

# The First Few Friends I Had: Love Stories from the Gone World



<b>Pages:</b>	192
<b>Genre:</b>	Autobiography
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<b>ISBN13:</b>	9780989710817
<b>Goodreads Rating:</b>	4.25
<b>Published:</b>	December 15th 2013 by Pondering Pig Press
<b>ISBN10:</b>	0989710815

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Someone asked me who the first hippies were, those unknowns who kicked off the psychedelic era of the 1960s. Were they born-too-late beatniks who arrived at the party after everybody had gone home? Or were they something else? Something new? I actually knew some of those first freaks. In fact, they were the first few friends I had. This trip starts in Nineteenth Avenue Park, San Mateo, California, winter of 1958, muddy raw subdivision streets, brine shrimped salt flats stretching to the Bayshore Freeway and beyond to sorrowful tract houses of Norfolk Street. The ground I sprung from. But we won't tarry. We'll hit the road through the vast Sonoran Desert on solitary two-lane highways spring of 1961 to adventures in Mexico, then on to steaming East Village summer to swirling fog over North Beach, broken hearted spring of 1962. Along the way, we'll stop at the corner of Seventh and Judah Street in San Francisco's Inner Sunset to watch a girl named Solveig rush out our door with 'Ban the Bomb' placards banging against her shoulder. We'll scene shift till midnight to watch Peter Weissinger swing over the stair rail into teens crashing our big peacenik party and whomping on them in peacenik joy. We'll contemplate a ghostly Carmen O'Shaughnessy stride through the archway in badass logger boots, tawny lionhair in long braids, brassy confident smile and my handmade Mexican chaleco. Snow is falling over Long Island, the first winter rains are pouring into the sewers of Lily Alley, San Francisco. Carmen has jumped off the bus in Barstow, hitched home across the desert and there is not a damn thing I can do about it. Summer 1964 in the Langley Porter Psychiatric Day Care Center for Mind-Blown Proto-Hippies and Hysterical Teenagers, the passengers are unraveling hidden meanings within Sally Go Round the Roses by the Jaynettes. They hear the Bomb, the war, the police dogs attacking demonstrators, fire hoses of death, J Edgar Hoover vs the Commies, peyote, pot, fear, angst, and - hey everybody, it's Mashed Potatoes Time.

Look, the sky has gone blue, the golden city beckons. It's spring again. Let's stroll down to the North Beach Arts Festival to find my friends. Come on, they want to meet you. The First Few Friends I Had.