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The UW during a cultural revolution

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Students lobby for the University to cut its ties with Brigham Young University because of its alleged racism. Executive Vice President John Hogness announced on March 8, 1970 that the UW would no longer enter in intercollegiate sports events with Brigham Young University until it was free of racism.

Students play music in the Quad in May 1970.

(Students lay bare for public relations in 1970.

The '60s and '70s swept up youth throughout the nation into a whirlwind of cultural revolution, turmoil and excitement, leaving an indelible print on our society.

"[It was] a personal Hiroshima that seared the clock in our souls," wrote Walt Crowley (the recently deceased), lifetime activist and local historian, in his memoir Rites of Passage. "We each knew when the time hit."

It's a piece of our history well known for its dramatic strides in civil rights and the birth of a counterculture that has captivated young people of the succeeding generations. The titillating tales of hedonism and mischief excite the imagination and make one wish they could jump in their history book, join the protest and the festivities afterward.

What was happening in and around the UW as it rode the exhilarating ride of the '60s zeitgeist?

For Steve Herold, former owner of the Id bookstore, and Paul Dorpat, publisher of the Helix, the era manifested itself in the Ave's street life. The Id was a popular hippie hangout during the time and the Helix, Seattle's first underground press, was a means to advertise events in the bohemian community.

"People hung out on the street, made friends on the street and sang on the street," Dorpat said. "It was a very exciting time to be young, such broad sympathy for experimentation."

The street scene was growing, but it was out of the public eye until 1965. That fall, a local syndicate at the University District Herald published an article warning the community that "beatniks" were prowling the Ave.

"If you were 'beat,' you didn't need a label," Crowley said.

Although they weren't calling themselves "beatniks," they were still hirsute bohemians, and that alone was enough to stir U-district residents and Seattle authorities.

The Daily responded to the Herald with an article by Deb Das, titled, "Beatnik Scare: Lower Ave Draws Beards Like a Magnet."

Editor Jerry Liddell called for "coexistence" with "the fringies," coining a new term (the word hippie had yet to reach Seattle).

The fringie presence quickly caused friction in the community. Shortly after the Herald's article, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA) held a panel to discuss the fringie problem. Businessmen, community members and UW professors attended the meeting.

Crowely quotes John Chambless, a UW assistant professor of philosophy, in his book.

"Where do the people come from who give the district a bad name?" Chambless said. "They come from the newspapers."

Not long after, police executed the first major drug bust in the U-District, arresting 13 people. Authorities started to warn people that the Ave would become the Haight Ashbury of the Northwest.

Poet Jan Tissot, artist Larry Van Over and UW professor John Spellman played off their anxiety by announcing the "Second International Bohemian Festival," when in fact there wasn't a first. The press ate the bluff ,and the Herald declared the failure of the festival and was clearly relieved.

However, it was just the beginning. The UW eventually got its first wave of baby boomers, which pushed enrolment to 22,000. It provided ample recruits for the fringies, and the Ave soon exploded with subversives and bohemians.

"Dress got more flamboyant, personal schedules suddenly got more flexible," Dorpat said. "It was like a fair … a continuous Kasbah."

Big changes were happening and many wanted to join.

"We were taught rules by rote memorization," Herold said. "Suddenly it was, 'I want to stay up all night, I want to eat that, I want to see my head turn backward.'"

Not all UW students bought into the movement.

"It took a long time for some people to realize that we had changed as a society and we didn't vote on it," Herold said.

The Ave was both friendly and hostile to the new youth. While authorities and irritated merchants tried to discourage the "long hairs," the Eigerwand Kaffeehaus, Pamir House and the

Id became popular hippie hangouts. A myriad of head shops and other specialty stores like the La Tienda Folk Art Gallery began to emerge.

The grassy knoll where the UW law school now sits became hippie hill. The city wanted to scour hippie hill, but UW President Charles Odegaard refused the Seattle Police Department's requests to patrol on campus. However, he did occasionally turn on sprinklers to clean up the scene.

In 1966, volunteers started the The Free University of Seattle, which offered an alternative curriculum of topics spanning from anarchism to Zen, Dorpat said. UW professors and local novelist Tom Robbins were among the volunteer lecturers.

"[It was] all sort of done in the name of love," Dorpat said.

The summer of 1967 was full of be-ins, protests and music festivals. A popular art demonstration, where a piano was dropped from a helicopter onto a pile of wood, inspired the Sky Rock River Festivals of '68 and '69.

Lorenzo Milam started KRAB radio in 1959, and it became another important media forum for the movement. It broadcasted alternative news, hosted interviews and played music like that from one of Seattle's original psychedelic bands, Magic Fern.

"Music was very important to us. It was delightfully important," Dorpat said.

The times were certainly wonderful for adventurous young people, but they were also daunting. War tensions escalated, and the benign Ave was riddled with hard drugs and violence.

"We didn't want to be political — we wanted it to go away so that we could be flower kids," Herold said.

The tension grew until 1972, when meth and heroine made the scene depressing, Herold said.

After violent episodes began springing up on and around campus, authorities closed Herold's bookstore, where Magnus Books now is, for selling a Kama Sutra calendar and erotic poetry.

"We were the center as far as the establishment was concerned," Harold said.

Although the movement was still in full motion, the golden age of the Ave fringies had dissipated. The Helix stopped running and society's melting pot was rapidly approaching the boiling point.

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