

## SUMMER OF LOVE: 30 YEARS LATER

# Growing up free and maybe too easy

As kids they could do as they pleased; some regret that now

By Donna Horowitz  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**N**OVATO — Growing up on the Olompali commune was heaven — and hell. The 15 or so children living at the compound in 1967 could do just about anything they pleased among an affectionate band of adults more carefree than their kids. They had space, love, and every imaginable pet at the ranch just north of Novato.

But some of the children, now adults, are disturbed in retrospect by the lack of supervision and horrified by their early dabbling in drugs.

It was a perfect fit for Lisa Wright who, at 10, like the other children, had her own horse to ride on the grassy, oak-studded hillsides of Olompali. She could visit the commune's lapidary or leather-making shops, learn how to make bread for the poor at the group's outdoor oven — and splash in the pool.

"I learned a lot at Olompali. I was treated with respect. I learned to appreciate life," said Wright, now a 40-year-old full-time mom in San Diego.

"There were many different types of characters," said Wright, who moved to Olompali with her sister and mother. "When I see somebody looking out of the norm, I don't fear them."

But Siobhan McKendrick, now 37, speaks harshly of the drug use.

"The adults were completely irresponsible," she bitterly recounted at a recent reunion at Olompali. "My dad and mom turned me on to pot when I was 8."

"They didn't look after me. I had no guidance. My whole childhood memories are of drugs."

McKendrick, who now has a daughter of her own and lives in

Terra Linda, said she experienced learning difficulties as a result of her early drug use and vows not to repeat the mistakes of her parents.

Sheri Zeelen, 40, of El Sobrante, said her early experience with LSD, PCP and marijuana has left her with health problems.

"I shake sometimes from the drugs," she said. "My mind, all of the sudden, stops."

When I'm trying to go to sleep, my mind is thinking about all these things."

Now a PTA volunteer and protective mother of two, Zeelen speaks out against drug use.

Noelle Barton Olompali cherishes her days with the community, but concedes it didn't work for everyone.

"There's resentment among some that their parents weren't there for them," said Olompali, who moved to the commune at the age of 17 with her mom, commune matriarch Sandra Barton.

"The kids got the love; they

didn't get the structure. Their parents were doing their own thing. We didn't have, 'OK, it's bedtime. Did you brush your teeth?' It was kind of a free-for-all."

"But the thing I like to reflect on is we worked out a camaraderie, a friendship and love for each other. I feel the kids came out with good hearts."

McKendrick's mom, Sheila McCoy, said she's "very, very sorry" for the bad feelings, but she's proud of the adults the children became.

"They have all grown up to be extraordinarily responsible parents who are devoted to their children. They all have their own

homes. They wouldn't think of doing what we did," she said.

Despite the difficulties, both Zeelen and McKendrick treasure some memories of life at the commune, as well as the enduring friendships they developed.

"I feel drawn to the place. I feel like I belong there," Zeelen said.

**Sheri Zeelen, below, now of El Sobrante, shows pictures of the house before the fire. Girl mugging at left above is Sheri 30 years ago at age 10. With her in the Olompali kitchen at the time were Jillaine McKendrick, 9, hugging Mary McCoy, 7, youngest of Don McCoy's three children.**



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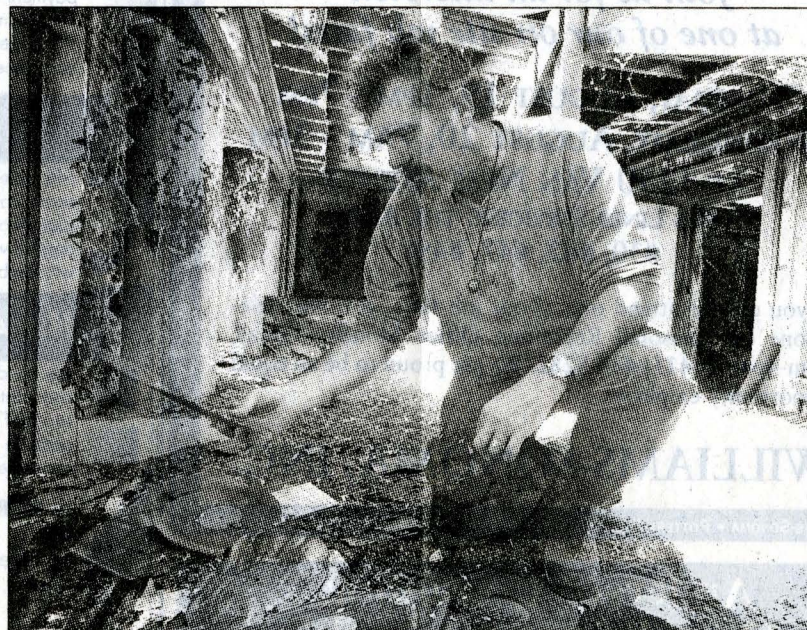
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EXAMINER/JOHN STOREY



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**The Olompali commune** was a lure for many. Among the frequent visitors were, at left, Jefferson Airplane bassist Jack Cassady and the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia. Above is back cover of a Dead album shot at Olompali. Right, archaeologist Breck Parkman sifts through ruins of the big house.