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CROW'S CAWS

by crow cohen

Freedom

I was invited to a 60's party recently. (That's 1960's, not 60 year olds, although that would have been a gas as well.) The hostess had a copy of *Woodstock*, the 1970 documentary of the biggest hippie festival in the world. I was mesmerized.

During the 60's, I was an Air Force wife so I never really rocked out until years later. I do remember when our pilot husbands and us repressed wives had a 60's costume party back then that was pretty pathetic when I think about it. We were playing dress-up while hippies in the streets were protesting our husband's careers. I knew something was off, but I didn't have the support or courage to speak up.

My hippie era took place when I nagged my husband out of the Air Force, moved to Vermont, and subsequently came out as a lesbian feminist in the late 70's. We weren't so much about beads and flowers as flannel shirts and shitkickers, but we still did headbands, free love, and as for me anyway, smoked plenty of pot. As a matter of fact, most lesbian feminists evolved from the hippies.

I admit, while watching *Woodstock* I felt those longings I used to feel when I was an Air Force wife. I can't picture a gathering like that ever happening again. A few years ago when they had a Grateful Dead concert in Franklin County, the cops freaked out when the Deadheads broke down the fence to enter. At Woodstock, they made an announcement from the stage that it was obvious they couldn't control the influx so they were going to make the festival free after an

initial attempt to collect tickets. They said dollars weren't as important as freedom even though the producers were going to lose money bigtime. Occasionally they warned about some "bad acid" (meaning poorly manufactured LSD) going around, not because it was illegal, but because you might end up on a bad trip. Better you should do the "good stuff."

The most phenomenal aspect of that happening was the lack of violence. I'm sure there were ugly incidents that went unreported, but there weren't any large-scale break-outs of hostility. Most of the lyrics to the songs as far as I could tell were about romance, civil rights, and peace.

My nostalgia was troubling. There was something seductive drawing me in that felt dangerous. The most glaring problem was the invisibility of powerful women. Nine years after Woodstock when I went to the Michigan Women's Music Festival in 1979, a gathering of merely 10,000 women, I was bowled over by the butch dykes climbing the scaffolding, running the sound system, and driving the shuttle vehicles. A new species was emerging in my midst that I had never seen before in such large numbers all gathered in one place.

Not only were the muscled butches impressive – so were the regal fat women draping their bodies lovingly with magnificent cloth and the crystal bedecked femmes with silk scarves wrapped around their wispy bodies. Most exciting of all, we were displaying our prodigious talents as musicians, writers, healers, visual and martial artists.

In *Woodstock* I mostly saw male pelvises thrusting around on stage while vague-eyed woman wandered around looking passive or lost. Perhaps the creators of this documentary didn't have the politics to film

any women with take-charge energy.

Equally disturbing was the assumption that a free-for-all = freedom. There's something delicious about free-for-all's – a rare occurrence in my middle age. The level of trust at Woodstock will never be duplicated. Oh, they tell me that global surfing on the internet feels like a virtual free-for-all, but it doesn't come close to immersing yourself outdoors amongst hundreds of thousands of humans knowing somehow you'll get food, water and care even if the place becomes an officially designated disaster area. (One local resident said he had to eat cornflakes for three days because he couldn't get out to buy food.)

But immediate gratification is *not* freedom. On the contrary, immediate gratification breeds addiction, attention deficiency, consumerism, depression, and cynicism among other modern ills. Freedom is about rigorous honesty, discipline, morality and responsibility. Freedom is about clear-headedness, confronting fear, and setting limits. Freedom is the willingness to be unpopular, tolerant, consistent, and more often than not, delaying immediate gratification for the greater good.

Freedom's a pisser. It's not always fun in the short-run. Too bad the Woodstockers never learned that. If they had, they wouldn't have let this nation of ours be run by Neanderthals like Bush, or worse – by insidious multinational corporations.

Mud season's coming. Let's all have a mud slinging party – literally. Let's slip and slide and cover each other with gop. Then, after we've had our fun, let's debate about freedom – along with love, the greatest of human pleasures.

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