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# Hippie Communes of the West Coast: A Study of Gender Roles and the Evolution of the Counterculture's Definition of Freedom

## **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to Dr. Dee Gillespie for all of your help and faith in my work.

# Hippie Communes of the West Coast: A Study of Gender Roles and the Evolution of the Counterculture's Definition of Freedom

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**LISA TRAYLOR SCOTT** was born and raised in the Bay Area of California and, following high school, went to work for a major highway contractor in San Jose. She resigned her position after sixteen years at the birth of her son in 1998, deciding to dedicate herself to being a full-time at-home-mom. While at home, Lisa methodically completed an AS in history and another in paralegal studies at West Valley College in Saratoga, earning the Paralegal Academic Achievement Award upon graduation. In 2011, she relocated to the Atlanta, Georgia area. With her son older, she decided to fulfill her lifelong dream of completing a BA in her first love, history, and was accepted to the University of North Georgia where she finished her degree with minor in political science, summa cum laude, in May of 2017. Lisa was honored to receive the UNG History Award in 2016. As an undergraduate, she was a member of the Golden Key Honor Society, the Society for Collegiate Leadership and Achievement, and Phi Kappa Phi. She is currently seeking employment and entertaining the thought of graduate school.

Some of my earliest childhood memories are of 1969 and the half-hour Saturday morning rides from my home in Los Gatos to the coastal town of Santa Cruz, California, where my father relished his weekly bowl of clam chowder. Invariably, there would be a group of hippies at the Highway 17 onramp, thumbs up, attempting to hitch a ride over the hill to Santa Cruz which was then, and still is, a haven for hippies who fled the deteriorating conditions of the Haight Ashbury in nearby San Francisco. As a young child, my parents taught me to fear these drug-crazed beatniks who lived in outlandish communes in the hills above our town, but I remember being fascinated; they looked nice enough to me. Most think of commune members as free spirits who dropped acid, had free sex, and lived harmoniously in peace with each other and nature. In reality, many of the traditions and problems that commune residents sought to escape in mainstream society manifested again in communal life. Young people who left San Francisco for the nearby hills to create their own idea of freedom found that, much of the time, progressive commune life reflected society at large, especially regarding racial segregation, gender roles, homophobia, economics, health issues, and dealing with unsavory individuals. In particular, women of the communes had to adapt to ever-changing gender roles within these communities in order to survive. These issues, as well as the negative public reaction to their utopia, ultimately led to the demise of most of these communities by the mid-1970s. This study will compare the founders' expectations for communal life with the realities of that lifestyle.

Following the Summer of Love in 1967, the hippie scene in San Francisco began to crumble. The Haight became increasingly overcrowded and evolved to being a sort of Miami Beach of the west coast, and with increasing numbers of speed freaks and junkies filling the city, hippies dispersed. Perhaps Billy Digger of the San Francisco Diggers put it best when he told *Newsweek*, "The Haight is not where it's at – it's in your head and hands. Gather into tribes; take it anywhere. Disperse."<sup>1</sup> Hippies leaving the city for communes felt a tremendous degree of disillusionment with traditional societal values as well as a great deal of negativity due to the Vietnam War and high-profile assassinations. The commune movement was, in essence, a revolt against an impersonal society and its pressures, chaos, pollution, and technologies. Thus, the commune movement began as a utopian vision that embraced nature and was

<sup>1</sup> "Year of the Commune," *Newsweek*, August 18, 1969, 89.

created in response to societal negativity.<sup>2</sup>

The hippies embraced their utopian vision on many levels. Commune members rejected the traditional biological family unit and, at least in theory, embraced everyone equally as members of a tribe. Traditional marriage, divorce, alimony, and responsibility for children were “the meaningless” since they viewed the nuclear family as isolated, conformist, hypocritical, dull in its routine, and much too sanitized.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, these hippies embraced a philosophy of new naturalism, rejecting the size and scale of industrial society and its technological dependency as an assault on nature. They frowned upon the new standards of food processing which removed natural nutrients from their diets and instead chose to develop organic farms where they could raise their own vegetables free of dangerous pesticides.<sup>4</sup>

With hippies fleeing the Haight, *Newsweek* dubbed 1969 as the “Year of the Commune,” and in that year, more than ten-thousand young people created more than five hundred communes nationwide.<sup>5</sup> So who were these young people? Commune members were overwhelmingly white and a product of middle class, nuclear intact families, but not all of them fit a certain stereotype. Some were “conventional” hippies—young dropouts who sought drugs and impermanent relationships, going from commune to commune looking to “crash” for a week or more before moving on. Others were older, married, professionals, such as professors, lawyers, and psychologists. These free-spirits were fed up with the rat race and wanted to create a more natural and real environment where they could raise their children and divest themselves of material goods.<sup>6</sup> Although most

had been involved in political protests, very few were registered voters as formal politics, to the average hippie, was futile and irrelevant; the few who were registered to vote were members of the Peace and Freedom Party. Most of the men had served in the armed forces and had come home to a bitter and resentful public.<sup>7</sup>

Although local residents shunned the hippies, the rest of the nation was fascinated. To this end, *Life Magazine* sent two of its youngest photographers to live in a commune and document what they found. Before gaining access, the *Life* photographers had to win the commune’s trust, and they were extensively interviewed in a solemn pow-wow. The tribe finally agreed to allow them to come solely on the promise that their location would not be disclosed. The reporters made note of the hexagonal lodge that was the center of daily life and held at least five-hundred books on everything from the occult to farming. Its forty-one members ranged in age from seventeen to thirty-two, including an actor, an office worker, a former computer programmer from a large bank, and a welder. Most of the day was devoted to hard work, which included chopping wood, planting seeds, and washing clothes, and this was said to strip them of their city frustrations. The commune’s credo said it best: “Getting out of the cities isn’t hard, only concrete is. Get it together. This means on your own, all alone or with a few of your friends. Buy land. Don’t rent. Money manifests. Trust. Plant a garden, create a center. Come together.”<sup>8</sup>

One man who searched for communal freedom was Richard Big Tree. A successful chemist for a mining company in southern California, Big Tree, who lived in Hollywood and drove a Jaguar, pursued what many would consider the proverbial American dream. His wife, Little Tree, was a former dancer and mother to three-year-old Lotus Tree, but both felt that their modern city lives were meaningless.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Roberts, “Some Enter Communal Seclusion to Escape Turmoil, Others to Find Religion,” *New York Times*, August 2, 1969, 28-29.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Golden, “Family Circle is Square: Hippies Go for Commune,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Sept 22, 1967, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Gilbert Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>5</sup> “Year of the Commune,” *Newsweek*, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, “Some Enter Communal Seclusion to Escape Turmoil, Others to Find Religion,” 28.

<sup>7</sup> Neal White, “Getting Away from it All Down on the Hog Farm,” *New Republic*, February 17, 1968, 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> John Olson, “The Commune Comes to America,” *Life Magazine*, July 18, 1969, 16B-20B, quote on 20B.

The Tree family decided “to get everything off our backs” and escaped to the wilderness of Oregon, and soon others joined their simple community built of stones from a nearby river. These communes seemed to represent a new and more durable phase of the hippie movement as families reduced life to the essentials and reconnected with the land.<sup>9</sup>

To a great extent, hippie communes were self-reliant and free from the trappings of progressive society. Members taught each other different skills such as auto repair, cheese and incense making, organic gardening, and beekeeping, and they cared for animals and the land in a way that had been disappearing for the last forty years. Generally, communes allowed people to choose when and how they worked, and individuals would work at what they did best for the benefit of the commune as a whole. Communes raised their own vegetables in organic gardens free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers as well as raising hens for organic eggs and cows and goats for milk. Hippies found great satisfaction in seeing a task through from beginning to end, and they lovingly prepared the ground with special teas to promote growth and picked bugs off of their beloved plants while chanting or listening to rock music.<sup>10</sup> They lived a much simpler life and, in a very real way, emulated Native American culture, referring to their groups as tribes. They embraced the Native’s philosophy of “open land” in that no one could own land, and they frowned upon society which parceled up Mother Earth. Hippies respected and took care of the land and valued all that resided upon it much like the Native Americans and, as a result, they and hippies got along well.<sup>11</sup>

Although white commune members were open to accepting members of color, black men and women were generally not attracted to the “hip” culture of the communes. While white, middle class young people wanted to

divest themselves from material wealth, African Americans, long familiar with poverty, had no interest in voluntarily ridding themselves of accumulated property. As the Civil Rights Movement splintered, young African Americans of the San Francisco area gravitated not to rural, white communes but to urban activist groups such as the Black Panthers. The primary goal of the Panthers was to monitor law enforcement’s treatment of people of color and, to this end, young African American men armed themselves with guns and patrolled Oakland streets. Ultimately, by the 1970s, African American women made up the majority of the party.<sup>12</sup> Commune members expressed disappointment since they embraced social equality and desired diverse interaction; one young woman who visited many communes was very disappointed that “she had never encountered a single ‘third world person’ in any of them.”<sup>13</sup>

The commune movement sought a simple life free from the trappings of modern American society, but what remained constant was the counterculture’s division of labor. Frequently, rural communes were without electricity or running water, so hard physical work such as hand-washing clothes and lugging water from a creek filled the hippie woman’s day. Generally, commune couples conformed to their parent’s traditions where man was “bread-winner” and woman “bread-server.” A pattern emerged with women performing traditional women’s work such as cooking, cleaning, washing, harvesting, and childcare while the men ran tractors and sawed wood—the assumption being that women could not physically handle the heavy equipment. In the evenings, while women cooked dinner and washed dishes, men would “rap” by the campfire at night.<sup>14</sup> In many communes, men and women defined their roles reminiscent of pioneers of the pre-industrial American frontier. They believed that such a

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, “Some Enter Communal Seclusion to Escape Turmoil, Others to Find Religion,” 29.

<sup>10</sup> Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective*, 37, 121, 129-130.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 153.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 176.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 154, 170, quote on 170.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 212.

down-home environment would make women less anxious about gender expectations; women cultivating their own individual identities would be detrimental to the community as a whole that needed them to perform traditionally female tasks. By filling their time with cooking and childcare, as well as being able to freely voice their opinions and mystical visions, hippie women, at least in theory, would be able to free themselves from the “feminine mystique” type traumas of suburbia.<sup>15</sup>

With the emergence of 1960s feminism, female commune members puzzled at their supposedly progressive men’s satisfaction with traditional “sanitized, hypocritical, and conformist” roles.<sup>16</sup> Rachel, a blossoming feminist and member of the Satna commune, was particularly perplexed that “at first, one of the single men expected that the women would do part of his housework...he approached Rachel with some of his clothes that needed sewing and washing. Rachel, indignant...told him to ‘fuck off.’”<sup>17</sup> By the early 1970s, commune life became blatantly sexist making many idealistic young women even more vulnerable to “macho hippie cowboys” than they were in urban settings. Without the bonds of traditional marriage, many in communes had sexual relations with a variety of partners, but sex was not as universally wide open as some might believe.<sup>18</sup> There is no doubt, however, that hippie men did indeed take advantage. Free from the shackles of a marriage license, men “split” whenever the mood struck them, and any obligation to women and children was largely unenforceable as counterculture ethics forbade contacting the courts or police.<sup>19</sup> As time went on, more and

more counterculture men “equated the ideal of mutual, reciprocal obligation as a hindrance to pure, uncorrupted, on-the-road freedom,” and as a result, many took off on extended road trips away from their families.<sup>20</sup>

On the outside looking in, women of the New Left were angry and puzzled at commune gender roles. Feminists characterized supposedly progressive hippie men as even more chauvinistic than mainstream males in that they were free from the responsibility of supporting their families as well as the daily grind of nine-to-five employment to pursue whatever their hearts desired. Feminists were appalled that their commune sisters, who in theory were supposed to be liberated from the 1960s Donna Reed homemaker role, were instead living a more physically demanding and sexually repressive existence than that of their mothers. In its manifesto, Valerie Solanas’ Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM) described hippie men as “excited by the thoughts of having lots of women accessible to him, [and he] rebels against the harshness of the breadwinner’s life and the monotony of one woman.”<sup>21</sup> Solana went on to say that communes existed primarily to satisfy male needs, and that women commune members fulfilled a dual role of sexual plaything and breast feeding Madonna. Any objection by women would be perceived as unnatural, “not grooving with nature,” and going against the way things were “supposed to be.” In her feminist manifesto *Goodbye to All That*, Robin Morgan equated women commune members to freed African slaves of the nineteenth century. According to Morgan, although previously enslaved women were free, they were still living the life of a slave. For Morgan, the redefined role of “liberated commune women” was nothing more than reinstated oppression under another name.<sup>22</sup>

Many hippie women simply ignored the budding feminist movement and chose instead

<sup>15</sup> John Anthony Moretta, *The Hippies: A 1960s History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2017), 252.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 212.

<sup>17</sup> Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective*, 127.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 202.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett Berger, *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life Among Rural Communitards* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 151.

<sup>20</sup> Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 87.

<sup>21</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 22.

to wear granny dresses, enter monogamous relationships, and bond with like-minded women. For others, however, the commune movement was just a stop on the feminist highway. These women soon tired of their men being withdrawn and unambitious and eventually embraced feminist ideals.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the rising feminist movement took notice of these hip women, and publications such as *Everywoman*, a feminist paper out of Los Angeles that printed articles such as “Hymans for Husbands,” incorporated an obvious counterculture tone in their graphics and makeup.<sup>24</sup>

Over time, more commune members embraced feminist ideals. For example, Ahni, who lived at the Black Bear Ranch commune in northern California, questioned why she was one of two women responsible for the daily care of the pigs while the men merely pontificated on the animals’ value as a living being versus a food source. When slaughter time came, a man wrestled a pig to the ground, presented it to the women as a caveman might present a wild boar, and then drifted away, leaving the grueling processing work to the women. Black Bear males embraced the self-image as “lawless mountain men” in direct opposition their suburban counterparts—the clean-shaven, crew-cut sporting, nine-to-five suburban advertising executive type. These rugged macho men were frequently absent on impromptu road trips for weeks or months at a time as “the work of the women freed them to create a world of masculine camaraderie uninterrupted by labor for wages or the bourgeois family man’s familial obligations.”<sup>25</sup> While men were having their fun, women at the Black Bear worked continuously. They breast-fed babies, watched over other children, milked goats, hand-washed endless dirty diapers, tended gardens, carried water, split and stacked wood, cooked for the commune’s forty to eighty members,

and provided extra hands whenever needed. By the early 1970s, many in the commune, such as Ahni, asserted that traditional gender roles had no place in a community supposedly dedicated to equality for all persons.<sup>26</sup>

Feminist consciousness-raising changed the mindset of the women of the Black Bear, and they gradually redefined their sex-defined daily tasks. Women held separate meetings that provided female camaraderie and gave them the courage to speak their minds to the men. With this new-found female unity, women were emboldened to insist that men take on more of the household labor, including the cooking, dishes, laundry, and in particular, the endless washing of dirty diapers. Some women transformed into the female counterparts of their rugged mountain men, becoming feminist leaders known as “women heavies” or “winch-winding women” and encouraging the more timid women to stand up to their men. Black Bear women soon learned new outdoor skills and, as they did, a truer equality among individuals was finally achieved within the commune.<sup>27</sup>

Although prejudices against homosexuality were beginning to change by the late 1960s, counterculture communes were much like mainstream society in that most condemned homosexuality as unnatural, and although many commune members accepted gays and lesbians for who they were, they still did not want them in their communities. As a result, radical lesbian feminists abandoned the idea of joining traditional communes that they perceived to be dominated by sexist men to live their own idea of freedom in lesbian communes such as Woman Share, Cabbage Lane, Dragon Wagon, and Owl Farm—mostly in Oregon.<sup>28</sup> Residents of Owl Farm strove to create an independent lifestyle in which they relied solely upon each other and Mother Earth for survival far away

<sup>23</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 128.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 68.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Hodgdon, “The Male Work Ethic Was Busted: Manhood, Feminism, and the Sexual Division of Labor at Black Bear Ranch, 1968-1974,” *Communal Societies* 23 (2003): 95-120, quote 98.

<sup>26</sup> Hodgdon, “The Male Work Ethic Was Busted: Manhood, Feminism, and the Sexual Division of Labor at Black Bear Ranch, 1968-1974,” 95-97, 100.

<sup>27</sup> Hodgdon, “The Male Work Ethic Was Busted: Manhood, Feminism, and the Sexual Division of Labor at Black Bear Ranch, 1968-1974,” 106.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 138-9.

from the influence of men. They called themselves a “woman’s land” so as not to exclude those who did not yet identify as lesbian, and they established their commune as a refuge where feminists would survive the ultimate collapse of traditional patriarchal society and western civilization. Interestingly enough, just as in heterosexual communes and main stream society, the races did not mix—women of color were not represented at Owl Farm.<sup>29</sup>

Hippie women began to emerge as the economic providers of the communes. They skillfully foraged for produce in urban dumpsters, and Italian grocery stores were particularly generous to the women, readily giving them unsellable produce while spurning hippie men, who they viewed as deadbeats. Hippie women were the ultimate scavengers who found usable furnishings and household items in dumpsters, alleys, and abandoned buildings. They purchased clothes at thrift stores or garage sales. While mainstream society looked at them as pathetic dumpster divers, hippie women viewed their recycling efforts as morally virtuous and a mode of resistance against wasteful mainstream society.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their best efforts to reject traditional society and its materialistic trappings, an inescapable reality soon manifested itself: they needed a certain amount of money to survive. As a result, commune members eventually resorted to short term and/or part time “straight” jobs in nearby towns. In a reversal of traditional gender roles, women now became the primary breadwinners by receiving government support such as welfare, food stamps and alimony from ex-spouses. Hippie women also depended on handouts from parents and relatives; others turned to crime in the form of petty theft or drug sales.<sup>31</sup> Most Owl Farm residents received food stamps, and they made additional money

picking apples in eastern Washington state.<sup>32</sup> Many earned “bread” by forming and performing in bands such as the Triple A Band in Marin and the Salvation Army Band in San Francisco or by singing in Santa Cruz coffee houses. A former teacher of film at a state university used her skills to make and sell movies. Others made pottery to sell at town festivals.<sup>33</sup> Commune members earned money in a variety of creative ways, but the irony was that while they viewed the state as repressive and corrupt and sought to escape the working world as much as possible, they ultimately relied upon government assistance to survive. They justified this by reasoning that the amount of welfare they received was minuscule in governmental terms, and cities benefitted by achieving their goal of ridding themselves of the unwanted hippies.<sup>34</sup>

Since hippie men frequently “split” for greener pastures, commune women, in addition to their domestic duties, soon found that they needed to derive significant income in order to make it. The idea of working in the capitalist system was repugnant to most, so hippie women engaged in entrepreneurial ventures, much of the time focusing on food preparation and procurement which was a result of the traditional division of labor in communes. Hippie women experimented with new diets and foods, utilizing natural and environmentally sustainable ingredients and rejecting processed foods and chemically injected meats. Most were vegetarian, and these entrepreneurial young women eventually established the first food co-ops to market the natural foods they ate in the communes. As interest in natural foods spread throughout the country, entrepreneurs, ironically mostly men, stepped in to pocket a share of the market which, ultimately, became a major industry. Without these hippie co-ops, it is questionable as to whether chains like Whole Foods

<sup>29</sup> Pelican Lee, “Setting up Women’s Land in the 1970s: Could We Do It?,” *Off Our Backs* 33, no. 3/4 (2003): 43-47, accessed March 9, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837791>.

<sup>30</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 160.

<sup>32</sup> Lee, “Setting up Women’s Land in the 1970s: Could We Do It?” 44.

<sup>33</sup> Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective*, 147-8.

<sup>34</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 96.



and Sprouts Market would exist today.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, commune women published numerous cookbooks in the underground press. One of the first counterculture cookbooks, Ita Jones' *The Grub Bag: An Underground Cookbook*, was published in 1971, and it was quickly followed by Lucy Horton's *Country Commune Cooking* in 1972.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the book that best captured the hippie woman's love of natural cooking was *Laurel's Kitchen* by Laurel Robertson. In her book, Robertson laid the case for a totally natural, home-cooked vegetarian diet and proposed that a homemaker was the "keeper of the keys' ... to the household, to its storerooms, attics, chests, and cupboards, was a position of great responsibility and, therefore, of great honor."<sup>37</sup> According to Robertson, women had the ability to influence the fate of the planet by returning to the frugal practices of their grandmothers by using resources wisely, pushing back against feminist criticisms of the traditional role of women in communal life. Although commune women did not receive the satisfaction of a paycheck or promotion, "no other job or career involvement [could] be quite so effective in bringing about the world we all want to see."<sup>38</sup>

While women cultivated their epicurean talents, they also utilized their creative abilities to earn money in a variety of ways. Many did elaborate beadwork, and although labor intensive, beading was a popular pursuit due to its low overhead costs. Bay Area commune members formed the Great Ooga Booga Bead Company and sold their creations in downtown San Francisco. Other women made handmade quilts, knitted and crocheted items, and created elaborate macramé plant hangers to sell at craft fairs and street markets. Others became expert woodworkers and sculpted a variety of furniture items and natural cooking utensils while other

<sup>35</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 90-91.

<sup>36</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 92.

<sup>37</sup> Laurel Robertson, *Laurel's Kitchen: A Handbook for Vegetarian Cookery and Nutrition* (New York: Bantam Books/Nilgiri Press, 1976), 38.

<sup>38</sup> Robertson, *Laurel's Kitchen: A Handbook for Vegetarian Cookery and Nutrition*, 48.

women made hippie inspired candle creations. Another lucrative business pursuit was the occult and healing arts, and commune women set up shops as psychics, tarot card readers, and herbalists. When women failed to succeed in these entrepreneurial pursuits, they often had to settle for "straight" jobs. Since most were young and inexperienced, their options tended to be limited to childcare, waitressing, retail, and clerical; many more became strippers, go-go dancers, and massage "therapists."<sup>39</sup>

In addition to economic issues, rural communes reflected society-at-large in that they could not escape illness, and unlike their Native American counterparts who lived with relatively few serious diseases prior to the European invasion, hippies brought mainstream diseases with them to the communes which spread easily in the primitive conditions. Hepatitis ran rampant due to the lack of sanitation, as did staphylococcus, ringworm, threadworm, scabies, lice, and sexually transmitted diseases; many commune members lived with a perpetual cold. Hippie women resorted to natural herbal remedies, but when these failed, they were forced to rely on doctors and hospitals in the city. Sanitation was indeed a huge concern in many communities such as the Morningstar in northern California. Here, the commune's two toilets were overwhelmed, and members took to defecating in the woods, frequently not covering their feces and toilet paper.<sup>40</sup>

Just as in mainstream society, communes had to deal with eccentric personalities as well as law-breakers and, without a doubt, many on the outer fringes of society were drawn to these communities. The Wheeler Ranch discovered that two men who had been living amongst them for six months were actually escaped convicted murderers from nearby San Quentin Prison. The hippies received advanced word of an impending police raid, and the convicts escaped before law enforcement arrived. Ironically, the convicts never caused a minute's trouble living in the commune. The Morningstar had an African

<sup>39</sup> Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture*, 93-95.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 50, 200.

American resident nicknamed “Mystery.” Nudity was the norm at the Morningstar, and when the sheriff made one of his frequent visits to the Bay Area commune, Mystery would tie a blue ribbon around his penis to point out that his was the largest. Why he did this, no one knew. According to commune members, Mystery was a kleptomaniac. Residents would frequently notice their dope missing, and Mystery would comment, “that sure is a mystery.” The victim would then reply, “yeah, that sure is a mystery, Mystery.”<sup>41</sup> Law enforcement was called on another member of the Morningstar who innocently cut the mane of a neighbor’s horse because she worried he could not see through the long hair. The animal, a valuable and highly competitive show horse, was ruined for years, infuriating the owner. Other situations were more dangerous. For example, one visiting scholar spent the night in a sweat-filled sleeping bag while a psychopathic commune member randomly shot a rifle into the darkness—some rounds coming very close to his head.<sup>42</sup>

Local reaction to these communes was mostly negative, and after the Charles Manson murders in 1969, suspicion increased. Years later, one former Black Bear resident asked a local resident what the locals thought of them, and he got a two-word answer: Charles Manson. With so many communes in the North Bay including the Morningstar, Wheeler Ranch, and the Chosen Family, Sonoma County residents feared their soaring home prices might be jeopardized.<sup>43</sup> Near Ben Lomond in the mountains above Santa Cruz, Holiday Commune members met with violence. Locals paid children fifty cents to shoot BB guns and throw rocks at the commune, and they held vigilante meetings, going so far as to bomb the commune bus with a Molotov cocktail. Santa Cruz business owners became increasingly alarmed about the influx of hippies in the nearby commune and formed a so-called “anti-hippie committee” led

by Torchlight Motel owner and president of the Santa Cruz County Motel Association, Al Conquest. Meetings were held with local law enforcement and judges, but since vagrancy laws were found unconstitutional in 1958, little could be done. The committee requested that the county building inspector investigate as to whether the commune was unsanitary, but he found no serious violations and the group “very cooperative” to any suggestions he made.<sup>44</sup> The irony is that these days Santa Cruz uses its hippie image to *attract* tourists. A popular bumper sticker in the Bay Area today is “Keep Santa Cruz Weird.”

For many years, the communes thrived in spite of the public’s best efforts to be rid of them. Ultimately, most failed by the late 1970s, overtaken by the 1980s yuppie culture. The hippie movement died with them. Although they could not completely escape the society that so disillusioned them, many found, at least for a time, a renewed connection to the Earth that their parents had all but forgotten. Unfortunately, many of the traditions and problems that commune residents sought to escape manifested again in communal life, including the division of races, repression of women, and intolerance of homosexuals. Additionally, they could not escape the financial realities of the world they lived in, and communes were plagued with health issues and unscrupulous individuals. Throughout all of this, the hippies still believed in their utopian vision, and women in particular found a freedom that they never imagined by establishing creative entrepreneurial enterprises that changed the food industry for years to come. Today, former commune sites, such as Olompali State Park in California, are popular excavation areas, and the artifacts found tell us much about the counterculture of the 20th century. By rejecting the meaningless, hippies found a new kind of freedom, and this added a very colorful chapter to the history of the American people.

<sup>41</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 177.

<sup>42</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 177-178, 220.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, 219-220.

<sup>44</sup> Holly Harmon, *Inside a Hippie Commune: Santa Cruz Mountains and Beyond* (Santa Cruz: Harmon Publishing, 2013), 94-95, 179.

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