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'IT WAS LIKE THE BEST PARTY'

SUMMER OF LOVE



EXAMINER/JOHN STOREY

By Donna Horowitz
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**SUMMER
OF LOVE:
30 YEARS
LATER**
◆
Second of
three parts

NOVATO — Dig it.

Archaeologist Breck Parkman is about to delve into the moldering ruins of a native culture where men and women professed vows of love at peculiar nude ceremonies, raised their children in a tribe, and smoked an exotic weed.

He hasn't yet spotted any pictographs or stone tools among the ruins — though he knows for a

fact the inhabitants were often stoned. He has seen half-burned candles and melted Beatles albums.

Parkman is studying the fire-gutted mansion in the midst of the Olompali State Historic Park here that was home 30 years ago to the Olompali commune. It was the sacred land of the '60s and the self-named Chosen Family, a ragtag band of resident hippies.

The earnestly alternative commune lifestyle was distilled essence of the '60s. "The Summer of Love," Merry Prankster and novelist Ken Kesey once said, "be-

[See *COMMUNE*, A-12]

Digging it at historic Olompali

Reunited at Olompali, from left, top row: Sheila McCoy, 64; Don McCoy, 67; Sheri Zeelen, 40; Oleg USSR, 58. **Middle row:** Ming Adler, 35; Lalo Vquela, 77; Noelle Olompali, 46; Buz Rowell, 54. **Flanking old door:** Siobhan McKendrick, 37, and Sandy Barton, 77.

HAIGHT ASHBURY V.F.

◆ **COMMUNE** from A-1

Digging the history of Summer of Love

gan one afternoon at Olompali."

Goats, horses, dogs, kids and their child-like parents had the run of the place for the two years the commune survived. There was free love, drugs — with two major drug busts in '69 — and the "Not School" for kids, run by teacher Garnet Brennan, who had lost her establishment gig as principal of the Nicasio School when she admitted smoking pot to alleviate stress.

Men, women and children wore fringed leather vests, boots, bell-bottoms and floppy hats — or nothing at all — and swayed to the riffs of entertaining visitors like the Grateful Dead, who stopped by on weekends.

"It was like the best party you've ever been to that never ends," said Noelle Barton Olompali, who moved to the commune when she was 17 and is so enamored of her life there that she adopted the community's name as her own.

It wasn't all laughs. There were rivers of tears as well. Two-year-old Nika Carter and Audrey Keller, 3, died after tumbling into the murky swimming pool while riding a tricycle at Olompali the summer of '69. The tragedy sparked the wrath of local officials, who very nearly shut the place down.

"There are numerous individuals and small children living in extremely dangerous and unsanitary conditions on this property," Douglas Maloney, then Marin County counsel, declared at the time.

In November 1968, a horse from the commune wandered onto U.S. 101 and a truck driver who hit it was killed. The mansion was destroyed in early '69 by a fire apparently

sparked by a faulty gas heater or electrical wiring. A dog, two cats and two parakeets burned to death; there were no other injuries. The hipsters were finally evicted from the grounds. Members became teachers and caterers, musicians, artists and homemakers.

The commune was launched in 1967 by Don McCoy, then 37, with \$500,000 in real estate profits and inheritance money. He supported as many as 60 adults and children on the 690-acre spread that he rented for \$1,000 a month.

"I was really looking to duck responsibility," said McCoy, 67, now retired in San Rafael. "I also was on a search for meaning in life. I was looking for answers. It seemed like the world was going headlong to its own destruction. It seemed like man was raping the Earth.

"I still have some of those same hippie sentiments. I wanted to change the world."

McCoy had to balance his reverence for freedom with enough rules to keep the place operating.

He asked members to give up outside jobs and focus on communal life. They signed up for chores on a blackboard in the kitchen: cooking, cleaning, gardening and baking bread in a large outdoor oven to distribute to the poor.

But Olompali admitted the discussion at nearly every group meeting — at this and other communes where she later lived — boiled down to the same kinds of issues: Who let the pets in, who didn't wash the dishes and who left the gate to the garden open?

"You're cooking for 50 or 60 people," said Olompali. "When we made breakfast in the morning, it was six loaves of bread, four or five flats of eggs for scrambled eggs. We bought things in bulk.

"You had space cadets who didn't

show up (for chores)," she conceded, but there were no real penalties for them. "People would suggest they show up the next day. It wasn't an uptight atmosphere. The whole idea was to get away from regimented things."

Still, "we didn't want to feel controlled. We wanted to feel freedom," she said. "Sometimes you were in the mood to hang out by the pool. Maybe you wanted to bake bread or hang out with the guys working on the motorcycles, or go on a truck to Baskin Robbins or hang out smoking a joint."

The dream was to be "a self-sufficient community where we weren't dependent on the outside world," said Olompali. "We really wanted to be separate from U.S. rules. We wanted to be our own entity. We had our own way of being."

The 15 children — ranging in age from 5 to 17 — were an important focus.

"We wanted to give them a good time," recalled Sheila McCoy, who lived on the commune with her three children and former husband, Bob McKendrick, and later married Don McCoy. "There was lots of space for the children. They had each other. We weren't chained to the daily routine of the nuclear family.

"We wanted to get the children away from the straight world, which was going into chaos after the assassination of Bob Kennedy. We wanted to get them into this natural atmosphere and let them lead a life of nature away from newspapers and TV."

At the commune's Monday night meetings each adult drew a child's name out of a hat, and would "adopt" that boy or girl for the week.

"I thought it was a great idea," said Don McCoy. "The reason we did that was that whenever children had a problem, they'd run to their bi-

ological parent. We changed it so everyone could be a mom and a dad. Everybody bonded."

The children were never pressured to attend the "Not School," which, Don McCoy now admits "had its down side." The teacher would often wait three hours for her charges to show up and the kids "fell behind," he said.

The Grateful Dead first rented the 26-room mansion the summer of '66 from the University of San Francisco, which then owned the property. The back cover of a Grateful Dead album, "Aoxomoxoa," features a photo of Jerry Garcia and commune members among the trees of Olompali.

The band drew a chorus of other rockers to the site — Grace Slick, Janis Joplin, Santana, David Crosby, members of Moby Grape and Quick-silver Messenger Service — as well as acid guru Timothy Leary.

"This was a big weekend gathering place for the San Francisco rock icons," said park ranger Fred Lew. "They had a lot of jam sessions here. They could play their music loud. They didn't have neighbors to disturb."

"The Dead played because they

loved the sound," Don McCoy said. "They'd get into these long, long riffs. They'd improvise. It would echo throughout the hills. You could go up in the hills anywhere and hear the music. It sounded like it was coming from above."

Parkman, an archaeologist for the state Parks Department, has already pored over the artifacts of that quirky lifestyle scattered among the mansion ruins — warped records, an old 45 turntable, knit cap and child's rain boot. The half-standing structure — crumbling masonry walls amid weeds — still contains a psychedelic blue door with the word "love" in trippy yellow letters.

Next month, partly in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Summer of Love, Parkman will start the dig to unearth other treasures of what he has labeled the "Hippie Horizon" period.

"I don't know what we're really going to find. That's the exciting thing," said Parkman, a 45-year-old baby boomer who sports an earring.

"The idea is that someday — maybe 100 years from now — those artifacts will have some meaning. I'll clean them, catalog them, put them in archival bags in storage. If

we do an exhibit in 10 years or 110 years, we'll have the artifacts."

Parkman believes he's the first to undertake an excavation into the 1960s.

The psychedelic '60s period is only a small part of Olompali's colorful past. The park also was a major Coast Miwok Indian village some 2,000 years ago, and the site of the only fatality in the short-lived Bear Flag Revolt in 1846 in which American settlers fought Mexicans for control of California.

Coins and artifacts found there indicate it may have been visited by members of the 1579 landing party of explorer Sir Francis Drake.

The old mansion, which dates back to 1834, originally was the adobe of Indian Chief Camillo Ynitia. He sold it to James Black, Marin County's first tax assessor, who gave it to his daughter, Mary, for a wedding present when she married Dr. Galen Burdell, one of San Francisco's first dentists.

Parkman is poised to learn more about the next chapter of the site in late September. With former commune members watching, he'll lay out a grid of 100 square feet and dig to a depth of 8 inches in the earth where the dining room once stood.

"We think history happens a long way away and happens to important people like Roosevelt or Churchill or Abraham Lincoln," said Parkman. "In reality, history belongs to all of us. We make history every day in our own neighborhoods. That's what this is about."

THE SERIES

Sunday: The way it was

Monday: Digging into the Sixties

Tuesday: Across the generations

Note: Examiner National Edition stories appear one day later.



Domestic scene at Olompali mansion rented by Don McCoy, center. Unidentified woman is flanked by rancher Jack Pinkney, right, and Phil Higgins.

PETER RISLEY