

Roots of the Sixties: The Beats

by Michael Erlewine



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What follows are blogs on the later 1950s and early 1960s and my attempts to follow the Beat Movement at that time. Most of this took place in Ann Arbor, but also in Berkeley, California and the Bay Area, plus Greenwich Village, New York. These are just my views and opinions about that seldom-mentioned time between the end of Beats (late 1950s) and the beginning of the Sixties Movement, which started basically in the summer of 1965, those in-between years. Not meant to be definitive, but just musings by me on those times.

Warning: I do discuss drugs used in the 1960s, and in some detail.

CONTENTS

Apprentice to the Beats	3
Berkeley in 1964.....	13
Prologue.....	19
The Beat Movement.....	27
The First LSD Trip	32

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Apprentice to the Beats

Today I have been thinking about all of this while the snow accumulates outside my window. How does one communicate experience to another? I find myself tending to abstract everything, intellectualize it, boil it down so I don't have to relive all the details in my own mind. It becomes more like a classroom than a one-to-one conversation. I need to slow down.

That being said, the only true way is for me is to tell you what happened and let you abstract from that. To do this means I have to give personal details, stories, and actually describe what happened to me back then, that sort of thing. Now, just to contradict myself, in this first blog I will give you an overall (abstract) view going in, but I will digress (or progress) into the scene as I lived it. I hope you don't mind. No one is forcing you to read this.

And what was it that I learned from the Beats? What was that lifestyle actually like? For one, I can start out by saying that the beats as I came to know them were very, very serious. Or was that me? They had none of the wild dancing that came along with the Avalon Ballroom and Fillmore Auditorium in the mid-Sixties. No way. Slow dancing, sure. Light shows and strobes? No. And it was a different kind of drug scene as well.

First, the beats drank wine, not beer. Hard stuff, some, but it was not promoted. No, what we drank as beats was wine, and wine with cigarette or whatever else we might be smoking. And it was dark out too. The beats did not celebrate the sunshine or the daytime as did the later hippies. They were creatures of the dark that only really came to life at night. Sure we shuffled along the streets in the daytime wearing

our old olive-drab army jackets and surplus clothing. I never wore a beret, but some actually did. I would have felt self-conscious in one. And remember, I was not a 'beat', but only wanted to be. I was too young. I searched for them, but they already were getting old. Even my naïve youth and enthusiasm for their existence could not revive them.

And it was nighttime that was bohemian, and I mean all night or at least until the wee hours of the morning. I can remember when the album "My Favorite Things" by John Coltrane was released in March of 1961. I stayed up all night listening to it at Harvey Armstrong's wonderful second-floor apartment down on Packard Street. I only had one room at the time. I seem to remember I had some Dexedrine (speed), so sleep was not an option. It was coffee, cigarettes, and Coltrane, and the heartbeat was fast. What an album that was (and is). Next to the Miles Davis "Kind of Blue," "My Favorite Things" is probably my most listened-to jazz album. And I particularly love the piano of McCoy Tyner on the title tune. It is just the best. If you have not heard it, really listened, by all means do yourself a favor!

So what does the apprentice beatnik do? Well, I quickly established that he or she is well read in literature and poetry. Ginsberg and Kerouac showed me that. Familiarity with the Existentialist philosophers like Sartre, Camus, and the like is also suggested, and probably required. Kierkegaard? Yes, him too. Classical music (at least some of it) is mandatory, and the more the better.

My first home away from home was a tiny single room at 335 Packard Street in Ann Arbor. This was after I came back from California. There was a bed, a chair, a side table, a hotplate (which was not allowed, next

to which was my jar of instant coffee), and a cheap record player, one of those kinds that had a hinged top that closed so you could carry the whole thing as a suitcase. For records I had Mozart and Bach. Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro" was one of the few records I owned and the Brandenburg Concertos of Bach. I might have borrowed a few of my parent's records too. I can't remember.

And the good 'Beat' was familiar with art, at least the French Impressionists. So there you have the general idea. I believe I mentioned that beats only come out at night and stay up to (or near) dawn. Did I also mention how serious life was back then? I did. So, no sunshine, laughing, or day tripping. And a strict diet of Ingmar Bergman films and the darker European shtick was preferable to any of the more entertaining American flicks. Those were uncool.

We would see the foreign films at the university-sponsored Cinema Guild in the old Art and Architecture building or at the Campus Theater down on South University Street, the only other theater that showed these films. As I look back on that time I can't believe I bought into that dark, depressed, alcoholic and nicotine-flavored world view. I really tried to enjoy it. Back then I would not be entertained. Humor was not a highlight in my life. We would take in a dark film and then spend the rest of the night smoking, drinking coffee, and talking about it. Today those films seem more like horror films to me. I know... I have no taste.

And jazz. Forget about rock n' roll; I dropped that for a time. As mentioned earlier, it was mostly jazz that we listened to, in particular Miles, Coltrane, bop, and most of all that 'cool' jazz. Beats were above all cool. It was kind of hard for me to be cool. I was excitable

and too much of an enthusiast and that was simply 'not' cool. And then there was the "just sitting around."

We did a lot of sitting around with serious talking, and often I would find myself watching a friend shoot up heroin. I never went there but I was familiar with all the dope paraphernalia, the little bent spoons, the tourniquet, the flame, the 'works'. I most remember my friend Frank Tron who was really steeped in the beats and a kind of model beatnik for me. He had a little upstairs apartment way out on South State Street. I would hike down there very late at night hoping his light would still be on so I could dare go up and knock. It usually was and he was friendly to me. How wonderful that any older person could even see me! To myself, there was still nothing to see.

I am sure we talked (probably he talked) about all kinds of philosophy and life matters, but mostly what I remember is Frank shooting up and me watching. Just watching him shoot up was an inoculation against my ever doing it. It was not pretty or rather: pretty scary. Later I heard that Tron was killed when his car ran off the road on the Pennsylvania Turnpike while driving back from New York City. I can only imagine his state of mind. Just like that, he was gone from my life. Impermanence.

And the beats lived 'down'. As a rule my beat friends had no interest in working a straight job and tended to do just barely (or less) than enough to get by. And they were likely to live in the poorest parts of town, where rents were cheap and no one cared how they looked or lived. Theirs was a life of the mind. For the most part they were dedicated intellectuals and aesthetes.

In reality, much of the Beat movement for me amounted to my just trying to get in the door, to be accepted, and to be like them. Reality is seldom what we hope for or expect. My dreams of the Beat movement were perhaps more interesting than the final reality. I never really became an insider because by 1960 that movement had already mostly dried up and grown old. There was no inside to 'become', but only the diminishing remains of what Kerouac and Ginsberg wrote of.

Perhaps that was why all the beats looked so old to me, because I was young. It was like hourglass sand. I tried to grasp it, but it was already gone, slipping through the fingers of time. There was only a taste left. With the beats gone or going, soon there were just a bunch of latecomers like myself remaining, going through the motions, but that train had already left the station or was trying to turn commercial. But we did have some Kerouac times of our own.

I can remember (back in 1960) an all-night car ride from L.A. to San Francisco, packed into the vehicle, penniless, and probably high on something, hurtling through the night on highway 101, all squashed together like that. When we finally reached North Beach, San Francisco (which was then the heart of the bohemian culture in that city), the first thing we did was to pull into an outdoor vending area and pile out of that cramped car into the cool night air. One of our group pried open a cigarette machine and made off with what coins they could find.

And then we stood before dawn outside a bakery on one of San Francisco's steep narrow streets waiting for the workers to throw out the day-old baguettes and feasted on those. Someone would lift a sausage or some cheese from an all-night store and we would

have that. And cigarettes. Somehow we always had cigarettes. Usually wine appeared along the way as well; that and marijuana were the common denominators back then.

I am trying to paint you the flavor and I could go on, but I write this just to give you a sense of what it was like, where I was coming from, and what I was trying to do and be. I should also mention that I was living at the Gas House, the notorious art gallery and gathering place at 1501 Ocean Front Walk on Venice Beach. It held sway for three years from 1959 through 1961 and was one of the main centers of the Beat movement. There I met icons like Lawrence Lipton, Eric "Big Daddy" Nord, Mad March, the poet Taylor Mead, and Tamboo. Everyone came there, including Kerouac, and later Ken Kesey, after I left, folks like Janice Joplin, Peter, Paul and Mary, and so on, also came. I remember drinking whisky with Joplin one night (she drank the whiskey), but that was later on at the Grande Ballroom in Detroit around 1966.

This was still 1960 and I lived in an old walk-in freezer (a non-functioning one) in the basement of the Gas House. It was not large, but made of beautiful natural woods inside, and of course there were the racks on which I slept. At that time I was an artist, a painter in oils and, of course, a poet. Everyone was. I spent my days... or more likely nights painting, drawing, and writing poems, deep poems of longing. By that time I was not only yearning for a beat life, but since misery loves company, I was also searching for a partner, a woman to love, one that would love me just as I was. Imagine that! I had no money and lived on what I could find or fall into, picking up old cigarette butts on the long wide sidewalk that ran up and down Venice beach along the ocean. I had nothing, but I was in

California and I was living with the beats. That was something!

And then there was my friend found hanging from a rafter in his upstairs flat, an artist like me who decided to commit suicide, why I never knew. He was much more gifted than I. And I am sorry to say I was suffering from a case of the clap that I had picked up while learning to whore in Mexico. Hitchhiking out along Route 66 to California we were picked up by a man in a late- model sedan. He seemed as wild as we were and he was headed for the Mexican border and Juarez. Did we want to go?

Well of course we wanted to go and we did. I will spare you the blow by blow details, but suffice to say that in Juarez I could drink tequila at a bar, and before I knew it I was drunker than a skunk. The tequila led to a whore house and the rest followed the natural order of things. I woke up back in the U.S. in a cheap motel along Route 66 with a hangover, but that was not all. Every cent I had was gone. That man had shown us a good time, waited until we passed out, taken whatever valuables we had (and they were few), and then was on down the road. I was left only with some experience I had never had before, not to mention (later on) the clap.

We hitchhiked on to Santa Monica with some monies my parents wired me through Western Union. Can I ever thank my parents enough for being who they were? I doubt it, but back to the story. I was already discovering the difference between expectations and reality. But hey, what good beatnik has not been with a Mexican whore? Worse, I had no medicine to cure it. What a mess. It really was no fun. I finally went to some public health clinic (such as they were back then), waited and waded through that, and was

administered sulfur pills, a very slow cure indeed. No antibiotics. My traveling friend John went back home; I can't remember why. I was alone.

Very early on when I had first arrived in Venice I remember going to a party along the beach in a little house of a friend or at least someone I had heard of, perhaps it was Tamboo, the conga player. I had with me half a gallon of cheap wine. I must have been nineteen years old at the time.

When I came through the door of the house where the party was being held, there were two federal narcotic agents waiting. They were frisking each person as they came in, looking for dope, and paid no attention to my wine or the fact that I was underage. They didn't even check my ID. I was directed to sit down along a wall with a string of other folks who already had gone through the same routine. So there I sat while the feds continued to welcome each new person as they came in. Needless to say, I was very nervous.

In my nervousness I opened the wine and started to take a sip or two. Well, before I knew it I had drunk the entire half gallon all by myself. Later, free and outside once again, I puked my guts out for hours. Nothing makes you sicker than a wine drunk, especially sweet wine.

The whole trip was a bohemian phantasmagoria and I had been wanting something like that for a very long time. But life there was also very sketchy, like riding the edge of a vortex from which I could see deep within. And while I was thrilled by what I saw, in the last analysis I didn't want to be swept away in it. LSD would soon take care of that a few years later. Plagued by my persistent gonorrhoea, it was time to go home to Ann Arbor and back to mommy and dad.

I took a bus to Barstow, California and hitched out from there with all my worldly belongings in a bag and my sketchbook under my arm. I was trying to get back to Ann Arbor. I finally caught a ride with a truly insane driver who held me captive for two days after asking me to put my precious belongings in his trunk and locking them there. He made me drive and, when the pieces of cardboard taped to the muffler gave out, he forced me to crawl under the car on my back amidst the overheated muffler and pipes and somehow put things back in place. I had to get away from the man, but my sketches and poems were all that I had to show that I was living the beatnik life, and I was loathe to abandon them simply to escape with my old ordinary life.

And I was dead tired. I had been up for two days driving. Then somewhere near Gary Indiana, after perhaps 54 hours on the road and tired as tired can be, the man dashed into a rest stop to take a leak and mistakenly left his keys in the car. In a flash, I had my things out of his trunk and was standing in the café close by other people when he came out of the restroom. My hands were shaking but I was clutching my sketchbook to my heart. He gave me one fierce glare and went out to his car and drove off. Otherwise, I would have been headed for New York City and who knows what else. I hitchhiked on up to Ann Arbor.

As for drugs, all that is interesting about them came later in the 1960s. Back at the beginning it was only about pot and speed: Benzedrine, Dexedrine, and Methedrine. And also codeine, when you could find it. There was some codeine to be found back then in non-prescription cough syrups, the kind you had to sign for. The problem was that there was not much

codeine in a bottle of the stuff, so you had to get a lot of bottles to get high, not to mention that it tasted horrible. You had to drink it. The clinker was that drug stores were allowed to sell you only one bottle of the stuff at a time, and you had to register for that.

To get enough bottles, you had to move fast, before your registration got through the system and around to other stores. There were no computers back then. I am not sure how it worked, but I do know that we had to drive (and quickly) from town to town hitting up drugstores for cough syrup. And it was the same kind of story with the Valo inhaler, which had an amphetamine base. We would tear open the inhaler, eat the cloth-soaked stuff inside, throw up, and get high on speed. I really hated getting high that way. It tasted terrible and the whole feeling and taste of speed in my system gives me shivers to think about to this day. But what is an aspiring beatnik to do?

We were terribly dedicated back then, but all of this slowly gave way to a different kind of life as the Sixties came into focus. I guess that all of us Faux-Beats finally realized that the real beatniks were gone (if they ever existed) and the beat movement silenced. If all that was left was just we lookers-on, we latecomers, what kind of movement is that? We knew nothing. If Kerouac and most of the headliners had checked out or clocked out, that just left my generation of wannabes and there was nothing to be learned there. They were no better than me. The death grip I had on being a beatnik gradually failed and I sadly let it go. But it was still too early to shepherd the hippies. There was a gap between the end of the beats and the beginning of the hippies, at least for me. What was I to do until my future came along?

I will try to tackle that in the next blog, when I can get to it. I hope this is not offending anyone. I 'am' being somewhat candid.

Berkeley in 1964

I am still putting the pieces of time into various orders covering the transition from the beat era to the hippie era, so bear with me. One of the things I did during that transition was live in Berkeley, California. Here is a little about that time. Back in 1964, when I lived there for a year, Berkeley was a college town like Ann Arbor was, but not like Ann Arbor. Moving there was like leaping into the future, because Berkeley was years ahead of Ann Arbor in most things. It gave me a real jolt relating to time, i.e., that time really is relative. Driving out there with all my things was also like driving from winter into perpetual summer. That was so different, at least for a while.

With what little money I had, I rented a small place off Telegraph Avenue on Haste Street. It was a one-room apartment with something like a mini-kitchen on the way to the bathroom, which was on the way to the alley behind. It was more like a Pullman Car than a box house and it was set back from the street through an arbor of ever-blooming fuchsia plants which always seemed to beckon to me from all sides. It was great. And so much happened there and then. I will give here just a taste.

I managed to find a part-time job clearing tables and washing dishes at the Café Mediterranean at 2475 Telegraph Ave, less than a block from where I lived, and only three blocks from the Berkeley campus. It was hot sweaty work, but it at least put me within talking distance with the many Berkeley professors and hanger-outers who frequented the place. Best of

all was the tiny Italian kitchen embedded in an alcove at the back of the coffee house. That was real food.

Run by a family of actual Italians, they made authentic Italian cuisine and inexpensively. I especially remember the ceramic oval baking dishes, little petite au gratins bakers in which they served lasagna. I loved that stuff and it was better than anything I have had since. What I didn't love so much was the son of the chef who thought he was an actor and was sure I was a dishwasher. We ended up in a fistfight wrestling in the dust of the alley behind the café, while his father tried to hit both of us on the head with a frying pan. It was time to move on from that job.

Then there was the long walk from campus way down to the marina by the bay to work the late shift at a seafood restaurant. I was there to degrease the kitchen, a job called the "closer," the worse work at any restaurant. I was the closer. I could hear them singing "Auld Lang Syne" every night through the walls of the kitchen, while I was up to my elbows in buckets of grease. I got out around 2 AM (or something like that) after having mopped the grease off the floor (twice!) and slowly made my way back up through Berkeley to my apartment and collapsed.

A little better was when I worked at Lucas Books on Bancroft Way and spent much of my time with my girlfriend Toby at her apartment nearby. Bookstores were more my speed. But the best job of all was as assistant manager of Discount Records on Telegraph Avenue. I had worked at the same chain back in Ann Arbor and knew a fair amount about music, so I kind of just fell into that job. Back then vinyl was still king, and I endlessly moved and removed armloads of records from place to place around the store. And of course, I was listening to more and more music, at

that time mostly classical, which brings me to my next little story.

In Berkeley, along with all that was going on I met Jim Dixon, I don't remember exactly where or when. Things are a little blurry almost fifty years out. Dixon taught me about classical music. Not that I did not know any classical music already, I did, but he became a guide to a deeper knowledge than I could have imagined. Dixon lived in a small apartment down Telegraph, south of the campus. I don't remember what he did for a living, but I seem to remember he was connected to Discount Records where I worked, but perhaps in the San Francisco branch. He still lived in Berkeley -- something like that.

And I also had to be somewhat careful, because Dixon was gay and not shy about it. He, like me, had set about to educate himself and he was a prodigious reader, far beyond what I would undertake, and I was quite the reader. It was not his reading that interested me; I was reader enough. It was his knowledge of classical music and most of all his approach that I found fascinating. It was profound, to say the least, and he was willing to share this knowledge.

What Dixon knew went way beyond facts, history, scores, and recordings. He never knew just one performance; it seemed that he knew them all, and intimately. There was not just one recording of a Beethoven's 9th Symphony, there were dozens to be known, and he knew them in such detail that I was initiated just listening to him expound. Most important of all, he did not just listen to music; he 'listened' to music actively. Sitting through a performance with Dixon was something to remember.

I must confess that, before Dixon, I listened to classical music somewhat passively. After all, my whole generation was quite passive if you stop and think about it. We listened to music, read books, looked at art, watched movies, etc., all quite passive activities. Dixon listened actively, meaning he more or less physically conducted each piece with fierce energy. It was eyeball to eyeball if you were in the same room with him, and there was no distraction. You had to be there 100% of the time. There was no avoiding being present. It just had never occurred to me to 'interact' with music to this degree.

We became good friends. As for his gayness, I had to be very careful not to give him any encouragement, and he was gentleman enough never to cross the line, but this too kept me on my toes when I was with him. We began to listen actively together and Dixon gradually led me through the major catalog of recorded music, composer by composer, and within a composer, piece by piece, and within each piece, it was about orchestras and then conductors and soloists. This went on for many months. He taught me how to do it myself.

To a great degree, what Jim Dixon liked in classical music, I came to like. He just knew what was good and I could find no fault with his knowledge. As a critic, you know I tried. And I am not going to take up time here to go into all of the many composers and periods of music that we worked through. But I owe it to you to make sure you understand how granular this can be. I will take one composer as an example, and even then tread lightly with you on the details. Let's take Bach.

Johann Sebastian Bach is without a doubt my favorite composer. Mozart is a close second, but still trails the

master to my ears. I find the music of Bach, especially his later works, simply profound. With Dixon, I worked through almost all of Bach and there are at least 1000 known works of Johann Sebastian. Let's start with a few of the vocal pieces.

Of his four passions (the four gospels), it was the St. John Passion that struck me, and I was captivated from the very first notes of the 36 bars before the chorus explodes with "Her, unser Herrscher..." It puts even the Catholic "Dies Irae" (Day of Wrath, Day of Mourning...) with its hypnotic theme to shame, and I was raised with that. And of course the oratorios and masses, in particular the "Mass in B Minor" and "Magnificat in D Major."

And the Bach cantatas: There are hundreds of Bach cantatas and at one time I owned them all. My most favorite is Cantata #110 "Unser Mund sei voll Lachens" (May our mouth be full of laughter), and in that cantata the aria "Was ist ein Menschenkind (What is a child of man?). I could go on. And years ago I made a point of giving a copy (often of different performances) of Bach's six "Suites for Solo Cello" to each of my kids. These are perhaps the most approachable Bach pieces I know, and they are above reproach. The six "Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin" are not far behind in my experience.

But beyond the incredible vocal and orchestral music of Bach, it is the keyboard works that I hold in highest esteem, and there are so many of them that are sheer perfection. Starting with the "Well-Tempered Clavier," pieces anyone can listen to, they proceed from there. There are the "Inventions and Sinfonias," the "Goldberg Variations," the "French Suites" and the "English Suites," and so on. And of course, the works for keyboard and instruments, my most very favorite

being the four “Sonatas for viola da gamba (small cello) and Keyboard.” And we have not touched on the many, many preludes and fugues, especially the “Schubler Chorales.” They are devastating.

But my highest praise and deepest infatuation is reserved for a few works Bach did toward the end of his life, in particular the “Canonic Variations on ‘Vom Himmel Hoch,’” the “Musical Offering,” the “Trio Sonatas, and finally, and in my opinion his best work, “Kunst der Fuge, “The Art of the Fugue.” If I could take only one classical piece of music to the desert island, it would be “The Art of the Fugue,” about the last piece Bach ever wrote, and I would be hard pressed to decide whether I wanted to hear it on the organ, harpsichord, or string quartet. I probably would want it on the organ, and the incredible performance by Helmut Walcha.

“The Art of the Fugue” is, bar none, for me the most deeply satisfying classical music I have ever found. Although unfinished at Bach’s death, it contains 14 fugues and 4 canons. The work ends with a fugue that just stops in midair, unfinished. All kinds of white papers have been written on what this piece is all about, including that it was written as an intellectual exercise, not to actually to be played, but to express various deep Pythagorean philosophies. Of course it was written to be played, and for the keyboard, IMO, and the organ is where I like to hear it most.

There you have a taste of the kind of detail I absorbed while listening to classical music with James Dixon. I came to have a taste for very strong performances, and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, back in the day, was about as good as it gets for me. Conductors like Ferenc Fricsay, Karl Bohm, some Herbert von Karajan, and even a few by Wilhelm Furtwängler had

the proper “Sturm und Drang” (storm and urge) for my taste.

I won't go on in this vein, but I wanted to give you chapter and verse here enough for you to at least know there is a world of classical music out there that sadly is mostly forgotten today. None of my four children know classical music to any marked degree, and of course I would not 'make' them listen. It is up to them and up to you. But there are deep life lessons coded in those scores, if you can bring them to life in your mind.

And James Dixon was able to do that for me, way back then, and I am forever indebted to him for that.. It took an enormous amount of listening and listening, but it was joyous and deep. I have no idea where Dixon is today, and if anyone out there knows, please let me know how to reach him.

I am still thinking through the Sixties and its prologue. What about you? Do you want more about this personal history?

Prologue

Lately I have been thinking about that most mysterious of decades, the 1960s. I not only came of age during that time (and lived through it), but I am old enough to actually predate the advent of the hippies and ended up serving as a welcoming committee to them. As would-be beatniks, folks my age were the natural older brothers and sisters to Sixties generation. I would like to explore this topic over several blogs. I understand this may well interest but a few of us, but who cares. We can share our comments and time together. Anyway, it is snowing outside today, and winter seems to be coming on.

Let's face it; most of us who lived through the 1960s are still trying to figure out just what happened. I know I am. And it is not just my fuzzy memory speaking, although I have that too. I find it hard to sort out what was happening culture-wise back then, like alternative 'everything' and what was just having a 20-something-year-old body. The two are not one and the same, yet they were for me and for many of you reading this. It is not like separating the wheat from the chaff here, because here there is no chaff. I came of age and found myself right in the middle of the Sixties. It is hard to sort all that out.

I see there are lots of books out there on the Sixties, but the few that I have picked up and browsed through don't do it for me. Theirs was not my experience. Of course, I came up in Ann Arbor Michigan, a very gentle but cosmopolitan town that back then probably had an inferiority complex compared to vortices like Berkeley and Cambridge. Today it seems to be the other way around. Ann Arbor has come into its own in the last forty years or so and no longer has to apologize to anyone. And I did not come to Ann Arbor for an education. I grew up in Ann Arbor. I was a townie and never knew anything else. Think about that for a moment. Ann Arbor was never quite like the rest of the world.

Today I visit Ann Arbor usually several times a year, if only to see my grandkids. My wife goes much more often. I am not a traveler. I like it when the kids come up here where we live in Big Rapids, Michigan and catch frogs. These days when I am in Ann Arbor it takes twenty minutes just to drive across town, and if I have one phrase to describe the difference between Ann Arbor back then and now, it is "overly caffeinated." There seems to be a coffee shop on

almost every corner and it makes a difference. Back then there was just one coffee house and that was Mark's Coffee House on East William Street, but for those of you who really have been around this town, the first "coffee house" in Ann Arbor was the Promethean on the other side of William Street from Mark's and about a block west, roughly where the Cottage Inn pizza place is today.

The Promethean Coffee House served (non-espresso) coffee and mulled cider (with cinnamon sticks!) and played jazz and old Shelly Berman comedy albums. Once in a while folksingers like Al Young would play there. This must have been in the later 1950s or very early in the 1960s. I went there as often as I could to just sit around, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, look serious, and (most of all) hope that I would meet the love of my life. Nothing much really happened there aside from sitting around looking at each other, and after a while it closed. Still, for someone back then who was reading all of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and the Beat writers, this was as close as I could get to joining up with the Beat Movement. Unfortunately, that party was already almost over and I had to wait for the next wave, which was the Sixties and (I hate this term) the "hippies."

People my age automatically became the granddaddies (sometimes the godfathers) of the hippies. As it turned out, hippies were for the most part uneducated in the liberal arts, and even the worst beatnik wannabe at least knew jazz, classical music, and European literature, especially the poetry. I was perhaps overeager. I had read all of Dostoevsky (some 53 books), not to mention everyone else, like Sartre, Kierkegaard, Goethe, Proust, Thomas Mann, Kafka, Rilke, and the list goes on and on. I even read

(as best I could) all the Loeb Greek and Roman Classical Library, and that is saying something. Unfortunately, it went in one ear and out the other. But the poetry and literature stuck. And above all I loved what the Germans call Bildungsroman, which roughly translated are coming-of-age books usually with a romantic yearning tossed in.

Examples of Bildungsroman include Goethe's "Grüner Heinrich," and his "The Sorrows of Young Werther," not to mention the super-romantic and devastating book "The Wanderer," by Henri Alain-Fournier. Does anyone remember that book? It killed!

For someone like myself, with no real past back in those days, everything was still very much in the future, too much so for my taste at the time. I wanted a little piece of that future right away and couldn't wait to be out there in the world living now. Even high school was too slow and I could not wait, so I never finished. I just left and my friend John Stanger and I hitchhiked across the country from Ann Arbor to Venice West (Santa Monica) California. We knew that if any of the Beats were left, they would be there, in North Beach, San Francisco, or in the West Village in New York City. As it was October, sunny California seemed much more inviting, so off we went. But that is another story in itself.

I was never any kind of academic student anyway, other than a student of life and living. I yearned to get out there in the real dirt of life and feel how it was, and I did. My mom tells me that I even played hooky from Kindergarten and that one day they found me standing at the edge of at an excavation site watching the earth-moving machines. Mom! How was it possible that you let me alone like that? Yet this is

what she told me. It was either kindergarten or first grade. Of course, I don't remember.

But I well remember the loneliness of being a teen and young adult in Ann Arbor. As one of five boys, we lived in a too-small house out at 305 Wildwood on the west side of town, so I moved out quite early on. Bedrooms there were at a premium and I was lucky enough to have one all to myself. That was the good news. The bad news is that it was in the basement. My dad built it for me and every spring and fall, when the rains came, a small river of water would flow in through the small overhead basement window, down the wall, under my bed (I had to keep my blankets up), across the entire floor, and out my bedroom door into the floor drain. It was damp and musty, but it was my room and I loved having it.

Sometimes my little brothers would raid my room and find my little stash of Playboy magazines hidden in the ceiling cubbyhole. That was no good. And my mom finally cracked down on all the snakes I had in my room and throughout the basement. I had been a naturalist ever since I was six years old and I had all kinds of snakes in cages. Does that make me a nerd? This was before nerds.

And my snake collection included poisonous copperheads and really big rattlesnakes. Unfortunately from time to time a snake or two would (somehow) escape and be loose in the house. It was usually one of the large whip snakes, which were big but harmless. Well, they could bite. Mom really hated them the most and we would go on an extended hunt until it was found. Not all were found. At the bottom of the basement stairs, down where I lived, mother had placed one of my snake-handling sticks. People who went down there always grabbed that stick before

venturing farther into any basement rooms, not that they knew how to use one. LOL.

Once mom panicked when she found what she thought was a large snake along the top of some cupboards up near the ceiling. Everyone came running and it turned out to be a huge snake skin that had been shed there. Who knows where the snake was by then. If you really want a scary thought, imagine my two-day bus ride from Dallas, Texas to Ann Arbor, while on the floor, between my legs, that coated card-board like container was filled with snakes in cloth bags, including a copperhead and a couple of rattlesnakes, one of them quite large. I am glad they didn't rattle and all of that. I would have been hitchhiking home.

I do remember one very real scare when one of my rattlesnakes got out of its cage (again: "somehow") and was sitting right on the pillow next to my bed when I came home. There was no overhead light in my makeshift room, but only a lamp by the bedside. I had to cross the room in the dark (basement, remember?) to turn that light on. As I did that and blindly reached through the darkness for the lamp switch I heard or felt something as the rattlesnake struck out. It swooshed by brushing my sleeve. I didn't get bitten, but it did bring to an end that kind of ridiculous freedom.

My mother, as all the rest of my brothers would agree, was a saint and one of the most understanding and compassionate beings I have ever met. She would have to be with five boys (a basketball team as my dad always said) to raise. Anyway, the poisonous snakes had to go. It was not long before I moved out of there and I believe my younger brother Dan took

the basement room. I was the oldest and he was next in line. I was gone and out on my own. I liked that.

In the beginning, before I left for good, I would come back home, at least for spells, and just as likely as not I would bring some friend of mine that needed a place to stay with me. Mom never said no, but like one of those dogs that adopt another dog's puppy as her own, she just took everyone in and for considerable time periods at that. Of course, who could appreciate this at the time. It was just 'mom', and it had always been like that. I don't know what dad thought and I have little to no memories of his reaction to any of this, other than when it came to these things mother was the boss. Anyway father was often none too pleased with me.

I never managed to get the traditional father's blessing until very late in dad's life, mostly because I was not a businessman like he was and liked he wished I would be. I could not make money and I was not into formal education. There is no doubt that I was the black sheep in the family and have probably misled all of my other brothers, more or less, one by one. Mother never deserted me, but she did say that she did not like me much one time. Of course, I did not like me much either sometimes and was very stubborn and could be a total PITA at the drop of a hat. I did not take direction well and could not yet direct myself either.

Socially, all my early life (especially with girls) I tried to fit in, to go along and get along. I desperately wanted to mesh socially and just be one of the guys and most of all to appear attractive and desirable to any of the girls, and in particular to those chosen few. But that never really happened either. I had no idea then how square a peg I was in the social milieu. No

idea. I am reminded of a real story someone told (I would credit them if I knew their name) of watching a line of cats walking across a farmyard all in a row with their tails raised high, and at the end of the line (and not far behind) was one skunk (tail also raised high) trying for all its worth to just fit in and march along. Well, I was that skunk, but I didn't know it then, and hoped against hope it was not so. It was. Ultimately we have no choice in these kinds of matters. Destiny will out.

Today, as a father of four who never even babysat his kids for the first 21 years or so, I can only imagine what my mother and father felt when I abruptly quit high school and set out on the road hitchhiking for the west coast as a would-be beatnik. Mom must have trembled for my welfare or was she glad to see me go? The former I am certain is the case. Did I mention that I was frequently a PITA?

Back then, as I have pointed out, there were no hippies and for that matter it was not even the Sixties when I studied up on the Beat Movement. All that I knew is that I was at last out of boring, boring school, on my own, and free to experience for myself what I could only read about and imagine in the books of Kerouac and poems of Ginsberg. As mentioned, the Beats were very educated in the liberal arts, often self-educated. They were not academics, but amateurs in the truest sense, in love with literature, music, and all the arts. That is what I deeply wanted as well.

Although it was 1960 when I lived in Venice Beach, it was not yet the Sixties as we call them now. Rather, it was still the dying remnants of the Beat Movement that beckoned me, which in no way really foreshadowed what was to come next.

Those of us who came up idolizing the beats turned out to be at the forefront and leaders of the Sixties movement, at least at the onset. As my friend John Sinclair likes to say, it was the beat-educated pre-hippies that taught the hippies about the liberal arts. They had not had the training we had and would not have the time we had to thoroughly read the literature, study the art, woodshed, and all of that. But the hippies did have the good sense and politeness to defer to those of us who did know this stuff. We were immediately the de-facto leaders, but we never were regulars in that army. We were the officers coming from another time and with dreams the hippies never fully would grasp. We were looked up to, but we never considered ourselves hippies. We were hippie tutors.

That's enough for now. Let me know if this resonates with any of you and if you want to explore this further.

The Beat Movement

I am not a researcher or scholar in all of this, and don't want to become one. My approach is experiential and the point of these blogs for me is to understand the framework in which my life experiences fit, and perhaps to discuss it with some of you. Right off I can see that there are many different flavors or ways of viewing not only the beat generation, but how that generation segued into what we call the Sixties. While I made it a point back then to spend time in what were probably the main beat centers in America (Greenwich Village, Venice West, and North Beach), I came from and went back to my life in Ann Arbor. In other words, your experience and views may differ.

And, while yesterday I offered up a lot of experiential comments for examples, today (for my own clarity) I

want to work on the general framework or “view.” This will be more abstract folks, so take note. It was the Beat Movement that empowered the Sixties with their chief stereotype, the “hippie,” taken from the beat slang “hip” and “hipster.” So, to grasp the Sixties it helps to understand something about the (earlier) Beat movement in America, which IMO finds many of its roots in Europe. The whole concept of a “bohemian” was born in 19th Century Europe to describe the marginal and unorthodox existence of writers, artists, and aesthetes. The word “Beat” originally meant literally beaten down or down-trodden, defeated. These disenfranchised Beats were also originally known as “The Lost Generation,” which later became known (and better remembered) as the “Beat Generation.” Either way, “Beat” or “lost” are words with a clear meaning.

Furthermore, that interpretation was later expanded to infer that you get beat down so far that some kind of enlightenment or new vision is attained, but that connotation seems like hyperbole and an “add-on” to me. The actual term “Beat Generation” was introduced by Kerouac as early as 1948 and poet Alan Ginsberg fueled the fire with ample prose like his poem Howl: “Angel-headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo...” When the Sixties began, the beat movement had mostly devolved into commercial stereotypes replete with bongos, black turtlenecks, books, berets, sunglasses for guys and black leotards, no makeup, and long black hair hanging straight down the back for gals.

By that time Elvis had already left the building, if he had ever been there in the first place. Since I personally never really found the quintessential

beatnik, perhaps it was more an ideal than a fact. Stranded between the beat generation and the Sixties generation were people like myself, kids that were too young for the Beat wave and too old to be typical hippies, a kind of limbo existence. We became the natural guides and step-fathers to the hippies. The Beats were often tagged by the conservative 1950s culture as communist, but what they instead were was anti-capitalist, happy to seek out the simplest means of living for the sake of having the time to pursue their own literary and inner journeys.

Beats coexisted with the inhabitants of the poorest sections of town, the ghettos and slums. For the most part they shunned the workplace and did as little work as possible, quite content to just survive and get by. Not bound by the conventional work schedules they drifted toward the night and found their "home" in the late hours. The beats were (above all) anti-materialistic, and also anti-racist and pro-African American. Unlike the hippies, the beats were markedly non-political. They were intellectuals (or wanted to be) in a very real sense that amounted to a literary movement.

And they liked to talk. Speed, coffee, wine (or whatever) was enough to fuel almost endless conversations. Ginsberg: "... who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge." – from "Howl." It was a life of the mind and not of the body. The hippies celebrated the life of the body, but that day was yet to dawn. While the beat movement was not monolithic, in my personal experience, the true inheritance of the Beat Generation was more of a European legacy than an American one. What may be peculiarly American is the beats infatuation with the "Continent."

Yes, Kerouac and Ginsberg were American, but many of the authors, music, poets, etc. that they were most fascinated and influenced by were largely European. It took the hippies to drop the European references, and reset the pointer to this country. The hippies Americanized their experiences. Acid will do that. Around 1960 one of the European mindsets that particularly fascinated the Beats (at least around Ann Arbor) were the Existentialist philosophers, writers like Jean-Paul Sartre and his book "Being and Nothingness" and Albert Camus' novel "L'Étranger," which translates "The "Stranger." The beats were estranged from conventional society and, having myself grown up in the 1950s, I don't blame them. There was a sterility there that couldn't help provoke a reaction like the beats and eventually the Sixties.

Beneath the intellectual concerns of the Beats, in my experience, was an ennui, a restlessness and lack of interest in 1950's society. For my part, I would add to this (at least in my case) a spiritual longing or yearning, which is most clearly defined in the book by Henri Alan-Fornier, "The Wanderer." At least this is how I received it living in Ann Arbor. The underground artistic and anti-materialistic lifestyle of the beats was a direct pull from earlier European traditions. And while much is made of the fact that the beat generation turned to eastern philosophies, which in the end was only somewhat true. They pulled even more (at least early on) from the darker side of the European world view after two world wars. If the hippie movement can be seen as an upper, then the beat movement must be viewed as a downer.

The beats music of choice was jazz and classical music, and their drugs were wine, pot, speed, hallucinogens, and on downward from there. Hippies,

like the beats before them, also rejected capitalism, the establishment, and middle-class values. They were anti-war and anti-nuclear, but pro sexual freedom, vegetarianism, and the environment. Hippies never learned the European literary tradition so valued by the beats and simply leap-frogged that to embrace all kinds of Eastern philosophies. What was important to the Sixties children was peace, love, and individual freedom. Hippies were not creatures of the night as had been the beats, but of the day and sunshine. Take your clothes off and dance. Street theater, rock and folk music were embraced, with extended psychedelic forms of rock music as their anthem. And everybody was invited. The line between audience and performers became blurred; everyone was welcome to exist and express themselves. Get up and dance!

A Time Magazine article published in 1967, the July 7th edition ran a cover story "The Hippies: The Philosophy of a Subculture," in which it laid down what in their opinion was the hippie code: "Do your own thing, wherever you have to do it and whenever you want. Drop out. Leave society as you have known it. Leave it utterly. Blow the mind of every straight person you can reach. Turn them on, if not to drugs, then to beauty, love, honesty, fun."

It has been estimated that in 1967, the "Summer of Love," some 100,000 hippies traveled to San Francisco to celebrate. I was one of those people there. If this interests anyone, let's discuss. If not, that fine. I am writing this because I want to.

The First LSD Trip

[Warning: The following is a graphic account of an LSD trip and may not be something you want to read about, in which case please don't]

The definitive experience during my year in Berkeley was taking LSD, acid. In the end I was not sure what it was that I was taking; almost no one did that early in the scene. It was May 6th, 1964. I was intrigued (we all were) by the drug.

More important, and the final impetus to take acid, is that I had reached a point in my life (a very tight place) where I really needed an alternative view. The stories I had heard were that LSD could provide that, whatever else it was. Something had to give and in the end I was willing to take a chance. Still, I was very nervous and worried about what I might do if I took acid, lost control, and then: what? I had no idea and neither did most folks that I spoke with, and I had asked around.

I took LSD in a cube of sugar in the men's bathroom of a small coffee shop in Berkeley California on May 6th, 1964 around 10:30 PM. It was pure Sandoz acid, and at the time I had heard of no other kind. I was with Mary, an almost-girlfriend of several weeks whom I had met at Lucas Books where I worked part time. We had never really gotten past the foreplay stage, because I didn't always have the nerve to push things to the point of real intimacy. It was basically a fear of rejection.

It seemed I would persist almost forever (with these kind of questions in suspension) waiting for one of us to make a move, but not daring to take the plunge. I am certain some few of you will echo this.

We were given the key to a friend of Mary's house, where there was a record player and some albums. I chipped in 50 cents gas money to get a ride over to the place. The idea was for me to drop acid and listen to some serious music, something I might do on marijuana. This was Mary's idea, and a plan that seemed absurd to me from the outset—the idea of scheduling anything for this kind of experience.

You see, I already had plans for acid, even if I knew nothing about it. Oddly enough, LSD is a drug that happens to be whatever you think it will be. I had long been apprehensive about this particular drug. Of course I had tried pot, hash, uppers, and even opium. Acid, however, was different, if I was to believe the stories about it. I feared that it might permanently damage or affect me in some way—like make me insane or bring out whatever schizo elements that might be lurking somewhere in there. “In there” being everything I didn't know about myself.

At the same time, I was intrigued at all of the possibilities of acid. And most of all, I was desperate for change. It seemed to me that my entire life had once again painted me into a corner, and I wanted out. And then there is that fact that I hadn't really eaten for almost three days prior to dropping the acid and I was in the emotional chaos of the disintegration of my study plan with the professor I had been working with. Once again I could simply not follow any program of studies, and was back to square one. I also had an unsettling long-distance phone call the night before with my old friend and former house mate in Ann Arbor.

All of these and very little sleep prepared me for this particular night in Berkeley, California. But I had backup. Mary had given her word that she would

watch over me and keep me from all harm. We agreed that no matter what happened, no matter what I might say to her, she would not leave me.

When we arrived at the house where the phonograph was, a record was put on. As I looked around I could see that the house was in shambles—a complete wreck. I found this totally depressing, in fact disgusting to observe. To my chagrin, the driver decided to stay with us to listen to the music. I was immediately more than a little apprehensive about the extra (read stranger) person there and began to wonder did the two of them just want to watch what happened to me. Of course they did.

Acid was still not all that common and everyone was curious. I was the only one tripping, and it was already too late to back out as I had taken the acid almost 45 minutes before. The first effects of the acid were some heightening sensations similar to alcohol, like when you have had a little too much to drink and are on the verge of deciding if you are all right or going to be sick. Rising through and overcoming this feeling came a stranger sensation, one of extreme unrest that soon became too much to bear without relief of some sort, a slow shockwave rolling through the system.

I was also realizing that I could be physically sick and so stepped outside. Mary followed. I told Mary privately that I wanted to get away from the driver and out of this house. By that time I was realizing that this experience was not about to be as gross as the programmed music that Mary had in mind for me.

Leaving the house, we drove back toward the Berkeley campus and were dropped off at the Café Mediterranean on Telegraph Avenue, where I used to

work. From there it was less than two blocks to my small apartment. I was quite buzzed by this point and beginning to feel (psychologically) very peculiar—a hostile/non-hostile sort of thing. It did not feel good. We entered my place and sat down.

At this point, I began to have vivid and pronounced hallucinations and an obvious projecting of animosity (or not, as the moment would have it) toward Mary. The same kind of feelings I had toward the driver were now directed toward Mary. She turned the small heater in the place on and declared that it was interesting to come to an understanding of one's own home.

Such a comment was way too crude for me at that point. These were not welcome words and triggered the reaction that Mary had somehow planned or trapped me into facing myself, and, worse, was actually enjoying or studying all of this. I could feel being the object of observation in Mary's eyes. This actually was probably the case. I was not in the mood to be anyone's guinea pig, even my own.

I soon was pacing back and forth in the small room. I could not seem to remain in the lighted area of the room but, under pretext that it had become too warm, would dart into the smaller back room and lean out the alley door, breathing in the cool night air. Then I also opened the front door and began to make small sorties outside into the overhanging arbor.

From this point on, this was (from my perspective) completely insane behavior on my part. I would normally never leave the door open at night. And the sight of the door opening in the night, as seen from outside, with the light leaping out from it toward me,

reflecting all of the leaves and the fuchsias was, well, eerie and a bit menacing.

Inside was Mary and the light and the growing feeling of slight hostility. And, when back inside I found myself almost holding my breath and then dashing outside again to breath. Once outside, I never went far. I was afraid of what I might do to myself. Outside the plants, and particularly the ground plants along the walkway, became a stream of waving arms with barbed points, glowing red and green, arms waving like sirens, beckoning me, but where?. And don't forget the fuchsias all around me, certainly a plant fit for one of Dante's circles. Their red and purple flowers became waving projections of letters, words — a ground

covered with a pattern of words. Scarlet letters. It was mad.

My Catholic upbringing and imprint was in full sway. I continued to slip in and out of the doorways, but I began also to experience the outside and inside in the same way, and not a nice way. It made less and less of a difference as the drug took hold whether I was in or out. The 'in' was out and the 'out' was in. There was no escape possible from my imagination.

And yet this mad world was comfortable in a strange way. It was strangely familiar. It was 'my' mad world. Nothing seemed too strange. Frightening? Yes, but not really strange or unfamiliar. These were just the kind of things I was always afraid of... somewhere back in my mind. In fact, these are just the things I might have expected, if I knew what to expect, these things and not others. I was just naturally so very used to them.

I would slip into the cavern of the arbor outside from which I could look back and see the light from inside glowing and flinging itself from the door, rays of god-light piercing the darkness. The extensive arbor became a cave lit by fantastic florescent creature lights—waving comforting siren-like arms and tendrils. I would dash inside to say something to Mary and then dash back out again. I could not remember when I had said something to her or even whether I had really even been inside recently and, if so, how many times had I come in and back out. Differences blurred.

I also could not get beyond the front gate. I kept trying, but would always stop short of the street and return inside the room under the pretext of saying something to Mary, who appeared (in my eyes) more and more of an observer each time. I could see then that I don't take objectification easily. I am mostly subject. My mental projections began to get way out of control. And I could see that I was projecting fantastic things, and that I saw what I wished and that any other person or event could be interpreted in bizarre numerous ways.

At some point, I began to chew on some bread and Mary had cut some salami, still sticking with her agenda of what she thought a guided trip should be like. I would grab a piece of something and run off with it to ravishingly chew like mad. I was not really feeling the chewing or anything, and only occasionally became aware after the fact that I was now or had been recently eating.

Inside became still more oppressive. I now vigorously resented Mary's presence and her comments more and more. She kept suggesting that I lie down and put out the light, which I refused to do. I kept inferring hostile motives to anything she said or I was

embarrassed by her lack of subtlety. I felt she wanted me to really get the fear that I already felt approaching. When I just couldn't stand it anymore, I insisted that we had to walk outside.

Together we walked up toward campus. I had really developed an attitude by that time about Mary. She was just too coarse in approaching me. Whatever she said, I did something with in my mind, so that she became many different persons successively in relation to me. Sometimes she was loving, sometimes hateful, making fun, sadistic, not aware, aware—etc. Often I would try on several ways of interpreting a statement and see her change right in front of me, even though she had made but one statement. I also knew that I was doing all the arranging.

The streets, the cars, people and colors were simply beyond description. The emphasis was not on the heightening of sensations such as with pot (although sensations were very vivid). Somehow vivid colors were way beside the point. The real focus was in the change and manifestations of the world, and of each object in it - rearrangements.

To see something undergo complete change in character depending on what I was projecting was indeed frightening. It was also fascinating and illuminating. I was learning more this evening about myself than I had in my whole life thus far. Sometimes walking a block would take an infinite period of time to cover, although the walking pace remained the same. At other times, it was gone in a second. I could walk and walk and still the block would never end. The speed anything traveled by varied tremendously. A shoe, a dress in a store, would become animate or would change personality.

The five minutes it took to walk a block or so in Mary's time seemed to last, for me, at least an hour. Time was simply very arbitrary, seemed ambiguous, and was entirely dependent on me. And I was not dependable right then. "Whose sense of time was real?" I thought.

People that were passed in the street tended immediately to become stereotypes and adjust themselves to the various roles I projected, right in front of my eyes. An Asian walking by became a stereotypical 'chinaman', bobbing, fattening, and hunching, while across the street a dull lanky bookworm raced furiously by us. This was simply astounding for me to see.

All this walking toward campus had been free from the fears that had begun earlier at the apartment. Moving up Telegraph Avenue, we reached the student union at Bancroft Way, which immediately arranged itself like an artist's blueprint, with all the trees becoming exactly the same—cropped and geometrical. We continued on into campus.

As we walked around the large central fountain Mary began to wander off, seeming almost to beckon to me. Once again I resented this and began to project anxiety on her part until she finally went and sat on a wall. I did not like to be manipulated in even the most subtle way. I was way subtler than that. I thought she was pretending to not know me. Perhaps I was behaving badly and didn't know it. Her face would appear to be like my own, but glowing a stereotyped boyish-girl look, foxily and cunningly leading me toward hell.

By this time, we were walking all over the inner Berkeley campus. Everything was fantastic.

Somewhere along in here, I began to become more actively paranoid and to project that paranoia into everybody and everything. This was enhanced when we reached Berkeley's famous outdoor Greek theater. I, who had read all the classic Greek writings, went up and touched the marble front with the huge word "Greek" etched in it. I was terribly moved and I tried to go inside. The gate was locked. I rattled it.

I was crushed and just couldn't understand why I was being locked out from the Greeks. This was, to me, a 'bad' sign and things kind of went downhill from here. The whole persecution thing picked up. I began to almost hate Mary at times. Trees were waving their arms like calisthenics doing jumping jacks. The ground everywhere was littered in patterns of red letters. Grass and shrubs became tendrils red and grasping, holding, and tearing at my feet. Things loomed up ominously and then fell back again. The sky was shooting stars and falling heavens.

Every car became a police car. Every person a policeman, complete in all the details. An actual police car caused a scare once and I started to run. I felt time slow down as I tried to pick up speed, moving my (seemingly then) huge body from a standing start into motion. I could feel the wind moving past my face, wind created by my own motion. Mary urged me not to hurry, not to run. I stopped.

I had a fantastic feeling of time changing depending on the speed I traveled. By this time I had more than enough of this state of panic and asked Mary to guide me home. She agreed and we started back. This trip took forever. We walked and walked. When we finally reached the student union (only a block or two), I wanted to just fall down because I couldn't face the

four-block walk from there back to my place. I knew it would take positively forever. Forever!

I could see in my mind the complete physical distance home, all four blocks of it, and I knew that it had to be covered in this very mechanical way before I would be home—one eternal step after another. There was this problem with time, simply—the traveling of this mechanical distance. It could take forever. We walked and walked, with me constantly fearing policemen.

I was still projecting hostile actions and intent on Mary, as if she were trying to get rid of me. Or, as if I was trying to get away from her. A couple came down an alley and hurried down the other side of the street, jostling each other. They were a drunk black couple, very crude looking and very happy. They got into a car and I saw that there were a middle-aged white couple, and not particularly happy.

My mind did that. Out there was in-here. I was doing that, me. As we walked, Mary pointed out a ram's head shape in a shop window, her face was glowing and smiling, now somewhat evil, menacing. I simply could not imagine how I could possibly go the last two blocks without being killed. Simply, how could anyone get two blocks and still be alive? It seemed that chance would destroy me or that my sense of time might stretch yet more and I would never be able to reach home, like the old conundrum of halving the distance to the finish line. Theoretically you never get there.

As it was, it seemed to take at least one and one half hours to go the last three or four blocks. This was in my time, which 'WAS' time for me. When we finally reached the gate to my house, I told Mary that I was fine and to leave me. No problem. She said goodnight

and walked off into the night and disappeared. Her promise not to leave me under any circumstance was canceled by my simply mentioning her leaving. She left as soon as asked. It was my own strength of will that caused it. I said “Go!” and she skedaddled. Gone.

Although I had just asked her to leave, I was sad about how easily she just walked away, leaving me there in this state. Yet, I felt that I was fated for this and had realized by this time that no one could watch or prevent me from coming to harm because the harm was simply already in myself. There was no running farther and I felt myself closing in from all sides with a heaviness and a horror.

I walked slowly up the path to my door, which was still covered (more than ever) with red, blood-like waving, grasping plants – fuchsia. The light from my doorway illuminated the arbor and the entire entranceway with a fantastic radiance, a brilliant cave that called, lured, and beckoned me to what I could no longer run from. This was it, and I knew that I had arrived at the business end of this project.

The door opened to the dull and scattered light of the lamp. As it swung shut, I felt that I was entering into myself completely. And I knew that all of me was here, that I brought it with me. The inside was now the same as the outside, secure only from chance or authoritative intervention by the door. I was simply trapped.

Suddenly there seemed to be no more hallucinations, or rather, if any, it was the hallucination of the dull heaviness and exact sameness of my room now having full sway. I knew that I could not go out. I knew that I would now lie down and turn out the light. And I knew that I was alone in the largest sense of that

word. I slowly removed my shoes, sweater, and pants, turned off the light, and crawled into bed. Darkness.

And I reached up and opened the small shutters above my head to let a slight light in from the outside alley. Then, lying there partially covered, things came to me all in one. I felt my aloneness. I knew that all the running and the fear, everything that happened during that evening, was only myself. I had witnessed it. And I could never escape, for I brought it with me. There was nowhere to find a reprieve now, simply nothing anyone could do.

Mary could hold me, protect me, but never could she or anyone protect me from this, my very self. The thoughts continued to roll in—my relationship with Professor David, my delinquency in studying, and its sad ending, and then my attempt to go on alone in study, without a teacher. Now I could see the fruitlessness of this approach, since I now saw that it was not the study, not any particular subject that was the point. It was the teacher, the student, the working together, the mutual care about the work that made the difference.

I was overcome with despair. I realized that there was no one in the world who meant enough or could mean enough to help me if I could not even help myself. What, in a word, was happening was that the special something within me that I had valued all my life, my spirit, my soul, was trapped for the first time completely, and it was dying. Up until now, I had always used my quick mind to rationalize and escape these hard thoughts. It was easy to forget what I found so hard to remember.

This whole evening I had been dying. Not quickly and fast, but slowly, ebbing. I was withering away bit by bit, relinquishing hold after hold on the world. Letting it go. Letting it go on. Fear was fantastic. I clutched and clung and cried and pleaded with myself. I felt it going, and finally allowed and OK'd its going. I knew that tonight I was going to die, that this was the end of my life. In fact, I was dying.

As I lay there on the small bed in the darkness of the room, I became aware of a peculiar feeling on my chest and arms. There is only one substance that is warm and wet with a special slipperiness, a quickness of feeling—blood. I was bleeding to death there on my cot. I thought that maybe, without knowing it, I had cut my wrists and didn't remember or want to know. I touched my wrists and realized that I was clawing and scratching at them. I madly tried to find the lamp switch, turned it on, and looked. I could see no blood. I turned the light out and lay back down.

But again I felt the slipperiness of blood, stronger now, and thought that perhaps I wouldn't let myself see it flowing. I jumped up before my strength was gone and turned on the overhead light. I stood before the cheap full-length mirror. The floor and the bed were covered with blood. I looked in the mirror and saw that I was, in fact, covered with blood.

God, I was bleeding to death. Michael was dying. I felt weak. I had so little strength left. And I was already so exhausted. I did not know how or when I had cut myself, but I obviously had, and I knew that I had very little time anymore to live. I was alone and dying far from anyone I cared for. In fact, there was no one I could think to ask. I had all the people I knew with me, there in my head, and none could help.

Was I bleeding to death or did I just imagine that I was? I could not answer this myself. Anyway, what was the difference? A thought occurred. Perhaps Professor David could tell me. Professor David, with whom I had argued many times, but for whom I did have respect. His reality somehow stood outside my own. I had not entirely compromised his relations with me, although even in that I hung on by a thread. The professor had an independent opinion from me.

If somehow I could get to his door, the professor alone would know the truth and would do what could be done (if anything was possible) to save me. He alone in all the world I trusted to judge the truth. I frantically pulled on some clothes and rushed outside through the arbor and out into the street. Everywhere was blood. The outside world was also bleeding and dying. The world and I were dying completely alone, together.

As I faded, the world faded with me. Fear had me to the death. I began to have doubts about even the professor. I could not go to Professor David's. We were not even very friendly at that point. And I felt that I did not deserve any sort of reprieve. I deserved to die. I thought of Mary and started toward her house. But no, she could not tell me. She was already part of my world and that world was dying, was dying and bleeding to death. She was already within my world and therefore could not judge it. Was I in fact bleeding to death?

But there was perhaps one other world. Professor David's world was not my world. And, though I disagreed with the professor about all kinds of thing, I discovered that the bottom line was that I believed the professor's world could judge the death of my own. I hurried faster toward the professor's home. It seemed

to take hours. Behind me was blood where my feet had stepped, a trail of blood. I felt weaker and weaker. Each car was the police who would prevent me from reaching the professor. I would bleed to death there in the street if they stopped me, and everywhere: scarlet letters.

The sky was blood red, dripping and hanging there where it had been ripped apart. Plants and houses dripped and poured blood in torrents onto the street. I would never make it. And it took hours and hours and hours. A car behind me overtook me after an unbearable length of time, pulled across my path and stopped. A huge black man waited there grinning at me and then pulled on into the driveway. I went faster. Time slowed.

Now, only a block away, I ran with my last strength up stairway after stairway. The highest lights were on in the professor's house. I rang the bell and slumped against the door. I then pulled away and stood there trembling. The door opened. It was the professor. I stammered something. I went inside where I tried to explain. Professor David did not seem to understand. He of course had no idea what was happening. I told him I was bleeding, showed him, and watched the professor's face change again and again ... hostile, furious, helpful, kind.

At one point I could see that the professor saw my bleeding, but was going to say nothing. He would let me die as I deserved. The professor seemed very impatient and kept asking me if I wouldn't have coffee as if to change the subject. I was horrified and broken. I prayed that I would not be left to die. Sometimes it seemed that the professor became mechanical, like a windup toy, sitting there jerking.

I slowly calmed down. In time, I was able to speak and we talked and I felt his words and thoughts and his heart. I saw that the professor still cared for me and that he accepted the entire Michael, including the bad-student, and not just the 'good' part of me. There were two forces within my mind fighting and I saw that these forces were within myself. They were two parts of me, parts not distinct, but spread over a million thoughts and decisions. These two forces were forced to face each other that night in Berkeley. I saw these two opposite and hypocritical forces and had to admit them or die. They were there, part of me. I saw them and allowed that they both existed. They both were true at the same time.

I then began to become still calmer and clear, and saw for the first time into Professor David's eyes and soul, and at the same time, into myself. I saw that, aside from all the noise, I was clean, that I was honest, and that that part within me that I had always hoped was good and pure was in fact good and pure. I could see that I was a real and good person, one with an identity, and a fine one.

I felt as strong as the professor and looked unerringly into his eyes. I was myself for the first time. There was a real me and I 'was' that, and it was good. My self was a clear and a strong, tough thing. Indestructible. I was everything I had ever dared dream or hoped to be. I talked with the professor about our working relationship and I felt honest and clean—straight-forward. I was able to speak of all things, including our teacher-student relationship, my own failures and wrongs, my inability to enjoy studying.

I could look at my quite ambiguous self and be unashamed of it. That was simply how it was, and I,

Michael, admitted it for the first time. Later that night I left the professor, who must not have known what was happening, and walked home. The world around me was also clear and clean. At home, I started to climb into bed thinking that I would sleep now and get up early to think about all of this. I stopped. No, that was what I always did, trying to save time, conserve time and energy, missing all the rewards. No. No sleep.

I would have myself a sunrise and I dressed and went outside. And the world was clear and clean. I walked and walked and the sun rose. I was thrilled, delighted. The world was everything wonderful. I passed an old man and said "Good morning!". The man replied "good morning." "A fine morning too," I added out loud. And it was. I thought about many things and for the first time from the point of view of a subject, no longer just an object in the world, an object subjected to the world.

I was a person, a subject in this world. I met different people and spoke freely and hard brilliant straight into their eyes. So many things I had learned about time, about my own romanticism, about the self. My tightly wrapped person and life had cracked and some light shone in. The outer world that I had struggled with, the world of hard persons and ugliness was found to be none other than my own mind, my particular world. There were not two worlds, my personal view and the external world.

On that acid night these two were seen to be one and the same. And I saw this in real time and accepted this as true. It changed things forever for me because I now knew that all of what I saw was part of my own mind, how I saw life. And it could change and be changed. It was like a sailor discovering his sails. I

suddenly was mobile for the first time. I could change myself and the things around me. I was no longer a victim, a masochist being dragged through life by external events. All that had changed through this experience.

While I could not change all exterior events, I 'could' change how I received and viewed those events. I could change my mind. And I did. From that day forward, I had a mission: to find out more about how the mind worked. I wanted to endlessly revisit those moments of insight and clarity I had experienced. I had imprinted on that particular night in Berkeley and from that moment on, I measured who I was from that time, from that experience. I was born. My interest in the mind, the psyche, and all things psychological was peaked. I couldn't get enough of alternative culture—alternatives. I had experienced an alternative to everything I had known up to that point, and the comparison between this new experience and my life to that point gave me a new life. I was changed.

Suddenly alternate points of view made a lot of sense to me. I immersed myself in anything out of the ordinary, anything that gave me a new perspective. My mind was open. I had experienced a radically new way of seeing myself and, with that part of my experience, I was a lot more willing to try other perspectives, including those of other people. And so you have heard my first acid trip. Marijuana never interested me much, but I thought long and hard before I would take acid again.