

DEAD

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who were in diapers at the time of Jerry's first guitar lick are the ones following the band and living out of their vehicles. And more people than ever are coming just to lurk, in freshly ironed tie-dyes with wide, white eyes. There are still the people that actually come to hear the band play. And of course, there are the people who come from all over just to party.

But let's not forget those who come to sell. Pipes, dreamcatcher earrings, hemp salve (great for those chapped hands), beaded trinkets — the air is thick with one-phrase sales pitches. Food? "Kind" veggie burritos, "fatty" egg rolls, organic hummus sandwiches, "veggie grilled cheese" on white bread. Beer? Choices from Budweiser to Hefeweizen, at only twice the price as the store. Enough commercialism to make the head spin. Steve has been selling beers since the Good Old Eighties. "First you have to know your market." As for the sales pitch, he said "You got to inject it into the crowd" at people who look like beer drinkers. "Third, they've gotta be cold."

Good old capitalism. They shoulda flown in some Soviet economists to experience greed, American style. A local activist named Spruce agreed, and wore a sandwich board sign decrying the cash-driven Scene. Not like the Good Old Days, where people protested commercial culture, not embraced it.

I notice now there are more dogs than ever here. It raises a question: since they all seem to be running around without leashes, do you just pick up someone else's dog when you lose yours?

Although dogs and sales are out of mind once inside the stadium, drugs aren't. In fact, it wasn't too long ago that the University told the band to get out and stay out of Eugene, and to take their druggie fans with them. But the gnarled hand of profit beckoned, and with the help of Kit Kesey's Dedicated Volunteers, blatant drug sales and use were kept under wraps ("Hey man, I don't want to see that!")

It's no secret that people do drugs here. Heck, what do you think attracted us touch-heads? Maybe people aren't so tempted by the availability of any drug you can think of, but by the atmosphere provided for taking them. The sensory stimuli, the weird people, and the "we're all in this together" feeling make The Scene a hot drug spot. This is probably the safest place you could be if you decided to strip naked, throw your wallet into the port-a-potty and run around screaming for your mother.

One police officer told me that his job wasn't to keep people off drugs here; it was to keep people from hurting each other or themselves while con-



FILE
What used to be so countercultural is now so mainstream that Jerry has ice cream named after him.

suming drugs. In fact, I saw quite a few Eugene hippie hecklers visit The Scene, and suspected that the walking pharmacy might have attracted them.

But I digress. I was on a soul search here: why I like the Dead, why not as much, and what will happen when they stop playing. A woman named Rainbow told me that when the band croaks out its last "Uncle John's Band," she will end up doing "something else." Although Grateful Dead concerts still attract wayward misfits — and truly accept the masses, the huddled and the poor — there is an air of boredom and "what next" lingering in the air like burnt sage. People realize that this will not go on forever. The band reinforces that notion with a Beatles tune: "This Could Be the Last Time."

Until then, the Grateful Dead is the best way to have the Total Group Experience. Claustrophobes need not apply. You either like it, don't like it, or have a lot of fun or irritation figuring out whether you do.

I can't join my Eugenean badasspunker-grungepittdwelling peers in hating the band and the human baggage it comes with. Where else can you feel so safe around 60,000 people? Where else can you care less about how you smell? Where else is someone going to hand you a rose and a smile with no strings attached? That sort of kindness doesn't exist in "The Pit."

Then again, I'm glad they aren't staying forever.

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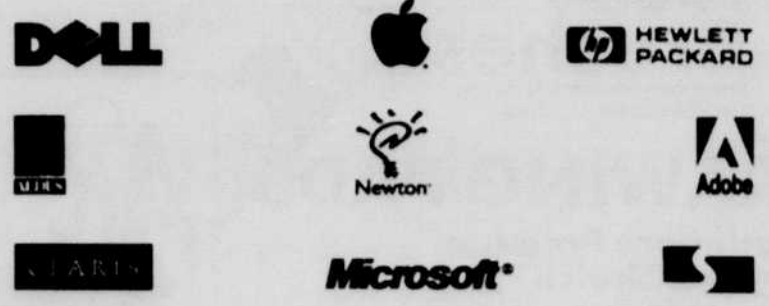
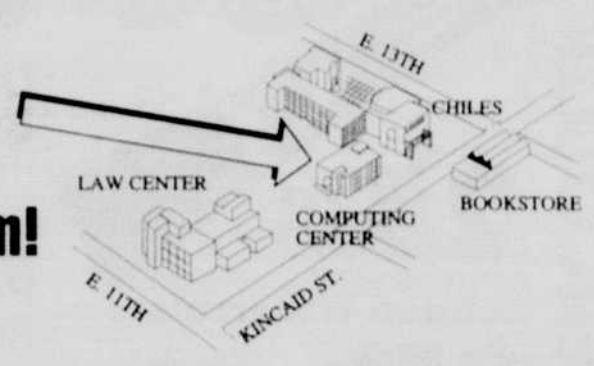
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