

The summer of love and anarchy, 40 years later... most of us were just joyriding

By ALLAN BONNER

New York–The Whitney Museum of Art is not the only place celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love. *The Vancouver Province* had a big spread on the topic, focusing much more on the politics and social agitation of the era. Nineteen sixty-seven is the year I first visited Vancouver, returning the next year to live.

As *The Province* article points out, there were a few early birds who'd visited Haight-Ashbury (The Haight) in San Francisco and brought the feeling and the movement North to "Van." But generally, we were a little late on the uptake in Canada.

Feeling nostalgic over both my trip to Vancouver and my visit to The Whitney, I Googled and giggled as I reminisced.

It wasn't until Oct. 23, 1968 that Yippie (Young Independent Party) Jerry Rubin spoke to a crowd of about 600 at Simon Fraser University. He called for the overthrow of the government and the destruction of the university system. The next day, he and 2,000 students invaded UBC's faculty club. Some may have been SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) members and many probably had no allegiance. Some may have been motivated by the May student uprising in Paris. At any rate, as a protest against authority, the crowd left the building with about \$5,000 in booze and other goods. A few days later, on Oct. 26, 1,500 people marched to the U.S. consulate to protest the war in Vietnam.

One place where Vancouver was ahead of its time was in the creation of Greenpeace. When you read that the environmental organization was formed in 1971–don't believe it. I was part of Greenpeace protests on environmental issues in Stanley Park long before that. The big issue we debated in those local protests was the irony of all the garbage left behind, especially the metal buttons.

The entire "1960s" movement slopped well into the 1970s in Vancouver. On May 8, 1970, several hundred demonstrated against the invasion of Cambodia and the killing of Kent State University students. They smashed windows at the U.S. consulate and burned an American flag. That night more protesters demanded that their comrades be released from jail, and a three-hour battle broke out with police.

And then came the highlight of the protest movement in Canada–the invasion of Blaine, Washington. This marked the first violation of the undefended U.S.-Canada border since 1812.

I was a young high school student, and was there. Like most protests, few were sure what it was about. We were mad at everything in those days–Amchitka nuclear tests, Vietnam and environmental degradation.

Our target was the border crossing, not Blaine itself. I tried to stay on the Canadian side, sitting on the lawn at the famous Peace Arch. Occasionally an organizer with a bull horn would come out and tell us all to move back because we were sitting on the U.S. side. For years I thought that's what constituted the Blaine invasion–until my recent nostalgic Googling.

What I didn't see was that a crowd of somewhere between 50 and 600 apparently crossed the border into downtown Blaine (population a couple of thousand), vandalizing storefronts, cars and a local memorial dedicated to veterans of previous wars. They burned a U.S. flag, threw rocks and fought with locals. The mayor met the crowd holding his 38-caliber pistol!

I didn't see it, but today's Google accounts say the Peace Arch was vandalized too. I did hear that fellow protesters had stoned a train carrying American made cars into Canada, causing about \$50,000 in damage to about 90 cars. I remember asking a kid why they did that. The reply was that the cars were "a symbol of American economic imperialism." I had just got my driver's licence and was anxious to get my hands on just that symbol, minus the rock

damage.

I also never heard of most of the groups who claimed to organize the event. Like the seven-minute Jerry Abrams film at the Whitney documenting one of the first "Be Ins" in San Francisco in January of 1967, events of the era are kaleidoscopic, super-imposed and confused. I didn't know there was a Vancouver chapter of the Yippies called the "Northern Lunatic Fringe," and had not heard of the "Vancouver Liberation Front." Some claimed the Blaine protest was over the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and promised to go no further than 22.7 miles into the U.S.—the same distance that President Nixon wanted to go into Cambodia.

After it was all over, invaders/protesters didn't apologize and only said, "We've withdrawn our troops from the U.S." They said they'd only apologize when the U.S. withdraws its troops from Cambodia, apologizes and makes full restitution to the people of Southeast Asia.

Many protests seemed to be over nothing or to relieve boredom. But then came the "Wimmin."

In January of 1971 a group of about 25 women occupied the railway tracks near Glen Drive and Hastings Street. Many were welfare mothers who didn't want their kids crossing the tracks on their way to Seymour Elementary School. They tried contacting the city, the Feds, Transport Canada and the railway to get a footbridge, but weren't getting anywhere.

One morning they carried signs reading, "Petitions Don't Work" and "Children Versus Profits." Railway and Transport officials told the women they'd contact Ottawa for them. Disbelieving, the women's response was to pitch tents on the tracks. There were threats against them. They held their ground and finally the deputy mayor came out and promised an overpass. Energized by their victory, the group started a community centre and food co-op.

I take several lessons from this Googling and testing my memory. First, while Eastern European students, civil rights marchers and the Vancouver Wimmin were putting a lot on the line for very concrete reasons, most of us were just joyriding. Two of the four major student protests in Canada in the 1960s and early 70s were: Simon Fraser University's PSA strike over the amalgamation of the departments of Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology, and the Straxx Affair over ID cards with numbers and pictures on them at the University of New Brunswick (where I went after Vancouver). SFU and UNB protests seem frivolous in retrospect.

The lesson from the Whitney is that the music endures, but regrettably the serious social protest movement over substantial issues not only didn't endure, but wasn't alive for very long, even in the 1960s.

Dr. Allan Bonner has consulted to eight heads of government, 12 party leaders, 36 Cabinet ministers and hundreds of diplomats and senior military officers on five continents. His latest book is Political Columns-Behind the Scenes With Powerful People.

news@hilltimes.com

The Hill Times