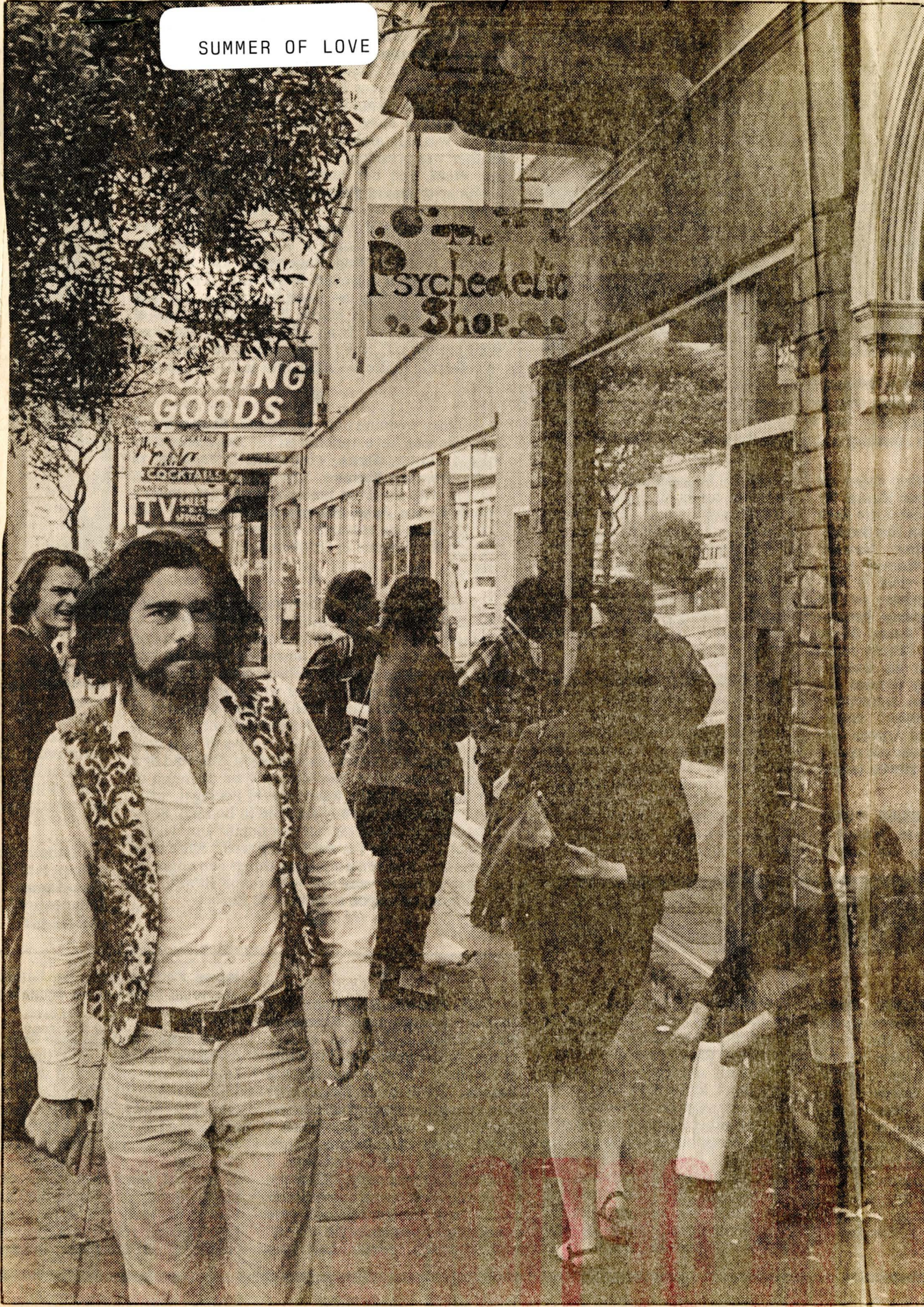


HAIGHT ASHBURY VF *HAIGHT ASHBURY - HISTORY*

SUMMER OF LOVE



The sidewalk scene on Haight Street within a block of Ashbury, early in 1967

# Life at the center of the universe

## When Haight became Love

By Geoff Link  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

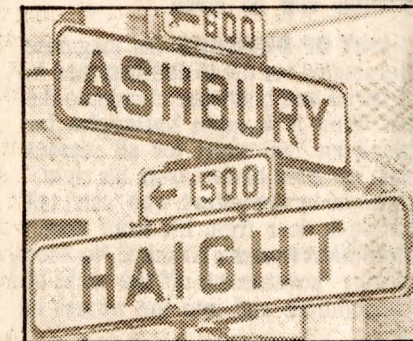
**T**HE SUMMER of Love was a feeding frenzy as starving people from all over the country swarmed to the Haight-Ashbury for a taste of freedom.

When Peewaukee, Bangor, Tenafly, Natchez, Cape Girardeau, Galena and every other niche in the nation heard that in the Haight everything goes — and the more the merrier — the neighborhood swelled like a pregnant rat.

My wife, Fran, and I lived on Haight Street before, during and after the Summer of Love. Refugees from the cop-behind-every-billboard mentality of the San Gabriel Valley, we had fled to Frisco in the summer of '62, and had had two previous Haight-Ashbury addresses before the world found its way to our doorstep.

From our \$95-a-month ringside seat over Abe Fela's Bargain Store midblock between Ashbury and Clayton, we watched our quiet neighborhood scene turn into a rowdy global spectacle — and it happened so fast ...

### The Summer of Love



20 Years After

★★★

Once home to large, middle-class families of European immigrants, the Haight-Ashbury in 1962 was slowly transforming. Blacks edging in from the doomed Western Addition and students attending the neighborhood's two major universities plus S.F. State were occupying the spacious flats and apartments as fast as they were vacated by the families fleeing to the suburbs.

Especially to students on meager budgets, the Haight was an offer they couldn't refuse. It had everything — at bargain prices.

The Victorian housing was deteriorating, but it was still elegant — and cheap. In those days, you found a flat or apartment by walking around the neighborhood, checking out the places with For Rent signs in the window. You could even haggle with the landlord. A studio apartment went for \$55 a month, a seven-room flat for \$135, garbage and utilities included.

Nine Muni lines served the neighborhood, making — See SUMMER, E-5

# SUMMER

— From E-1

anywhere in The City easy to get to. S.F. State was only one transfer and 20 minutes away.

You could buy groceries at Cala's supermarket on Stanyan or at any of a dozen mom-and-pops. Larry's Meats on Divisadero ranked among the best butcher shops in The City. There was a jazz club (Haight Levels) and a movie house (Haight Theater). Bars and liquor stores galore. Ethnic cuisine included Connie's East Indian, Annka's German, Shangri-La for Chinese and a Russian restaurant. There were delis, bakeries, coffee shops and Ice Cream Land, which was run by a strange old man who looked like a refugee from a Ray Bradbury story, but stocked every kind of penny candy ever created and displayed it in a sweet jumble on counters so crowded you could hardly move around inside the tiny store near Clayton.

And, of course, Golden Gate Park was right there — 48 blocks of greenery and culture, plus the Panhandle.

So the Haight was the right place — and the Sixties was the right time. The peace and civil rights movements had made freedom this generation's password. Drugs were rapidly becoming more popular than a naked cheerleader in a frat house.

College enrollments were climbing. British bands were putting the rock back in rock 'n' roll, and Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, the Fugs and others were bringing protest and poetry to the lyrics. The times were changing, but the transformation was sensed rather than seen.

It was long hair that finally brought the underground into the open.

I can't recall even seeing a "longhair" on the street until 1964. It was, I think, about the time of the first civil rights picket in The City, a protest against job discrimination at Mel's Drive-In, then at Mission and South Van Ness. LSD was still legal, the Grateful Dead was a jug band, and "hippie" hadn't been coined yet.

Standing at the corner of Masonic and Waller, he looked normal in every respect but one. His hair was so long it draped his shoulders. Within months, that too looked normal.

Once everybody let their hair grow and they could see they were the majority in the neighborhood, the pace of change accelerated. During 1965, the scene took shape.

One remarkable place where it all came together was 1090 Page Street, one of those huge hippie boarding houses that dotted the neighborhood. They were called communes, but the residents were really tenants, for each rented a private room and shared bath and kitchen.

1090 Page was the home of the Family Dog, which was headed by Chet Helms — then a student of esoteric religions — soon to be Bill Graham's major competitor. Chet had the longest hair around and a beard to match. Graham gets the credit as the pioneer rock music impresario, but it was Helms who proved it could be done.

Before the Matrix, the Fillmore Auditorium and Winterland, before Ken Kesey's Acid Trips at Longshorem's Hall and the Family Dog dance-concerts at the Avalon Ballroom, there were underground concerts in the cavernous basement of the huge Victorian house at 1090 Page, corner of Broderick.

On Tuesday nights, Helms hosted bluegrass shows, featuring the Albin brothers, Peter and Rodney. Admission was 50 cents, same as on Wednesday nights when there was a rock 'n' roll with Big Brother and



Broom-bearing hippies, above, during a 'street cleaning happening.' Left, an impromptu jam session is broken up by police

Examiner file photo

band. Peter Albin was one of the musicians.

No posters advertised those shows, but the place would be packed both nights just from word of mouth: 200 people dancing, sweating, smoking, tripping. It was the start of something big.

The Haight became home to many rock bands besides Big Brother. The Grateful Dead moved into a big Victorian on Ashbury just a block off Haight. Jefferson Airplane had their mansion over on Fulton. Members of The Charlatans and the Final Solution lived in the neighborhood and Blue Cheer made their deafening debut in the back of the Print Mint. Guitar cases on Haight Street were as ubiquitous as briefcases on Montgomery Street, but many did not actually contain a guitar as they were great cover for carrying kilos.

The peak of the Haight was in 1966, as the hip population reached critical mass and the trip exploded in the national media. Straight businesses were fleeing the street, to be replaced by hippie boutiques.

The Boot Hook on our side of the block and the Psychedelic Shop across the street had been the first. Soon came the Print Mint and the Blushing Peony. The Pall Mall bar next door began serving Love Burgers made by a woman called Love. Mendel Herscovitz closed his paint store at Masonic and reopened near the Print Mint as Far-Out Fabrics. Annka's tried to ban bare feet and finally fled the street in disgust. The Haight Theater was renamed the Straight Theater and booked rock bands instead of movies.

The Diggers gave away food out of their Free Frame of Reference building on Page Street and they didn't even make you take off your shoes and pray first as did Swami Ghakivedanta, who opened his first Krishna Consciousness storefront over on Frederick across from Poly High School. Following the model of the skid-row gospel missions, the swami wouldn't feed



his wandering flock until everyone came inside, took off their shoes and "ohmmed" a while.

The Diggers, on the other hand, were the conscience of the neighborhood and their philosophy of free food, clothing and human services set the tone for the non-profit organizations that were established to help the many in need.

The Haight-Ashbury Switchboard became information central and the Free Medical Clinic was busier than the Post Office it overlooked. The coffee shop across the street from our apartment started staying open all night and became the hangout for the speed freaks and Hells' Angels and other bikers who made life so miserable that eventually the Summer of Love became the winter of discontent and the neighborhood went belly-up. But, early in 1967, it still seemed as if the Haight was a wet dream from which we never had to awaken.

Suddenly, it was summer, the magnetic moment when Haight was to become Love. So many runaway teen-agers from around the country were attracted to the neighborhood that Glide Memorial Methodist Church secured a \$25,000 grant from the San Francisco

Foundation and on June 20 opened Huckleberry House at Waller and Broderick, the first of scores of such programs throughout the country.

Traffic choked Haight Street. The sidewalks could not contain the crowds, so pedestrians spilled into the street and strolled among the gridlocked gaggle of cars and tour buses. Some people would leap onto the paralyzed vehicles and stomp across the hoods and tops as the driver and passengers inside quietly quaked.

Naturally, everybody got stoned. Guys would amble around the Panhandle, toting gunny sacks filled with kilos. They'd simply step into the bushes to complete a sale. The going price for Mexican grass — usually from the valley around Culiacan, not the mountains near Oaxaca or Acapulco — was \$110 a kilo, \$10 an ounce. Often the bricks had been soaked with Pepsi to add weight.

Teen-age girls hung out on Haight Street, generally in the block between Ashbury and Clayton, hawking LSD for \$2 to \$3 a hit — purple microdots, Orange Sunshine, Mr. Natural.

Hashish was abundant: red and blond Lebanese, Nepalese temple balls striated with opium and smooth Afghan "surfboards."

Speed was just a shot away in dealers' pads convenient to the street.

Sticky fresh opium was frequently available, DMT was plentiful and bitter, green peyote buttons streamed in from the Southwest.

Pot was smoked openly when the street was crowded, joints vanishing into the throngs, suddenly reappearing a few steps ahead.

Parking was so bad it made Saturday night in North Beach now seem a snap. It was worse than on the Sundays when the 49ers used to play at Kezar and every curb in the neighborhood was lined with cars of fans too late for a spot in the tiny stadium lot. These days, the only comparable gridlock and crush of bodies is at Columbus and Broadway on New Year's Eve. But the mess was daily in the Haight.

Just going to the grocery store became a chore. If we had to go outside the neighborhood, we could hardly get home again. Finding a parking place even three blocks away was like stumbling onto a four-leaf clover. Walking the last half-block along Haight was like swimming upstream through the river of people.

It went like this throughout the summer. The Haight was more popular than Fisherman's Wharf or the 49-mile drive. Everybody in America on vacation that summer stopped in San Francisco to see the hippies in their own natural habitat. We came home one day to find Dennis, one of the Mouseketeers who we knew from high school, on our doorstep.

Yet, throughout the summer, an undercurrent of tension was coursing through the neighborhood. Store and apartment owners put steel gates across their windows and doorways. Police would sweep down Haight, snagging unwary runaways, rounding up a dozen or two at a time and carting them off to Juvenile Hall for the heinous crime of being under 18.

Meanwhile, at night, the bikers would gather at the

coffee shop across the street. Relatively quiet early in the evening, they got increasingly rowdy as the darkness deepened and the drinking and doping intensified. Along about 10 p.m., the craziness would begin and continue into the wee hours. Fighting, shouting, throwing bottles into the street. By morning, Haight Street at the corner of Clayton would be literally paved with broken glass.

When a bottle came through our front window one night, we knew the party was over and it was time to leave.

But it wasn't the crowds — as some people have said — that soured the Summer of Love. And it wasn't the media that had enticed the people here. The press had just been doing its job describing this amazing subculture. The blame also has been placed on the growing dominance of hard dope, mainly heroin and Methedrine, but they were just the symptoms, not the cause of the sickness.

City Hall killed the Haight. City officials fostered an environment in the neighborhood that encouraged the seeds of violence to take root and grow.

In 1967, the neighborhood movement lacked the political punch it has today. The Haight-Ashbury in '67 wasn't even the same neighborhood it had been in 1963 when the Panhandle Freeway was scrapped by popular demand. These hippies weren't regular citizens. They didn't work, they looked weird, took drugs and believed the world could be a better place. They were an embarrassment to City Hall.

So when neighborhood residents begged the Board of Supervisors to ban buses, cars and motorcycles on Haight Street from Masonic to Stanyan and turn the street into a pedestrian mall, they were snubbed quick as a streetwalker propositioning the Pope.

Even after some people lay down in front of cars and refused to budge until they were hauled off by police, The City's only concession was to reroute Muni buses onto Page Street.

Had motor vehicles been banned, the tourists would have been forced out of their role as spectators and become part of the spectacle, rubbing elbows with the long-haired critters they'd come to see. And the bikers, who were given tacit permission to wreak havoc at night, unmolested by the police who apparently were too worn out after a day of rounding up runaways to stop the chaos at midnight, wouldn't have been on the street. They'd never have parked their motorcycles blocks away from where they partied. And without their violence, the Haight might have been forever young.

As the community commemorated the Death of Hip in October 1967 with a cortege down Haight Street, we were carrying our mattresses and other belongings to another flat, still within the neighborhood but out of the line of fire.

We paused in our move to join the procession at the Panhandle where mourners were tossing things into the cardboard coffin that had been spray-painted black. Sticks of incense, hits of acid, flowers, joints, beads and other items.

I dropped in two cents and went back to finish packing.



A sign of the times: Unpaid municipal workers gave the street a new name