

Cultural Daily

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A Taste of Gypsy Boots

R. Daniel Foster · Wednesday, January 6th, 2021

If you've lived in Los Angeles long enough, you'll remember [Gypsy Boots](#) — a zany health and fitness pioneer who slept in fields, caves and trees and appeared on national TV swinging from a vine and banging a drum. Born Robert Bootzin in San Francisco in 1915, the irrepressible long-haired and often bare-chested Boots had a singular message of spreading “health and happiness.”

A long-time L.A. resident, Boots died in 2004 at age 89 – a booster of L.A. Dodgers, Lakers, USC Trojans football and Raiders games right up to the end (clanging his signature cowbell on the sidelines as he chanted, “Don’t panic, go organic!”)



Gypsy Boots / courtesy of Dan Bootzin

Yes, gypsies can reincarnate — at least this jovial one has

Now, Boots is back — reincarnated in a way, via a signature health food box of treats: [Gypsy Boots Bites](#). The 12-pack includes mocha, cashew and coconut, peanut butter and chocolate as well as nuts and fruits varieties (\$28). The product is an homage to Boots, developed by his son [Dan Bootzin](#), wife Beth and son Timur — a family project that’s been in development for years.

Presented in a hippy-trippy box printed with swirled flowers, the all-organic snacks can be ordered in an “all flavors” box or as boxes of a single treat. Beth’s niece, Zoe Crouch, masters the [Gypsy Boots Bites Instagram account](#) and another niece, Rui Wheaton, creates marketing artwork.



Gypsy Boots Bites / courtesy of Dan Bootzin

The treats are not exactly the sprout sandwiches that son Dan Bootzin brought to school as a boy, giving him “no bargaining power” whatsoever, he said in a [2004 Los Angeles Times article](#). Raised on carrot juice in the 1960s, Dan Bootzin (mother Lois Bootzin died in 2014) later became a filmmaker and lives in Los Feliz with this wife and son.

The “Nature Boys” — a precursor to the hippie movement

Gypsy Boots developed a cult following through the years, and was a favorite on [The Steve Allen Show](#), appearing 25 times. Locally, he also was a regular on [George Putnam’s Talk Back](#), a coda to the broadcaster’s KTLA [George Putnam News](#).

The ebullient Boots was a hippie decades before the term and movement became popularized. As an early 1930s high school dropout vagabond, he wandered California with a dozen or more others in his tribe. The group slept outdoors, emerging from hidden caves with long hair and beards. They bathed beneath waterfalls.

The tribe was labeled as “[Nature Boys](#),” a distinct Southern California subculture within the emerging hippie movement, its precursor anchored by German immigrants and their late 19th-century [Lebensreform social movement](#) (nudism, sexual liberation, vegetarianism and the like).



The Nature Boys, a Southern California subculture of the emerging hippie movement / courtesy of Dan Bootzin

There was a boy ... a very strange enchanted boy

Among Gypsy Boots’ tribe was [eden ahbez](#) (George Alexander Aberle), who, inspired by his naturalist tribe, composed the otherworldly hit “[Nature Boy](#)” recorded by [Nat King Cole](#) in 1947. The song has been covered by many, including a recording by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga. “Nature Boy” also was employed as a central thematic element in the 2001 jukebox musical romantic drama, “Moulin Rouge!”



Nat King Cole recorded the otherworldly hit “Nature Boy,” composed by one of the Nature Boys / public domain photo

Gypsy Boots also operated his tiki-styled “Health Hut” natural foods store (just west of La Cienega on Beverly Blvd.), visited by scores of 1960s Hollywood celebrities. He also had a band, “Gypsy Boots and the Hairy Hoots,” played bit parts in movies (Michael Douglas was a pal) and wrote the book “Bare Feet and Good Things to Eat.”



Gypsy Boots and Dr. Harry Lehrer / public domain photo

The eternally sunny rebel with a cause led an exuberant life packed with numerous other appearances, capers and cacophonous antics (he possessed an impressive collection of percussion instruments).

A big-hearted nonconformist and an eternal boy to the end, Gypsy Boots forever claimed he was a millionaire “because a millionaire would pay a million to have my health.”

Wise words from perhaps the freest of Southern California spirits.

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