

Memory Lane: High Hopes to Strawberry Fields

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In weeks just past, there have been nationwide remembrances of L.J. Day 40 years ago, Vietnam 10 years ago, and with Fulton, De Dillsey and the Drifters lining the Arlington on Saturday, our mental clocks naturally turn back to times in between — 10 and 15 years ago.

The television "We and We are" program of cultural remembrance that took place nationwide and stuck to Santa Barbara is memorable ways. They started out with Frank Sinatra singing "High Hopes," a song about a city still set, thinking he could move a rubber tree plant, and ended with the Beatles about another strawberry field forever. Somewhere in between were Betty White and De Dillsey.

In 1970, Sunnyside Chase was a terrific place, where P.E. consisted of everyone running laps on the stadium track and kicking each other in the shins in the name of soccer. Frisbees and tetherball from the popular games, and the really hot activities were jacks and trading cards.

There was an old "Y" building up the street, on East Valley Road where the Bank of America now stands, and here a kid could take an lesson after school and be picked up afterwards by parents who probably drove the latest two-door Buick convertible.

The Minnerat Hotel breakfast was a great burger, with the Beach Shack at the beach providing hamburgers, free pickles and soft malonuts. Here, the focus rested on different things over "The Group," which consisted of Winston Collins, Buddy Vale, Gabe McFarland — and a funny-looking kid named David Chazy, who always ran around with a guitar.

An average Group day at the beach consisted of everyone hanging out and being out of the life guard stand, and there would be body surfing contests to see who could ride waves tallest, and then there.

One summer there was a rash of shark attacks, and most people were finding ways to wear a five inches of water. News-Press articles of the day were helpful, and advised swimmers what to do if they ran into a shark: Stay calm, hold your

breath and go under to minimize splashing, and as a last resort, to the shark on the nose with a clenched fist.

The junior high school years of 1971, 1974 and 1976 were combinations of politeness and popularity contests. The last page of the 1974 La Ventura Junior High school yearbook was entitled "Popular Personalities of '74" and featured "Ideal Ninth Graders, Ideal Eighth Graders and Ideal Seventh Graders." A boy and girl were picked for each honor, and they were like king and queen of the hill around the school halls.

The popularity contests were exciting plans to make young people more interested than they already were, but they were also awkward. The way everyone looked in those days was enough to make Elton Presley drop his guitar — with girls wearing their hair in beehives and boys with heavily feathered, the hair on the sides glued down with Wetzel Cream Oil.

The guys rolled up the sleeves of their shirts (if they were short) and the girls (if they were cool) wore layers and layers of politeness, which they bought from the Beach Shack from an inner State Street.

The politeness was fun when they were new, but later on, the trick was to talk them at the beach, eat, stand, exercise, and spread them in big circles on the beach to dry in the sun.

You weren't with it unless you wore about four of these heavily starched numbers all rolled up around your waist in a big, uncomfortable wall, and a large leather belt would keep them from falling on the ground. You hoped your shirt would stick straight out, and everything looked best if you wore a matching opaque sweater and sandals colored with red-and-blue letter socks.

There were Friday night dances at the Blue, but the best activity to take was staying there from Friday to Saturday and back again, and staying at the Blue House.

The Barber Restaurant on Spanish Street was where you went with the family for the really big celebrations, like birthdays. The Barber — with its old music, horns, riffs, horns and trumpet — had songs that seemed when you were there, and it was hard to watch

steps go by as you ate the fish on your plate.

If you got asked out on a real date in 1980, you might go to a movie, then the roller rink on Chaparral Street, and then you might park for a while on Channel Drive while you listened to Great Music sing "Belong to Me" on the radio.

When the early 1980s rolled around, everyone began to dress and grade in very heavy fashion to Chubby Checker. No longer did dancers hold on to each other (except in the case of "Loving You" by the Four Tops or the Shalimar "Innocent Boy" by the Carole Walk, the Shaggy, and other independent acts in the town of De Dillsey or the Drifters).

The Minnerat Hotel looked up to polished business, and suddenly, the deckle and Wildcat Cream Oil hair styles went on in Santa Barbara. So did the Frank Shark at the Minnerat Hotel breakfast.

The writing came for the best

teacher with the name of the big girl went throughout, and the Beach Shack became big name nationwide. Guys and girls everywhere crowded around with "Surfer Girl" coming from their radios, and in Santa Barbara, parents worried about their kids getting in and dropping out if their look is surf-worthy.

David Chazy, the funny-looking kid from the Group, now began to make a rock music festival with his guitar, and here it became clear why he carried it around so much when he was a kid.

The middle were progressively balanced times with the war in Vietnam and with it full force, the rebellion of home yet to be ignored. Then, as these young men were shipped overseas, the hair of the men grew long, the Beatles began to sing about "Strawberry Fields" — and what happened after that is what the nation has been thinking about in the weeks just past.



Photo by Steve Heston

The Minnerat scene of the 1980s shows a shoreline very different from today, a wide, sandy beach upon which permanent fences and a children's playground were installed every summer — and where the "Group" met every day around the lifeguard station.