

EPISODE 56

NEW MORNING

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 56 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now last episode we went over what might be called the psychological/cultural step change which occurred in the late 1960's. And I didn't want to in any way glamorize LSD. But I also wanted to emphasize how important it was, not just for those who took it, but also for the much wider society. Before we continue on, though, there are a few issues connected to the last episode which I'd like to either expand upon or touch upon for the first time.

The first has to do with rewritten history. Because if you are younger than, say, the age of fifty, all that you know about The Sixties is from what you've read or heard. Kind of like me thinking about the Roaring Twenties. So that you might have been confused by the emphasis which I placed on the psychedelic experience, since your understanding was that the main takeaway from the Sixties was protests and political conflicts. I just happened to have been there, though. And although it might be natural to lump together everything that took place at that time, in reality the world which the hippies lived in was poles apart from the one in which the political types operated. As I mentioned in a previous episode, no one ever dropped acid and then decided to become a Marxist. And one's mind could go to many strange places while on acid, but one of them definitely was not to become enraged at some 'them' on the opposite side of your political beliefs. Or, really, to become enraged at all.

Nor were the political types all that idealistic. Rather, to take an example, and—interestingly enough, as one would expect in a true liberal democracy—protests against the Vietnam War stemmed almost entirely from self-interest, and not from a concern for others. Consider: The war was just as immoral the day after President Nixon ended the draft as it had been the day before. But once he did that all protest ceased immediately.

And it is true that, especially from 1966 to 1970, the vast majority of the older generation did lump together everyone and everything that was going on back then. This is because they honestly did not understand any of it one bit. And it frightened them. What's more, the psychedelic experience was such that, especially at the beginning, the only way to understand it was more or less to do it. So it is

perfectly understandable that journalists, etc., at the time would be confused as to what was really happening.

On the other hand, as we shall very shortly see, by the early 70's the situation was much clearer. The confusion was gone, and important changes were starting to manifest themselves throughout society. So it is disturbing to someone who did live through each year of the 60's and the 70's to see all of the positive new beginnings which did take place back then, not to mention proper causes and effects, to be now airbrushed out of the story in the present day.

But this particular part of the tale will be taken up in a slightly future episode.

Anyway, the next myth which I would like to take apart is the idea that the so-called Sexual Revolution was a result of 'The Sixties'. Well, it is true that many of the statistics such as divorce rates and the like, did start to drastically change then. And it's also true that the birth control pill was first approved for use in 1960. But that's kind of like saying that since the first Super Bowl was in 1967 it therefore had something to do with the Summer of Love.

The reality is that the psychedelic experience made users almost hyper-aware that actual Love had absolutely nothing to do with the physical act of sex. If anything, the two experiences were almost polar opposites. And to the person high on acid the Fifties' hipster vision of promiscuous sex as some sort of wonderful pursuit in and of itself would have been seen as beyond sad. Kind of like trading a hundred dollar bill for a nickel and a dime.

Now it is true that couples under the influence might feel as though they had merged into a state of at least temporary union or marriage, and in that case, there right in the moment, whether they were legally married or not would have seemed immaterial. And sometimes, of course, it would turn out that people had just been caught up in the moment, and such feelings of union would fade as soon as the LSD wore off. But even in this worst case scenario, the 'free love' of hippies wasn't even remotely similar to the 'free love' of Playboy Magazine.

No, if you're searching for the cause of the skyrocketing divorce rate by 1970, you need look no further than those no fault divorce laws enacted in the 1950's and early '60's. And if you want to know how sex came to be separated from love, marriage, and the process of having children, and instead became a commodity which people were supposed to unabashedly and unashamedly spend their entire lives pursuing in and of itself, then it's the decade of the Fifties when that happened. And therefore that this particular vision of sex was totally unrelated to either drugs or rock and roll. Rather it had actually

been there back in 1800 in Jeremy Bentham's hundreds of thousands of words on Utilitarianism. All of which—let me remind you once again—then formed the foundation upon which John Stuart Mill's Liberal Democracy was built.

The third issue which I would like to address has to do with the disconnect which might have formed in your head when I was going on and on about what for lack of a better word we could call the spiritual insights of those people who took psychedelic drugs. Because when you think of LSD the image in your head might be of naked hippies haphazardly dancing around at a Grateful Dead concert. Well, as I said earlier, not all of us are natural born philosophers such as Rene Descartes. And what makes it worse is that, as another person put it, 'there was this energy, this consciousness, that mystics had spent lifetimes just trying to touch. And there we were taking baths in it'.

Not that there wasn't often a wonderful positivity associated with LSD. Especially when, in an unattached way, one considered the absurdity of it all. And it was also true that life *was* but a play. So why not be a joyful player? At the same time though, the psychedelic experience also showed you as plainly as possible that Life itself was as serious as Death itself. Because you soon discovered that this was indeed a strange Cosmos which humanity had found itself in. For on the one hand there was the possibility of that endless ecstatic moment. And yet simultaneously this was also a world of undeniable ugliness, unhappiness, and sorrow, a world of hunger and conflict, and a world where animals, including us, were condemned to endlessly kill and eat other beings, just in order to survive themselves. And somehow you had to integrate both the agony and the ecstasy, and never lose sight of either.

As I said, a strange Cosmos.

And even if many people back then never realized even a fraction of this deeper understanding, but just ended up going to those Grateful Dead concerts, and/or devolved into just adding ever more exotic drugs to the mix, that doesn't alter the points that I am trying to make. Because, remember, I'm not trying to present an exhaustive history of The Sixties here. Instead what I'm trying to do is to place this short period within the broader context of the intellectual history of the 20th Century. After all, to make an analogy, not very many people who vote Republican could tell you who Edmund Burke was, let alone have read any of his writings. Yet no one would argue that Burke wasn't a major influence in Conservative thought.

And one final point. Because as I noted in the last episode, the world of 1962 might have shown no foretaste of what was to come. But the youth cohort which was entering high school back then, whether because of boredom, or prosperity, or for some other reason, was somehow different. The newly formed Peace Corps was very popular. Average SAT scores peaked in 1964, and would then slowly decline from then until now. In 1965 college freshmen were surveyed as to the relative importance of perceived benefits of going to college. The most important reason chosen by far, with 84% of them, was 'to get a better understanding of life'. Way down the list, at around 24%, were what we might call the Utilitarian benefits, such as 'getting a well paying job' and 'making important contacts for the rest of life'. (Twenty years later those results would be reversed. And to my knowledge they remain that way today.) And these weren't just Ivy League students being surveyed. This was for all students, even those attending nearby state schools.

Which shows that, if nothing else, very few young people at the time were in it for the money. And this was what was going on before anyone turned on or tuned in. So, again, it is probably more appropriate to see the whole psychedelic experience as a catalyst to a much larger reaction: A more abrupt version of the shift between Age of Enlightenment thinking and the Romantic Era which took place around the year 1800.

Except that there were several important differences. For one thing, this would be a revolution with no theoreticians and no leaders. And outside the possible exception of singer/songwriter Bob Dylan, no cultural figures to act as Pied Piper.

Most importantly, not only would this 'movement' seemingly arise out of nowhere, but it would also seek to wipe clean all of the corruption and all of the artificiality that had clogged up the world of 1962. A tweak here and a new regulation there wasn't going to cut it. This meant, especially for those who did tune in, that the entire political process—including the blaming of some outside, evil 'them' for the world's problems—was just as useless and pointless.

No, the only real solution would be to metaphorically pave everything over and start anew.

Now, again, I'm not saying that everyone involved consciously thought everything through in any specific manner. But for a large number of people, on some level at least, there were some commonalities.

First, whether it was after one trip or many, at some point it became clear that one couldn't stay high forever. And that if you were at all serious about the seriousness of Life itself, then you wouldn't

want to be even if you could. Because if you really believed in being in harmony with Nature, then that would be a drug free Nature. And in time couples would form, babies would come along, and somehow food had to be obtained and roofs had to go up over heads. Work would need to be done.

Second, since life had to end up being meaningful, then whatever that work turned out to be would have to be meaningful, too. No more just punching in on time clocks. Or wearing suits to go up to some stupid job on the fourteenth floor of some building. Or spending ten years getting a PhD in English Literature. In fact, everything about this new world was going to have to be real.

Which meant that, since the psychedelic experience had so clearly shown that ultimately all personality or ego is fake, then any new society would also have to be straightforward and honest. No more elaborate social games to play or irrational rules to follow. Simplicity. No posing. No status symbols. Everything just clean and open.

Now looking back it is difficult to see how, without any specific plans and only the vaguest of those idealistic visions, anyone would have thought this a doable project. But on the one hand the repulsion which people felt towards a society which had been broadly acceptable just a few years earlier was almost raw. And on the other the true revolutionaries had already, as it were, crossed over. And it seemed both impossible and pointless for them to go back. Besides which, it appeared more than obvious that the present society, allowed to go forward on its lame, materialistic trajectory, would inevitably crash and burn. So that such a future just did not compute. The ship was sinking, whether the captain and crew knew it or not.

Speaking of which, the metaphorical captain and crew, namely the people running that artificial world which the younger generation was fast becoming alienated from, not only didn't at all understand what was happening and what the big beef was, but they also didn't take kindly to being told that they were artificial people busily creating an ever more artificial and dead end world. So, especially at first, the generational/cultural split which was fast developing was not an amiable one.

In fact, it is hard to convey to someone who wasn't there at the time just how intense the hostility that arose in the 'straight' world (which is what the word referred to before being appropriated by the gay subculture) towards what, for lack of a better word, we can refer to as the longhairs. From the longhairs' viewpoint, save for that small fringe of angry political people, they mostly just wanted to be left alone. What's more, having been brought up with law abiding, middle class attitudes, it was more than confusing to be all of a sudden despised and ostracized for the apparently serious social crime of not having had the proper haircut. For instance, on a personal level, there was at least an

eighteen month period when I hardly went a single day without a stranger driving or walking by and saying or yelling extremely ugly things at me.

As for doing meaningful work and having the absence of pointless, neurotic ego gaming, good luck finding it in the straight world. Which meant that even those people with an innately strong work ethic ended up sitting around with nothing useful to do. Which only served to reinforce the opinion of the older generation that this new group of people were nothing but lazy bums.

Finally, on top of all that, there certainly may have been some negative aspects to smoking marijuana, which was much more prevalent than the taking of psychedelics. But any way that you looked at it grass was much less dangerous, both to the mind and body, than was the consumption of alcohol. Yet for some unreasonable reason marijuana was the substance which was highly illegal. Which meant that longhairs not only became highly fearful and suspicious of law enforcement, but their previous lifelong respect for the law itself started to come apart.

So that when, in May, 1970, National Guard soldiers shot and killed four students at Kent State University, a common thought was on the order of, 'Wow. They really are going to try to wipe us out.' This was subjectively followed by a slight pause, in which people on both sides of the divide waited for the next shoe to drop. And then...

The totally unexpected happened. The 'vibe', as they said back then, suddenly changed. The older generation, still by far the large majority of the population, were genuinely shocked that events had come to this. After all, these were their own middle class American children being shot. And wasn't 'peace and love' what virtually every semi-advanced civilization had always claimed to be as its goal? So that now, seemingly out of nowhere, the 'silent majority' implicitly decided that anger, which would inevitably lead to such violence, could not be the answer, and that therefore some accommodation with its youth would have to be found.

Which meant that, as if turning on a dime, to a large extent the 'culture war' was effectively over. And the so called counter-culture had won.

Now I don't want to make a serious argument that it was all actually this cut and dried, that night and day.

But for the previous four years or so, in historical terms, cultural change had been happening at lightning speed. Because you'll notice that those Kent State shootings were not at Berkeley or Cambridge or Ann Arbor or any other major college town. Because by 1970 the vast majority of

people in those places were way past the pre-psychedelic political mentality. No, the killings happened at a previously totally undistinguished, mostly commuter college in Ohio. Which also signified that by now at least some aspects of that counter-culture had permeated to just about every nook and cranny of America.

And whether or not you agree with the idea that the Kent State shootings was some kind of specific turning point, it is difficult to deny that the Spring of 1970 also saw other ideas of the counter-culture, some trivial and some profound, starting to go mainstream.

For instance, it is interesting to note just how many overtly or symbolically spiritually oriented number one songs there were during this brief period. Spirit In The Sky. Bridge Over Troubled Water. Let It Be. The Long And Winding Road. O Happy Day. Candles In The Rain. Hardly the type of subject matter one usually associated with the term 'pop music'.

An event which had far more lasting impact was the first Earth Day, held on April 22 of that year. Now it is important for you to know that at the time the concept of global warming was nothing more than a hypothesis held by a few scientists. Other scientists thought it equally plausible that, since any number of ice ages had happened in the last several million years, that climate might be getting colder in the near future. So that this first Earth Day was instead an explicit call to peace and brotherhood, and a recognition that society was fast internalizing the earlier lessons from both Rousseau and the Romantic movement, that for the human psyche to stay sane it had to be in touch and in tune with Nature, and that this entire planet of ours had to be kept clean and pure. And when I say that this change was fast, I mean fast. For less than two years earlier professors at major universities would have been unfamiliar with the word 'ecology'.

Nor was this first Earth Day organized by proverbial tree huggers. Much of the broader society had also suddenly gotten behind this idea. The most important financial and operational supporter of the event was the working class United Auto Workers union. Not only that, but less than three months later, on July 9, Republican President Richard Nixon proposed creating the Environmental Protection Agency.

And along with the health of the planet also came a newfound concern for the health of one's personal vehicle, the body. Once again, it might surprise you to know that back in the world of 1962 hardly anyone was ever conscious of the connection between the fact that they liked to eat food and the fact that their body needed that food in order to keep itself going. Yes, of course they knew this on

some level. But the idea that the quality of what they were ingesting right now would have an effect on the quality of their health, both short term and long term? In any kind of practical cause and effect way, no. Thus any number of behaviors which today, whether we do them ourselves or not, we recognize as unhealthy, such as pouring copious amounts of salt on food, or smoking cigarettes, or blithely eating any number and amount of what we today call 'junk foods', were engaged in back then without the slightest sense of consciousness or guilt. Most people still did believe that they had souls. But that the body was the temple of the soul? It never occurred to them.

But yet another catalytic effect that the psychedelic experience initiated was the dawning understanding that to at least a large degree your body's health and ultimately your mental health were related to what you ate. If one was going to be serious about being in touch with Nature, then the truth of that old saying that you should 'eat to live and not live to eat' became achingly profound. If there was a purpose and seriousness to Life, then maybe stuffing your face with whatever might not be all that constructive of an idea. And in the period between 1968 and 1970 these new thoughts quickly spread throughout the greater society.

For instance, in 1965 virtually the only kind of bread that you could buy in supermarkets was white. And it was usually squishy processed white, such as Wonder Bread. There was one 'healthy' alternative sometimes available, called Roman Meal, which had all of 10% whole wheat flour in it. Five years later, throughout the vast majority of the country, every supermarket sold a wide variety of various whole grain breads.

The same change occurred with fruits and vegetables, which by the 1950's and early '60's were mostly consumed in a processed, canned, or frozen form. By 1970, however, the idea of eating fresh fruits and vegetables had suddenly come back into fashion.

And I could go on and on up and down the food pyramid. But this new concern for healthy and natural living extended well beyond just what you ate and drank. For consider the strange history of breastfeeding.

Now there had always been some women who for whatever reason couldn't produce milk for their babies. And if they could afford it they would then hire a wet nurse. If not, they would mix together a concoction from animal feed and the like.

By the early 20th Century, however, making infant formula had become a commercial endeavor. And in the spirit of being 'scientific' and 'modern', educated women started using it whether they needed to or not. Still, in 1936 some 77% of women continued to breast feed.

But then advertising campaigns from those self-interested large corporations took over, and soon using formula became the societal norm. So that by the 1950's and '60's it never even occurred to many young women that their breasts were there in order to feed babies, and it was almost shocking if a middle or upper class woman breast fed. (And you'll note that this change went hand in hand with that Playboy-ization of the early '50's which re-purposed women's breasts so that they were now seen solely as sex objects for lustful men.) Anyway, by the late Sixties the percentage of women of all classes who didn't use formula was down to 22%.

All of which was one more particular instance of the generalized artificiality which had been ever more rapidly spreading throughout the greater society.

As I noted earlier, though, when young women took LSD and the like, the near universal reaction was a repulsion towards the absurdity of the girdles, makeup, and the like which they had mindlessly believed in their entire lives. And when in the course of events these young ladies had babies anything other than breastfeeding seemed equally repulsive.

And as with the other insights which arose out of the psychedelic experience, this new renewed interest and emphasis on natural childbirth spread throughout the larger society. The Lamaze technique of breathing and relaxation exercises (which, by the way, had been perfected in the Soviet Union) was soon being taught in YMCA classes across the country. And by 1982 the incidence of breastfeeding was now back up to 61%.

And since this statistic covers all socioeconomic classes, it should drive home the point that the dramatic, almost overnight, shift from the plastic and artificial to the real and the natural indeed extended throughout all of society. And that also included the world of entertainment and the world of commerce.

In 1972 ABC unveiled a new TV Western. Except that its hero was a pacifist, Eastern-wisdom-spouting Shaolin monk whose first reaction when confronted with violence was always to turn the other cheek. Each week, however, the bad guys would become so evil that he was finally forced to use his martial arts skills to beat the crap out of them. Almost immediately 'Kung Fu' became one of television's biggest hits.

And then there was the decline and fall of G.I. Joe. This toy was introduced in 1964 as an explicitly militaristic play action figure. But by 1970 little boys no longer liked war, and Hasbro Toys

recast him as an ‘adventure’ hero. The soldier image could not be shaken, however, and in 1976 the line was dropped for lack of interest.

The taste of little girls was changing, too. In 1974 Mattel, the makers of Barbie, started selling a line of alternative dolls. Called the Sunshine Family, it consisted of Stephe, Steve, and little baby Sweets. Unlike Barbie and her sexy, extensive wardrobe, Stephe wore a long, chaste, flowery white dress. And unlike Barbie and Ken’s brightly colored beach Jeep, the Sunshine Family had a camper van, in which they traveled around to go to craft fairs.

As for crafts themselves, the stereotypical suburban housewives were going nuts over macrame. More seriously, thousands of people became immersed in pottery. And just about every town of any size had at least one stained glass studio. Which makes sense, since in architecture and interior design the cold concrete and steel ‘modern’ look of the ‘50’s and ‘60’s was now replaced by wood, glass, stained glass, plants, and more wood. Not only were people going back to Nature, they were bringing Nature back to their houses.

Fashion—that most artificial of pursuits—was now out of fashion. And peasant dresses and the like weren’t just for hippies any more. For instance, the Laura Ashley company, with its line of long, often frilly dresses which evoked the 19th Century, experienced explosive growth throughout the world in the early 1970’s. The top selling shampoo at the time, by the way, was the giant corporation Proctor & Gamble’s Clairol Herbal Essence, the label of which featured a long haired hippie girl in a natural pool.

And I could go on and on. Like Pop Tarts changing to granola. And VWs replacing Buicks. But I would hope that, especially if you were not there yourself, I have provided enough evidence to show that the entire culture in the early 1970’s was sincerely attempting to both internalize and externalize this new set of ‘natural’ values.

And as someone who was there, I can tell you that the world of 1973 was utterly different from the world of 1965. For instance, when I first went to college in 1965 you could not eat in the dining hall unless you were wearing a coat and tie. No coat and tie, no food. And this was the rule at most private colleges back then. When I returned to university in 1971 virtually every undergraduate was extremely shaggy, and I doubt that many of the students even owned a coat and tie. What’s more, there was now a very popular separate vegetarian, natural food dining hall which had been set up for those who were so inclined.

Finally, even the political realm had seemed to enter a new era of Peace and Love. By 1974 overwhelming popular opinion had forced the highly unlovable and not particularly peaceful Richard Nixon to resign. And the election of 1976 was contested between the effusively smiling Christian environmentalist Jimmy Carter and the thoroughly conservative, but also thoroughly decent, Gerald Ford. Ford's Chief of Staff, by the way, was a hirsute, always cheerful young man with longish sideburns named Dick Cheney.

So that if you had been standing there in the middle of America in, say, 1973, it would have seemed beyond much argument that the near miraculous changeover from the materialistic, shallow, empty world of 1962 had been complete. And that the new, clean, kinder, gentler world of the future had already completed its birth. The tide was in. The vision was clear. And now all that was left to do was to work out the details.

And you, nor probably anyone else, would have ever guessed how the world of 1985 would actually turn out. Not to mention the world of 1995. Not to mention the new millennium. Your mind just would not have gone there.

We, however, will go there. Although, as always when I get to this point in the episode, not until next time. But until then I would like to sincerely thank you once again for once again so far having listened.