The dark side of the summer of love

how meth and madness destroyed the hippie dream

by Frank Owen

Early years ago this summer a sizable segment of the country's youth was gripped by a peculiar frenzy. Something was stealing away America's teenagers. In what seemed like nothing less than a replay of the Children's Crusade of the Middle Ages, normal kids from middle-class homes suddenly took to the road, often carrying little more than the clothes on their back. They came from far and wide, refugees from relative affluence, by car and by thumb, from the big cities and the Great Plains. They were headed to a New Jerusalem: a Gothic Victorian village on a hill in San Francisco called Haight-Ashbury.
Who needed money or possessions? Everything was free in the Haight. The Grateful Dead played for free in the park. The Diggers gave out free food. Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters supplied free acid to anyone who wanted it. People lived free in communes. Free love was common currency. It was one big countercultural utopia.

What could possibly go wrong?

Hippies young and old idealize what happened in Haight-Ashbury during the summer of 1967 as a dawning of a new age. In many ways it was a noble experiment. But behind the scenes a more sinister reality was already emerging as a new subculture took root in the shadow of the flower children, one devoted not to spiritual exploration but to madness and mayhem. A group whose signature drug wasn't LSD but a substance we know today as the favorite high of hillbillies, right-wing preachers and suburban moms: crystal methamphetamine. The tale of how this group and this drug came to tear Haight-Ashbury apart is one of the little-known stories of that summer. But it is as much a part of its legacy as long hair and tie-dyes.

The summer of 1967 began in effect on a January day. A free concert in Golden Gate Park called the Human Be-In drew some 20,000 people. Among the bells, beads and face paint that afternoon was a clean-cut man in a jacket and tie who stood out because of his ordinariness. He could have been an undercover narc or a reporter, but the way he wore his earnestness like an emblem marked him more as an academic type. He was Dr. David E. Smith, a 28-year-old toxicologist who worked up the hill from the Haight in a lab in the pharmacology department at the University of California, San Francisco. By day he injected mice with LSD and methamphetamine and examined their behavior, but even that paled in comparison to what the fresh-faced doctor saw at the Be-In. From the stage, the poet Allen Ginsberg led the crowd in Buddhist chants, and acid guru Timothy Leary urged the audience to “turn on, tune in, drop out.” The best of San Francisco’s acid-rock scene performed: the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and Big Brother & the Holding Company. The real stars of the Be-In, Smith soon realized, were the hippies. As he recalls the event today, he was seeing something he could not believe. “Everybody was tripped out on acid,” he says. “I remember one guy in the back was having a death-rebirth experience. I was like, ‘Wow.’ Forget rodents. Here was a chance to study up close the effects on humans of the same drugs he was injecting into animals.

“In the beginning,” Smith says, “my interest in the Haight was as a natural drug laboratory, a giant mouse cage.”

After the Be-In not a single fight was reported. Even the Hell’s Angels behaved. The Parks Department complimented the hippies for leaving the park in a pristine state. On that golden afternoon some attendees believed they were witnessing the birth of a religion. The Be-In catapulted San Francisco’s flower children to national prominence. All the publicity lured more young people to sample this new lifestyle for themselves.

By February 1967 it was clear that the impending summer—when the high schools and universities let out—would welcome a huge wave of hippies-in-training. A group of politicians, artists and shop owners around Haight-Ashbury formed a coalition to welcome the teenage tenderfeet and act as a liaison with the community. They called themselves the Council for the Summer of Love.

It now had a name.

The council suggested that visitors be allowed to sleep in Golden Gate Park, an idea shot down by San Francisco police chief Tom Cahill. “Law and order will prevail,” he said. “There will be no sleeping in the park. There are no sanitation facilities, and if we let them camp, there would be a tremendous health problem.” He warned, “Nobody should let their children take part in this hippie thing.” For the police it was too late. The hippies were already arriving.

As the Summer of Love approached, Smith, who held a second job at the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Screening Unit at San Francisco General Hospital, noticed more and more panicked young people being admitted with adverse reactions to psychedelic drugs. Prior to 1967 he dealt mainly with older alcoholics, heroin users from the ghetto and jittery methamphetamine addicts (“speed freaks”) from the Tenderloin. But the Haight hippies didn’t fit the drug-user stereotype. They were younger, better educated and almost exclusively white. They were also scared of emergency rooms, where they risked being forced into straightjackets until the drugs wore off. Such treatment, Smith believed, exacerbated the negative effects of LSD. He had the idea to open a special clinic to deal with this new drug-taking community, one that offered nonjudgmental advice and was free of charge.

Smith approached City Hall and warned officials about what he saw as a public-health crisis in the making. He was quickly rebuffed. If anything went wrong, acid casualties would have to use the existing facilities. “They said that...
Above: A bulletin board of missing persons at the Park Police Station in the Haight-Ashbury district, June 1967. The sign at the top reads missing juveniles only. Throughout the summer, teenage runaways continued to arrive, many with no money or even shoes.

if you set up special clinics, it would just bring more of them," says Smith. Outwardly, Smith was an odd advocate for hippie health. The ambitious son of a working-class family, whose grandparents had fled the Oklahoma dust bowl for a better life in California, he appeared more Doogie Howser than Jerry Garcia. "I was the least likely person to end up doing what I did," says Smith. "My career plan was to do academic medicine, do research, be respected in the university, in the ivory tower. But I was learning more walking the streets of Haight-Ashbury in the evening than I was in my job."

In May 1967 Smith had what he describes as a spiritual awakening: his first acid trip. In October 1966 LSD had become illegal in California, but Smith had access to it because of his work. He had never dosed himself before. Looking back, the famed and still controversial 68-year-old drug-treatment expert admits he was naive. "I romanticized psychedelics," he says. "I had this view that there was a hard-drug subculture and there was a separate psychedelic culture. I'd convinced myself that psychedelics were the good drugs. At the time, I didn't realize that the two worlds would soon morph into each other."

The acid trip energized Smith to take action. He rented a 14-room former dentist's office on the second floor at 558 Clayton Street, just off Haight Street, for $150 a month. The new facility was to be called the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic, financed by private donations and staffed by volunteers from the medical community and local citizenry. It opened just as the summer arrived—on June 7, 1967. Its slogan, which was painted on a sign outside, summed up its mission: LOVE NEEDS CARE.

Within 24 hours, 250 patients came through the doors of the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic. The shabby Italianate row house with overhanging eaves and wide bay windows had a line stretching around the corner. Patients entered through the door and climbed the dark stairwell. At the top a sign greeted them: NO DEALING, NO HOLDING, NO USING DOPE, NO PETS. ANY OF THESE CAN CLOSE THE CLINIC, WE LOVE YOU. Stoned teenage boys nodded off in the hallway. Young girls passed out flowers in the waiting room, the walls of which were decorated with psychedelic posters. The smell of marijuana and body odor wafted through the cramped Warren of cubicles and side rooms. Among the cases treated that day were two bikers with second-degree burns, 12 patients with infectious hepatitis and 50 hippies who complained of bronchitis, a workload that would expand the next day to include cases of ringworm, asthma attacks, malnutrition, food poisoning and venereal diseases.

As Smith had anticipated, one of the major tasks in the beginning was calming down LSD trippers. At midnight a young woman clad only in a pink bedsheet turned up at the reception desk. She had been up for 10 days tripping. Two days later another hippie tried to throw herself through the walls of the clinic while freaking out on acid. In the first few days the clinic was seeing as many as a dozen adverse reactions to LSD every hour. In July alone 15 children, ranging in age from six months to five years, were treated for bad trips at the free clinic. They had been given the drug by their parents. Only a small percentage of trips turned negative, but a bad trip was difficult to

"like a dope-fiend bowery."

the hit parade
was 1967 pop music's greatest year?

JANUARY 4: The Doors, the eponymous debut album from a new L.A. band, lands in music stores. "The End" is a masterpiece. "Light My Fire" begins its 40-year run of radio overloud.

FEBRUARY: Jefferson Airplane's Surrealist Pillow opens America's eyes to the acid-drenched San Francisco scene.

FEBRUARY 6: Between the Buttons includes the Rolling Stones' hit "Let's Spend the Night Together." The band causes a stir when it performs the tune on The Ed Sullivan Show.

FEBRUARY 20: The Byrds' Younger Than Yesterday features "So You Want to Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star" and "My Back Pages."

MARCH: Donovan's Mellow Yellow is no

MARCH 10: With "I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You," Aretha Franklin wins herself plenty of respect.

MARCH 12: Produced by Andy Warhol, The Velvet Underground & Nico establishes the art-rock genre.

MARCH 17: Jerry Garcia and the gang release their first studio record, The Grateful Dead.

MAY 17: Jimi Hendrix arrives with Are You Experienced? The all-time greatest debut album?

JUNE: A kilo of entire Hearts Club Band changes the music scene forever.

JULY 3: The Stones release Flowers.


OCTOBER 2: The Doors' follow-up, Strange Days, includes "Love Me Two Times" and "Jumpin' Jack Flash."

NOVEMBER 27: The Beatles' Magical Mystery Tour features the hit single "Penny Lane."

DECEMBER: Traffic releases Mr. Fantasy.

DECEMBER: The Stones come again with Their Satanic Majesties Request.


DECEMBER 27: Following his near-deadly motorcycle crash, Bob Dylan returns with John Wesley Harding. "All Along the Watchtower" hits number four on the charts.
summer of love
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beating you down. But he liked the action.
He liked the action so much he thought if it
ever stopped, he would die. Selling drugs and
taking drugs were the sum of his exis-
tence. His favorite book was the _Physicians' 
Desk Reference_. He dreamed of owning his
own speed lab or inventing some new chem-
ical compound that would make him rich.
This night was a tiny neighborhood, and
these were crazy times. The place was
turning into one big drug supermarked. Dr.
Zoom was helping some long-time business
was all going to end. "Terminal euphoria,
he liked to call the new mood he detected
in the kids. The kids were starting to see
here think they're so cool, but they don't
have a clue," he told anyone who would
listen. "All those teenagers trying to
around little 12-year-old kids out of their
skulls, acting like they got more cool than
anybody else in the Haight. Well, it isn't true,
all they got is terminal euphoria. Hell, the
whole place has got it."

As the summer moved along, more
and more speed freaks wore syringes on
their laps, a sign that the mood in the Haight
was about to change, and not for the better.

Drugs weren't the only thing causing health
problems. In this small, tight-knit neigh-
borhood, with its emphasis on sharing and
its contempt for the laws of hygiene, com-
munication spread rapidly. They all filtered
through the clinic. In July, Smith treated
more than 100 people with menses. He was
also infected, as were two dozen of his helpers. Mononucleosis swept
through, followed by strep throat and
tonsillitis. Flu cases and communications
illness, as were pneumonia and pleurisy. Scabies, 
Trench mouth. Athlete's foot. Hemor-
roids. Even tooth discoloration from hippies rubbing their teeth with
cups of grass. One of the most acute
problems was the liver disease hepatitis, transmitted
by shared needles used by heroin junkies and
speed freaks. Close to a thousand new
cases of hepatitis were reported in San
Francisco during 1967, most of them from
in or around the Haight.

Diseases that had largely been eradicated
or were in steep decline abruptly ex-
perienced a resurgence. "Tuberculosis was
almost extinct," says Smith. "Then sud-
denly you started to see it come back in
the Haight." Doctors at the clinic came
across exotic strains of sexually transmitted
diseases such as gonorrhea, prostatitis, a bac-
terial prostate infection that had previously
been diagnosed among U.S. servicemen in
Vietnam but before 1967 was unheard of
among adolescents in America.

But in the end the clinic was a home
for drug casualties. As the summer wore
on, Smith began to come across substances
he had never heard of—drugs like STP, a
long-lasting hallucinogen touted as a legal
alternative to LSD. The hippies called STP
surprisingly pure. Bad acid wasn't causing
the burn vibes; the problem was that the
acid was so good.

As the Summer of Love progressed,
Smith realized that the LSD saturating
the Haight was just one element in a vast
pharmacopoeia. Impartially, his clinic
had quickly become a barometer, a filter
of sorts, for what was going on in the
streets. He knew the Haight was headed
for trouble. Typical of his patients was
Janis Joplin, queen of the Haight. The
singer was both an early benefactor to
the clinic and a client. Smith initially
treated her for complications from an
abortion she'd undergone in Mexico,
after which he became intimately
involved with trying to detoxify her. "She
would get toxic on speed, so she'd switch
to heroin. She'd get toxic on heroin
and then switch to alcohol. She'd get toxic
on alcohol and switch back to speed. She
had no real interest in stopping using
drugs. There was only an interest in not
dying from them, which is what eventu-
ally happened."

From left: Sonny Barger (on bike), head of the Oakland chapter of the Hells Angels, who enforced their own laws in San Francisco during the Summer of Love. Topless Hippies stroll on campus at San Francisco State College. Timothy Leary, acid-head mystic, was a demigod in the Haight.
Playboy

Serenity, Tranquility and Peace. (The cops called it Too Stupid to Puke.) The clinic saw its first case of an STP overdose two days after it opened. A 19-year-old man who had taken the drug 36 hours earlier was panicking because he thought he was never going to come down. At first this seemed like an isolated case. However, at the end of June, at the Summer Solstice Festival in Golden Gate Park, 5,000 hits of STP were distributed gratis to the crowd. The liberal dosing came courtesy of Owlsley Stanley, the legendary underground chemist who, it was said, "did for LSD what Henry Ford did for the motorcar." Timothy Leary called him "God's secret agent." Owlsley test-marketed the products of his clandestine laboratories by giving out free samples in the Haight.

Scores of young people suffered bad trips. Thirty-two of them ended up at the clinic, some suffering major breakdowns and complaining that their brains "were on fire." "We had to keep them for two or three days until they came down," says pharmacologist Darryl Inaba, an early volunteer at the clinic who was christened Dr. Dope by the hippies and would later go on to co-write the popular drug guide *Upers, Downers, All Arounders.* "It was very scary." Eventually the identity of the chemical was revealed: 2,5-dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine, one of the dozens of compounds synthesized by Dow chemist Alex Shulgin, chemicals that were initially intended to be used in psychotherapy but had found their way into underground cookbooks. As Shulgin—the man who rediscovered ecstasy and would go on to become the patron saint of the rave generation—later wrote in his drug bible *PiHKAL* (Phenethylamines I Have Known and Loved): "Three milligrams [of STP] will produce a good high. Ten milligrams will allow you to take your brain out of your head and examine it."

The initial doses being distributed in the Haight contained twice that amount, some 20 milligrams.

Halfway through the Summer of Love a growing division had split the Haight's leaders. Gurus like Timothy Leary touted psychedelics as the modern-day equivalent of the Holy Eucharist. Meanwhile doctors—Smith foremost among them—were left to clean up the mess. During the Summer of Love, Smith invited Leary to speak to fellow doctors at the University of California, San Francisco. After the lecture Leary and some of the doctors smoked pot and went down the hill to visit the Haight. Leary, who was riding a wave of popularity, was mobbed by devotees. Then a window opened in a second-floor apartment. Some people were suffering from bad trips, and their friends didn't want to take them to the emergency room. They begged Leary to come upstairs and help. Leary dutifully trudged up the steps, but when he entered the apartment he was apathetic. "I wasn't interested in the drug in a proper religious context," he huffed. "You deal with it," he told Smith, who by now was as high as a kite on pot. "Leary couldn't deal with the realities of the drug's downside," remembers Smith today. "He said, 'Turn on, tune in and drop out.' Well, some people turned on, tuned in and freaked out. When they freaked out, Leary wanted nothing to do with them."

In August 1967 the unraveling picked up speed. The grisly murders of two local drug dealers in the space of one week stunned the Haight. First was a 25-year-old speed dealer named John Kent Carter, who was found stabbed to death in his apartment in the Haight, his right arm severed at the elbow. The guilty man was apprehended outside San Francisco, driving the victim's car. Next to him on the passenger seat was damning evidence: Carter's arm wrapped in a suede bag. The killer, apparently on methamphetamine, calmly explained to the police why he had chopped off his victim's limb. "The hand is a man's history," he said. "I'm a Cancer. I'm not a hard person, normally." A few days later William Thomas, a pot dealer known as Superspade, was found shot and stabbed to death, stuffed into a sleeping bag and left to dangle from the top of a Marin County cliff. The rumor was that Superspade avoided prison time by ratting out rival dealers; his murder was said to be payback.

Violence was inevitable. That summer a number of different subcultures were crystallizing at the same time. What was labeled "hippie" in the media was actually a collection of competing groups united by only a common interest in sex, drugs and rock and roll. There were the genuine hippies, true believers in the holy trinity of peace, love and cosmic consciousness, but as the Summer of Love progressed they were increasingly outnumbered by the oddest collection of moochers, burnouts, fake mystics and sociopaths this side of an asylum for the criminally insane.

Among the local fixtures on the street that summer were the Hell's Angels,
whom the hippies looked up to as their protectors despite their reputation for violence and mayhem. The Angels frequently roared through the neighborhood on their polished choppers. Ken Kesey had introduced them to the scene during one of his famous Acid Test parties. "You break people’s bones; I break people’s heads," he reportedly told them. At one of these parties the Angels made contact with acid producer Owlsley Stanley, who employed the group to distribute the various products of his underground laboratories.

The passing parade on Haight Street also included "plastic hippies" (harmless weekend adventurers), draft dodgers and what honky hipsters called street spades, nattily attired black men engaged in petty hustles. There was even a satanic contingent. In 1966 Anton LaVey founded the Church of Satan at his home on California Street, which attracted a steady stream of socialites and celebrities to campy black masses. Over at the Russian embassy on Fulton Street, Mick Jagger and underground filmmaker Kenneth Anger (Lucifer Rising) performed black magic rituals in the wooden tower of the grand Gothic pile.

Teenage runaways arrived in waves all through the summer of 1967. They came with little or no money and expected the hippies to take care of them. "Some of them didn’t even have shoes," recalls Smith. "I would get calls from desperate parents: ‘My son left in a van from Des Moines and went up to the Haight.’ And then I would talk to these kids. Some of them would say, ‘My mom is an alcoholic’ or ‘My dad tried to rape me.’ The big myth is that this problem was created in San Francisco. It wasn’t. It was created in the heartland of America. I started to realize these kids had problems before they ever came to the Haight."

More troubling still were the crazies, people who suffered from mental illness and used drugs to medicate their condition or mask their madness. "There was this attitude on the street that the crazier you were, the groovier you were," says Smith. "Schizophrenics were very much looked up to because they could hallucinate without drugs." The king of the crazies was Charles Manson, the Haight’s very own Raspoutine. Manson missed the Summer of Love but arrived soon after and lived in a house on the corner of Haight and Cole streets. He was an extreme example, but his basic hustle was a common one. Any would-be guru with the first month’s rent and a security deposit could set up a commune in one of the ramshackle Victorian houses where he could play spiritual leader to his gullible followers. Drugs were no longer used to free people’s minds but to control them.

The most reckless group to invade the Haight during the Summer of Love, however, didn’t have a name until they were everything from weight loss to curing hiccups. But in the early 1960s a new form of the drug appeared: powder cooked up in illegal labs. The hoodies were consuming this crystallized meth in the most direct way (by needle) and in massive doses.

Smith knew environmental factors could exacerbate a drug’s toxicity. If the population density was high enough and a relatively small dose of methamphetamine could lead mice either to keel over dead or to start killing one another. Crammed together in dilapidated apartments all over this small urban neighborhood, the speed freaks began to act like the caged mice Smith used to inject.

"The speed freaks were the worst," he says. "They were violent; they were paranoid. They preyed on the hippies, who were easy targets. ‘Like a valley of thousands of plump white rabbits surrounded by wounded coyotes’ is how writer Ed Sanders described the scene. The hoodies brought a new, nihilistic edge to drug taking in the Haight. The near-suicidal doses of meth these young people shot into their arms astonished Smith.

Injecting methamphetamine was not a new practice in San Francisco. Ever since the 1950s when local doctors began to prescribe liquid ampoules of Methedrine and Desoxyn (brand names for methamphetamine) to help heroin addicts, among them a number of Korean War veterans, kick their addiction, the city had played host to a substantial number of speed freaks. Many physicians believed a suitable treatment for heroin dependency was to substitute the powerful depressant with a powerful stimulant. Just like LSD, liquid methamphetamine was introduced into the general population not by street dealers but by the men in white coats.

Other physicians were motivated more by money than medicine. For the price of a visit, unscrupulous doctors, called script writers, would make out prescriptions for methamphetamine to practically anybody who wandered in off the street. Typically, for less than $10 the intravenous addict would receive a hundred Methedrine ampoules, plus hypodermic needles and sedatives to help with the comedown afterward. A single San
Francisco doctor reportedly prescribed 24,000 ampoules of Methedrine to a handful of patients in one year.

Roger Smith (no relation to Dr. David E. Smith), who headed the Amphetamine Research Project at the Haight-Asbury Free Medical Clinic and was Charles Manson’s personal physician, conducted a May 1968 study among local intravenous meth users, titled "The Marketplace of Speed: Violence and Compulsive Methamphetamine Behavior." Roger Smith’s study revealed for the first time the underground economy that had sprung up in San Francisco surrounding the Methedrine trade. Addicts who once made a living by burglary or credit-card scams could now support themselves solely by selling meth. They would get the drug from their doctor, keep half the meth for themselves, dilute the other half and sell it on the street.

As early as 1965 Allen Ginsberg had called methamphetamine "a plague on the whole dope industry" and complained that "all the nice, gentle dope people are getting screwy up by the real horror-monster Frankenstein speed freaks who are going around stealing and bad-mouthing everybody." As the summer entered August, methyl fumes took the Haight into their grip. A famous flâneur had started to circulate in the community: "Pretty little 16-year-old middle-class chick comes to the Haight to see what’s all about & gets picked up by a 17-year-old street dealer who spends all day shooting her up. Again & again, then feeds her 3,000 miles & raffles her temporarily unemployed body for the biggest Haight Street gang bang since the night before last. The politics & ethics of ecstasy. Rape is as common as bullshit on Haight Street." By the end of the summer, David Smith believed meth users were responsible for a disproportionate number of neighborhood crimes. So-called crystal palaces—flophouses where speed freaks went to shoot up—began to replace the communies. Recipes for making meth circulated in the Haight. A gang called the Methedrine Marauders appeared on the streets, its sole purpose to stick up speed dealers. An upsurge in gang rapes, drug rip-offs and murders was blamed on methamphetamine.

Smith admits the clinic was late to realize the extent of the crystal-meth problem in the Haight. Because of the clinic’s association with acid heads, speed freaks shied away from it in the early days. But as the summer wound down, a young hoodoo named Randy showed up in the waiting room. Randy was a walking epidemic. Among his many illnesses were abscesses the size of golf balls on his arms. He also suffered from a severe skin infection and had contracted hepatitis from sharing needles. When he came down from speed, he was given to bouts of chronic depression characterized by suicidal impulses.

Outside the clinic, people didn’t call him Randy. They called him Dr. Zoom. He was accustomed to visiting. The community was crowded and unhygienic; but at least they had furniture, not just bare walls and dirty mattresses, and they didn’t need a password to enter the premises.

Not long after Smith met Randy, he got a call from him one morning around 4 o’clock. Randy was in a panic. The girl he had was killed. Smith had been blowing. He was worried she would die. "We were having a shoot-out," he explained. "What’s a shoot-out?" asked Smith.

"It’s a best-man-left-standing-dope contest where one person shoots up speed, then another, then another to see who falls over first."

"That’s insane," said Smith. The doctor hung up the phone, grabbed his medical bag and headed over to Waller Street. When Smith got there, Randy was pacing around, and the girl was on the bed, shaking. She complained her head was pounding, and she thought she was having a heart attack. Her heart rate was 140. Her blood pressure was 180 over 120. Smith injected her with Thorazine and gave her oral phenobarbital; both her blood pressure and pulse dropped to normal levels.

Smith told Randy, "You can’t keep doing this. You’re going to kill somebody."

By October the whole scene had suffered a painful demise. A Death of Hippie ceremony, a mock funeral, was held in Golden Gate Park. Throughout the neighborhood, a group of longhairs carried a coffin labeled SUMMER OF LOVE and stuffed with concert posters. To the sound of Hare Krishna chants and shouts of "Hippies are dead," the casket was set on fire and people tossed LSD tablets into the flames. After the ceremony, one of the participants scribbled a message on the steps of Smith’s free clinic: "The Haight was love once. Now, where has all the love gone?"

After temporarily closing in the fall for lack of funds, the clinic’s medical center resumed business. Its main task now was to treat methamphetamine casualties of one sort or another. During the winter after the Summer of Love, Smith had a run-in with a mysterious figure rumored to be the biggest crystal-meth dealer in the neighborhood.
Smith had noticed a shady-looking character called Papa Al hanging around the waiting room. He stood out because, in an environment where even some of the clinic staff went barefoot, he always wore a snappy business suit. He also carried a .38 revolver and was constantly accompanied by a husky hoolie named Todd.

Papa Al was hatching plans to take over the clinic and use it as a front for his meth-dealing operation. False rumors were circulating in the neighborhood that Papa Al was the free clinic’s secret benefactor. The story reached Smith’s ears. People were saying a portion of every crystal-meth deal that went down in the Haight went directly to the clinic. Smith approached Papa Al and told him he had to leave.

The next day Smith received word that Papa Al had put a contract on his life. For $100 worth of speed, Smith would be dead. The doctor went to the police station, but the cops said there was nothing they could do unless Papa Al acted first. "I went back to the clinic, and one of the Hell’s Angels was hanging out there," says Smith. "He said, ‘Call Sonny Barger [head of the Hell’s Angels’ Oakland chapter].’ So he gives me his number, and I dial-up. I said, ‘This is Dr. David Smith from the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic.’” Smith explained the situation. He heard back six words.

"We will take care of this."

The next day Barger sent two Angels to the Haight to kill Smith. Smith told him, "You are Smith’s insurance policy. If Smith is hurt crossing the street, you’re dead.”

Papa Al showed up at the clinic to apologize, pleading for forgiveness.

"Okay," Smith said. "Just don’t come around here anymore."

The next day Papa Al disappeared. As Smith puts it today, "He’s probably part of a freeway somewhere."

In late 1968, two days after Christmas, a horrific crime occurred that summed up all that had gone wrong with the Haight. Nineteen-year-old Ann Jiminez, who had traveled from Washington state over Thanksgiving to be part of the hippie scene, was raped and murdered in a crystal palace on Waller Street—the same place where Dr. Zoom once lived—by a group of biker speed freaks. Jiminez, a patient at the free clinic’s annex on 409 Clayton Street, had found that life in the Haight was not what she’d expected. She had lost 25 pounds in the first three weeks after she arrived. She was on her way to the clinic when she ended up four blocks away at the crystal palace. Accused of molesting a pair of boots, she was beaten, forced to have anal sex with six bikers while their girlfriends looked on, had her hair clipped and her body shaved and then was left to die with obscenities scrawled on her body in lipstick. Six bikers and three of their girlfriends were arrested and charged with murder.

A girl who knew Jiminez told The San Francisco Examiner, "She wanted to swing with the crowd, but she didn’t know how."

That winter—barely a year after the Summer of Love had ended—Smith surveyed his neighborhood, and what he saw chilled him. The dream had turned into a nightmare. "Nothing left but freaks and gangsters today," Dr. Zoom told Smith. "It’s like a speed freak heaven, like a dope dealer’s paradise." Smith’s condition mirrored that of his neighborhood: Dr. Zoom would soon be dead of an overdose.

Looking back over his 45-year career, Smith now compares himself to the Wolf, the Harvey Keitel character in Pulp Fiction. "People think I’m friendly with a lot of musicians," he says, "but I would get called in to clean up the blood and brains—the overdoses, the detoxes. They didn’t invite me backstage when things were good. They invited me backstage when things went bad."

After the Summer of Love ended, America’s first speed scene spilled out of San Francisco into the rest of the country. It moved on steel wheels thanks to the Hell’s Angels. The Angels were initially employed as delivery boys but soon came to dominate the drug’s production as well. The dangerous science of meth manufacturing spread to other chapters and to rival motorcycle gangs in cities and eventually rural areas, where meth labs are more difficult to detect. Today 10.4 million people have used crystal meth at least once in their life. There are an estimated 257,000 addicts. The meth problem that vexes society today—the exploding labs, the overdoses, the battles with law enforcement—has its roots in the Haight during that strange summer of 1967.

It is springtime 2007. Under a blue sky, Haight Street bustles with nostalgia and commerce. A rusty Volkswagon van painted with flowers pulls down a throughfare lined with boutiques, cafes and novelty stores. The shops are named Pipe Dreams, Coffee to the People, Positively Haight Street. The Red Victorian bed-and-breakfast offers individually decorated hippie-themed rooms. The line descendents of the hoodies who flocked to the Haight during the Summer of Love still line the pavement, begging for change. These days they are called gutter punks, raggedly dressed homeless youths with their ever-present pit bulls. One of them holds a cardboard sign that reads TRYING TO GET DRUNK. An uneasy truce exists between the neighborhood’s countercultural past and its over-the-counter present. You can still feel the tension between hippie idealism and the edge unique to drug neighborhoods. It is here on every street and in every alley.

As the lights start to fade, the gutter punks carry their bedrolls into the park, looking for a secluded spot in the woods to cook up their dope and bunk down for the night. The demand is great, and the best places go quickly. As surely as the sun will come up, tomorrow will bring new faces, more bodies coming in from the bus station. New hipsters, new punks, the same old drugs. The weather is beginning to change. Summer is about to arrive.