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The Summer of Love • 1967, San Francisco



1967 was the Summer of Love, and nearly 100,000 people from across America and beyond descended on the Haight-Ashbury, joining the flower power phenomenon that had erupted in San Francisco, creating a media circus and a social earthquake. In search of the holy grail of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, they joined the spiral dance, swapping flowers, love, and sex, for peyote, mushrooms, and mescaline. The boys in Nehru jackets, tie-dyed shirts and paisley bell-bottoms and the girls in flowing skirts, patched jeans and braless tops, were experiencing a whole new world through granny glasses, windowpane and blotter acid. On a cosmic peace train, they wanted to stop the war, stoned on love, love, love. Renouncing consumerism and materialism, they came in the store to steal ribbon, gum, and balloons. The throng of barefoot long-haired kids, tripping on purple haze and orange sunshine, represented everything my father stood against. Daddy hated the Summer of Love.

Every morning, runaway teenagers from Des Moines, Dayton and Duluth, slept in the storefront. My father had to step around them in the early morning fog to open up, muttering, "Goddam good-for-nothin' dirty hippies." After mopping the store aisles, he'd haul the bucket out front and dump the raunchy mop-water on them. Later in the day he'd take his big push broom and sweep them off the sidewalk as they napped in the afternoon sun.

A policeman tried to stop him once. “You can’t do that, Mr. Clemens,” he said, holding his hand up to halt my father.

“When I see shit,” Daddy retorted, “I sweep it in the gutter where it belongs.” With a final push, he turned on his heel and walked back inside. My father seldom swore, except when provoked by shoplifters and hippies.



In the aftermath of the Be-In and the Summer of Love, the Haight slid straight downhill. The originators of the counterculture movement had fled, and the deteriorating Victorians were now a mixture of psychedelic-colored crash pads and rundown heroin haunts. An element of criminals and pimps populated the streets, the rows of empty store windows plastered with *Free Love*, *Free Food*, and *Free Huey* handbills.

Dime stores didn’t do well in that grittier climate. None of the old neighborhood stores did.

The Grayline tour busses tootled past what used to be the Haight Theatre and was now the Straight Theatre, overflowing with flabby, white-thighed Midwesterners in tank tops and Bermuda shorts. The tourists leaned out the windows like bird-watchers, binoculars and cameras hanging from their necks, some hoping to catch a glimpse of the few remaining hippies, others praying to spot their runaway children.

My dad managed the Sprouse-Reitz store at 1644 Haight Street from 1954 until its doors closed in 1968. Adding great insult to my father’s injury, the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic moved in, and the hippies and addicts—hoping for some spare change and a ray of sun in the morning fog, could finally rest in peace against the red and gray tiled storefront.