

Shrink Rap: Summer of Love Reunion

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Originally published in *Coast Magazine*, October 2007

I never made it to any of my high school or college reunions. But I wasn't going to miss attending the recent 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love in beautiful Golden Gate Park. And what a reunion and celebration it was, especially for those of us who were old enough to remember.

On a perfect San Francisco day, more than 50,000 people of all ages came to celebrate love, compassion, and understanding - the meaning of the 1967 Summer of Love.

Performers included Lester Chambers from The Chambers Brothers, singing his potent hit "Time;" Country Joe MacDonald; Taj Mahal; Buddy Miles; a reunion of Moby Grape; and Canned Heat. It was topped off by an unannounced appearance by Paul Kantner and his latest edition of Jefferson Starship, including original Airplane vocalist Marty Balin. The day was filled with musicians who were veterans of the Fillmore and Avalon era in San Francisco playing together in various configurations.

For me, it felt like a reunion with the tribe, reminiscing with those who had lived through that time, when we were coming of age during the exciting and turbulent '60s and early '70s. While wandering through the crowd, I experienced a wave of nostalgia, flashing back on the many concerts and gatherings I'd attended like this one during those times. I reflected on how much my generation had changed over the last 40 years - how far we'd come, individually and collectively.

We'd gone from idealistic, righteous, highly experimental, risk-taking college students and hippies who were going to change our society and the world to mostly conventional and established citizens on the cusp of retirement, who now had a slice of the economic pie, with many of the comforts, rewards and responsibilities that come with success and maturity. I realized once again how time and accumulated life experience have a way of grinding down and softening the sharp edges of youthful idealism.

Many of us did our best to retain the values of our youth by finding ways of integrating them socially and professionally to forge viable lives for ourselves. We decided to enter careers that would serve others. So we became doctors, nurses, do-good lawyers, social workers, and teachers rather than investment bankers or stock brokers.

We learned, through our successes and failures, how much any generation - no matter how well-meaning and dedicated - was both able and unable to change the world on all levels.

While many of the cultural aspects of the '60s made a definite mark on future generations, our idealistic politics had limited long-range impact. After all, here we are, 40 years later, fighting another unpopular war. At the same time, we may be on the verge of electing our first female president, a savvy and politically toughened boomer idealist if there ever was one.

I met one man, now 59, who told me how he'd had a low draft lottery number and decided to high-tail it to Vancouver. He stayed there two years and upon returning, had to pay \$20,000 and spend two months in jail for draft evasion. I asked him if, all these years later, he'd have made the same decision. He replied, "I had to do the right thing then and I'd do it again now."

I mentioned to another guy how I remembered being a little frightened by the rhetoric and tactics of the Black Panthers, who were headquartered in Oakland when I was a student at Berkeley. He told me he went to junior college with Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale and remembered them as "thugs." Curiously, over the years, Cleaver became quite conservative in his politics. And Bobby Seale now hawks a book of barbeque recipes. Like all the rest of us who managed to survive the '60s, their sharp edges got tempered by the ravages of time.