



“History may not repeat itself, but it certainly rhymes.”

– Paraphrased from a Quote Attributed to Mark Twain, American writer, humorist, and lecturer

## Prelude

“Tyranny of the Downbeat”

Remembrances of Things Musical

*It was twenty years ago today,  
That Sergeant Pepper taught the band to play.  
They been goin' in and out of style,  
But they're guaranteed to raise a smile.  
So let me introduce to you,  
The band you've known for all these years,*

– The Beatles, “Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band”

There's a saying. Our mortality is measured by the music we grow old with; that songs are the score to our lives. I remember exactly who I was and what I was doing by certain records. Every time I hear one, I'm back to what I was at that moment. In the Sixties, music marked the time of our lives. All the events, all the experiences, all the memories from that time are linked forever to a mesmerizing melody or smashing power chord, a mobilizing lyric or communal chorus.

There's another saying. Everything is changeable. Only change is eternal. It is inevitable. It is persistent. As predictable as time. As tyrannical as the downbeat. The Sixties were a time for change and a time of change. Rock ‘n’ roll provided our anthems.

Because I lived in the Central Valley, I wasn't part of what was happening in San Francisco, The City. So I participated, vicariously, on my time machines – the radio and one particular pulp magazine.

“The Herald” who signaled the beginning of our trip was, appropriately enough, a music critic: Ralph J. Gleason, with back-up from Ben Fong-Torres and a handful of disc jockeys. Some on AM, but most on the first underground, free-form, FM stations, like KMPX, then KSAN in San Francisco, and for us valley kids, KZAP 98.5 in Sacramento. It was Tom “Big Daddy” Donahue, or Creedence playing the long version of “Suzy Q” at a street dance. The official journal of the

journey was not Gleason's *San Francisco Chronicle*, but a “rock tabloid.” A new publication that commented on the counterculture by writing about the music it made. A rag dedicated to printing “All the News That Fits.” That journal was Jann Wenner’s *Rolling Stone*, which he co-founded with his mentor Gleason. In 1969, it was my primary source of information.

Why fate chose The City as the location for this flowering of music and gathering of tribes will never be known. But it did. And it gave us an incredible amount of music and musicians – The Charlatans, The Grateful Dead, It's A Beautiful Day, The Beau Brummels, The Jefferson Airplane, The Steve Miller Band, Big Brother & the Holding Company, Moby Grape, The Youngbloods. I hear Quicksilver's “Pride of Man” and I think of Chet Helms and “The Family Dog.”

*The new children will live,  
For the elders have died.  
I wave goodbye to America,  
And smile hello to the world.*

– Tim Buckley, “Goodbye and Hello”

I remember the first “official” outdoor rock concert. “Magic Mountain” at Mt. Tamalpais in Marin. Singer-songwriter Tim Buckley backed by Carter C.C. Collins. I wondered if I should wear flowers in my thinning hair.

“Pushin' Too Hard.” Sky Saxon and the Seeds. The first time I smoked dope. “The Loner.” Neil Young's first solo album. My first experience with psychedelics. We were all counterculture cowboys, denim Indians like him. Fringed, buckskinned, and alone in our melancholy.

“Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die-Rag” will always be Vietnam and a long bus ride to Fresno for my induction physical. I was terminally healthy. There was a longer trip to the Oakland Draft Resistance Center, knowing that if I didn't do something I was going to war. After all, when the numbers were called the night of the lottery, I was number twenty-four.

“Light My Fire,” The flip side of the awakening. The Doors at a roller-skating rink in my hometown of Modesto. On the inside, Jim Morrison was smoking and sultry. On the outside, two gangs were beating the hell out of each other. The old and the new: one living, one dying, in 4/4 time.

“Long Time Gone.” The Polo Grounds. The Moratorium. The first taste of revolution, of defiance, of togetherness. Crosby, Stills and Nash wearing those furry coats. I remember walking by them and thinking how short they were.

There was a point when music and movies, the other cultural touchstone, came together. Films like *The Graduate* and *Easy Rider* broke new ground in many ways. But I remember them especially as the first movies to use popular music and rock ‘n’ roll to help tell the story. Indelible music such as “The Sound of Silence” and “Mrs. Robinson,” “Born To Be Wild” and “Ballad of Easy Rider.”

In a speech in Cape Town in June 1966, Robert F. Kennedy said, “There is a Chinese curse which says, 'May he live in interesting times.' Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history.”

The origin of the notion of “living in interesting” times has had a clouded history. Kennedy attributed it to the Chinese, likely due to a speech made by Frederic R. Coudert at the *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* in 1939, who said, “Some years ago, in 1936, I had to write to

a very dear and honored friend of mine, who has since died, Sir Austen Chamberlain, brother of the present Prime Minister, and I concluded my letter with a rather banal remark, ‘that we were living in an interesting age.’ Evidently he read the whole letter, because by return mail he wrote to me and concluded as follows: ‘Many years ago, I learned from one of our diplomats in China that one of the principal Chinese curses heaped upon an enemy is, ‘May you live in an interesting age.’ ‘Surely,’ he said, ‘no age has been more fraught with insecurity than our own present time.’”

This phrase has been considered by some to be a blessing, by others to be a curse, often spoken ironically, implying that times of peace are less, or more, interesting than times of chaos. The Sixties in general, and 1969 specifically following the political unrest and assassinations of 1968, were interesting times to live in, regardless of how you interpreted the phrase. They were anarchic and creative, oppressive and liberating, uninspired and innovative, deadly and enlivening, predictable and startling, ordinary and outrageous, disappointing and compelling, violent and peaceful, mind-numbing and exhilarating. Whatever they were, and it was, the Sixties and 1969 shaped me and a generation of my peers.

This fictional memoir is a narrative of the year 1969. It is a remembrance of things past. My past. The way I recall it. The five senses conjuring déjà vu and the familiar as surely as Proust's tea-dipped *madeleines*. This story chronicles who I was, where I was, what I was doing, when I was doing it, and why during the decade that many people say, “If you remember it, you weren’t there.” I remember it and I was there. This is my older self now looking back at my younger self during that defining year. It is the best, most honest story I could tell based on the research as I did it, the facts as I know them, and the memories as I recall them. The experience of returning and revisiting these moments can be unsettling, but not surprising. It's predictable. Like time. It's persistent. Like change. It's inevitable. Like the downbeat. This is my story and I'm sticking to it.

When I wrote *Getaway Day*, I was asked if I had considered writing a prequel, or a sequel. I hadn't thought about it. But, I had contemplated writing a “Baby Boomer” novel; a novel about my experiences and the experiences of my peers. *Getaway Day* was the first book in that journey. *Beautiful Day* is the second. I hope you enjoy it.

*Lately it occurs to me,  
What a long, strange trip it's been.*  
– The Grateful Dead, “Truckin’”