

## **Mud, Music and More: I Was at Woodstock**

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I'd been dancing in a circle of people in the downpour for hours when the sun broke through the clouds, and suddenly Army helicopters hovered above us. Was this how they were going to force us to leave, I wondered. Instead, I looked up to see daisies, dropped by the choppers, raining down on us.

On its 50th anniversary, there has been much discussion about the significance of Woodstock. While there as a 19 year old NYU student, I (as well as my boyfriend Fred and half a million others) withstood countless discomforts and conditions that were labeled by the outside world as “disastrous,” or a “public health emergency,” and nearly resulted in the dispatching of the National Guard. These included hunger, thirst, being drenched, and lack of sleep, bedding and shelter. Rather than bemoan our circumstances, we rejoiced in the spirit of harmony, friendship and cooperation that surrounded us. For me the experience was life changing.

At no time did I feel threatened, worried or frightened. While hiking the six miles into the festival, we were given rides on the tops of cars slowly making their way as far as possible. As we entered Bethel, the townspeople welcomed us by bringing out their hoses to provide drinking water and a cooling spray, while flashing us the peace sign. So trusting was I that during the concert I left my backpack, including ID, money, and dry clothes, under a tree to go exploring. I was not surprised that it was still there when I returned much later.

During the hot Saturday afternoon a large slice of watermelon appeared among the audience. So parched and craving of any type of food were we that each of us took a bite and

passed it along. It made its way back to me minus fruit and rind, nothing left but the hard green shell.

I mud danced and chanted “No Rain,” feeling oneness with a crowd of people whose names I can’t recall, but whose joyful faces are emblazoned in my memory. They came from everywhere: La Grange, Ill.; Portland, Me.; Ontario. I even met someone from my hometown of New Bedford, Mass., who insisted (to my dismay) on telling my mother that he’d run into me there. When Grace Slick greeted the dawn singing the culturally relevant lyrics to “The Other Side of This Life” – *“I don’t know where I’m going next, I don’t know who I’m gonna be”* – I was inspired by the freedom she and that song represented.

Even as we experienced it, we knew the importance of this event. At one point Fred made the following dictum: “From now on there will be only two types of people — those who were at Woodstock, and those who weren’t.” This pronouncement turned out to be quite prophetic. Woodstock represented the best in my generation. At a time of great societal divisions, those of us who flocked there were united by the idealism of the 1960s: our desire to stop the war in Vietnam, disregard for the establishment, questioning of authority, and acceptance of a new set of values emphasizing openness, freedom, and change.

When I made my way to Woodstock, I was on a pilgrimage — a journey to self-discovery. I left as part of something bigger, accepting new ideas and risks, and on the verge of being the woman I would become. I soon became active in the peace movement and eventually lived on a Colorado commune, ultimately going into a “helping” profession. It’s ironic that this anniversary of “peace and love” occurs the same month as two horrendous mass shootings, and in an era of discord within the country not unlike that which existed back then. I’m more cynical

now about the future of our country and the planet. Still, if Woodstock happened amidst such tumult, isn't there hope for a similar feeling of connection to take place today?

When I remember dancing in the mud while army aircraft showered us with daisies – the symbol of peace, innocence, and new beginnings — I'm brought back to a time when I believed in our potential as a generation to accomplish good things — to end the war, even change the world.

After all, if we could make the Army drop daisies from the sky instead of bombs, we were capable of doing anything!



Woodstock Crowd