

# The Gazette

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## SPEAKING OUT!

### Forty years ago, music of Woodstock, and a world on the brink

by Jim Naughton

It was beginning to evolve into one of those warm, humid, old fashioned August weekends. My friend Jim and I were heading north toward Lake George, New York in my '62 Chevy that my friends nicknamed "Red Bird".

It seems weird now but back then guys made up nicknames for older cars, probably because none of us could afford a new car in those days; it was a way of dealing with it. The summer of '69 was brutally hot and we were looking forward to some relief up north. I just finished a summer semester and was looking forward to my senior year at Central Conn. University. [ I was 25, then, and working the summer for the Hartford Automobile Club. For a lot of reasons, I didn't start college until I was 22.] We had reservations at a Dude Ranch near Lake George for Saturday, August 16, as for Friday night...we were "playing it by ear". Around the Pittsfield area of the Mass Turnpike, we heard a radio advertisement for an Irish Musical Heritage event in the Catskills' town of East Durham. Our parents came from Ireland, so we figured we would "check it out".

The summer of '69 was hot in many ways. The war in Vietnam was raging. (I had recently completed my reserve commitment to the US Marine Corps. Having enlisted November 1963, and arriving at boot camp at Paris Island January of 1964. I never heard of Vietnam until I was in Advance Infantry Training later in May of that year.) Other areas of the world were in trouble also, one of those was Northern Ireland.

I recall it began raining Friday afternoon August 15th, just as we stopped for gas and directions somewhere near the

Catskills. For reasons I cannot explain, we ended up inadvertently turning on to a dirt road in a downpour. Just as we were about to turn around, two young "hippie looking" girls came out of the trees and suggested we follow them (actually they sat of the hood of "Red Bird" and directed us to a huge stage and field)

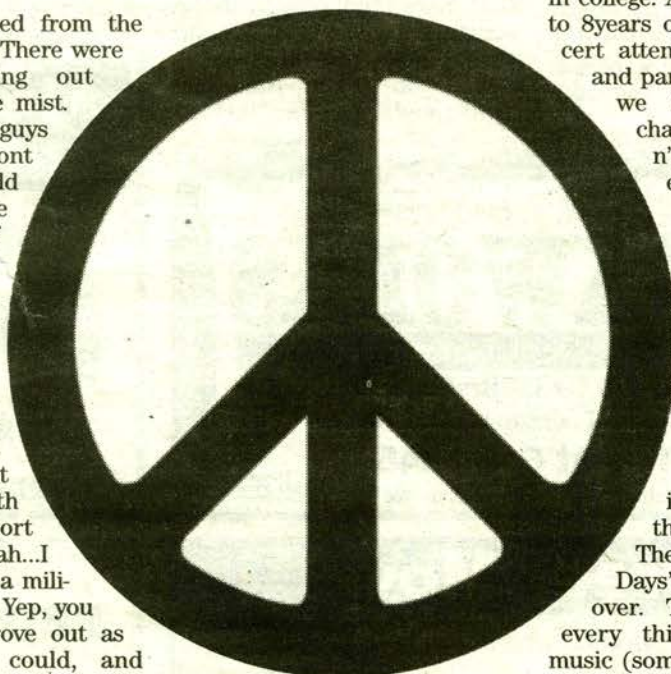
My eyes roamed from the stage to the field. There were campfires spitting out smoke due to the mist. Two long hair guys were peeing in front of a tent. The field was a mud hole and smelt of urine and pot. The stage was huge and looked ready for a band, however none was insight. Suddenly, we realized how out of place we must have looked with our kaki's and sport shirts, and oh yeah...I was still sporting a military style hair do. Yep, you guessed it we drove out as quickly as we could, and arrived at the Irish Hotel in East Durham, NY with the sun now shining brightly, and getting ready to set.

We ordered 2 Guinness in the lounge and began listening to the band play an Irish rebel song. Within about 20mins we noticed 9-10 soldiers in kaki uniforms with Black Berets marching into the lounge. These guys, acting like salesmen, began offering free airline tickets to anyone who would come to Northern Ireland and "Man the Bog side". For a few minutes we thought about taking a free flight to the land of our parents' birth. Luckily we declined, which turned out to be a wise choice.

Saturday morning we drove to the Dude Ranch where we

encountered a lot of what I would later call "preppie kids" from Long Island and NYC. We had a great day swimming and riding, and concluded with a dance to a fabulous Oldie Band. We fell in love with the girls from Long Island.

Sunday afternoon on the New York Thru Way and the



Mass Pike we noticed 100's, 1000's of kids, hippies, flower children, peaceniks, some carrying banners of "Woodstock Musical Festival". Some were throwing flowers and flower petals onto the highway.

At the risk of sounding like Forrest Gump, I turned to Jim and said "I think we just missed the greatest musical event in all time". And we weren't the only ones. According to Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia "Jethro Tull refused to perform claiming 'that it wouldn't be a big deal!'. "Tommy James and The Shondelles declined thinking it was being held by some pig farmer in upstate New York. "we could have kicked our-

selves a few days later". Frank Zappa and The Mother of Invention Quote: "A lot of MUD in Woodstock. We were invited and turned it down".

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder". I can still envision the mud, the rain; it wasn't our scene; however I should point out that even though I was still in college. At 25, I had about 6 to 8 years on most of the concert attendees. I love music and part of me wishes that we stayed, took our chances that we wouldn't have been accosted for looking like a couple of "Narcs".

To sum up our weekend adventure August 15, 16, and 17, 1969, I tell my kids that while we had fun that weekend, I felt that I was experiencing a very volatile time in our country's and the world's history.

The so called "Happy Days" of the 50's were over. The 60's changed every thing, not only the music (some would argue that the "new" music beginning with the Beatles changed every thing) and the clothing styles. Whatever it was, in my opinion, it brought the world to the brink. Martin Luther King was shot and killed as was Bobby Kennedy in 1968. The Manson Family was convicted of murdering Sharon Tate in 1969. We had a half a million music loving, hippie, peaceniks, who wanted the war to end. They were "Free" to do whatever they wanted including "sex, drugs, and rock and roll". "Man the Bogside" turned out to be as symbol for what ended up being Northern Ireland's Catholic Activist Bernadette Devlin's famous March thru the Protestant section of Derry. Derry soon resembled the site

of battle in Vietnam, "Can't begin to imagine what might have happen if we naively took the free offer to go". Then there was a couple hundred wealthy "preppie kids" from Long Island and NYC at the Dude Ranch who didn't have a clue to any of this.

Unbeknown to any of us at the time, the country would soon be violently shaken by the Ohio Kent State Student Massacre. And finally, as a former Marine, how can I not reflect sadly and proudly on the young men (over 50,000, not including the wounded) lying dead in a "Hell Hole" called Vietnam so that we and the world could be "Free". One of them was from my Marine Battalion and hometown of East Hartford, Ct. Marine Pfc. Robert "Bobby" Beaman (born April 1945 - killed June 3, 1969-South Vietnam).

Later another East Hartford boy, Army Captain Francis "Fran" Jordan Sullivan died in South Vietnam 9-26-70. There were many, many others, who I didn't know personally. God Bless them all. Why? ("And I am not trying to make a statement here, just still looking answers after all these years") Is it, Timing? Fate? Wealth?, Birthdates? Family? You go figure it out and let me know. "Because" I cannot. It was the 60's, and the "world was on the brink".

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*Jim Naughton was formerly a Regional Vice President in the Financial Services Industry. He is now a Business Consultant for Dale Carnegie. He and his wife Sharon reside in North Kingstown, RI. They have three children and three grand children. Jim's accompanying childhood friend during the August '69 road trip was Jim Maloney, also from East Hartford, WHO now resides in Dallas, Texas.*