street, the culture that was deadened by self-congratulatory platitudes, compromises, and mediocrity.

The routine of adult life mounts a conspiracy against the ability to dream great dreams and attempt great feats. All children sense that tragic secret in their parents before, as Franz Fanon insists, they discover their own destiny and either pursue or betray it. Our parents were no emptier than any other generation, including our own now that we are grown, but the crises of the times demanded more of them, and so exposed them all the more. And there was nothing intrinsically more altruistic about our generation that created a greater share of rebels in the '60s than beatniks in the '50s or punk rockers in the '80s. It was simply that the vicious immediacy of the war and race hatred forced more of us to lose faith in the ruling culture. Drugs were a result, not a cause of that loss.

None of the physical danger of drugs or moral danger of feeding the drug trade registered on me in my youth. At Woodstock, announcer "Chip" Monck warned that the brown acid that was floating around was "not specifically too good," implying that some other mind-bending chemicals being passed around by strangers presumably were. In that naive day, the grass was grown down on someone's farm, and the LSD was mixed in a college lab, and we thought that made it safe. We were wrong, of course, to think it safe to trust a friend who was at the end of a long chain of unregulated capitalists to provide "good" LSD, when by its nature LSD is supposed to scramble your perceptions of the world in random ways. Still, there was a quaint quality about traffickers of softer drugs, as opposed to heroin pushers, whom even we knew as capitalists and murderers selling something that turned you into a drooling junkie or a corpse. We saw grass and acid dealers as kindred spirits, pirates and rebels with as much

pride in their wares as the Italian waiter who would rather throw himself into the Arno than bring you a bad liter of wine.

One young summer, I met a dealer while driving up the four-lane highway connecting New York City with the Finger Lakes. He flagged me down as he stood by his disabled car, and when he saw his reflection in my age and the hair over my shoulders, he ducked back into the trunk and grabbed an attaché case. Within a minute of being in the car, he flipped the case open and offered me anything I wanted to ease the final miles. It was a portable drug store, with a series of cardboard panels with vials and pipes strapped neatly into them hanging from the top, bags filled with various colors of powders, and underneath it all 50 sheets of paper with little black dots scattered over them like beauty marks on a contessa's face...the week's supply of LSD for the Ithaca market. He suggested some "mild" grass, with a sprinkling of opium, and he merrily prepared a joint, describing his ingredients like a twisted Julia Childs.

We left the highway for the 30 miles of two-lane road to Ithaca, and smoked the joint by a diner. We sat in the diner over coffee, and the dealer was speaking very fast, the diner was throbbing with activity, and we were there a very, very long time. Back on the road, we agreed that the music on the radio was just too quiet for us to feel properly, so we turned it up until only the beat and the brapping of the speakers remained. Then we agreed that it was necessary to bounce the tone between total treble and total bass, again to get a better feel for the music. It was awfully hot and stuffy in the car, so we turned off the heat and opened the windows, but it was still so hot that we had to stick our heads out the windows and drive down the road like railroad engineers, peering ahead into the night. I was going way too fast, tearing along the curves of the country road, feeling my insides swing like the tide in response to gravity, but I just couldn't bring myself to slow down and spoil the fun. We started to scream out train whistles, answering the other's calls in a cascade of creative bellows.

Suddenly, the party was over. A country sheriff had seen us drive by, leaning out the windows, screaming and laughing. On came the bubble-gum machine, and I pulled over. He stared at our silly grins and our immunity to the white noise of the radio, and he leaned inside and turned it off. "Do you know how

fast you were going?" Oh no, I thought, here comes one of those hundred dollar speeding tickets. "I really didn't think I was going over 55," I replied, and he looked at me even more strangely. "55? You were going five miles an hour! Have you been drinking?" The dealer and I started to laugh uncontrollably. Our wild careening had been a three-mile crawl. Our crazed hours in the manic coffee shop had probably been five minutes in an empty room. It was freezing outside, not incredibly hot. Reality depended on the condition in which you faced it. Drinking? Hardly. On we went, since before the "war on drugs" County Mounties had no grounds for booking or searching harmless, if strange, kids. I eventually gave the dealer door-to-door service, and his last words were those of a proud merchant: "Good shit, huh?"

I didn't want to take a toke for months, maybe years after that. You only need to be in an altered state once in a while, maybe once in a lifetime, to get the point about the many ways to see and choose and live. But there were people who didn't want just to inform themselves about the other world of introspection, but actually to live in it, all the time. One was a dealer from Ithaca College named Daley, who called his business Daily Drugs to distinguish it from his father's pharmaceutical company. He took an avuncular interest in our house full of high school graduates in the summer of 1969, listening in his constantly stoned condition to tales of our revolutionary activities...like riding various conveyances on ruling class golf courses, ripping up the greens in front of the outraged golfers waving their clubs ...or sitting on our porch and screaming at the owners of Lincolns and Cadillacs: "Ten Vietnamese babies died to put the rubber on your fuckin' tires, asshole!" or "Blood! I smell Vietnamese blood all over that fuckin' car!" (Beat-up Fords and Volkswagens didn't have that killer look, I suppose.)

Young Daley kept encouraging me to take "that California trip" (named for a line from the Rolling Stones' cover of Nat King Cole's "Route 66"), and I didn't need much encouragement. My friend Fritz Kiersch was detailed to escort me, and one sunny morning I dropped half a little brown tab onto my tongue. Fritz quickly regretted taking on the task, since I became a human version of the Katzenjammer Kids, the Germanic cartoon twins who live to disrupt. I started throwing everything in the house to the ground, delighting in the noise and mayhem, until in a flash of

insight he sat me under a tree with the stern warning that if I took my right hand off it would die. I sat happily for the next few hours stroking and admiring its bark and roots, until Fritz decided to go swimming. All was well until he stopped the car on the way there to get a watermelon.

Fritz held my arm as we passed down the aisles of the supermarket, which blazed with neon and the sunlight that poured in the front window. I became irritated at the buzzing neon, which I had never heard before, and as we turned a corner, I churlishly punched a five-foot pyramid of canned corn. Wow! It sounded like a brass band being dropped into a garbage can. Even before the last of the couple hundred cans stopped skittering down the aisle, my eyes lit up at the myriad possibilities of making more noises like that. Fritz had seen those gleeful eyes earlier, so he grabbed a melon and prodded me toward the cashier, hissing, "No, no, no," as I reached out to the colorful boxes and cans along the way. At the check-out counter, I began to focus on how remarkably full of feature people's faces were as I loomed forward to match my eyes with theirs from inches away. Nobody seemed to mind, since I wasn't belligerent, but Fritz raged until we got to the car where, realizing the story he could tell, he started to laugh hysterically.

At Beebe Lake Bridge, Fritz swam while I leered at the crowd from a shady bank forty feet above, smearing my face and then my body with the cool insides of my half of the melon. I imagined I was Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, and I bellowed "Sanctuary!" as I swung out over the cliff, holding with one hand to a slender tree trunk and clinging with the other to the melon as if it were Esmerelda, my dear gypsy girl. Fritz whisked me away from this dangerous promontory, and drove us up the road a mile to safe Flat Rocks, where children wade in slow, shallow waters. My presence here also became untenable, as parents began to cast concerned glances as I sat happily among the babies, as oblivious to them as they were to each other, gazing at the sunny water that was flowing over, and it seemed actually through, my skin, and trying to mimic the gurgling of the wavelets.

Fritz brought me home and called up Matt Cleary, offering him a pizza if he'd watch me for the rest of the trip. The deal made, Fritz pointed me down the sidewalk toward Matt's apart-

ment, which was not more than 100 yards away, just past the bridge over Cascadilla Gorge. I sat down halfway across, scared that I could fall through the tiny metal shapes down to the rocks and water hundreds of feet below. I was going to die, and it was going to hurt. Every car that came rumbling over the bridge, its tires whining on the metal, made me cry in fear. My mind was racing from thought to thought, from stimulus to stimulus, sounds, sights, smells all overwhelming and terrifying me, my physical hunger turning into a spiritual horror like I had never known.

Matt found me dazed on the bridge, and bundled me off to a room he and his roommates had outfitted precisely to bring people down from this kind of trip. In front of a powerful light bulb they had rigged up a pizza platter made of colorful plastic slices. A motor turned the platter slowly, changing the light from red to blue to green. The safe predictability of this display was a relief from the petrifying relativity of life, from the orgy of chance I saw contained in freely-moving objects. As Matt left the house to go to work, assuming from my mellow look that his duty was done, he slammed the door...which knocked down the platter, leaving only the whirring of the motor and the glare of the strobe light. I knew I was staring at a terribly bright light that was going to blind me for life, but I couldn't look away, because the purples and browns my eyes were imposing on the light were so fascinating, and so reminiscent of colors I'd seen as a child, softly rubbing my eyes while drifting off to sleep.

And so I sat there, crying because I was going blind...when miraculously a being marched into the room. It was a man in a swim suit, a fish-man, with a mask on his face and a snorkel coming up out of the mask, and he had giant black flippers on his feet. This was enough to snap me out of my trance, and I looked away from the lightbulb, and at him, relieved and amazed. "Hi, I'm George," said the Creature from the Black Lagoon, who apparently was one of Matt's room-mates who had been invited to go snorkeling the next day, and was practicing by wearing the gear around, walking in and out of the shower and then lying in the bathtub. He was either a little stoned himself, or naturally stoned as many of our generation were, but he grasped my predicament, flipped off the light, and saved my sight.

There was nowhere to go but Daily Drugs, which fortunately was downhill too, on the same street. I arrived with a pained look that told Daley I needed sustenance to handle the battle in my body. He rushed me into his old de Ville (no dead babies on this Hank Williams special), and set the automatic seat on full rotation as we glided down State Street hill. The bricks made a comforting rumble underneath us as we steered for the Italian Carry-out and the saving pizza. Along about midnight, when he dropped me off, my roommates were sitting on the porch in the hot evening, listening to Fritz tell his Caleb in the grocery store, Caleb making love to a watermelon story for the tenth time. I sat down gingerly in the midst of accolades and laughter, once and for all, and never again, as Jimi Hendrix said, really experienced. It was fascinating out there on the edge with your very own monster, but dangerous and lonely. And if you spent too much time out there, you'd never get anything done in the real world. That awareness tilted my inclinations away from the counter-culture and toward the anti-war movement. Dylan was right when he sang in Mr. Tambourine Man:

Though you might hear laughing spinning
Swinging madly across the sun
It's not aimed at anyone
It's just escaping on the run

And, but for the sky, there are no fences facing.

The drug culture and its intense self-exploration was part of our generation's rejection of society's rules and the greed, violence, and hate that went with them. But it wasn't aimed enough at anyone for my tastes, wasn't going to change quickly enough the acts we were responsible for as a nation, wasn't going to tear down the fences facing us. There had to be political change along with the spiritual change, and we could only achieve that out in the streets, not up in the clouds. And my first steps toward the streets took me right on down to Yagur's farm.

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