

Human Be-In in the Park

John Zukowski

1967

Special to the Fifth Estate

San Francisco — Hippies, Hippies, Hippies, and when you turn around, more of them were sitting on the grass, perched on fences, standing on benches, straining for a look, or entwined on the ground.

People carrying odd pennants, flags and signs, seeing colored smoke bombs going off. People dropping into the crowd by parachute, souls filing through the crowd handing out L.S.D., others handing out sticks of incense.

Couples were making love on the ground and photographers were taking pictures. Unfortunately I was one of the photographers. The lovers looking even more intense for the cameras.

On stage groups were performing. The Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead sent out their amplified music so that it still landed with the impact of loudness at the far end of the Polo Grounds. That's where this "Gathering of the Tribes," this "Love Feast" was being held in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. A huge park stretching from the center of town to the Pacific ocean and containing everything from Buffalo herds to art museums, from police shooting ranges to the Panhandle, where the diggers hand out free food every day, where kids come to smoke, to meet, to lie in the sun.

Timothy Leary spoke a very few words and then disappeared. Perhaps the idea is that if you want to see and hear Leary then you've got to pay. A word from the new Messiah must not come cheap.

The gathering was called as a joint effort of the Bay Area's double-pole hippy community. San Francisco is one center, with a concentration of hippies in the Haight-Ashbury area, but permeating the rest of the city. The other nucleus is a little bit more bourgeois, mainly because it has more money, a bit more intellectualized. It is centered around Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley.

Everyone of importance in the San Francisco area was on hand to watch and do whatever.

A skinny kid in faded blue denim, his long curly hair in disarray, growled and howled at the girls. He wanted to say something. Hells Angels with beautiful oriental girls. A cute girl in a bright green mod dress and a too-sophisticated hair-do carried a large golden peace sign on a pike. I had never realized its similarity to the cross before. She carried it proud and high, an acolyte in the new culture. In the circle on the front of her dress where the tops of her breasts were exposed, another peace sign was painted in green.

Children were everywhere. There were very young babies being fed in their mothers arms, there were others of about four or five who wandered through the crowd. There was a circus of people.

Everywhere you looked, things to see like the bold man with the bespectacled teeny bopper. A girl lying seemingly asleep while the 'thousands stood around her.

Allen Ginsburg chanted down the sun and, as predicted the sun sank into the sea beyond the trees of the park. Everyone turned to face the sun. There was a feeling of reverence. All of these people faced into the living dying orange ball as the amplified sound of the poets voice touched them and it was twilight.

Ginsburg asked first, echoed by the bearded emcee, if we would pick up the mess. I had noticed the ground littered with Lucky Cager cans and all the other waste that 25,000 people can deposit in five hours.

It was a gesture, I thought, like Ed Sullivan asking his 35,000,000 viewers to “support the fight against muscular dystrophy” to fill the time before the network is ready ‘for the next commercial. But I was wrong.

Down on their hands and knees the people went picking ‘up the beer cans, the paper, even the pieces of orange peel. “Don’t forget those roaches”, said the emcee. Everyone scoured the field for refuse, carefully put it into the cans provided, and when there were no more cans, piling up paper bags filled with more litter.

As the names of the lost children were being called out and there were many, “We have a little blond-haired boy here whose name is Sidartha,” I joined the progression of people, an army of hippies, lit by the headlights of the hopelessly jammed cars back to the city.

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