



I have been working during the summer months at various hotels, parking cars, since I turned 16 in 1960. I just finished my first year of dental school in Richmond, Virginia and now was back home trying to earn enough money to rent a temporary place of my own. Right now, I was crashing at my parent's for the last few days. Not where I wanted to be, but necessity dictated that I stay there. This job was not paying much and I was restless. Saved a few hundred when I get a call from my buddy Mark. It seems that his cousin, Bobby, is heading out to California for the summer and needs someone to help him share the driving and gas. I am eager and meet Bobby. We hit it off and he is planning to leave that night. I quit my job, pack some clothes, grab my money, and tell my folks I am driving out to California for the summer and will call once a week. Don't worry.



We head out around 2 AM . I'm heading Out West for a great adventure.

We're driving a Volkswagen Beetle. Gas sells for 25 cents a gallon. No air conditioner. Just drive. Yeah, just drive. Cross the Mississippi, head across Texas. The terrain is changing. What was once green and lush, now becomes dry, mountainous, and rocky. The West; through Arizona, the red rocks, the Petrified Forest, the cowboy boots, the dry, desert climate. Then Nevada and the small town of Las Vegas. Not like it is now. Gambling in the downtown section. No Strip, no glitzy hotels. Just a small town in the middle of the desert. Bobby and I stop, change into our gambling attire - all black - and walk into a casino to play blackjack. One hour later we walk out destitute, no money, broke, 2500 miles from home. We hock most of our clothes at a local pawn shop. They give us fifteen dollars and we beat it out of town, heading for the West Coast. Driving through Los Angeles, the sky is a hazy, yellowish green -- smog -- not to our liking. So we head north towards San Francisco.



San Francisco: It's mid-day when we arrive at a three story apartment house on Pacific Avenue in the Pacific Heights district of "The City." Yes, "The City" -- long before Los Angeles became the premiere megalopolis in California, San Francisco was the city. In fact, any mail sent on the West Coast, if addressed to "The City," would automatically be sent to San Francisco.

Barbara greeted Bobby very intensely. She was a high-class call girl, gorgeous and loved Bobby. He was an adorable con man, who would rather lie than tell the truth, and had an infectious persona. I was there to explore and

see this new part of the world. Entering into her third floor apartment, the whole San Francisco Bay with Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge and all of Marin lay before us through the large picture window. It was breathtaking. Barbara had a beautiful efficiency. My sleeping quarters was a mattress in the kitchen. It would make due for awhile. Why not, we were broke.

The next night found us entering the Avalon Ballroom. We were dressed East Coast style -- pegged pants, slicked-backed hair, pointed shoes. All the men there had shoulder length hair or longer, mustaches and/or beards, bell-bottomed pants, sandals or boots, tie-dyed shirts, and day glow paint on their faces. The women wore long, flowing



gowns, all had very long hair, very little makeup if at all, and painted also with day glow colors. The music was everywhere. Approaching , a gentleman and a woman said to us, “Welcome to our establishment. I’m Chet Helms, the owner, and this is my sister. I see you’re new to this place. If you need a place to crash, you can stay with us.” I said, “Why would you do that?” Chet said, “Peace and love, man.”

I walked through the beaded curtain where the main ballroom was. Stroboscopic black light filled the room Pulsating psychedelic images danced on the walls to the rhythm of the music. The whole dance floor was filled with young men and women rocking to the music. No steps, just free-dancing, moving with the music, arms in the air. The aroma of incense and marijuana filled my lungs. And on stage was a chick singer belting out a soulful tune. She was great. I never heard of this group. It was a local San Francisco sound -- Janice Joplin with Big Brother and the Holding Company. My senses were overwhelmed. I joined the dance. I fell in love with San Francisco.



Barbara had many friends/clients. One particular night, we went up to the 14th floor of the Fontana apartments/condos at Ghirardelli Square and met Vinnie. He was a deeply tanned, stocky, clean-shaven, bald physician, who worked for Rockwell Industries. Rockwell was involved in purchasing mineral rights in Southeast Asia, especially Cambodia. The war in Vietnam was slowly intensifying. His place was fascinating. Animal heads on the walls, a great bear skin rug on the floor but the coup de gras was the grand view. One whole wall was glass with sliding glass doors and a balcony that overlooked San Francisco Bay and Alcatraz. Magnificent.



He poured each of us a brandy and we sat and chatted. Vinnie was recruiting men to parachute into Cambodia and gain the locals' trust to obtain the mineral rights for Rockwell. He offered us a job. I asked him if he lost any men. He said he lost 38 out of 52 men in the past few years. I respectfully declined the offer. Dental school was much safer (I kept that thought to myself).

Bobby was a con man extraordinaire. We introduced ourselves about town as Bobby F. of the Skyliners, “Since I Don't Have You” and I was Drake Regent of the singing group The Regents, “Barbara Ann.” Bobby had an offer for us to go on radio, but I didn't have the balls to pull it off. We planned a scam to extricate some money from Barbara so we could leave. Bobby suggested to her that I should get my own place so they could finally be together without my presence. We agreed on \$250 dollars and went out the next day to a pizza place to celebrate. She handed me the money in the restaurant. I excused myself and went to the men's room. Bobby joined me a few minutes later. We opened the bathroom window, climbed out, ran for the car and drove out of town over the Bay Bridge heading East. It was time to go back to school. The adventure was over. -- *Drake Regent*