

Manson: When love, sex turned to madness

Several weeks before we decided to come south, I had met a lady in Frisco. She was a trippy broad, about 45 years old, who experimented with everything. When I met her, she was pumped up about devil worship and other satanic activities.

I didn't attend a lot of the places she invited me to, but we often discussed the good and bad sides of different beliefs. As a result of our acquaintance, she had given me a standing invitation to visit her home in Topanga Canyon.

I was in L.A. waiting for some action on a recording session. We needed a place to park the bus for awhile, so we went looking for her house. Taking Topanga Canyon Boulevard, we came to a two-story house with a peculiar winding staircase, which one of the girls quickly dubbed the "Spiral Staircase."

The day we first drove up, we were innocent children in comparison to some of those we saw during our visits there. In looking back, I think I can honestly say our philosophy — fun and games, love and sex, peaceful friendship for everyone — began changing into the madness that eventually engulfed us in that house.

Each time I returned, I would observe and listen to all of the practices and rituals of the different groups that visited the place. I'm not into sacrificing some animal or drinking its blood to get a better charge out of sex. Still, through the drugs and listening to the ways a particular leader or guru manoeuvred his people, some of their rap may have become embedded in my subconscious. Planting fear in their people is the way a lot of leaders keep control. At the time, love and doing our own thing was what held us together and that's the way I wanted everything to be, but at a later date, the things I was exposed to at the Staircase may have come back to me.

After a lot of travelling, we finally shook the Spiral Staircase and came up with a place of our own. We needed it! Twenty people travelling in a bus can be an adventure, and although the bus gave us a fair amount of comfort, even a gypsy needs some kind of headquarters. You can live without fresh hot and cold running water, electricity, and the other conveniences of a house, but damn, it's nice to stretch out every once in awhile.

Spahn Movie Ranch is located just above Chatsworth, California in the Simi Hills, though only a 30-minute drive from the heart of Hollywood.

At one count, more than 35 people who were later called part of the Manson Family lived there at Spahn Ranch, and many times that number passed through. Those first months at the ranch held some kind of magic. Love, togetherness and fulfilling each other's needs bonded us as one. True, our lives were everything parents and society preached against, but that was the reason those kids were there in the first place. The dope, the sex and all the avenues we travelled were nothing more than rebellion against a world that preached one thing but failed to provide an example of it. The whole trip in the 1960s — all the protests, the drop-outs, the runaways, the flower children, the hippies, the drug addicts, and yes, the murdering outlaws — was the product of a society that spoke lies and denied their children something or someone to respect. And unfortunately, society remains the same.

For all the space and pleasures at the ranch, I would still have the urge to travel. Something inside me was always gnawing at me to look over the next hill, check around the next corner, look into the other guy's game or just spread myself out so I didn't miss anything.

It was on one of those impromptu trips that I first met Dennis Wilson, the drummer for the Beach Boys. I had stopped by a friend's house in San Francisco to replenish my supply of grass. When I started out of the place, another guy was on his way in. My friend kept me from leaving, saying, "Hey, Charlie, you two ought to meet. You're both into music. Dennis, this is Charlie Manson, he sings and plays the guitar. Charlie, say hello to Dennis Wilson of the Beach Boys."

Dennis was a hell of a guy. For all his success and wealth, he still enjoyed the simpler things in life. Sure, he put on airs and played the role of a Hollywood success story. He'd make appearances and play whatever part the occasion demanded, but inside he was a rebel and had long ago tired of catering to the whims of a public who wanted him to be the "All-American Boy." He wasn't looking for a way out, just time and space to let his hair down and be out of the public eye. He was the dream of 99 per cent of American youth, but he was just as lost, just as wanting, just as in search of something as those kids with me. So it was kind of natural Dennis and the rest of us hooked up.

Dennis opened the doors of his house to us, and as much as his business agents would let him, he opened his pockets. Others have painted pictures of us moving in on

In 1968, Charles Manson, anxious to pursue a recording contract, got his parole supervisor transferred to Southern California. Manson moved his 20-member family that included Mary Brunner, Squeaky Fromme, Patricia Krenwinkel and Susan Atkins into a house in Topanga Canyon known as the "Spiral Staircase." Soon he was associating with Beach Boy Dennis Wilson and Doris Day's son, Terry Melcher, a record producer. This is part three of a five-part excerpt from MANSON IN HIS OWN WORDS as told to Nuel Emmons. — Editor

Dennis like a bunch of vultures. We never did move in. Some of us stayed there for days at a time, but always with an invitation. He also spent some time out at the ranch with us. He liked his booze, grass and cocaine. Acid was a sometime thing with him, but girls were a constant desire. For all the good he gave and shared with us, we gave and shared with him. He was no fool and was his own person when accepting for giving. He gave what he wanted and took what he wanted.

The good times with Dennis lasted for well over a year. In that time he and I worked on several songs together, two of which made it onto an album the Beach Boys recorded. He even gave me some gold records that had been presented to him. Along with the music, there were always parties and gatherings that saw two different worlds coming together: the rich Hollywood set from one part of Dennis' life, and us, with no material values, from the nonconforming side of his life. Through Dennis and some of those gatherings, I met a lot of people with solid connections, including Terry Melcher, Gregg Jakobson and several others who liked my music enough to want to record and market me and my material.

Terry Melcher is the son of Doris Day and head of a recording studio. More than anyone else, he had it in his hand to pick us up and put us in the music world. He did give us a little attention, a lot more than was brought out in the trials and in other books that have been written. He and Jakobson arranged for a couple of recording sessions, and, in looking back, I guess the girls and I blew it. Melcher and the people who were doing the ses-

sion had their ideas of how they wanted the recording done, the girls and I had our idea. We clashed, and nothing was accomplished, but that relationship lasted right up until August of 1969.

As long as I was still trying to get into a music career, Melcher and Dennis and Jakobson were people I liked being around. When things were really desperate out at the ranch and some money was needed, Melcher was a touch. For the prosecuting attorney to say I sent those kids after Melcher is total bull. Why would I? He gave me money, lent us his car and credit card. Melcher was all right and I had no bad feelings for him.

For a while there, everything was really coming together for me. There was promise of a soon-to-be released album, I had a small nightclub in operation for which I wrote the songs and led the band, and it was general knowledge that 20 or so of the girls did only what would be pleasing to me. Things were good. I felt proud and moved around with my head up and chest out. But that kind of good thing never seemed to last for me, and when things stopped working out, it all seemed to fall right back in my lap. Then the head starts reeling, pressure mounts, tension increases, frustration starts and there ain't no rhyme or reason to a thing.

According to some, this is when the devil started sprouting horns. Two or three of those who lived within our circle have written books contending that when they first met me I waved a magic wand of love and music. With a single wave, they came under my spell and had to be with me. While they don't say the magic wore off, they do say that around the begin-

ning of 1969 I began undergoing personality changes that eventually caused love and togetherness to turn to evil and discontent. They say I became bitter and frustrated because I was never able to record successfully. They say I became convinced the Beatles' *White Album* with its songs of *Piggies*, *Revolution #9*, and *Helter Skelter* held special messages for me and my circle, that I interpreted them as signals to create an uprising between the races, and began programming everyone to prepare

themselves for the s--- that was going to come down.

I don't deny disappointment at not reaching my goals as a musician. Nor do I deny being impressed with the *White Album*. But I gotta say, those kids were expressing their own ideas more than what was going through my mind. Hell, those were kids of the Beatles' generation — I had at least 10 years on most of them. I envied any successful musician and appreciated any best-selling album, but like most people, the music I

felt close to was music I had heard when I was young. Sinatra, Crosby, Como and people of that era meant more to me than the Beatles, Beach Boys or any of the prominent groups in the 1960s. The lyrics I wrote and the music I put to those lyrics identify me as not being all that wrapped up in the Beatles. It was Sadie (Susan Atkins) and Little Paul (Paul Watkins) who started deciphering messages from the Beatles' *White Album*.

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