

Reflections on SANTA BARBARA



by Rex Maurice Oppenheimer

REFLECTIONS ON SANTA BARBARA – 701 words

I was driving along listening to my iPod, and two songs played in succession that stirred memories and seemed to characterize a particular period in my life.

The songs were Joni Mitchell's "Carey," and the Rolling Stones "Honky Tonk Woman."

It was the beginning of the 1970s, I had been smuggling Pre-Columbian art out of Mexico, spent some time living on a yacht at the World's Fair Marina in New York City and out at Montauk, went back to London for awhile and had ended up in Santa Barbara. Well, initially it was actually out in Isla Vista, the college town for the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Other than the fact that I was uneducated, unemployed and had no ambition other than to write poetry and lyrics, it was an idyllic time. The 1970s were really the 60's, it was a time of sex and drugs and rock and roll, and Isla Vista, with its nearby nude beaches, and hippy atmosphere was perfect.

When I'd listen to Joni Mitchell's album, "Blue," and the song "Carey," in particular, the lines, "The wind is in from Africa," and "my fingernails are filthy; I've got beach tar on my feet, and I miss my clean white linen and my fancy French cologne," were like a soundtrack for my life.

Back then the beaches were paradisiacal. I would lie naked on the sand, smoking dope and drinking wine, watching the sunlight sparkle like diamonds on the glassy sea. The islands in the distance were like the far-off homes of goddesses. The sea told its story of continuity, power and fate. Reassuring yet threatening, it seemed to hold the whole of yin and yang and imbued my life with a mysterious romance. I had beach tar on my feet, and taking deep draughts of the cocktail of idealism and hedonism, Joni's words about the Mermaid Café, the carefree, sun-filled frolic yet with the ability to go to Rome, rent a grand piano, put

some flowers around the room, fulfilled my vagabond-minstrel dreams.

Much as had the images of the villa Keith Richards had rented in the south of France, when the Stones, as tax exiles from England, were recording "Exile on Main Street." The beautiful villa was almost devoid of furniture and the trappings of the rich. Instead it was filled with guitars, keyboards, amplifiers and Rock Stars, drinking, smoking and creating.

In Santa Barbara, wearing bellbottom jeans and an embroidered tank top, dreadlocks falling on my shoulders, when I wasn't on the beach, I'd be cutting a tape at Rainbow Recording, tending bar at "The Headband," or sitting in the courtyard of the old El Paseo.

Santa Barbara is so much more built up and gentrified than it was back then. The old El Paseo was a quiet collection of offices and little shops. I'd get coffee from the little cafe and sit at one of the round metal tables in the courtyard writing or halfheartedly looking through the want-ads for a job.

I met women there. Dominique, who was French, and Rachel, who was Japanese. Fun, short-lived relationships.

There were lots of others, either from the beach or the Blues Club called the Headband, where I worked for a few months as a bartender. I don't remember if I quit that job or got fired. I do remember that when Big Mama Thornton played there I was drinking hard with her and the band backstage. At one point I crashed two pitchers of beer together, shattering them, which didn't go over too well. But I was also tired of working. I was writing every day, and realizations were sparking in my eyes like the sunlight on the waves.

When Joni Mitchell sang about the Greek Islands, and that loose hippie, transient, sun-filled song of a life, it described my days, and when Mick Jagger sang Honky Tonk Woman, it melded with my nights, and fit my image of standing at the mike in the studio, drinking from a half-pint and smoking a joint.

I was loaded, irresponsible and unrealistic, but I felt justified in my search for a truth. I may have been living a lie, but I didn't know it.



MUSINGS



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MUSINGS – 403 words

I'm in my comfortable home, lying on my back and looking at a painting of the colorful buildings facing the bay of Villefranche. Some blue shuttered windows catch my eye. They are beautiful in an imperfect sort of way. I love the way the buildings look like they were troweled together by a mason who had had a little too much wine.

As the images in the painting stir feelings and memories within me, my thoughts wander, from the reflective waters off the Côte d'Azure, to the latest evidence confirming the Big Bang theory reported in the news this morning. Then my thoughts, those strange intuitive messages, start to think about themselves, and how my thoughts are colored by my environment and the time in which I live.

I think of how similar I am, physically and emotionally, to someone who lived centuries ago but whose frame of reference was so different. I think of how much alike we are and yet how different so many of our thoughts must be.

Take a truly primitive man, who would not have a house or apartment or even the knowledge of modern housing. If he were lying on his back one morning, perhaps in a cave in Africa, and looking at a drawing on the wall, at what level could our thoughts mesh? How would the way in which we perceive and name our own thoughts and feelings, such as the unknown aspects of death, or love, desire and fear, be similar, considering how all of our perceptions are colored by the time in which we live. We are the same biological beings. Would we share any pure thought or feeling arising from our deepest center of what human beings truly are?

I am watching the CEO of HBO on TV. He's talking about the stock market and competition involving all the new technology. He's listing all the different ways

people can now receive HBO's content, via television and Internet, and emphasizing how HBO focuses both on serving the consumer and competition.

He has a rather large space between his nose and upper lip, and I'm focusing on his philtrum, the indentation between those two lines below the nose. I'm thinking it's the same as it would have been on an ancient Roman or one of Ghingus Khan's warriors, or a cowboy in the Wild West.

They wouldn't have any idea what he's talking about.

