

# ALL GONE NOW

BY 'FRED'

*(What) is sane? Especially here in "our own country" — in the doomstruck era of Nixon. We are all wired into a survival trip now. No more of the speed that fueled the Sixties. Uppers are going out of style... All those pathetically eager acid freaks who thought they could buy Peace and Understanding for three bucks a hit. But their loss and failure is ours, too... a generation of permanent cripples, failed seekers, who never understood the essential old-mystic fallacy of the Acid Culture: the desperate assumption that somebody — or at least some force — is tending the Light at the end of the tunnel... Whatever sells today is whatever Fucks You Up — whatever short-circuits your brain and grounds it out for the longest possible time.*  
 ('Fear & Loathing in Las Vegas', 1972)

When Thompson blew his brains out, a door closed somewhere. The main man had gone. Most of us can easily be replaced. There was only one Hunter Thompson. I'll heist one tonight to a fine, fine writer, a voice of his time, the embodiment of an age the like of which there never was and which, for good or bad, will never come again.

The Sixties look drab now — unkempt Manson girls, the lost and unhappy, kids bleak and bleary-brained after waking up with too many strangers in too many sour crash pads. There was that. It was not a time for the weak-minded. But for those whose youth passed in the freak years, there was something gaudy and silly and even profound, something delightfully warped, that nobody else would ever have. Thompson caught it.

I didn't know him. Others have written better than I can of his work. But I knew the world that gave rise to him.

Starting around 1964, a restlessness came over the land, an itch. Kids trickled and later flooded onto the highways as if called by something. I can't explain it. Few had done it before. Few do it now. They — we — set forth and created the only country in which Thompson could have made sense.

It wasn't the war, at first. Nor was it only the usual impatience of youth with authority. Nor was it even that we were young and the world was wide. There was a revulsion against suburban emptiness, against the 8-to-5 Ozzie & Harriet gig, a rejection of the Establishment, which meant boring jobs and singing commercials.

We discovered drugs, then regarded as worse than virgin sacrifices to Moloch, and looked through a window we could never name. If the times were out of joint, we were seldom out of joints. Chemistry defined the life. You found a freak in some rotting slum and said, "Hey man, got some shit?" You toked up. You got the munchies, the skitters, the fears. Parents didn't really understand. Dope, we said, will get you through times of no money than money will get you through times of no dope. It did.

Thompson, a savage writer, a grand middle finger raised against the sky, essayed drugs and found them good. And said so, and we loved him. When he wrote of getting wacked out of his mind on seven illicit pharmaceuticals, and wandering in puzzled paranoia through the lobby of existence, we shrieked with laughter. We knew the same drugs. We too had desperately tried to look straight in public when the world turned into a slow-motion movie. When it was over, everybody went into a law firm.

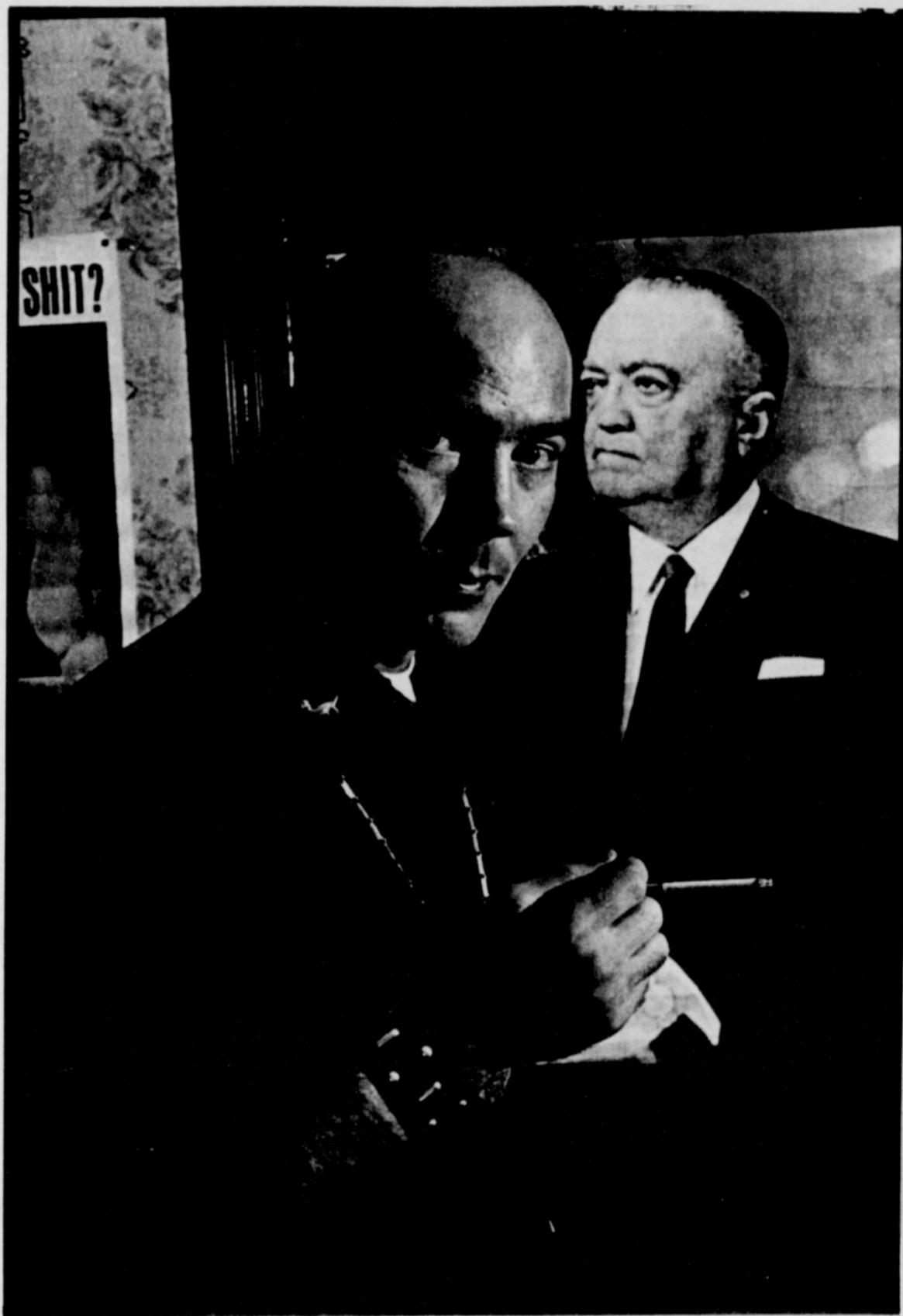
Our socio/political understanding was limited. After all, we were pretty much kids. I remember having a discussion in Riverside, California, of how Republicans reproduced. We didn't think it could be by sex. I figured it was by budding.

For a while though it all worked. Apostles of the long-haul thumb, we hitchhiked in altered mental states. I don't recommend it without guidance. We stood by the western highways as the big rigs roared by, rocking in the wash and the keening of the tires, desert stretching off to clot-red hills in the distance. At night we might buy bottles of Triple Jack at some isolated gas station and dip into an arroyo, roll a fat one and swill Jack and talk and hallucinate under the stars. An insight of the times was that if you got fifty feet off the beaten track and sat down, you didn't exist. It still works if you need it.

None of it was reasonable. I've never found anything worthwhile that was.

Then there was the politics, the war. Thompson was rocket smart and knew you couldn't work within the system since that meant granting it legitimacy. Peace with Honor, the Light at the End of the Tunnel, all the ashen columnists arguing about timed withdrawal and incremental pressure. He knew it was about profits for McDonnell Douglas and egotistical warts growing like malignant goiters on the neck of the country. He was Johnny Pot Seed, a Windowpane Gandhi, dangerous as Twain.

The times brought their epiphanies. I remember being gezonked on mescaline in a pad in Stafford, Virginia, and realizing that existence was the point of execution in a giant



HUNTER S. THOMPSON PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHERIE HISER (1970)

FORTTRAN program. So it's all done in software, I thought. I was floating in the universe. In the infinite darkness of space the code stretched above and below in IBM blue letters hundreds of feet high that converged to nothingness:  $N=N * 5$ , *Go To 43*, *ITEST=4 \* \* IEXP*. For an hour I was awash in understanding. The stereo was playing 'Bolero', which was written by a Do-loop, so it all fitted.

Thompson savaged it all, lampooned it, creating a world of consciousness-sculpting substances and bad-ass motorcycles and absolute cynicism about the government. Today, after thirty years of journalism, I can't find the flaw in his reasoning.

The other writer of the age was Tom Wolfe, but he was not in Thompson's league. Wolfe was a talented outsider looking perceptively at someone else's trip. Thompson lived the life, liked big-bore handguns and big-bore bikes and had a liver analysis that read like a Merck catalogue. His paranoia may be style, but you can't write what you aren't almost.

I remember standing alone in early afternoon beside some two-lane desert road in New Mexico (or somewhere else) that undulated off through rolling hills and had absolutely no traffic. I don't know that I was on anything. Of course, I don't know that I wasn't. A murky sun hung in an aluminum sky like a fried egg waiting to fall and mesquite bushes poked the dry sand with blue mortar bursts. The silence was infinite. I lay in the middle of the road for a while just because I could. Then I followed a line of ants into the desert to see where they were going.

A gray Buick Riviera, a wheeled barge lost in the desert, slid to a stop. The trunk creaked open like a jaw. A squatty little mushroomy woman behind the wheel motioned to get in. As we drove the cruise alarm buzzed, and she told me it was a communist radar. They were watching her from the hills.

It was a Thompson moment.

Then it was over. Everybody went into I-banking or something equally odious. We gave up drugs as boring.

You can see why he ate his gun. Everything he hated has returned. Nixon is back in the White House, Rumsnamara risen from the dead, bombs falling on other people's suburbs. The Pentagon is lying again and democracy stalks yet another helpless country. This time the young are already dead and there will be no joyous anarchy. The press, housebroken, pees where it is told. But he gave it a hell of a try.

'Fred' can be blogged at [soycowboy100](http://soycowboy100.com) — readers 3 at [yahoo.com](http://yahoo.com). Cherie Hiser's photographs of full-bodied tattooed persons appeared in the Jan/Feb 1991 NCTE.

## FEAR & LOATHING IN PORTLAND

Hunter S. Thompson spent a few days in Portland 35 years ago, in the summer of 1970. That was the year he ran for sheriff of Aspen (Pitkin County), Colorado. He was in Portland to Gonzofy a national convention of the American Legion and its counterpoint, the People's Army Jamboree, a raffish potpourri of anti-Vietnam War hippies and dissenting Vietnam veterans.

Thompson made Reuben's 5 Tavern, a local longhair bar, his literary office. Reuben's 5 was at its peak that summer, featured in local and national media as the colorful headquarters of the babyboomer rebels. Gonzo One commandeered several tables and barely moved throughout the week of the Legion convention, a blond woman and a darkhaired woman on either side of him like bookends. He ordered pitchers of beer which he offered to anyone who blundered into the bar, which always seemed to be half-filled with undercover police agents.

He might have had more fun if he had gone to Vortex, also known as the 'Governor's Rock Festival', inspired by Governor Tom McCall's son Sam among others to remove the cultural element of the counterculture from Portland and allow the political faction to carry out its anti-Legion agenda free from worry: police seldom distinguished potsmoking music lovers from 'radical' antiwar dissenters.

But for all his crazed antics, his prolific intake of heavy drugs, Gonzo Man was a deadly serious opponent of misused power. He consistently and bravely wrote some of the most original and clarifying treatises on the excesses of despotism, grotesque and fiercely satiric metaphors of the grossness of predatory power. He might have written something similar about the bitter but peaceful confrontation between prowar and antiwar veterans that summer. Or he might have concluded with the venerable liberal correspondent of *The Washington Post*, Nicholas Von Hoffman, that "The People's Army Jamboree is a lot like the Loch Ness monster. Everybody's talking about it, but nobody has ever seen it." Whatever he wrote, if he did, nobody seems to have seen it.

One of Thompson's friends said after his suicide that everybody had a story about him who came in contact with him, however briefly. There might be a million stories the Gonzo provoked. His visit to Portland is one of them.

—MICHAEL MCCUSKER

## CORRECTION

I was honored to have my remarks published on the front page of the January 2005 issue of *North Coast Times Eagle*. For the record, I would like to call attention to an omission and make some corrections. My original draft was misprinted in the following three ways:

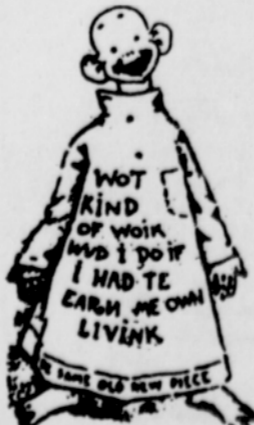
(1) My letter stated that the first premise of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is, "It is better to win and not fight." This was left out of the text of my article.

This is perhaps the article's most important sentence. The Executive department is particularly feckless on this account; rather, it seems that the President would rather fight and *not* win. We are promised a continuous state of war for the foreseeable future. Espionage, confirmed intelligence, diplomacy, treaty, truce, and fair trade are last resorts. The United Nations is considered as a straw man that can be knocked down on a whim. It can only be as effective as the participating parties allow it to be. This President has shown his contempt for the UN from the very start.

(2) The title of Thomas Cleary's book is *The Tao of Politics*, not the "Law" of Politics.

(3) In the last paragraph my utmost wish is for Bush to bite off one more country *than* he can chew (not "that" he can chew), resulting in Congressional censure and impeachment. How many countries are going to be invaded 'preemptively' before Congress puts a stop to this madness?

—LESLIE MILLER



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