

Get Back (to where you once belonged)

February 9th, 1963, 60 years ago today, Glenwood Way, South Lake Tahoe. That's when and where I met the Beatles--on our living room black and white TV. Game changer! I wanted to be like them. (The next day at school a kid showed up with his Brylcreemed hair washed out and combed forward Beatle style. By lunchtime, he'd had an ass-whipping and the next day it was back greaser style.)

I saved up and bought a no-name acoustic guitar for \$10 with crazy high action and heavy gauge, Black Diamond strings, and a Beatles song book. I started fumbling, bloody fingered, through the songs with no idea what I was doing. The notion that this would become my life's work was about as unfathomable to me as me becoming an astronaut. Musicians were guys like Jim Burgett, full grown men who could whip a Legion Hall full of teenagers into a frenzy, not insecure, redheaded kids like me.

Anyway, within a year or so I'd sort of learned the songs and upgraded to an electric guitar, a red Supro, and a small Harmony amp from the little music store near Carson Ave.--can't remember the name but they sold sheet music and band instruments, etc.. Luckily, Hal Cole, one of my best friends, (and future mayor of South Lake Tahoe) had his dad's old drum kit set up in their house on Ski Run adjoining Cole Electronics where we could jam after school. Most Beatles songs were a little complicated for us but we could blast through some simple hits of the day: Satisfaction, Louie Louie, Gloria, Little Black Egg (!?!?), etc. I wasn't much of a singer (then or now) but I shouted out the vocals as best as I could.

Once we had a dozen or so songs worked up, the next step was to take the show on the road—in our case a few miles up Highway 50 to a teen dance at the Round Hill fire station. That first configuration was called “Hal and His Pals,” featuring Hal, me, Mike Makley (future SLT teacher and football coach) on rhythm guitar, and Chris Smith on his mother's Lowrey organ (which we snuck out of their house in the back of somebody's pick-up.) No bass guitar--we didn't know anybody who owned one. Later we played a gig at Whittell High, some house parties, and a few Friday afternoon spirit rallies in the old STHS gym. The counselor, Mr. Blaustone, (anybody remember him?) would sit in on drums on “Hang on Sloopy.”

In the Fall of '66, Hal and I both went to UC Davis but we always kept a band together, playing at frat parties, campus events, whatever was fun and/or paid a few bucks. When we graduated, neither of us had the inclination to go to grad school, or worse yet to work, so we kept gigging around Davis and Sacramento. Hal's brother, Bob Cole, (who now runs the Rock House Ski Shop in the old Cole Electronics building) came down from Tahoe to add lead guitar and vocals to the mix and we became “The Skins,” (don't ask). We got pretty dang good IMHO with a sizeable following around central CA.

We still played gigs in Tahoe and the Sierras whenever we could at places like Squaw Valley, Bear Valley, Kirkwood, Mammoth Mtn., weddings at Strawberry Lodge--and some pretty rough joints on South Shore. One that comes to mind was the Mother Lode,

just past the old Lakeside Casino on the left. We'd show up around 11 PM, start drinking, fire up around midnight when the casino swing shift workers showed up, then go flat out 'til dawn. If you ever want to feel like a total POS/waste of a college education, stumble out of a bar, drunk, into a beautiful Tahoe sunrise, past barf, broken bottles, and blood in the snow from a fight the night before. Yikes. Sorry Mom.

We eventually grew up, broke up, and went our separate ways. Music became my sole occupation in Sacramento, then LA, then Nashville with the rent, car payment, and the kid's Happy Meals depending on it. Hal and Bob moved back to South Lake Tahoe where they had a great band called the Mover's for a while. Still, some of my fondest memories will always be playing around South Shore, young, dumb, and broke with no plan, no pressure, and no expectation other than to have fun. Thanks, John, Paul, George. and Ringo.