

Cultural Daily

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Behind the Scenes at the Woodstock Festival

Carol Green · Wednesday, August 14th, 2019

It must have been the Cosmic Tweezers that brought me to the Woodstock Festival. It was early in the summer of 1969 when their sudden and unexpected arrival landed me in Upstate New York to begin a summer job that would change my life forever. It was not the first time, but certainly the most propitious occurrence of this mystical instrument that whisked me from one circumstance to an entirely different situation where anything can happen. At least that's how I explain my trajectory living pretty much from synchronicity to synchronicity as I do.

Back on terra firma and in actuality, my best friend, Fillmore East stage manager Steve Cohen, designed an early iteration of what would be the stage at Woodstock. He liked my cooking and hired me to cook for the crew. He put my boyfriend, Stephen Ostram, on the stage crew so he could "keep an eye on him" and make sure he was "treating me right." The catch was that we had to take Steve's inordinately clumsy black lab Godzilla with us.



We took off from Philadelphia in a blue

VW bus with paisley

curtains. Around 160

miles later we arrived on

a dusty road at a barn

emblazoned with a

psychedelic mural in the

middle of nowhere. This

was the office. A woman

was out in the field

teaching herself how to

operate a tractor. Inside,

Penny Stallings sat at an

IBM Selectric across

from Mel Lawrence, who

oversaw festival

operations. This must be

the place, but not for

long. We got kicked out

of town after town before

we found Yasgur's farm.

The crew was housed at Rosenberg's Bungalow Colony. Each cottage bore the name of a fruit. The Apple, Berry, Cherry, Grape, etc., as in "meet you at the Berry." Amenities included a shuffleboard court with one stick and a basketball rim with no net. It was one of those places where mothers made tuna sandwiches for their kids, cautioning them not to swim in the lake until at least an hour after lunch. Yarmulke-wearing husbands came up on weekends to visit their families and indulge in homemade borscht. Picture the juxtaposition of a wayward band of hippies with this crowd.


At the first site, the guys cut through vines and began to build roads. The place was covered with poison ivy, sap invading every nook and cranny of the men tasked with clearing the land. It was awful. Bob Dylan's doctor to the rescue. A few weeks later, the good doctor hosted a spaghetti dinner while we watched the moon landing on his black and white TV.

Back at the ranch, the natives were restless. Word was that the townspeople didn't want "no 50,000 hippies" here. We moved down the road to a motel called the Red Top Lodge. There were 13 of us, a 12-burner stove and Jimmy, the chef/proprietor who dumped salt in whatever I was cooking. My pregnant partner Linda McGillicuddy and I served hot breakfast and every dry cereal known to man. We made three meals a day, delivered lunch to the site, shopped for food, made dinner, served dinner, cleaned up and did it all over again the next day.

Trips to the supermarket were particularly thrilling. Members of the Concerned Citizens Committee tailgated us in pick-up trucks outfitted with racks of shotguns. Supermarket security hovered with suspicion and contained hostility. It "didn't make no nevah mind" that we spent \$700 in cash on a daily basis. Eventually, I flashed a wad of cash and told them to back off. Linda and her husband dropped out to go home and have their now 50-year old baby girl.

We hired a couple of local guys thrilled to do anything to be part of the mix. I remember their clutching my ankles begging, "Please don't leave us." The crew had grown exponentially when I hired them to be our dishwashers. That night I made spare ribs for 80 people having neglected to line the pans. We found them curled up on the kitchen floor the next morning, a sleepless night the result of their diligence.

Onward to the Diamond Horseshoe, once popular with tony horse-racing fans, now a condemned hotel. Ah, yes, the Diamond Horseshoe—in other words "home" for a growing crew. It was a wreck, but we loved it. When we inspected the kitchen, we found a table set with dishes holding atrophied remnants of food as though diners of yore had been abducted by aliens. The ceiling caved in on us at breakfast when the hot water went in on the floor above. The night before the festival, there was a fire. No one was hurt, but my beautiful Guild F-30 guitar disappeared, and hatchets left gaping holes in the doors. By then, we were all at the site with no way in or out. The roads were jammed. Thousands of onlookers applauded stagehands who rode cherry pickers held by cranes to position the lights. The rumors are true that LSD kept some of them awake.

 Hammers rang out and machinery ground on. It was scary and exhilarating and pressured and wonderful. I remember when I first heard the music. Crystal clear sound shot through me when Richie Havens sang "Freedom," and I knew everything would be alright.

Stephen and I took naps in our bus parked up the hill from the stage. We'd wake to hear snippets of Crosby, Stills and Nash or The Who. I answered phones at the "freak out" tent, even with laryngitis. Stephen worked on stage when the Grateful Dead's equipment cracked the turntable,

and the storm roared in. Sly and the Family Stone took us higher and Santana blew our minds. It was amazing.

On Monday morning, Stephen rolled our bus down the hill to the gas tank behind the stage. He had made it to the site on fumes. While he gassed up the van, I stood at Hendrix's feet for the "Star-Spangled Banner." I don't think I've ever felt so patriotic.

We got back to the Diamond Horseshoe to find a couple sleeping in our bed. Stephen could barely speak. It was up to me to evict them. I paused for a minute when they protested, saying, "But we can't leave. We came all the way from India!" Even that couldn't sway me, though I think back every now and again and wish I'd had a place for them to lay their heads. I guess it's just the hippie in me.

It's been 50 years since the Cosmic Tweezers dropped me into the middle of one of the most extraordinary events of our time. I became a member of the Woodstock Nation and one of a cherished family that was born that summer. There's a certain celebrity to having been part of it all. Years later in an interview with the NBC Nightly News, I was asked what I did at the Woodstock Festival. I replied, "Well, there were these people building a historic event. What's a nice Jewish girl supposed to do? I cooked for them."

Top image: Image of John Sebastian at Woodstock – Photo Credit: Henry Diltz

Images of Carol Green back in the day – Photo Credit: Bob Gruen

To hear interviews with the crew and family of the original 1969 Woodstock Festival, visit <https://www.talkinboutourgeneration.com>

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