

ROARSHOCK PAGE

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Summer's arrived for 2016 in the hot north. Malls and movie multiplexes full of syrup and chemically pickled jalapeños illuminated by LED lights. Here and now, ROARSHOCK PAGE be different.

CALIFORNIA STREET SKETCHES THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Old Man of the Mountain was A.. A... 's private name for a small hunched fellow who walked up and down California Street for decades. He had dark eyes and a bulbous nose, and he walked the hill hunched into himself, carrying nothing but a blanket, non-descript shabby clothes, hair unkempt, though sometimes he got a haircut. Riding home from work on the one California Cable Car commute and there he was slow trudging up the California Street Hill, A.. A... saw him as did the other riders on the car, but only the long time locals knew that the guy had been walking up and down the hill for twenty or thirty years.

Homeless, by definition without shelter in the world, must live private lives in public spaces. A.. A... grew up in the 20th century East Bay (Before most things familiar were swept away by Bong! Cuckoo! 21st century BOOMS!), and he remembered the "street people" of Telegraph Avenue. Maybe most of these folks had places to crash (It was, after all, a time before weirdos had been priced out of existence), but they lived their social lives publicly in coffee houses, parks, and along the sidewalk. The roots, known and unknown, understood and misunderstood, were found in Hobo culture and the unwritten "Code of the Road," and also the Bohemian lifestyle of places like Prague, Paris and Amsterdam, where crowded personal accommodations encouraged people to live as communities in public settings, like bars and public squares. San Francisco also had its 20th century street people from the remnants of the Beats in North Beach to the Hippies born too late in Haight-Ashbury, questing for the lost illusion of a Summer of Love. A queer community emerged along Polk Street and in the Castro. La Raza were always in the Mission. In his youthful visits to the City, A.. A... remembered being shocked at the sight of alcoholics completely down and out in Tenderloin alleys ("The Heart of the Wine Country"). After Governor Ronald Reagan defunded state psychiatric hospitals, the mentally ill were deinstitutionalized. With nowhere to go, they often land-

ed on the streets to exhibit their often exasperated illnesses. The street people scene was overwhelmed. As economic conditions continued to tighten, with housing becoming ever more expensive and scarce, the ranks of the homeless continued to swell on the streets. The years passed, and it became more and more apparent that nothing meaningful was being done to alleviate the problem of thousands of people, in varying states of addiction and mental despair, left to live in filth and squalor on the streets, screaming in their madness. Screaming and raving on corners while the well-dressed and employed hurried by with every attempt to ignore those wretched ones and block out their cries. The only explanation A.. A... could imagine as to why such a situation was allowed to continue and fester, year after year, in the richest nation in the history of the world, was that the mad homeless were left to remain outside the temples of commerce as a stark warning to the working class: don't rock the Status Quo boat, or this fate might await you too.

A.. A... moved to the heart of San Francisco in the 1980s. These were the years of the City's war on Keith McHenry and Food Not Bombs for serving free vegetarian food to hungry people. The police made over 1000 arrests beginning August 15, 1988. A.. A... considered the City's actions ludicrous, virtually insane, and morally criminal. The decade ended with the spectacle of Camp Agnos in the Civic Center Plaza. Though the tents were eventually razed, the area remained, decades later, a living room for the destitute. From his arrival in the California Street neighborhood, A.. A... soon recognized local street people. Often fleeting earthly apparitions, truly transient on the streets of San Francisco, sometimes they remained for years posted every day along the same patch of sidewalk. Some spots especially favored by panhandlers were those in front of the chain drug stores and corporate fast food kiosks. The drug store on Polk at California, in what was once the Maple Hall, was valued turf, and over decades a great number of regulars held it for a time, and there was always somebody outside the door with a cup in hand and signature spare change rattle. There was a man with wild hair who for many years walked along Van Ness Avenue with a sports coat on and holding up pinwheels with long multi-color streamers attached to his glasses frames and flowing out behind him. A quiet man walked around for many years always wearing the same worn cream colored suit. He had long straight white hair and

a long beard and was in appearance somewhere in between Howard Hughes and Robert Anton Wilson. An eccentric bald man wore mirrored strangely shaped sunglasses day and night with an orange cap. For years whenever A.. A... saw him he had on seemingly the same pair of orange bell bottom trousers with a weird fringe and he had an orange furry vest, and always seemed some walking feral knitting project. This dude randomly showed up on Grant Ave, riding the 1 MUNI line, sleeping by the fountains at Yerba Buena Gardens, on the MUNI OWL rumbling down 3rd Street at 3 AM in the morning. Before everyone had a cell phone, and long before people in public got lost and all strung out staring into screens, it was easy to spot the crazy people talking to themselves. Then one day on the bus A.. A... observed a disheveled fellow having a long talk on his cell phone. After many stops it became apparent there was nobody on the other end of the conversation, and doubtful that the phone even functioned. By the time the 21st century was established and well underway, when A.. A... saw someone walking along apparently talking to themselves, more likely than not they were plugged into a communications device. No fewer schizophrenics were walking around than before. Actually, it certainly seemed that there were always more destitute crazy people out arguing with themselves in various parts of the City, and certainly on lower California Street in the wee hours of the morning. As has been told in these sketches, A.. A... walked on California Street for many decades. Sometimes he passed by the Old Man of the Mountain who would shuffle past, head bowed. A.. A... would silently pass by, being a man practically and philosophically inclined to mind his own business. One day as they approached to pass, A.. A... suddenly felt inclined to offer something to the Old Man of the Mountain. He had a paper dollar loose in his pocket which he took out and offered the man as they passed. The Old Man looked up and with a clear eyed smile said, "Oh! Thank you very much!" and continued on his way. One time in all the years, and seemingly in agitated humor, the Old Man had paused and asked A.. A... if he had a dollar, which A.. A... did, and gave to him. What was the story of the Old Man of the Mountain that channeled his life to walking up and down the California Street Hill day and night in any sort of weather for so many years it seemed like forever? What a remarkable existence to survive in so long, and when he didn't see him for a while A.. A... would wonder if he had disappeared finally like most street people eventually did, but then he would see him again shuffling along, bedroll under his arm. Usually silent in his walking meditation, one early morning on his way up the hill, A.. A... saw the Old Man of the Mountain across the street and the man was singing, quietly, but strongly, some folk tune that sounded ancient, so old that it might have been brought to the hill from any land by those men called in legend the California 49ers.

— D. A. Wilson

JUNE ALMANAC

- 06/01 1967 *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* by The Beatles was released.
 06/02 1835 P. T. Barnum circus began first U.S. tour.
 06/03 1943 Zoot Suit Riots, Los Angeles.
 06/04 2016 NEW MOON
 06/08 1949 *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell was published.
 06/11 2016 Giovanni "Gianni" Giotta, founder Caffè Trieste, North Beach, SF died at age 96.
 06/12 1997 Queen Elizabeth II reopened the Globe Theatre in London.
 06/13 1886 King Ludwig II of Bavaria found dead in Lake Starnberg near Munich @11:30 PM.
 06/16 1890 Arthur Stanley Jefferson (Stan Laurel) born, Ulverston, Lancashire, England.
 2016 Bill Berkson, poet, died in San Francisco.
 1904-2016 BLOOMSDAY
 06/18 1873 Susan B. Anthony fined \$100 for attempting to vote in 1872 presidential election.
 06/19 1934 United States Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was established.
 06/20 2016 FULL STRAWBERRY MOON
 2016 SUMMER SOLSTICE-NORTHERN EARTH
 06/21 1940 Painter Édouard Vuillard died in France.
 06/23 229 Sun Quan proclaimed himself emperor of Eastern Wu.
 06/26 1870 Christmas declared U.S. federal holiday.
 06/27 1985 U.S. Route 66 was officially removed from the United States Highway System.
 06/29 1776 Father Francisco Palou founded Mission San Francisco de Asís (San Francisco).

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Calling for Contributions! ROARSHOCK PAGE invites submissions of art, photographs, poetry, and micro-prose, to be considered for inclusion in future issues.

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