

When the War Was Close to Home

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Theme: [History](#), [Society](#)

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Memories are like those fireflies that sparkle your vision on a deep hot summer night. They entice you with their sudden appearance and just as sudden departure. So it is with this baby boomer's mind, transversed back so many decades until... 50 years appear as if it was today. This brings tears to your tired eyes within this pandemic hibernation.

As I write this piece I have the Animals' great song ' Sky Pilot' sung by the irrepressible Eric Burden, that little tiny giant of blues rock. Suddenly I am transported back in time to the summer of '70, the greatest summer of this writer's life. My cousin Mick and I were staying in Virginia Beach, Virginia for the summer. This was the first time we two twenty year olds had ventured away from our parents' homes for any lengthy period of time. We were your normal college kids who were happy as shit to not be drafted, thanks to our student deferments. Recently I had just been *baptized* into anti war activism when myself and a herd of fellow students closed down the Brooklyn College campus two months earlier.

The Kent State massacre of four students by National Guard troops the same age as them, coupled with Nixon's illegal and immoral (aren't they all?) bombing of Cambodia, shut down many college campuses.

We all played songs like ' For What it's Worth' by Buffalo Springfield (With Stephen Stills and Neil Young) , ' Eve of Destruction' by Barry McGuire and Edwin Starr's ' War, What is it Good For?' Getting high on good pot and hashish was our ticket to any *repose* from the insanity of Vietnam, or ' The Shit' as returning veterans referred to it.

So, here I was, having the greatest time of my life down in Virginia Beach. We rented an apartment and each found part time jobs. We had brought down a nice stash of white opiate hash, which lasted us for two weeks, instead of for the whole summer, it was too easy to enjoy. We both worked in the evenings, Mick as a short order cook, me as a barker at the basketball shooting game by the arcade. We slept late each morning, ate big breakfasts of bacon and eggs and then off to the beautiful beach. Running by the shore barefoot, and throwing around the football each day got the two of us in probably the best shape we had ever been in. Of course, the girl chasing was our primary goal each day. As I eluded to, this was the *best* summer I ever had, up until then and up till NOW! Let us leave it at that.

One day I ran into this guy who called himself Huck, who was just out of the Army and of course Nam. He still had the Army style haircut, which he was quickly growing, along with the moustache you saw so many military guys wearing. I think he said he was from Ohio and had rented a whole house not too far from the beach (we lived much further away, paying less rent). Huck told me that he let this ' Hippy Dippy ' bunch, as he put it , crash at his place. " Lots of good looking chicks along with the guys. Safe bunch. All they wanna do is listen to music and get high." He then informed me that they all had gotten onto their '

Hippie van' and went to Atlanta for a Johnny Winter concert. " Why don't you come by. I got some really far out shit we can smoke."

As Mick and I had used up all our stash, and were paranoid of buying anything down in Virginia, I said I'd be by later that afternoon. It was Sunday, my day off, so I had plenty of time. My cousin was at work, so I hustled over to Huck's place. I can never forget just sitting in his living room, smoking his really top shelf weed with him. Huck put on this Animals LP and ' Sky Pilot ' came on. He said the guys back in Vietnam just played this song over and over. I sat there, *mesmerized* by the lyrics and the pot. It was as if I was right under the plane from the song, as it roared above the troops on its way to dealing death and destruction on the Vietnamese. Huck told me some of the experiences he had in the bush, and how it never really escaped him. After a bit, I invited him over to my place for some steaks that Mick and I *liberated* from the supermarket. He took down my address and we planned to meet up in two hours.

Huck never showed up. I walked by his house the next day, but no one was there. OK, I thought, the guy just came back from the ' Shit' so I cut him some slack. A few weeks went by and I finally met up with Huck one afternoon near the main drag. " Man, you must have stepped in shit " he said. " Not more than twenty minutes after you left, the hippy dippy van pulled up. My pad crashers had just returned from Atlanta. Within a few minutes the whole house was surrounded by a ton of cops! They arrested all of us for drug possession, and those hippies had a shit load too!" He then told me that with the new laws in Virginia, he was forced to stay there for at least a year on probation. Some of his guests had to go to trial for drug dealing, facing stiff prison sentences. " Man, you sure stepped in shit! Those cops were out there in the woods by my house when you visited. They were waiting for those hippies to return." It turns out that Virginia did have really draconian laws on the books then, even for simply marijuana. I would have been stuck there for at least a year too.

That summer of ' 70 was my epiphany as an anti war /anti empire thinker. Each time I hear that Animals' song, or any of the other songs of that Vietnam era, I cry.

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