

Pam File - Catalyst

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The Catalyst Crowd

Felton Dam Assessment

Patton Interviewed

Welfare, Part II

Santa Cruz Hip, Part III

Changing Times Have Changed The Catalyst

santa cruz Times

by Joan Klingenberg

SCULPTOR RON BOISE, MOST likely stoned, sauntered through the doorway of the Catalyst and scanned the lunch-crowded room for a place to sit. Barefoot, shirtless, his pants hanging around his hips, he spotted the only available chair at a table already occupied by well-dressed men in suits. He smelled like a blow-torch, since he used one regularly to create his Kama Sutra statues and the bronze nudes. Two of them hung above the Hip Pocket Bookstore to the dismay of local merchants. Clutching his pitcher of beer, he drank uninhibited, not bothering to use a glass.

He became immersed in conversation with the cautious men at the table. The manager looked on, positive that Boise's nonchalance would deter the already wary customers from ever eating a pastrami sandwich there again. The men were Santa Cruz judges who had walked over from the courthouse on Cooper Street. They had a strong sense of etiquette. In spite of that, however, they were charmed by the unkempt sculptor who drove around in a multi-colored bus. As they left, one judge remarked to the relieved manager, "That man was incredible!"

RON BOISE EXEMPLIFIED THE spirit of the early days of the Catalyst, according to Al DeLudivico, manager of the Catalyst Co-op its first four years. Boise had the ability to communicate across social barriers filled with paranoia and to establish common bonds among cross-sections of the community. The Catalyst was so named to identify it as a gathering and eating place where Boise-like communication could occur. The name embodied the optimism of the liberal group that formed it in 1965 and the idealism of DeLudivico. Now, both Boise and the Catalyst Co-op are dead.

When DeLudivico ran the co-op, government center employees were not separated from downtown by the San Lorenzo River. Because then they worked in the Victorian, brick building on the corner of Cooper and Pacific. They were not deterred from lunching on Pacific Avenue by the ten minute walk that now exists between them and the Avenue cafes. Until the Catalyst, no downtown restaurant offered a decent sandwich. The Catalyst offered such a deal.

DeLudivico was coaxed into managing it because he had coffeehouse experience. Describing himself as "the first beard in town," he also admits readily that he would not be classified as a "businessman." He and his wife Patti took the job because they had faith in coffeehouse atmosphere, not



Photos by Eric Strayer

because of a desire to achieve financial success.

They did manage to create a unique atmosphere; and they definitely were not a financial success. The co-op folded due to increasing debts. They had tried to set up a second branch at UCSC which was successful the first year, but sank into debt the next when it tried to absorb the cost of new buildings that replaced the original A-frame structures. The co-op was committed to paying the university a percentage of the gross. On rainy nights, the poorly located buildings would sometimes attract only two customers from the 500 student population. In the end, debts amounted to \$25,000.

"It is very hard to make a co-op fun because people don't cooperate," said DeLudivico, giving the reason behind the Catalyst's failure. He spent many days, working from 8 a.m. until 2 a.m., in the kitchen, since not enough members were available to volunteer their time. He said the co-op could never attract an experienced manager, "because any experienced business managers thought we were crazy."

The Catalyst, according to DeLudivico, wanted to integrate the various cross-sections of the community. They didn't want to alienate the other merchants. They wouldn't sell coffee or pastrami by the pound, even though urged to do so, because the Plaza Mediterranean already did that. "We wanted to provide a service that wasn't already existing in the community."

BEER DRINKERS ASKED TO LEAVE

DELUDIVICO SOMETIMES DIS-couraged business if it wasn't in keeping with his coffeehouse-ideals. He would stop serving food and drinks while folk singer Kai Moore was performing. He was very much interested in folk singers and felt that others should feel the same way if they

came on those nights. One time he remembers asking a group of loud (by his standards) beer drinkers to leave because they were talking while Moore was singing. The customers were somewhat surprised, since they had spent more money on beer than anyone in the whole house. "You are the strangest businessman I've ever met," one remarked slowly as DeLudivico ushered them to the door.

The co-op didn't include the entire floor space of the present Catalyst. It existed only in the kitchen of the present Catalyst and then expanded into the fountain room, which is the doorway to the lobby of the St. George Hotel. DeLudivico claims the co-op housed "an incredible accumulation of everyone — doctors, office workers, secretaries, local artists, lawyers, blacks, Hell's Angels and teeny boppers. DAs would share a table with the person they were prosecuting the next day. Little old ladies would come in for a cup of tea," he reminisced, "and the board of supervisors would finish off their meetings there." Morris Abrams came daily. Allen Ginsberg, Eric Nord and Ken Kesey all showed. The most radical element present, according to the former manager, was the new hip generation that was filtering down from Haight Ashbury.

The entertainment included folk singers, jazz groups, classical guitarists and string quartets. A belly dancer performed one week, and the Santa Cruz Symphony the next. Poetry readings were held on Sundays. Each segment of the day, and each day of the week, attracted a different group of people. The coffee drinkers would filter in early and stay throughout the afternoon, the "teeny boppers" would stop by after high school, and then "the heavies" from 8 until 10 p.m.

Unlike the present Catalyst, the co-op never sponsored any rock bands.

"We didn't want to alienate the older people at the St. George Hotel," DeLudivico explained. Besides, The Barn in Scotts Valley was providing the acid-rock entertainment then. One corner of the co-op became the property of an old man from the St. George who used to sit, glued to his chair, daily, watching television. He fought a constant friendly battle with the music that was played over the stereo system. As the music would get louder and louder, he would turn his t.v. up full volume. The senior became so much a part of the co-op scene that Boise finally did a sculpture of him.

Although DeLudivico was accused of spiking the food with acid and of molesting 13-year-old girls by the more aggressive opponents of the co-op, he said no one ever "freaked-out" on drugs there. "We never called the police in the four years we were there," he claims. If someone got out of hand, DeLudivico would take the time to talk him into more social behavior, rather than resort to force.

Ironically, the only night of any real trouble at the co-op, other than a poetry reading that the Hell's Angels had tried to disrupt, occurred on its last night. Still in financial trouble, DeLudivico remembers that the last night was one of many parties around town. The co-op had originally planned a street dance, which was overthrown by the notorious Hell's Angels. "The co-op was in shambles; I couldn't believe it," he sadly recalls. "It was an evening of nightmares."

POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

ALTHOUGH FINANCING WAS the main reason for the co-op's downfall, other, more subtle problems existed. According to

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DeLudivico, much friction existed among co-op members. The scene was more political then and there were the usual disagreements. Also, he feels many businessmen resented the idea of a co-op in the first place, which caused hard feelings among merchants on the avenue. More than this, however, times were changing. "We're in a whole other age now," the former manager explained. "The town is polarized. Unique Santa Cruz has changed. The co-op was a very unique business that will never happen again."

DeLudivico feels the closest thing to the old Catalyst today in Santa Cruz is the Solarium on Soquel Avenue. Although it is not a co-op, "it serves the owners' own community" with a minimum of profit. "At the Catalyst, our customers were our friends," he noted, in comparing the two places. When you walk into the small rooms of the Solarium today, you do get the feeling that everyone knows each other. Coffee is self-service, and the pace is unrushed; you can sit there all day, drink coffee and talk. The climate surrounding it, however, is not the same as it was at the co-op. In 1966 the Solarium would have been considered a suspicious enterprise, whereas now it goes unnoticed. It will not be a part of hip Santa Cruz history as the co-op is.

DeLudivico's present status as director for the Community Action Board is probably more suited to his unbusiness-like nature than was his post as co-op manager. Now, still dedicated to the ideas of community cooperation and lending a hand to those in need, he runs in and out of the drab, beige and green, wall-scruffed CAB offices located in the former County Hospital complex.

Still wearing a long greying beard and torn straw hat, he flips through a stack of "While you were out" on his desk, picking out only those needing immediate attention. He can only spread himself so thin, being involved with staff meetings, Meals on Wheels, the breakfast program and Operation Wilder, among other things. On the peeling green stucco wall of his domain a poster invites you to "eat, drink and be merry cheaply - join the neighborhood co-op." USDA flour, skim milk, cornmeal, sugar and grapefruit juice are stacked into his office cupboard. It's as if the Catalyst kitchen followed him into his present office.

RANDALL KANE AND THE CHANGES

OWNER RANDALL KANE SAYS the Catalyst kitchen "was a real swamp" when he took it over for business. "You'd have had to see it then to appreciate how nice it is now," he commented. Dinette sets, card tables and folding chairs all crowded the floor space. Now, assorted wooden tables with hardwood chairs give the Catalyst its more "classy" appearance.

The kitchen seems surprisingly organized and clean for such a large organization that attracts a motley crew of customers. The shelves are stacked with bulk salt, vanilla, flour and mayonnaise. As he talks, blunt and highly opinionated, Kane makes a huge batch of peanut butter cookies in "the cookie machine," which is really a steel rotary blade that can stir up to 10 dozen cookies at a time. Kane does "four dozen at a whack" on this particular day. Walking through the



Randall Kane, broom in hand, works as hard as any employee.

maze of necessities that make the Catalyst deli run, he talks about how he first set up the Catalyst.

Unlike DeLudivico, Kane "had no real concept of what he was getting into" when he started out. "At that time, the drug scene was pretty big," he remembered. "People were dropping acid and doing a lot of speed. The rock music thing was already happening."

Kane moved into the large Front Street room of the Catalyst about six months after he took it over. "The place still isn't big enough," he regrets. At night, when a good band is playing, one can walk around the circumference of the fountain room, the bar and then the stage room, and find all the chairs taken.

DeLudivico feels the main difference between the Catalyst then and now, are the customers. "The Catalyst does not attract the cross-section of people it used to," he remarked. The hard-core atmosphere does seem to keep many businessmen, families and older people from frequenting it, although one can see representatives from all age groups there, particularly in the mornings and afternoons.

In the mornings, Bach plays over the speakers and the coffee is fresh. Many people filter in before work to read the *Chronicle*. In the afternoons, the younger, so-called hip crowd starts filling the tables, and space becomes harder to find as the band sets up and a cover charge starts to be taken at the door. At this point, IDs are religiously checked.

Kane has been accused of changing the Catalyst from a non-profit organization into one for profit. "When I took over," he explains, "they (the co-op people) took me as a smooth operator who had stolen the treasure from under their noses." He says he's not into making money. "I've got enough money," he asserted dryly. "What's the use in making more, so they can take it out in more taxes and build better bombs?" He expresses satisfaction in breaking even. Last year, he said the Catalyst made \$6,000 and the year before, \$2,000. Before that, he was in the hole.

Kane insists on local entertainment and won't pull in big name bands to add more money to their pockets. "I never wanted any celebrities here," he explained, banging open a peanut butter can. "You just have to rip people off too much so you can give some creepy, jerkwater entertainer his fourth million." The Catalyst gave fame to local bands like Oganookie and Jango. These bands were good practically every night they played. The rock stars, Kane pointed out, may not even put on a good show the particular night they appear.

BIG DIFFERENCE IS ATTITUDES

THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN the co-op and today's Catalyst is not the music or the hard liquor, but the attitudes of the customers. Since adding hard liquor to the bar menu last November, Kane said "It has made no difference" moneywise or otherwise. The music itself has evolved according to the trends taking place in the music scene today. Folk singers and coffeehouses are more or less passe, except in the minds of people like DeLudivico.

The regular customers, however, do not come to the Catalyst as they did in 1966 to have contact with different facets of the community. Most are not leaving their jobs temporarily, whether it be artist, lawyer or secretary, taking time out to talk non-professionally with a variety of workers, and then to go back to work. Most regulars came into the co-op to open themselves up to those who were different from themselves. Today, however, many regulars at the Catalyst seek out those who are like them, for a sense of security. For many, the Catalyst is their home. Its loose atmosphere attracts those who can't stay in one place for any length of time or who don't know what to do with themselves.

"There are people who live in here," Kane drawled, now throwing sesame seeds in the cookies on impulse. "They stay in here all day, spend 40 cents on two cups of coffee, and act as if you're ripping them off." He doesn't seem to mind, however, as long as they maintain.

"This is not just a saloon," he continued. "For a lot of people it's a half-way house. We babysit all those lunatics they turned loose from the state mental hospitals."

Two years ago a lot of Hell's Angels were hanging around the Catalyst, said Kane. "Fortunately, most of them have O.D.'ed by now," he said.

George Cuneo, who has been working at the Catalyst for a year and a half, said he used to "hang out" there for a long time. Sometimes bartender, sometimes dishwasher, Cuneo says he did things then as a customer that he wouldn't think of doing now. "Working with the customers here has kind of burned me out on people," he explained. "A guy will flip you a peace sign and then rip you off at the same time. As soon as someone comes up and gives me a lot of brother, brother stuff, I put my hand on my wallet."

His black hair, damp from the steam of the dishwasher, earring in one ear, Cuneo talked about the good relationships, by contrast, that exist among Catalyst employees. "It's a

pretty good work environment," he remarked. "Everybody enjoys each other's company. We all hang out together. It's too bad everyone here is over-educated for their job. One bartender has a masters in psychology."

THE POLICY IS TO KEEP THE DOOR CLOSED

AS CUNEO TALKS A "SURPRISE band" sets up in the stage room. This particular night is a benefit for women from the Birth Center who were recently arrested on midwifery charges. Kane figures the evening will profit the Center about \$1,000, since practically all the cover charge will be turned over to them.

As the band sets up, some employees make their way through the crowded tables, picking up glasses and empty pitchers, seemingly oblivious to the bizarre dress and mannerisms of the customers who have paraded inside. Other workers stand by, surveying the whole scene, alert to any disruptions. One bearded man is reprimanded for opening the door to the St. George.

"What did you open that door for?" someone yells from across the room.

"Because it's too hot in here," he answers defensively.

"Close it!" comes the undebatable reply. In the evenings the policy is to keep the door closed.

Unlike DeLudivico, Kane does not believe in catering to the sensitivities of the older residents at the St. George. He calls some "a bunch of ole booze hounds with no family, ending their lives in those boring cells, those wretched little rooms rented by the little creep that runs the place. They're uptight dragons, whiling away their declining years, waiting to assume the permanent horizontal."

Kane, running his fingers through his white, silky hair, claims not to be "an admirer of senior citizens as a group, if they are a group. . . . A person shouldn't merit special privileges just because they have the distinction of living over 65 years."

If all goes well, by the end of the year Kane will no longer have to deal with the hotel residents. After completing red tape procedures (like the architectural review board, which is composed of "a bunch of dentists' wives and other such qualified people"), Kane plans to move the Catalyst. He has bought the building housing the bowling alley and Frenchy's on South Pacific Avenue to house the new Catalyst. Again, he has ideas, but no definite philosophy behind the next phase of his enterprise.

"It's going to be four times as big, and it's going to be very posh," Kane surmised. "There will be fountains and flower beds, and a sauna bath for the troops. And I've always wanted a saloon with a laundromat," he dreamed. It's not going to be any more expensive, however, at least if one takes inflation into account. He claims the new Catalyst will maintain the same relative prices of food as it does now, "which is not as high as it is supposed to be by restaurant standards."

He doesn't want to have \$8.95 steak and lobster dinners as some places do that are considered "posh. I don't enjoy those kind of places myself," he explained. "People that frequent those kind of places want their asses kissed. I don't like to do it myself or to pay people to do it. People that come in here don't need their ass kissed."

As far as the customers go, Kane asserts that the new Catalyst will basically attract the same people it does now. "They don't have anywhere else to go." •