



Revisiting the Summer of Love... as Middle Aged Parents With Curious]

by Terri Mandell

Most of us are bombarded daily by tv, radio, magazine and billboard asking if we've talked to our kids about drugs. But on a recent trip to Francisco with our 8 year-old, we were faced with a brand new, total unexpected question... how do we talk to our kids about what it was] communal-living, free-loving, tuned-in, dropped-out hippies? In our mom fits that description perfectly. Dad wasn't quite as committed to lifestyle, but he did graduate from Kent State and spent his 16th birth Woodstock. That makes us uniquely qualified.

When our original plans to stay at an upscale hotel on Union Square through, someone recommended a little-known bed & breakfast with strange name,

"The Herb'n Inn" (pronounced "urban"), located in the heart of the Haight district. We were apprehensive after all, the neighborhood had a reputation for being a little on the scummy side, and then there was the thing, as the name Herb'n implies (hint: it's a verb). But when we arrived, what we found was an immaculate Victorian home, modern, secure, beautifully furnished and run by a unique little family consisting of a brother and sister in their 40s, and their mother. We knew immediately that our being there was no accident.

The 8-bedroom, 4-story house features 3 guest rooms (one is a honeymoon suite), and for under a hundred bucks per night, guests also receive a healthy and satisfying breakfast each morning, lovingly served in a huge country-style kitchen by Pam Brennan (the sister). Pam, her brother Bruce and their mother kept us entertained with stories of their lives as a counter culture family. Mom was a real radical in the sixties, and raised her children the same way. Today, in addition to running the Herb'n Inn, they're community activists involved in everything from helping the homeless to supporting the local senior center.



Aside from Brennan family, the charm of the place is clearly in its history. One room of the house has been set aside as a sort of hippie cultural museum, filled with memorabilia like old photos of Janis and Jimi, collected books, posters and magazines, and a variety of pipes & paraphernalia. The house is an official stop on the Ashbury Walking Tour. So official in fact, that during our stay, Noel Redding (he was Jimi Hendrix's bass player), was also a guest at the inn. But its appeal is definitely not limited to former hippies. On our first morning we shared breakfast with a young honeymooning couple who were both graduates of West Point and about to embark on serious military careers. It was a Utopian vision.... radical pacifists and military officers breaking bread together in peace and harmony. Where better for such a thing to happen?



The living room centers around a piano and a tv, and is stocked with videos and kids' toys like Legos and dolls. It's a lovely place to spend the evening sipping wine and relaxing with the other guests, who come from all over the country. The area is full of street performers and assorted eccentrics, and found the area was remarkably kid-friendly. In fact, at Gold Park, just seconds from the site of the first love-ins, a new and imaginative playground now stands, with one of the most creatively designed play areas we'd ever seen.

Getting around San Francisco is relatively easy. People

actually walk to where they need to go, and public transportation is pretty reliable. But traffic is slow on streets, and we found that the best way to see the sights was from the top of a shiny red 1955 Mack fire truck. This was made possible by Robert and Marilyn Katzman, a couple who actually live in a restored fire house who run a little business called San Francisco Fire Engine Tours & Adventures. They are the proud owners of an actual old fire truck that shuttles visitors through the city, over the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito, and back again. Passengers (the truck seats 13) can wear authentic fire gear and enjoy the open air ride, which takes an hour and 15 minutes, and is worth every penny of the \$22 fare. But beware... it's cold. They bundle you with blankets, and the firefighter jackets are insulated and snuggly. Robert drives while Marilyn entertains -- gives a lesson in fire safety for kids using original songs which she performs with the kids singing along. This experience not to be missed.

And speaking of new experiences, food is always a problem when traveling with kids, and getting little ones to try new foods is a monumental hassle. San Francisco is famous for its cuisine, and we decided to use our adventure as an opportunity to introduce our finicky eater to something a little more exotic than chicken nuggets.

Our first dinner stop was a visually-stimulating place on Sutter Street called the A&O Trading Company. It's a restaurant and brewery, and in addition to beer, they actually "brew" their own sodas. The decor recalls the ambiance of an old trading warehouse in the far east, and though the menu is a bit sophisticated for kids, the sodas are a big hit, and you can't go wrong with chicken satay. Add a sweet & sour dipping sauce, and kids can easily be tricked into eating it.

Another fun eatery is a place on Jackson Square called MacArthur Park. Kids are welcome, the prices are reasonable, and the food is pure Americana (it was easy to find menu items that didn't gross out an eight year old). Back in the Haight, after bus and fire engine trips around the city, it was a relief to return to the homey living room of the Herb'n Inn and to Bruce's stories about the good old days. Even if you missed Haight the first time around, you'll find it infinitely interesting in retrospect. Be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.

And be sure to tell your kids *why*.

