

{remember}

Santa Cruz 1965

Back when times... they were a-changin'

By Lee Quarnstrom



Gypsy Boots, author of *Barefeet* and *Good Things to Eat*, enjoys happy hour at the Hip Pocket entrance to the Catalyst.

When writer Ken Kesey and his family and we few Merry Pranksters remaining with him in La Honda finally split from San Mateo County for greener pastures, discouraged by, among other things, a questionable septic system and too many visits by too many Hells Angels and Sheriff's deputies, we naturally headed down the coast for Santa Cruz.

Fellow Prankster Hassler – or Ron Bevirt, as he was listed as co-owner of the Hip Pocket Bookstore – helped us find a cheap farmhouse rental just north of Rodeo Gulch in Soquel. We parked Kesey's famous psychedelic bus with "Further" on its destination sign, out by the barn, and I went to work peddling books at the Hip Pocket.

For readers who've moved to town since those long-ago days, 1965 to be specific, the Hip Pocket was really the first outpost of psychedelic weirdness in a sleepy little seaside resort-and-retirement community that would quickly become colonized by the weird, the stoned and the artistically bent seeker of some sort of spiritual truth.

The store, never much of a money-maker for Hassler and his partner Peter Demma, was on Pacific Avenue in a long, narrow storefront that had once been the cafe for the aging and decrepit St. George Hotel. It wasn't the only bookstore in town – one could buy best-sellers and self-help volumes up the street at Plaza Stationery, but it was certainly the only place you could find Kerouac and Sartre, Marx and Malraux, Wilhelm Reich, Theodore Reik, Henry Miller and, much to the horror of the theocracy that ran nearby Scotts Valley in those days, a fine selection of nudist magazines with titles like "Jaybirds" and "Nudists' Monthly" that featured blurry black-and-white photos of naked volleyball players.

I thought they were pretty tame but they brought on conniptions among the holy rollers who ran Scotts Valley in those days. (We didn't sell many of those nudie publications and the few we did sell – and never, never to minors – went to straight businessmen who'd come by the store at very slow times such as the dinner hour; they'd rush in, grab, say, "Clothing Optional Badminton," rush it to the cash register and demand that it be



Artist Ron Boise set up towering nude sculptures outside the bookshop in 1965, furthering its reputation as a 'dirty bookstore,' while others applauded the flowering literary and arts scene.

put in a brown paper bag – “And be quick about it.” When he was working the register, Tony Maggi, a fellow clerk who was one of the local painters who gathered at the Hip Pocket when they weren’t in their studios, would open the magazine and, while the prospective purchaser turned red in embarrassment, would wave it at me in the back of the store and shout, “Hey, Lee, look at the boobs on this chick!”)

Tony was, as I said, but one of the local artists who found camaraderie and even community among the folks who hung out among, if rarely purchased any of, the grand selection of paperbacks on the Hip Pocket’s shelves. Artists, including Joe Lysowski and the remarkable and wonderful painter Stan Fullerton, rubbed elbows with writers, UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College professors, poets and musicians – including our musical Acid Test compatriots the Grateful Dead and future Jefferson Airplane star Paul Kantner, who played and sang folk songs out at the Sticky Wicket in Aptos.

And, of course, Kesey and other Prankster pals such as Neal Cassady, the model for the main character in Kerouac’s “On The Road,” and poets Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky as well as local writers like Jim Houston could be found browsing the books and yakking with friends at the Hip Pocket.

(Stan Fullerton, by the way, would become one of the first bartenders when the original Catalyst opened in the courtyard rooms behind the Hip Pocket, accessible to us through a hidden sliding panel. Stan quit when the joint got a liquor license, saying he would not work in a whiskey bar!)

Needless to say, the authorities were confused and even frightened by all the long hair, rumors of illicit drugs (remember, LSD and other mind-altering substances were legal in those days) and early opposition to the draft and a war in far-

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Peter Anon Demma, right, opened the Hip Pocket Bookstore along with Ronald K. 'Hassler' Bivert in 1964. The Hip Pocket, frequented by the Merry Pranksters, was located at the St. George Hotel on Pacific Avenue and closed in 1967.

off and unknown Vietnam.

An actual truant officer from the Santa Cruz police visited us several times a week seeking wayward youths who were thought to gather somewhere back in the sociology books, I guess. Fire inspectors regularly poked their noses around the store, and I remember when they made us remove a sculpture my friend and famed sculptor Ron Boise had fashioned from a defunct motorcycle and displayed in the front window: The long-empty gas tank of the immobilized Honda might explode, they warned us with an authoritarian and officious wink-wink.

But as the worried public safety officers and the concerned Rotary Club members who owned most of the other businesses along Pacific Avenue fretted about the beards and the goofy outfits and the colorfully painted vehicles that seemed to be proliferating up around the Hip Pocket Bookstore, I felt like an advance scout for a new and unstoppable wave of civilization:

The new University of California had just opened on the hill above town and some sort of movement of which Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were pioneers was sweeping around the world. The Hip Pocket was only a beachhead in Santa Cruz but, man, I knew things were gonna change before too long! 🍌

Retired San Jose Mercury News reporter and columnist Lee Quarnstrom and his wife Chris live in Southern California.

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