

A neighborhood divided

HAIGHT ASHBURY

JAN 10 1990

VERTICAL FILE

REFERENCE



Bee/Michael Jones

Christopher Swasey is one of hundreds of transients in Haight Ashbury. Some residents

in the neighborhood that has defined social tolerance claim the transients bring open

drug use, panhandling and violence. Others claim it's a case of liberal intolerance.

Haight Ashbury: From Summer of Love to winter of discontent

By Gretchen Kell
Bee San Francisco Bureau

SAN FRANCISCO — The Summer of Love still lingers in Haight Ashbury. As if it were 1967, youths in tie-dyed shirts flock to this famous neighborhood, where shops like Far Out Fabrics, Dharma and Pipe Dreams evoke the past.

No longer a hippie hangout, the Haight today is the city's most eclectic district — a mix including the upwardly mobile, skinheads, artists and punks. But it remains Bohemian, politically progressive, and proud of a social tolerance born there in the late '60s.

Today that tolerance is being sorely tested.

More than 200 transients who panhandle, drink and sell drugs on Haight Street — the neighborhood's commercial strip — and camp in Golden Gate and Buena Vis-

ta parks are challenging this liberal stronghold of 20,000 residents.

During the past two years, neighbors say they've noticed an increase in the number of transients and in cases of violence. Afraid and annoyed, they now shop and eat elsewhere and no longer enter the parks.

"My kids are not comfortable walking down Haight Street. ... It's become such a zoo," said John Hooper, a Haight resident for 10 years. "People who used to bring their kids to Golden Gate Park are not doing it. I've literally seen people sticking needles in their arms on walks through the park."

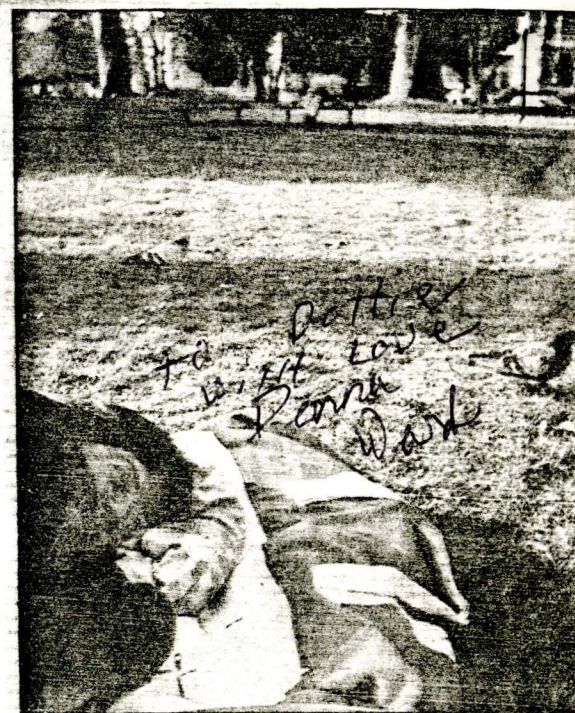
Hooper, who belongs to a loose coalition of several hundred concerned neighbors, said he's seen as many as 20 cardboard and plastic shelters, drug paraphernalia, empty bottles and human waste in Buena Vista Park, near his home.

"The myth is that the Haight is a neighborhood with infinite tolerance for eccentricity and odd behavior," he said. "The reality is that we're very tolerant, but that tolerance has a limit, and we've passed that limit."

But longtime community activist Calvin Welch and others see this intolerance as a class struggle waged against the poor by a rising number of upwardly mobile homeowners with "an almost suburban aesthetic about what a neighborhood should be" in a major metropolitan area.

"They're at war with the neighborhood they live in," he said. "Their basic solution is to remove the (transient) population. What they want is not achievable. Get real. You cannot arrest poverty."

Resident Lillian Milgrom said her fight for more police patrols and



Donna Ward normally calls a station wagon her home. On the road for 12 years, she takes a break in Golden Gate Park.

See HAIGHT, page A11

Haight

Continued from page A1

stricter enforcement of park codes "is not a question of aesthetics. It's a crime-rate issue and an issue of safety." She added that many groups battling the transient problem also give money to community-based agencies that serve the poor and homeless in the Haight.

Welch's group, the Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Council (HANC), instead is lobbying city officials to install showers and toilets in Golden Gate Park for the transients' use, said its president, Jim Rhoads.

San Francisco police say there is a long history of homeless encampments in Golden Gate Park. But for two years now, the park's southeast entrance at the intersection of Stanyan and Haight streets has been attracting a more violent, drug-abusing type of camper, said police Capt. Charles Hoenisch.

"There's a terrific amount of drug abuse, intravenous drug abuse with both speed and heroin," he said.

Hoenisch said that while most of the transients sell or use drugs, the rest have other reasons for being in the area. "We have a periodic influx of campers who follow the Grateful Dead," he said. Others are simply homeless or drawn to Haight Ashbury out of nostalgia for the '60s.

"I'm a hippie myself, a Dead Head," said a 28-year-old transient named "Butterfly." A runaway since age 15, when his parents died in a fire, he said he's received nine citations in the past 1½ years for camping in Golden Gate Park.

"The police give me a list of shelters, but I need something to care about, to love," he said, pulling a rat named Sandy out of a bag. He said shelters won't allow pets.

Patrols at that end of the park have been beefed up during the past month, said Hoenisch. Scott Shafer, an aide to Mayor Art Agnos, said the mayor requested the extra help after eating at a McDonald's restaurant in the Haight

that overlooked the littered park entrance way.

Hoenisch said that 200 arrests have been made since Dec. 3, most of them drug-related, and 174 citations were given for illegal camping or drug use. "These aren't the true San Francisco homeless," he said. "They're here because they're into the drug scene."

But Welch said the vast majority of people who live in Golden Gate Park "do so out of choice, and they are not engaging in drug-dealing." The complaining neighbors, he said, represent only a minority of residents in the district.

The park's gardeners also want a crackdown on the transients. Many of the 50 gardeners that tend the south-east entrance to the park have signed a petition to Cal-OSHA saying they are at "great emotional and physical risk" working there.

"I used to have to wake people up so I could put the sprinklers out," said one gardener, who asked that his name not be used. "Eight hours a week I spent in garbage pickup, and I always came across their defecation and such."

Brad Bihlmeyer, general manager of the Haight's Stanyan Park Hotel, said Haight Street shoppers make the same discoveries. He said he steers hotel patrons to restaurants and shops on nearby Cole Street instead.

"It's so uncomfortable to walk down the street because people hang out in crowds blocking the sidewalk," Bihlmeyer said. "Midday you can see drunks throw up or urinate on mailboxes."

Elana Yannotti, an 18-year-old drifter, said she never expected to find such anger in the Haight toward the down and out. Her mother used to live there as a hippie, she said.

"This street is supposed to be so full of love," said Yannotti. "But it's called Haight. Even though hate isn't spelled that way, there's so much hate and hostility."