

Photo: © Ken Babbs

On the road with Ken Kesey, Neal Cassady, and Lee Quarnstrom

By Mickey Carroll

Returning to the scene of the crime is an idiom you might expect penned on the pages of a paperback mystery fiction novel. But when local writer, journalist, and former Merry Prankster Lee Quarnstrom arrives at Book Shop Santa Cruz to read from his memoir — *“When I Was a Dynamiter! Or How a Nice Catholic Boy Became a Merry Prankster, a Pornographer, and a Bridegroom Seven Times”* — he in an essence will be doing just that.

Quarnstrom once clerked at Hip Pocket Books, a previous incarnation of Book Shop Santa Cruz that was opened in 1964 by a group of author Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters. Quarnstrom, Kesey, and fellow Pranksters migrated south from La Honda to Santa Cruz after visits from Hells Angels and Sheriff’s deputies became too common at their mountain retreat. The Pranksters and the Hip Pocket soon realized local acclaim after installing two modernistic nudes by sculptor Ron Bosie in front of the bookshop and offering nudist publications to a then-decorous Santa Cruz.

Quarnstrom’s adventures with Kesey and the Pranksters blossomed at “The Spread,” a dilapidated farm in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It was there that Kesey and Prankster pals

such as Neal Cassady, along with poets Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, would gather. Life at their bohemian outpost was to inspire the first “Acid Test,” a party centered around the use of the psychedelic drug LSD, also known as “acid.” A San Francisco band known as the Warlocks, later to become the Grateful Dead, provided entertainment at this legendary party in Soquel.

Quarnstrom was just 20 years old when he abandoned his fledgling career in local journalism to join the Pranksters during an interview with Kesey about his novel, *“Sometimes a Great Notion.”* After his glorious ride with the Pranksters, Quarnstrom moved

on and took up journalism again. His accomplishments included posts as editor at Paul Krassner’s *Realist* magazine and *Hustler* magazine, and lengthy stints as a reporter at the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* and the *San*

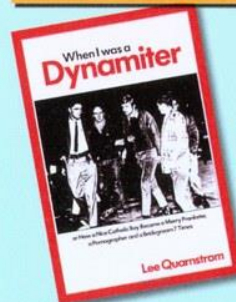
If You Go

What: Lee Quarnstrom will read from his memoir
When: December 3, 7 p.m.
Where: Bookshop Santa Cruz

Jose Mercury News.

Don’t miss this opportunity to hear firsthand accounts of the unforgettable characters and events that helped shape the counterculture of Santa Cruz, the Bay Area, and the rest of the country. ♣

Further Reading



When I Was a Dynamiter! Or, How a Nice Catholic Boy Became a Merry Prankster, a Pornographer, and a Bridegroom Seven Times
 by Lee Quarnstrom

“...several fascinating, adventurous autobiographies packed into one.”

~ Goodreads