

Designated Drivers

I ran into the quintessential Southern California girl, Vicki Shields, on a Saturday afternoon at a Bel Air wedding in 1980. I met her in Dallas in 1966 on Roswell Street at Gary Bishop's house. Vicki and her friend, Marie, had moved to Dallas from Los Angeles to take jobs designing gift wrapping paper at Susan Crane Packaging. Vicki was a fashion artist and a seamstress. She made apparel for herself and friends, designing a hand-made clothing line called, "Victoria Star," garments frequently designed from flags and the stars of flags. She was smart, beautiful, confident.



Waddy Wachtel fronted the wedding party band. I asked Vicki to dance. We caught a few good songs. It was nice dancing in-sync with a beautiful woman, once in a blue moon. The last time I saw Vicki was twelve years earlier. I was in L.A. visiting family and called Vicki and invited her to go to a concert. On Saturday August 24, 1968, I arrived at her Venice, California house in the early afternoon. She meditated. I walked on the beach. Then we made ready for Saturday night at the world, a three band venue at the Pinnacle Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. This was a concert to see on LSD. Weren't they all in the 1960's? I had scored some "Window Pane" acid from merchant marine, Eric Bryant, in San Pedro. I assumed Vicki and I would both drop. But she abstained and must have offered to be the designated driver for the evening. I can't imagine how this Saturday could have happened otherwise. That it happened, I'm certain. How it happened, I'm not.

Another great designated driver back in Psychedelia was Nanci Nash. Gary Ferguson and I took mescaline or LSD before concerts in Texas and California during the 1960s. We gave her the tickets, the money, the keys, freeing us up from those anchoring matters of consequence. Nanci ran good interference and loved to drive. I remember a concert in Dallas where she did the navigating. We were in a green 1963 Corvette Stingray, stolen but never reported, a payback gift to Ferguson. We had the car only a few days and wanted to stretch the Stingray out on a highway under the sky. After the concert, we drove east on I-30 toward Terrell in Kaufman County. We found ourselves on an asphalt Farm-to-Market Road. There were no stripes on the fresh blacktop. Ferguson was driving. At 80 miles-an-hour, *suddenly*, we ran out-of-gas. That's not easy, three people unaware of the gas gauge in a stolen Corvette on a country road in the middle of the night?



We walked westerly in moonlight so bright we could see our shadows. Then, again, *suddenly*, in just a few miles, there's a motel. This is too crazy: Out-of-gas and a motel in the late night in the middle of nowhere on LSD. We got a room. Next morning, it wasn't quite so in-the-middle of nowhere. We acquired a gas can and a few gallons of gas at a Hwy. 175 gas station near the motel. We caught a ride back to where the Corvette was. But the car was gone. I presume our reaction at the time was as stammered as mine now. But in hindsight, it seems it was no great shakes. Just another matter of course, another inexplicable happenstance in a book of days. We called ourselves, "**The Drivers**," from then on.

Back to Victoria Star. We left her place. She was driving. We went to a Hamburger Hamlet in Westwood. For some reason unbeknown, I decided to take the psychedelic before dinner. I didn't tell Vicki that I took it. LSD comes on in a half hour to an hour, an evolving high that turns into full-blown tripping the second hour and lasts a half to a whole day. Fasting before and during an acid trip was customary. It was also protocol to be at the concert before taking a psychedelic. Why would I take an hallucinogenic hours before the concert? And what were we doing at a Hamburger Hamlet if fasting before tripping was apropos? I guess it was her idea. Inexplicable as it is, on an empty stomach, I took the LSD and, *suddenly*, it came on posthaste. I was high as a kite before our food arrived.

Eating was out of the question. I couldn't pick up my fork. Conversation became difficult. Vicki had to pay the check. I remember her leading me out of the restaurant onto Wilshire Boulevard like a dog on a leash. Saturday Night at-the-world in the City of Angels is not the best place to lose control of one's faculties. That's not always the case with acid. But this was powerful LSD. I don't remember the drive to the concert. She must have made the best of an acute situation.

Going to a concert at the Pinnacle Shrine involves driving to downtown Los Angeles and dealing with a great deal of calamity. Parking is a nightmare. Why would I put such a navigational task on a woman I would like to hook-up with? And why would I go on a date with her straight and me tripping? It makes no sense. But it appears to be what happened. Blame it on “burglar blood.”

Inside the Shrine Auditorium, I was full-blown tripping, relieved to have gotten there. At last, Ground Zero, letting go of conceptual thinking, placing my mind in the present moment. Three of the best bands on the planet, Charles Lloyd, Steve Miller, and The Grateful Dead were touring together. Lloyd performed, “Forest Flower.” Steve Miller Band performed, “Sailor.” The two bands played on separate stages in the huge auditorium.

A one time boxing arena, now a major music venue, the seats had been removed and replaced with an array of large tubular geodesic domes strung with colored lights, a nice touch for tripping, dancing concert-goers.

I was in *solo tripping mode* for this most special event, committed to *being-here-now*, absorbing every musical moment of the counterculture’s messenger service, and with no interest in talking. I pretty much forgot about Vicki. I moved around a lot, taking in the first two bands from the floor, then making my way upstairs to a wraparound balcony for The Grateful Dead. The Dead performed “Anthem of the Sun.” Their extended set culminated in a half hour version of “Alligator” and sequel into “Stay Off The Tracks.” The finale included Jerry Garcia lead guitar lines that rival any in the annals of rock’n roll.

(A Remaster of the 1968 Grateful Dead, “Anthem of the Sun” Live, was released in 2017, the 50th Anniversary edition)

I didn’t see Vicki until the concert was over. Somehow we found each other. I guess our date was a non-event at best. I stayed at her place. Still tripping, I stayed up and wrote the first draft of “The Last Visions of Icarus,” on her screened-in porch. Then came the dawn. I left my journal on a plane flight back to Texas and wrote the second draft of “Icarus” forty years later.

I didn’t see Vicki again until now, at Jeannie Anderson’s wedding. Seated at a table after dancing, I asked Miss Shields if she remembered The Grateful Dead Pinnacle Shrine concert. “Yes,” she said. “I don’t remember you being there.” A moment in time I can’t forget, she can’t remember. “Why don’t we keep in touch?” I asked. “I’m just not interested,” she replied. I said, “I like the way you dance.” “Yes, we dance well together.” “Well, that’s something,” I thought.

I got up and left. I saw her a few minutes later get in a cab at valet parking. That was the last time I saw Victoria Star.