



Chellis
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The Way We Were

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I plopped down onto the sidewalk in the first row of cross-legged protestors, eye-level with the shin-guards of the first row of National Guardsmen. My hair dropped down my back in a braid, and I was wearing a shirt made of an Indian-print bedspread. The blonde next to me leaned over and disclosed that she was on acid, in fact that she took acid every day.

I know all the details because a photograph of us showed up in *Newsweek* a few days later: me, the acid head, the dudes with their gas masks and rifles. It was snapped by photojournalist Peter Barnes, who later broke from the “objectivity” of press work, wrote a book on the oppression of soldiers, founded the progressive credit-card company Working Assets, wrote some more books -- and even later than that, by 20 years and wild providence, became lovers with the subject of his camera aim whose Indian-print shirt had long since shredded into compost.

Another photo appeared in that article about the rabble-rousers in Berkeley: a helicopter soaring between the Campanile and Sproul Hall dropping toxic CS gas into the plaza like it was Vietnam. Down at ground level people were screaming, fainting, falling down, blinded, retching, and the National Guard was advancing into the crowds cracking skulls with their batons.

My husband Bill and I somehow ratcheted our bodies away from the toxic clouds, into the cafeteria, down the spiral staircase of the kitchen, and out into the lower plaza. It was the first (and last) time I ever hurled a rock through a window, I was so appalled by the military exercise, and I wonder to this day whatever happened to the woman on acid.

The Third World Liberation Strike demanded that we students skip classes, so I regrouped in the Victorian house that Bill and I rented on Walnut Street, turned my attention to cooking Adele-Davis-style, shook my fist during protests against racism, played volleyball with my professor-pal Troy Duster and his social-science comrades ... and quietly kept up with my homework.

I was taking The Sociology of the Family. At the end of the quarter, when I decided I'd hand in my paper on women in the Soviet Union and take the final so I could still graduate, the template was laid for a nightmare that plagued my dreams for decades after.

I nervously approached the lecture hall that I hadn't stepped Swedish clog into for three months. To my terror it was empty. Abandoned, reassigned, unavailable, gone. No students. No prof. No sign redirecting the Returning Striker.

Panic emanated from The Sociology of the Family again when I sheepishly edged toward the departmental office to retrieve the paper and final exam I had somehow managed to hand in. I rifled through the pile to no avail: neither was there – and I felt as adrift as a hippie waif on Telegraph Avenue. I finally mustered the courage to ask the secretary, and she offered that I must be “the one” who was instructed to see the prof.

He had a beard and glasses (as if I even *remembered* what he looked like). With a stern voice he told me to sit down, and I felt the axe about to fall. He then smiled and explained that there had been only two A's in the whole quarter ... and they were *my* paper and *my* exam. It was hardly the moment to speak of irony, as he blubbered on encouraging me to pursue graduate sociology. I had a flare for it, apparently. Somehow the news was more stultifying than if he'd announced I'd been kicked out for fraud.

The strike was a raging success, laying the ground for what then became a norm in higher education: Black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American studies. I went on to write books that sprang from such experiences as our Third World Liberation Strike -- and at least hinted that I might have kind-of taken some sociology classes.

I really can't figure out how I have wrangled my way through this life, somehow doing the most out-there-outrageous things -- and at the same time being so timid.

The Café Mediterraneum was clearly the place to hang out. Michael Delacour was always there in his pea coat, earnestly talking revolution. There was Moe, with his waning hairline and cigar. Marty Schiffenbauer with his shorts, combat boots, and curly red locks flying every which-

way. Old Carroll, the ghetto astrologer. Street poet Julia Vinograd in her yellow cap.

It was all I could do to go in there, I was so nervous: the place was *that* cool.

It was where the hot-and-heavy political strategizing took place. Where the Red Family grabbed a break from haggling about who did the dishes in the commune. Where the seekers from Shambhala Bookstore talked Krishnamurti, astrology, and Tibetan Buddhism. Where Simone de Beauvoir mixed it up with Martin Heidegger. Where the espresso machine swooshed, Vivaldi's "Primavera" echoed, and folks sported Mao caps. Where, for Chrissake, everyone smoked ... *Galoise*.

I went, at first ordering cappuccino dusted with chocolate and toting the *de rigueur* blue pack of cancer sticks, later (after I launched a stint with a two-hour-a-day yoga-meditation practice), the far thinner rose-hips tea.

But I always felt a tad "thin" in the cool department.

I cottoned right up to the fashion side of things, though. I mean, how many cases of scabies can be traced to the ultra-wide bell-bottoms scrounged from piles of threads on the concrete floor of the San Pablo army-navy store?

As my signature, I donned the Pirate Coat I paid \$15 for at the Paris flea market. Some days I boasted a green leather jacket hinting of London Mod, purchased at the hippest of boutiques Red Square, and my closet burst with slinky 1930s dresses.

But maybe the finest of couture happened when we dressed up in garb appropriate to the film we were seeing: tux and gowns for Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers; trench coats for *noir*; boxy 1940s suits and spectators for Preston Sturges; kimonos for *Rashomon*.

Being in jail had its perks. Quiet time, good food, ample bedding, exercise, books for illumination, freedom to roam -- they were not among them.

But it was a pre-feminist moment for us women to be together. I know now that we could have done things differently. There simply did not have to be that pre-midnight crescendo of panicked voices in a solitaire cell that some 100 women from the Mass Bust were now crammed into; we could have gathered into small groups to quietly discuss terror and claustrophobia. We could have been more supportive of our disparate needs. We could have meditated. Or done a ritual.

But what did we know?

We *did* know that the big bust was coming. Our own private rendition of Deep Throat within the police department had tipped us off, and a few had met in a living room just off campus to weigh our options. Tom Hayden was there. Wendy Schlesinger. Delacour. Bill Miller.

But somehow any planning we mustered had zero effect when the shit hit the fan and the cops cordoned off Shattuck Avenue, hemming in not just us anti-war protestors, but also innocent mailmen and shopping mothers. I was one of the Health Food 15. Guilty as all get-out, we had rushed into Goodson's, grabbed wire shopping baskets, and pretended to be buying organic oatmeal -- but sure enough, a policeman emerged tall and angry through the back door and rounded us up for the bus ride to Santa Rita Detention Center.

Knowing it was coming, I had made my own plan for bail. It's not a plan that -- what with post-9-11 paranoia -- would fly today, but it did back then. I had hand-penned a letter to Wells Fargo bank authorizing my commune-mate to take out \$300 from my savings account, and when he showed up at the jail with papers for my release, I was never happier to see a parking lot.

The stories that came out of the men's section were grim. While we women had had the freedom to fashion the plastic bags filled with Wonder-bread-bologna sandwiches into "volleyballs" for our nervous amusement, the men had been jammed face down in the yard and made to lie there without flinching through the night. One had his head tied to an iron pipe, and an officer had banged the pipe till blood gushed from his eyes, nose, and mouth.

In the end, the Health Food 15 got off through the efforts of our pro-bono lawyer Bob Treuhaft. And in the end, the perk was seeing the system from the inside out.

In their humongous leather jackets, the Black Panthers came on as fierce as the police they were bucking. One day a militaristic line-up of them made the trek from downtown Oakland to hold forth at the noon rally in Sproul Plaza.

Their message was kind of confusing to those of us who had grown up on "We Shall Overcome" and sharpened our political teeth in the South during Mississippi Summer. Bristling with the radicalism of the international liberation/decolonization movements, the Black Panthers announced that the new revolutionary tack was to stand alone, Whitey not invited. At the same time, they demanded our support.

After that, a lot of inter-racial marriages broke apart in a frenzy of political realignment. Along with everyone else, I was reading Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, and Frantz Fanon's notion of violence against whites as a cleansing act was flying through the halls of academia, so I

wasn't completely in the dark about rage, separatism, and self-empowerment.

Just then something began to appear in the dark, hung on a peg in the hallway of the apartment we shared with a university secretary, who was white. It was the fiercest black-leather jacket of all. Every time it was there, a heavy silence emanated from behind her closed door, and soon she began to show up in a black beret behind the card table, taking the money and handing out leaflets, at Panther events.

I could only think that she, among very few, had mastered the delicacies of white support.

I had no idea that we activists – sometimes amassed in crowds of 3000, sometimes 100,000 – had, through the years of rampaging around campus and in the streets, developed an unspoken *method*: a way of forming, spreading, taking over the city, then dispersing, and finally re-congealing like a dance that was in our genes. That is, until the neophytes arrived -- which happened the summer after People's Park when every Tom, Dick, and Hari Krishna east of Sproul Plaza decided that Berkeley was the place to hone one's revolutionary skills. Suddenly, up against the Alameda County Sheriff's Department "Blue Meanies," the streets became a place of edginess, chaos, and utter lack of method.

I said, "To Hell With It," and retired to my commune on Vine Street. It was a good time to pull back for a spell. The obvious next step was something akin to what we'd seen in the film *Battle of Algiers*, and indeed many in the New Left were joining gun clubs, just as some Students for a Democratic Society radicals back East were morphing into the Weather Underground.

Bill and I hightailed it to Europe, bought a second-hand Deux Chevaux in Amsterdam, and tooled at 40 m.p.h. through Holland, Denmark, Sweden, France, Andorra, Spain, and Morocco. When we got back and retreated to a maple-sugar farm in Vermont, sure enough, the FBI tracked us down and paid a visit to see what we were up to.

Things being as they were, Bill refused to ID any of the folks in the photos and told the FBI dude to shove it.