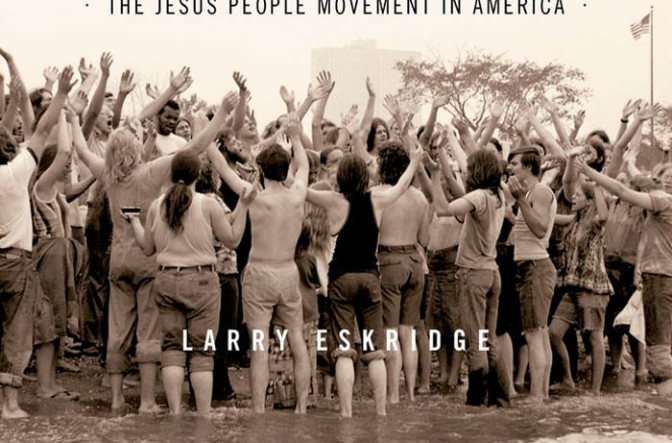


God's Forever Family

· THE JESUS PEOPLE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA ·



LARRY ESKRIDGE

God's Forever Family

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*The Jesus People Movement
in America*



LARRY ESKRIDGE

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For Dave Eddy

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Acknowledgments

TRYING TO DOCUMENT and interpret a sprawling, grassroots religious movement while trying to hold a day job is not recommended as a route to a serene and well-ordered life. But thankfully there have been any number of people whose knowledge, advice, criticism, competence, wisdom, friendship, and sense of humor have made the journey possible, and enjoyable.

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The genesis of this book came more years ago than I care to admit as the result of my participation in George Marsden's Notre Dame graduate seminar on Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism. There, under George's learned eye (and

with his hospitality and that of his wife, Lucie, whose fantastic dinners took the sting out of my weekly 250-mile round-trip between Wheaton and South Bend), I put together my first foray into the world of the Jesus People, an examination of Billy Graham's relationship to the Jesus generation. Eventually, I ended up working with David Bebbington as a doctoral student in history at the University of Stirling in Scotland. David's cool, Cambridge-trained, British academic's approach was the perfect counterpoint to my flighty, pop-culture-attuned, American ways. I always appreciated not only his knowledge and genuine interest in my progress but also his friendship and the hospitality he and his wife, Eileen, manifested on my several sojourns in Stirling.

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God's Forever Family

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Introduction

Remembering the Jesus Generation

BY THE SUMMER OF 1971, a battered American public had been through the social, cultural, and political wringer, enduring a series of revolutions in the space of a few short years. There had been the civil rights revolution, complete with racist resistance and frustration-driven urban riots across the country; dark murmurings of political revolution as anarchy reigned on the nation's college campuses over the Vietnam War and the draft; the advent of the Pill and the sexual revolution; the spread of LSD and the psychedelic revolution; and the countercultural flower power of the hippie revolution. To make matters worse, all of these seismic changes had directly involved the attitudes, concerns, and evolution of America's huge, up-and-coming Baby Boomer generation. As the June 21 issue of *Time* hit the nation's newsstands, the readers of the country's premier weekly newsmagazine might have been forgiven had they not wanted to hear tell of yet another revolution—particularly one involving the nation's youth.

But the revolution the June 21 issue touted bespoke anything but the rejection of old-fashioned values and morality that so many Americans feared. On the cover of the magazine was the familiar, deep-eyed visage of Jesus Christ—albeit drawn psychedelic-style and in Day-Glo colors. The hippified cover portrait highlighted the issue's lead story on what the banner headline proclaimed “The Jesus Revolution,” a remarkable upsurge in a traditional, evangelical Christianity with a hippie twist that was increasingly making itself visible among young people across the country.

“Fresh-faced, wide-eyed young girls and earnest young men,” the *Time* reporters gushed, “badger businessmen and shoppers on Hollywood Boulevard, near the Lincoln Memorial, in Dallas, in Detroit and in Wichita, ‘witnessing’ for Christ with breathless exhortations. Christian coffeehouses have opened

in many cities... a strip joint has been converted to a 'Christian nightclub' in San Antonio. Communal 'Christian houses' are multiplying like loaves and fishes... Bibles abound." Color photos of beach baptisms in California; hippies in hands-raised Pentecostal bliss; gum-smacking, bubble-blowing worshippers at a New Jersey "Jesus Rally"; a circle of praying athletes in the middle of a football field; and a band of happy commune dwellers in upstate New York accompanied the eight-page story. But to these seasoned reporters used to covering the plethora of new social and cultural trends and movements that the previous decade had unleashed on American society, this "Jesus Revolution" was different than anything they had encountered. "There is an uncommon morning freshness to this movement, a buoyant atmosphere of hope and love along with the usual rebel zeal," commented the writers; "... their love seems more sincere than a slogan, deeper than the fast-fading sentiments of the flower children: what startles the outsider is the extraordinary sense of joy that they are able to communicate." The writers were taken aback at the Jesus People's "total belief in an awesome, supernatural Jesus Christ, not just a marvelous man who lived 2,000 years ago but a living God who is both Saviour and Judge. ... Their lives revolve around the necessity for an intense personal relationship with that Jesus and... [they] act as if divine intervention guides their every movement and can be counted on to solve every problem."¹

Of course, by the time a public figure, celebrity, trend, or movement reached the cover of a magazine like *Time*, it was almost always near the peak of its stature or cultural vitality. In the case of the Jesus People, *Time* was certifying the status of a religious movement that had already attracted considerable attention in the religious and secular media. Eventually, the movement would be tabbed as one of the top ten news stories of 1971.²

The Jesus movement had blossomed from seemingly insignificant beginnings, its first embryonic embodiment in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury during 1967's famed Summer of Love. While the Bay Area was the movement's first identifiable Jesus People outpost, similar manifestations of a hippieized Christianity popped up in the next two years—in Oregon, Seattle, Spokane, Fort Lauderdale, Detroit, Milwaukee, upstate New York, seemingly anywhere that the counterculture and evangelical Christianity might rub shoulders.

But it was in sunny Southern California that the interaction between these apparently polar opposite cultural entities really took off beginning in 1968, as evangelical pastors and youth workers like Arthur Blessitt at His Place on Sunset Strip, David Berg's Lighthouse Club in Huntington Beach, Don Williams and his Hollywood Presbyterian Church-sponsored Salt Company coffeehouse, Tony and Susan Alamo's Alamo Foundation in Los Angeles, and, especially, Chuck Smith's "Little Country Church"—Calvary Chapel—in suburban Costa Mesa began to reach hundreds and then thousands of Los Angeles area youth.

By mid-1969, a full-blown Jesus People scene had taken root in the region running roughly from Santa Barbara down to San Diego and from Long Beach out to Riverside and San Bernardino. Communal Jesus Houses with names like 1st Corinthians House and Mansion Messiah housed converts from the drug culture, and scores of coffeehouses such as the Fire Escape in Stanton and the Lost Coin in San Diego hosted Bible studies and guitar-strumming Christian singers. A bevy of new Jesus music bands with names like Agape, Mustard Seed Faith, and the J.C. Power Outlet set up shop in parks, gymnasiums, and churches to seek out the lost and encourage the faithful. “Underground” Jesus papers like Duane Pederson’s *Hollywood Free Paper* served as evangelistic tracts and foldable, portable bulletin boards for various Jesus People hangouts and events. Promoting their causes, opinions, and enthusiasms much like their secular peers in the counterculture and New Left—but with a supercharged gospel-fueled intensity—the Jesus People produced posters, bumper stickers, buttons, and jewelry to announce their presence.

The presence of this new Jesus People scene in densely populated and culturally influential Southern California served to galvanize, connect, and promote the nascent Jesus movement. By late 1970, Jesus freaks were in evidence in Ontario and Texas and in such unhip places as Boise, Idaho, and Waterloo, Iowa. Jesus was beginning to pop up at every turn in youth culture, as attested by a sudden upsurge in religiously tinged pop music and the controversial release of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*. So when Billy Graham encountered hundreds of “One Way”-signifying (a raised index finger pointing heavenward) Jesus People at the Rose Bowl Parade on New Year’s Day 1971 and talked to reporters about it afterward, the nation’s press was ready to take the story and run with it.

Over the next several months, stories on the Jesus People appeared in *Life* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal*, in the nation’s newspapers and in local newscasts. Religious leaders, celebrities, and politicians shared their overwhelmingly favorable opinions on the movement.

By mid-June 1971, as *Time*’s cover story attested the movement’s arrival, journalists, pastors, and actual participants in the movement were in the midst of a mad rush to get books into print to capitalize on the Jesus People’s sudden celebrity. By the end of 1972, nearly fifty books had been published on, about, by, or somehow connected to the Jesus People.³ To salve the curiosity of academic-minded observers of the American religious and cultural scene, a few scholars—mostly social scientists—tried their hand at describing and understanding the nascent Jesus movement.⁴ But the most books were written by evangelical observers who were not only interested in reporting on the Jesus movement but also eager to promote the Jesus People as evidence of a generational movement to Christ, if not as the portent of a sweeping national revival. Here again Billy Graham proved

most influential. In his best-selling book *The Jesus Generation*, Graham wrote that he was “convinced that the ‘Jesus revolution’” was making a “profound impact on the youth of America” and that he even saw signs of its “spreading to other countries.” Although he felt that it represented “a minority” of American young people, he was persuaded that it was “growing rapidly.” Indeed, he felt “it may be the answer to the prayers of millions of Christians who have been praying for spiritual awakening.”⁵ But Graham seemed reticent when compared with others’ enthusiasm for what was happening. Two excited Southern Baptist observers provided a typically excited assessment of the movement:

The movement—for lack of a better word—is raging across the nation like a wind-driven brush fire, jumping any obstacle to break out—almost by spontaneous combustion—in dozens of places, in dozens of forms. . . . This is revival spirit unprogrammed, with no mission board strategies, no super-evangelists at the head.⁶

However, by the latter part of 1972, it is safe to say that very few people outside the bounds of the movement itself—or the larger realm of evangelicalism—were paying much attention to the Jesus People. Curiosity and fashion are fickle things, and by the fall of 1972, it was apparent that the public’s curiosity had been sated; stories about the Jesus movement had dwindled significantly. There had been a brief and notable upsurge in late June during Campus Crusade for Christ’s “EXPLO ’72” conference in Dallas, which attracted 85,000 young people for a week of seminars, rallies, and evangelizing and a crowd of nearly 200,000 for a daylong, conference-closing “Jesus Music Festival.” “Godstock,” as the press dubbed it, once again landed the Jesus People on the front page and gave them a slot on the evening news. But after the well-behaved, Jesus-cheering young people cleared out of Dallas, it was apparent that the media considered the Jesus Freaks to be yesterday’s news. Except for a tiny trickle of stories in evangelical magazines and a few late-to-the-market (mostly academic) books, the buzz over the Jesus People dried up during late 1972 and early 1973. By the fall of 1973, the evangelical monthly *Eternity* printed an article by Ronald Enroth that told the magazine’s readers that, despite the lack of media scrutiny, the Jesus People were, actually, still around and thriving.⁷

The Jesus People, in fact, did soldier on long after the media and academic spotlight had turned elsewhere. Indeed, the vast burst of publicity in 1971 had helped spread the movement across the country. Independent of the organized church, thousands of young people formed communes, fellowships, and coffeehouses; created their own Jesus Rock bands; and printed their own street papers to hand out on evangelistic forays. And the pastors and youth workers, whom sociologist Robert Ellwood described as leaping “with alacrity” in their desire to reap a harvest of young

souls by adapting the music, terminology, jargon, and accoutrements of the Jesus People, spread the movement into every nook and cranny of the United States.⁸

Eventually, however, the movement did peter out. By the late 1970s, many of its older, longtime members had moved on to school, marriage, jobs, families, and local church life. New musical styles and youth cultures arose that rejected the countercultural model from which the Jesus People emerged, and the movement—almost without exception—withered away. I witnessed much of this rise and fall firsthand as a high school senior and young adult living in the far northwest suburbs of Chicago in the 1970s. I—along with many of my peers—was influenced by the Jesus movement. My coming of age included attending Jesus rallies and concerts, going to coffeehouses, reading Jesus papers from across the United States, and flashing the One Way symbol at passing cars bedecked with Jesus stickers. At one point, I was even a twenty-one-year-old elder at a coffeehouse in my hometown of Round Lake, Illinois.

As the movement faded away in the late 1970s, I, along with my old Jesus People friends, moved on with our lives, with most being absorbed into the larger evangelical subculture, which by that time increasingly impinged on the national consciousness by dint of its massive media presence and its growing consternation over the nation's cultural and political drift. Eventually, I moved into the academic professions and in the late 1980s joined the staff of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE) at Wheaton College—Billy Graham's alma mater—in Wheaton, Illinois. There, as I helped implement conferences and study projects, I was inevitably asked about possible research interests. When I mentioned—among several possibilities—a desire to revisit the impact of the Jesus People movement from a critical distance, I was usually met with a look of glazed indifference: "There wasn't really much there," commented one historian; "it was just an ephemeral moment—a fad, don't you think?"

I thought not. Looking back on all the articles and books about the Jesus People movement that I had seen in my high school days, the photos of hundreds of young people gathered on California beaches for mass baptism services, the TV specials on the J-E-S-U-S—cheering crowds at the Cotton Bowl at EXPLO '72, and the extensive network of Jesus People groups, churches, coffeehouses, newspapers, and traveling Jesus Music artists in the Midwest in the early and mid-1970s, I believed that a significant religious movement had occurred. To my mind, the germ of the historical question had been set: what to make of this collision between old-time evangelical religion and 1960s American counterculture? Did the fact that it lasted as a coherent movement for only about a decade mean that the Jesus People were not much more than a faddish, ephemeral blip on the American religious landscape? Or was it representative of larger changes in American culture and religion that exerted a genuine, lasting influence on the shape of American evangelicalism?

All too often, we are tempted to dismiss or look down on the religious enthusiasms of youth culture as little more than a religious equivalent of the hula hoop or bellbottom pants.⁹ I suspect that the “youth factor” may be a key ingredient in why the Jesus People were so quickly forgotten. University of Massachusetts literature professor Nick Bromell, in a thoughtful book on the formative nature of 1960s rock culture, *Tomorrow Never Knows: Rock and Psychedelics in the 1960s*, perceives the problems with this mind-set toward youthful enthusiasms in writing about the international uber-phenomenon that was Beatlemania:

An extraordinary, indeed in the twentieth-century United States a singular phenomenon, it has never been taken seriously by historians of the '60s or of rock 'n' roll. The tendency has always been to be embarrassed by Beatlemania. Documentaries consistently present this moment in the Beatles' career with an awe that is also a sneer. While marveling that the four mop-tops could exert such orphic force, they pointedly condescend to the young teenagers, almost all of them girls, who pursued and panted, screamed and wept and fainted whenever the Beatles came within reach.¹⁰

Bromell notes, however, that to overlook Beatlemania is to absolutely miss what was going on during this period. “Those who were young at the time,” he writes, “will remember that Beatlemania was an essential precondition of the Beatles phenomenon” and all that followed. It was, he admits, “a ridiculous spectacle,” yet a force that existed despite “what other people thought” and—importantly—had “power to convert others to the Beatles cult.” Moreover, Bromell argues that the teenage girls of 1963–1964 “created Beatlemania . . . Beatlemania was a creation, not a Pavlovian reaction . . . they seized and made a world, taking power and space away from the control of adults.” Ultimately, he contends, it was those selfsame teenagers, “surrendered absolutely to their passions,” who were the driving force that “demolished so much of the rigid, sexless self-control” that typified 1950s American society.¹¹

Similarly, for those interested in the dynamics of American religion, the recent and contemporary trajectory of the larger evangelical movement, and the overarching evolution of American culture, to overlook the ecstatic religious fervor and bold, evangelistic enthusiasm of the Jesus People would be to miss a major part of the American evangelical Zeitgeist of the period from 1966 to 1976.

It is well past time for a reexamination of the Jesus movement's genesis, development, and lasting impact. Nearly all of the popular and scholarly examinations of the movement were written amid the publicity boom that surrounded the Jesus People during 1971 and 1972, and much of it was centered on the movement in California. To bring to light the postpublicity and non-Californian aspect of the

movement, this book grapples with four major sources that have been largely untapped to this point: the prolific written sources produced by the Jesus People in the years following 1971, including the dozens of Jesus People street papers from all across the country; the contemporary coverage of the movement and perceptions of its larger cultural (and pop culture) impact; retrospective interviews with a number of figures associated with the movement—including many from outside California—who provide insight into the long-term spread, development, and disappearance of the Jesus People;¹² and the written responses to a survey of participants in the movement put together by Jesus People historian and film documentarian David Di Sabatino and myself, hosted on the Internet from late 1997 to April 2004. I compiled the results and pulled them together in 2004 (see Appendix) for my doctoral dissertation, which constitutes the roots of this book. The survey was hardly scientific in its methodology, but it did pull in responses from more than 800 individuals. It is, to date, the largest attempt to gauge the scope, nature, involvement, and memories of the Jesus freaks themselves in this far-flung, decentralized, nationwide movement.

This study argues that the Jesus People movement is one of the most significant American religious phenomena of the postwar period. Much ink has been expended, both journalistically and academically, observing and explaining the dramatic resurgence and activism of evangelical Christians in the United States since the 1970s. However, there has been little attempt to explain the important role the Jesus People played in this evangelical renaissance. This book contends that we cannot begin to understand the resurgence of evangelicalism during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries without taking into account the crucial way in which the Jesus People movement shaped the development and direction of the larger American evangelical subculture.

The Jesus People movement was the culmination of a trend that had begun as far back as the 1920s and 1930s and produced the Youth for Christ movement during World War II. The desire to incorporate the countercultural Jesus People themselves and the acceptance (often grudging) of their taste for hippie fashions, music, and ambience in many ways sent the message that it was all right for evangelical kids to occupy their own cultural space distinct from that of their older evangelical brethren. In fact, the Jesus People movement marked the first time that American evangelical youth received a go-ahead to replicate the larger youth culture, albeit with proper evangelical respect for moral probity. This strategy of accommodation has since become a part of the evangelical landscape both in the United States and, increasingly, in other areas of the globe where American evangelical styles are influential.

Closely related to the matter of youth culture was the manner in which the Jesus People impacted the evangelical relationship to popular culture as a whole. The enthusiasm they showed for buttons, bumper stickers, Bible covers,

posters, crosses, and other “Jesus Junque” was but one aspect of the Jesus People’s friendliness toward popular culture. Part and parcel of the Baby Boom television-immersed generation, the Jesus People moved and breathed within the surrounding culture like fish in water. As a matter of course, they incorporated their pop culture sensibilities into their religious lives, in the process constituting the leading edge of what has proven to be a mortal blow to traditional evangelical abstention from “worldly entertainments.”

This pop culture-friendly aspect of the Jesus People movement had tremendous implications for the role of music within the evangelical subculture. First, the Jesus People’s enthusiasm for pop and rock music-based idioms brought forth Jesus Rock and, in so doing, marked the beginnings of what would eventually become the Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) industry, which has become a major component of American evangelicalism’s mass media and bookstore infrastructure, as well as a significant aspect of everyday life and devotion, spawning radio station formats, summer festivals, Web sites, and the like.

But the emergence of CCM is just part of the larger musical impact of the Jesus People movement. The Jesus People’s taste for simple, folk-based melodies and scriptural passages in their corporate worship has had a profound impact on the worship of American evangelical congregations. The minstrels of the Jesus People movement were major architects of what has become known as praise and worship music. The object of scorn for many traditionalists and church music professionals, the popularity of this music has, in turn, become the focus of the infamous “worship wars,” which have embroiled thousands of American Protestant congregations since the 1980s.¹³

The rise of these new styles of evangelical music, easily accessible to anyone familiar with the larger popular culture, bespeaks another way in which the Jesus People movement has impacted American evangelicalism: the rise of the seeker-sensitive megachurch. Two of the prototypes for the megachurch model—the original Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, and Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois—both trace their roots (albeit very differently) to the days of the Jesus People movement. Both have become influential models and planters of similarly styled churches. The casual, come-as-you-are informality and attachment to up-tempo contemporary music and pop culture that are the staple of this dynamic new ecclesiastical form are a direct result of the Jesus People movement.

Yet the largest impact of the Jesus Revolution was greater than the sum of its parts. Tens of thousands of youth from outside evangelical ranks found the Jesus movement to be a congenial entry point into the larger American evangelical subculture. More important, millions of evangelical youth were able to negotiate a truce between the demands of their own religious heritage and the allure of secular youth culture.

Indeed, the much-discussed resurgence of evangelicalism that became apparent by the 1980s probably could not have occurred, had the movement not taken place.

In his epic *A Religious History of the American People*—published during the very height of the Jesus Movement in 1972—historian Sydney Ahlstrom diligently tucked the Jesus People into a long, last-minute, discursive footnote near the end of the book in a chapter titled “The Turbulent Sixties.” Amid his recounting of the sensationalism, radicalism, and strife of that period, he cast the Jesus People as something of a breath of youthful fresh air for both those in their generation and their older contemporaries in evangelical churches. But Ahlstrom, seasoned historian that he was, knew that it was folly to attempt to forecast their ultimate historical impact:

...their long-term significance cannot be known. Whether they should be considered in a footnote (as here) is a question which only the future will answer. To grim, tormented times they brought the blessings of joy and love; but there is no apparent reason for seeing them as an exception to the larger generalizations attempted in this chapter. Yet surprises are the stuff of history.¹⁴

The purpose of this book is to show that the Jesus People—strangely forgotten in public memory and neglected and largely dismissed by scholars of recent American culture and religion—did indeed turn out to be one of those fascinating surprises that are the stuff of history.

“Jesus Knocked Me off My Metaphysical Ass”

THE FIRST “JESUS FREAKS” IN
SAN FRANCISCO

IN EARLY JULY 1961, more than 10,000 evangelical teenagers and several hundred adult workers from across the United States and Canada descended on the old Billy Sunday campgrounds in Winona Lake, Indiana, for Youth for Christ’s (YFC) seventeenth annual convention. For two weeks, the delegates maintained a hectic regimen of early morning devotions (“quiet time”), swimming, Bible studies, baseball, prayer meetings, and barbecues in the heat and humidity of the Midwestern summer. In the evenings, the campers assembled to hear various youth evangelists, take in YFC’s talent contests, and cheer on the finals of the YFC Bible Quiz, which pitted the very best teams from around North America in a furious competition combining Bible memorization and knowledge with game show theatrics. After the meeting, many of the kids headed over to the Eskimo Inn, the air-conditioned game room and soda shop, for ice cream and conversation or perhaps a game of Ping-Pong.¹

Out of the thousands of gathered youth at Winona Lake that summer, if there was one teenager who was the star, it had to be TAMI. A slim, stylishly dressed, attractive blond with her hair in the de rigueur ponytail, TAMI’s movements during the meeting were an event ready to happen. She made her grand entrance like a parade queen, perched on the back of a white convertible and greeted by a crowd of her peers. Later, she met YFC President Ted W. Engstrom in front of the assembled delegates and then had center stage all to herself as she shared her testimony of how she had come to follow Christ. TAMI, the daughter of another YFC executive was, of course, a living, walking YFC public relations campaign that borrowed from secular ad strategies and teen magazines’ attempts to create an “everyteen” to hawk their wares. “Teens Are Most Important” (TAMI) was YFC’s attempt to create a symbolic “every YFCer”—someone who “typifies everything a Christian teenager should be” for the 1960s, YFC’s self-proclaimed “decade of destiny.”²

In many ways, the idyllic, early-1960s, middle-class evangelical world of TAMI and the YFC convention mirrored culturewide perceptions of the state of American youth. Going into the 1960s, there was little indication of the cultural turmoil that would swarm around a sizable segment of the Baby Boom generation later in the decade. In fact, if the experts were to be believed, the rising generation of adults-to-be appeared to fit in quite nicely with their elders' values and expectations. That was certainly the thrust of a late-1961 survey of American youth by pollsters George Gallup and Evan Hill, published—appropriately enough—in the ultimate journalistic symbol of wholesome consensus, the *Saturday Evening Post*. Their research indicated that American teenagers were happy with their world, if not downright complacent. "The typical American youth shows few symptoms of frustration," they wrote, "and is most unlikely to rebel or involve himself in crusades of any kind."³ In fact, the typical youth demonstrated "little spirit of adventure"; most simply wanted "a little ranch house, an inexpensive new car, a job with a large company, and a chance to watch TV each evening after the smiling children are asleep in bed."⁴ What concerns there were, according to Gallup and Hill, centered on the Cold War and the effectiveness of educational and religious efforts. Even so, the pollsters concluded that American youth appeared very favorably inclined toward religion and tended toward the traditional at that: more than 75% firmly believed in God, and nearly two-thirds believed that the Bible was "completely true."⁵

Gallup and Hill's findings were very similar to those put forth in a 1962 article by Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons. "The general orientation," he said of American teenagers, appeared to be "an eagerness... to accept higher orders of respectability" and a "readiness to work within the system."⁶ Two years later, he found the situation to be much the same. Indeed, he believed that youth were generally becoming more conservative and, perhaps most important, seemed more amenable to adult control.⁷ Parsons's sentiments were echoed in a statement by one university administrator who opined in the early 1960s that "employers will love this generation.... They are going to be easy to handle."⁸

In retrospect, early '60s cultural observers like Parsons and the Gallup organization were just as wrong as that college administrator—Clark Kerr, chancellor and president of the University of California at Berkeley—in most of their observations about the direction of American youth. Fueled by an expanding roster of cultural, social, and political crises, a growing segment of young people began to express their dissatisfaction with the system and with American values. The resultant counterculture would shake the foundations of American life.

The counterculture had its origins in the antiestablishment, hedonistic attitudes of the '50s Beat movement. Fed up with what they perceived as the sterile conformity and consumerism of postwar middle-class life, a sizable number of American youth began to drop out of the rat race of school and career to seek fulfillment through personal and communal relationships, drugs, sex, music, and

esoteric spirituality. With a history of bohemian and Beat-friendly neighborhoods, San Francisco, particularly its Haight-Ashbury district, became the first major outpost of this developing counterculture in late 1966 and during 1967's famous Summer of Love. Surprisingly, within the initial flowering of San Francisco's hippie community, an evangelical Christian strain of the counterculture—what would come to be known as the Jesus movement—first appeared in the persons of a converted bohemian couple from Sausalito with an oftentimes difficult relationship with a square Baptist pastor.

Pastor MacDonald, Meet the Wises

John MacDonald was a native of Stockton, California, and a classmate of Billy Graham's at fundamentalist Wheaton College in Illinois (class of '43). Following degrees at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and the American Baptist seminary in Berkeley, California, MacDonald pastored several churches in Northern California. In 1960, he was chosen as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Mill Valley, California, a moderate-sized church of about 200.⁹ The community was "arty," as MacDonald described it, and "close to some of the other high-toned residential communities" in wealthy Marin County, just north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge (figure 1.1).¹⁰

Sometime in late 1964, Elizabeth "Liz" Wise began to attend the church. Raised in Auburn, California (about thirty miles east of Sacramento), in a pious family that attended the First Baptist Church of Auburn, she had undergone a religious conversion at the age of eleven at a Bible conference at the Mount Hermon campgrounds near Santa Cruz. Pastor MacDonald and his conservative congregation welcomed the quiet young woman, oblivious to the fact that she often attended services while coming down from the previous night's acid trip. As months passed, she continued to come back, and she asked the people at the church to pray for her husband, Warren "Ted" Wise.¹¹

As it turned out, Ted and Elizabeth Wise were part of the vanguard of Beat-sympathetic free spirits that predated the 1967 Summer of Love in the Bay area.¹² Ted Wise was a native of Lakeport, California, a small community on the shores of Clear Lake, about seventy miles north of San Francisco. When he was a child, his family had moved to Auburn, where he nourished an interest in art and literature until joining the Navy in the mid-1950s. While serving aboard a Navy tender in the Pacific Fleet, he learned how to work with canvas and began learning the sail-making trade; on shore leave in Japan, he experimented with marijuana and heroin. Even as a child, Wise had been fascinated by the idea of drug use; he cherished a magazine photo of a Mexican peasant with an array of mind-bending mushrooms. As a teenager, he was captivated by the 1955 Frank Sinatra film *The Man with the Golden Arm*, which he remembered made heroin addiction look



FIGURE 1.1 John MacDonald (r.), Pastor of First Baptist Church, Mill Valley, CA, and family ca. 1960.

Courtesy of Mary Ann MacDonald.

attractive: “All you had to do was roll around in agony a bit... the worst thing that could happen to me would be to meet Kim Novak.”¹³

Upon returning home to Auburn, Wise enrolled at Sierra College. While he continued to nurse his interest in the “jazz musician’s smoking preference,” he met Elizabeth, a young woman who, like Ted, was interested in art and poetry. At Sierra, they were devotees of an English professor with connections to the Beat scene in San Francisco. The allure of the exciting artistic and literary scene there prompted Elizabeth to move to San Francisco in the summer of 1959 in hopes of starting a career in modeling; Ted followed her shortly thereafter and enrolled in the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. Once in town, they quickly moved into a Beat commune on O’Farrell Street in the city’s North Beach bohemian enclave. “Our basic identity,” Wise recalled, “was as beatniks.” Life in the commune proved a constant source of new ideas and fascinating discussions, as artists, academics, and literary figures such as Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti turned up regularly at dinnertime.¹⁴

In 1961, the couple married, and a daughter was born. To make ends meet for his new family, Ted found work in the boatyards, eventually landing at Sutter Sail in the “boho-friendly” village of Sausalito, and the Wises relocated across the bay. Throughout this period, drug use loomed large in the Wises’ lives. Marijuana was the foundational drug of choice (George Hunter—leader of the legendary San Francisco band the Charlatans—was one of Ted’s primary connections for pot), but mushrooms of all sorts, mescaline/peyote (“it was amazing”), and

amphetamines were all on the menu. But the imagination of many of the people in Wise's circle was fired by what they were hearing about the wonders of LSD, and Wise was no exception. After a failed attempt to secure some of the new mystery drug from "Chemical Buddha" (British philosopher turned Bay Area Zen Buddhist maven, Alan Watts), in late 1964, Wise and friends finally scored a batch of prime black-market LSD that came straight from the labs of Swiss pharmaceutical manufacturer Sandoz. His first trip was an epiphany: "We tried it, and it was a phenomenal experience," Wise recalled. LSD use became routine; often he would go to work high on acid. "Small doses were very interesting," he remembered, noting that after the initial score, supply was not a problem: "We had a lot of it."¹⁵

By 1965, Ted Wise's life seemed to be shaping up just to his liking. From his job, he made connections with the owners of racing boats and yachts and spent much of his time on weekends as a crew member for his bosses' customers. Plying a craft he loved, hanging out with interesting people, and using drugs—everything in life seemed to be coming up roses. All in all, he lived what he later claimed "on the outside looked like the coolest life one could have," with a mix of friends that included "beats to yachtsman [*sic*], jazz musicians, artists and poets . . . America's Cup captains . . . Yogis, Buddhists, Anarchists, [and] Communists."¹⁶

The internal reality, however, was apparently less than cool. Wise was regularly working long hours, going out carousing with friends, and sleeping with a succession of girlfriends, while Liz stayed at home with a family that soon included two children.¹⁷ Knowledge of Ted's philandering caused increasingly rancorous relations within the marriage—later, Wise even admitted to plotting to murder Liz.¹⁸ Mercifully, on one of his frequent LSD trips, he began to be troubled by insights into his own character or, more precisely, his lack thereof. He became increasingly convinced that, at bottom, Ted Wise was a self-centered liar, cheat, and thief; as he put it: "I went into the palace looking for the prince on the throne but discovered only the rat in the basement."¹⁹

Ted, whose exposure to Christianity thus far had been a couple of visits to church with his grandmother and a few mandatory chapel services in the Navy, was antagonistic when his wife began to attend services at First Baptist in Mill Valley, but he noted, "She came back from church just glowing." Eventually, he decided to read the New Testament: "I didn't want to be hypocritical about it; I was always putting it down but [had] never actually read it."²⁰ What he found, however, surpassed his mild expectations of finding a new role model in Jesus Christ. "I just got fascinated by Jesus," Wise recalled. As he read, he was particularly impressed by Christ's claims to divinity and Paul's assertions that all people had a need to respond individually to his invitation to be born again. Convinced that Jesus was God, Wise later described his experience as a Paul-like conversion: "While on my way to my own Damascus . . . I found it necessary to cry out to God to save my life

in every sense of the word. Jesus knocked me off my metaphysical ass. I could choose Him or literally suffer a fate worse than death.”²¹

Having embraced Christianity, Wise felt his next step was something of a heavenly legal requirement—making a public acknowledgment of his belief in Jesus. One Saturday night in early 1965, he and Liz took a healthy hit of LSD and traveled to Berkeley to visit an old friend, Danny Sands. At the party, they found a house full of pot-smoking people plundering a major score Sands had just brought north from Mexico. Isolated in the midst of the mellow, marijuana-imbibing crowd, Wise began announcing that “Jesus is my Lord,” much to his fellow partiers’ discomfort and befuddlement. Leaving the party, Wise, who had driven before while on LSD, experienced a nightmare of a ride back across the Bay Bridge. “It seemed like the bridge was going straight up,” Wise remembered years later. Even more disconcerting, he claimed, “it seemed like I was out of the car, somewhere else, [but] conscious of myself still driving the car.” Hearing demonic voices urging him to “Flee!” he prayed and was rationalizing his past behavior when he claimed he heard an audible angelic voice telling him that excuse making was inappropriate when speaking to God: his best option would be to “Shut up!” Eventually, the Wises returned home, and Ted believed that God had rescued him—and had audibly ordered him to attend church the next morning.²²

Come Sunday morning, the more distressing effects of the trip had worn off, but at another level things had gotten worse; he now felt that in addition to having a Sabbath requirement to head over to First Baptist in Mill Valley, the Lord was telling him to say something—the same thing, in fact—to everyone he met that day: “He is back!” Unable to argue himself out of the conviction that God was really talking to him, he and Liz drove to church. At the prescribed “invitation” time, Ted got up from his seat, walked forward to the front of the church, and made his declaration that “Jesus is Lord.” One of his friends later recalled Wise’s description of what happened next:

They were all upset....This was not in the program. The pastor, John MacDonald, was completely surprised and decided to shake my hand. And I said, “He is back.” And John said, “That’s nice.” Then I talked to the elders and told them that “He is back.” They stood there and looked at me strangely....Not a word....The next weird thing that happened after that I told the whole [story of the last two days] to John MacDonald, verbatim, because he wanted to know how I became a Christian. He didn’t know what to do about it. Like “Wait a minute, is this thing real or not,” because he knew I was high. God would [have been] hard-pressed to find a time [when] I wasn’t high. I had already read that we are saved in the midst of our sins. It was fine with me that he caught me high and not fornicating. I was in serious trouble with some serious circumstances, and God answered my prayers to a greater degree than I had anticipated.²³

Although the Baptists were just as befuddled and discomfited by Wise as the partygoers in Berkeley had been the night before, the Sunday morning commitment was not the one-off response to an acid trip gone bad. In the months that followed, Wise shed his extracurricular lady friends, met regularly for personal Bible study with MacDonald, and kept on getting high (“no ‘thou shall nots’ about that”). After completing the prescribed course of instruction for baptism, Ted Wise, the drug-taking beatnik, had become, as he later said, a “dues-paying, meeting-going, praying-out-loud member” of the First Baptist Church.²⁴

As Wise set out on this new personal course, he began to tell his friends of his faith and invite them to church. Many thought he had lost his mind, but others were intrigued by the new peace that had descended on the Wise household. As a result, some of them—much to the surprise or horror of many in the staid congregation—began accepting Wise’s invitation to visit the Mill Valley Baptists.²⁵ While the congregation extended an official welcome to the visitors, many within Pastor MacDonald’s tradition-minded flock were having difficulty adjusting to his growing ministry among Marin County’s free spirits—the presence of Ted Wise often proved to be a difficult exercise in cross-cultural Christian brotherhood. Much of the conflict stemmed from Wise’s readiness to ask questions that skirted assumptions and Sunday school pieties held unquestioningly by many of his new evangelical brethren. Writing in 1970, MacDonald described Wise’s hyperparticipation at Bible studies and in Sunday school classes:

Ted was not simply one to ask questions and be satisfied with any answer. If he didn’t understand a statement, he could not drop the matter. . . . We were made aware of his utter newness in things biblical and, perhaps more to the point, in current evangelical vocabulary. . . . From the beginning, Ted’s questions were mixed with opinions. He brought with him, out of . . . psychedelphia [*sic*] many assumptions about reality. A curt dismissal of some Old Testament passage might be his impulse at the moment. More often it was a dogmatic statement of what a given passage must mean. Very frequently it was a proclamation of pure idealism.²⁶

For the veteran saints of First Baptist, the give-and-take between Wise and MacDonald and other church members often proved to be little less than “an interruption—even an exasperation. . . . [Ted’s] combination of persistence and sharpness was . . . capable of rankling other sensitive souls” in the church. MacDonald observed that the whole process often left many in his congregation feeling “that the sacred had been profaned.”²⁷ One particularly awkward moment came one Sunday morning when Wise brought a friend with him who had served six months in prison for some minor offense. During the course of his sermon MacDonald began excoriating people who had landed in jail,

opining that they deserved the punishment they received. At about that point, Wise recalled, the guest, whose "experience had not been that God had been running the jails," stood up and told MacDonald, "Brother, you're full of shit!" and walked out.²⁸

Between such incidents and Wise's interaction with the pastor, MacDonald later estimated that perhaps as many as half of his original congregation eventually left the church because of the hip newcomers who eventually made their way to First Baptist.²⁹ But while MacDonald was sensitive to his members' frustrations and was often irritated by Wise's outspoken ways and criticisms of the ingrained tradition of business as usual, he realized that there was something there that he could not easily dismiss:

His idealism stemmed in part from his old hippie outlook, and in part from the fact that the Bible was new to him. What he read, he accepted at face value and he offered no resistance. . . . Most refreshing was his readiness to do whatever he understood God to be requiring of him. Having no buildup of rationalizing Scripture to where it could not get a response, he frequently came up with valid insights which the rest of us would miss.³⁰

Moreover, he also realized that the irritation factor was cutting both ways: Wise and his friends had trouble understanding how longtime, self-professed Christians could read the Bible and be unmoved by Christ's teachings or so thoroughly miss the point of a Scripture passage. "He couldn't understand why others didn't get the message," MacDonald wrote. "Continually I found myself pleading with him to be more patient, and at the same time, realistic."³¹

For his part, Wise found MacDonald and the straight, suburban, middle-class folks at First Baptist every bit as frustrating as they found him. Reminiscing years later, Wise recalled thinking that "these church folks were not at all like the people I had read about in the Book of Acts." Particularly perplexing were the economic dynamics he saw at play in First Baptist. Wise remembered: "They didn't live together or share much of anything, they didn't hold everything in common or give to each as any had in need. They had a tough time coughing up the salary for their one pastor."³²

Although the Wises genuinely liked MacDonald and the various church folk they met, they could see no reason to sever their connections with their friends in the bohemian, fast-developing-into-hippie, scene in San Francisco. And in that regard, the couple soon found an outlet for a hipper take on the Christian faith while keeping their attachment to MacDonald's church. Within the Wises' immediate circle, three other couples began to be particularly influenced by their enthusiasm for the Bible and Christianity and, by late 1966, had begun to form the nucleus of a Bay Area group of bohemian evangelical Christians.

A Small Circle of Friends

Jim and Judy Doop (pronounced “Dopp”) had first run into Ted and Liz at a neighborhood party and had been intrigued at the way the hip Wise made his newfound Christian “trip” sound relevant and exciting. A native of Des Moines, Iowa, Jim Doop had served a stint in the Marines (primarily as a trombonist in the Marine Corps Band) and was attending Grandview College in Des Moines when he met Judy Marshall, a girl from an upper-class Presbyterian family who once had harbored a desire to become a missionary. Married after a three-month whirlwind courtship in 1959, they headed out to California in 1961 and ended up in Berkeley, where Jim worked for Mills Women’s College. Hoping to pursue his dream of becoming a stand-up comedian in the mold of Lenny Bruce, Jim began working in clubs and strip joints on the weekend as “Jimmy Sand” and picked up a fairly solid weekday job as a full-time factory sales rep for the Philip Morris Tobacco Company. On the personal side, the Doops’ life was a bizarre mix of middle-American respectability and California bohemian hip. Regular attendees at a local Lutheran church—despite the fact that Jim was fairly doubtful about there even being a God—and social hosts for the North Carolina delegation during the 1964 Republican convention (Jim Doop was an admirer of Barry Goldwater), they indulged their wild side with a steady stream of cocktails and were early members of Berkeley’s Sexual Freedom League.³³

This bifurcated lifestyle began to grate on their marriage. “[We were] torn in two directions, free but not free,” remembered Judy Doop Marshall.³⁴ As a result, they found themselves more than open to both the allure of the Bay Area drug scene and a desire for spiritual truth. Both of those paths intersected in their new friends, the Wises. Jim Doop looked to Ted Wise as something of a father figure, respecting both his biblically infused wisdom and his knowledge of drugs—the latter admiration won by dint of Wise’s tales of his own numerous excursions on acid. After experimenting with LSD a couple of times, Doop dropped by Wise’s house one evening in October 1966 to visit and smoke some joints. During their conversation, he reported mixed results with his first encounters with acid—his first trip had been exhilarating, but his second had been depressing. Doop remembered years later that Wise then leaned close to him and shared his own revelatory insight about “the Rat that lives in the cellar of our soul.” Oddly affected by the marijuana, Doop lay down on the floor and began to contemplate Wise’s words with Bob Dylan’s recently released album *Blonde on Blonde* playing in the background. While he lay there, he began to meditate on his spiritual condition and came to a profound realization:

I finally got it. I was the rat. And it was my soul that was repenting. I thought to myself, “Maybe there is a God.” I hadn’t considered that possibility in a number of years, when suddenly a peace came over me, my breathing became easier. My chest became lighter. And I said, letting out

a long sigh, “Oh, Father, forgive me.” Immediately the entire weight that was on my chest was gone, and the rush of relief from my heart was one of exultation. . . . My eyes were closed and there was a bright light in front of me. I felt such happiness. I had never known anything like this before. . . .

I understood in an instant that God is my Father and I am His child. . . . The joy, the peace and love that I had on my heart for God and others was just incredible. Never had I realized anything comparable before. . . .³⁵

In the days and weeks that followed, Doop’s appetite for the Bible was insatiable. “My mind was being blown away by the Bible’s brilliance, by its simplicity,” he recalled; “the words of Jesus just enlarged my love for God and for mankind. . . . I felt so cool that I [started telling] my friends I was dropping LSD, smoking marijuana and that Jesus Christ was my Lord. . . . I had turned on, tuned in, and Christ was leading me out.”³⁶ The new spiritual Jim Doop proved very popular in his own household. When he finally sat down with Judy and explained the changes that had come over him, she was ecstatic. Happily, she told him that she, too, had been moving back toward God and that this was an answer to her prayers.³⁷

As the Doops embarked on their new odyssey with Jesus, their close friends the Heefners were experiencing their own existential and marital crises. A childhood friend of Jim Doop’s, Steve Heefner had regularly attended Sunday school and church camps while growing up in Des Moines and had even taken in a late ’50s Oral Roberts campaign in the area. He had gone on to attend Drake University, where he graduated with a degree in journalism. While at Drake, he met and married Sandi Buckberg, a Chicago-born sociology major from a Catholic background.³⁸

Blessed with a rich, sonorous voice, Steve had begun working part-time while in college as a radio announcer at a local Des Moines station and, following graduation, snared a job as a disc jockey at KIOA. Over the next few years, Heefner worked his way up the radio market ladder, hopscotching to jobs in Madison, Wisconsin; Peoria, Illinois; and Milwaukee, where he became “Steve O’Shea” because his program director at WOKY insisted on having Irish names for all his djs. On New Year’s Day 1965, O’Shea started a job at KNBR, the NBC affiliate in San Francisco. The next year, he landed the six to nine evening slot at the city’s major pop station, KFRC (“The Big 610”), where he also hosted *Perspective*, a weekend talk show that featured interviews with people like celebrity media witch Sybil Leek, Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey, author and Merry Prankster leader Ken Kesey, and LSD gurus Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (later Ram Dass).³⁹

Heefner/O’Shea’s status as a rock dj—he emceed the Rolling Stones’ 1966 concert at the Cow Palace—made him a genuine celebrity in the Bay Area, and he frequently hobnobbed with the musicians in the developing San Francisco music scene. He knew the guys in the Grateful Dead and Quicksilver Messenger Service well, danced with Joan Baez at an after-concert party, sat with the Stones’ Brian Jones

at the Monterey Pop Festival, and was particularly good friends with Janis Joplin, a nine-time guest on his *Perspectives* show. When Jimi Hendrix came to town to play the Fillmore West, they hung out, and Hendrix sat in the studio answering the station's song request line. The Heefners were living the mid-'60s California, rock 'n' roll good life—replete with a “\$20,000 salary” for his disc jockeying, a new Ford Mustang, a green 1960 Jaguar sports coupe, and a tony “\$28,000 home in Mill Valley.”⁴⁰

Despite the flirtation with fame and fortune, Steve Heefner was a pretty miserable man. He was becoming increasingly fed up with the internal politics in major-market rock radio, and his marriage was not going well. He had a girlfriend on the side, and his wife knew about her—no recipe for household peace. As he searched around for some sort of answer to his personal sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction, his acquaintance with Ted Wise became a deeper friendship. Sandi Heefner had first met the “very interesting, artsy-looking” Liz Wise at a local Welcome Wagon type of event when the Heefners moved into Marin County. Becoming social friends at first (the Heefner holiday party where the Doops first met the Wises was also the Heefners' introduction to the Wises as a couple), he found Wise's Scripture-filled conversation increasingly more intriguing—so much so that for the first edition of his *Perspectives* show on KFRC, his roundtable guests were rock promoter Bill Graham of Fillmore West fame; Grace Slick, the lead singer of the Jefferson Airplane; and Ted Wise. Wise proved to be the ideal evangelist for someone in Heefner's shoes—mired in a chaotic personal life, drawn to the freedom and honesty of the emerging hip scene, and yet impressed with the message of Christianity. In addition to marijuana-mellowed conversations with Wise, Heefner attended several Bible studies at his house.⁴¹

Against that background, a strange incident on Saturday, October 31, in the downtown financial district had a profound impact on his perception of what was going on around him. Ken Kesey was the guest on *Perspectives* that day, talking about his “Acid Test Graduation” party that would be held that night at the Winterland Ball Room. After the interview, one of the guys in Kesey's Merry Pranksters group furtively pulled “O'Shea” off to the side. Heefner asked the Prankster what this whole thing was really all about; he bent down and in a whisper told him: “Jesus Christ, man. And he's gathering his church in this period and a lot of people are going to be coming to the Lord... that's what's happening, man.” With this cryptic revelation added to the things on his mind, Heefner went to Wise to ask him to shepherd his first acid trip. As a favor to his friend (“I thought if [he] was going to take LSD it was better that [he] took it with me,” Wise recalled), he agreed to accompany him on his inaugural experience with psychedelics. Shortly thereafter, Heefner took his first acid trip in the company of Ted Wise. Afterward, he recalled that it was immediately after coming off acid that he had seen the light: “All I know is that when I took LSD I was a seeker, and when I woke up the next morning I was a Christian!” This was not your grandmother's Sawdust Trail.⁴²

Dan and Sandy Sands were the last couple in the Wises' circle to sign on board with Christianity, but Danny Sands had known Ted and Liz Wise since their days at Sierra College. The son of an ex-Marine, Sands had been raised in Costa Mesa in Orange County and entered the Navy after high school, where he was transferred from a gunnery crew to a desk job after telling his commanding officer that he really was quite uncomfortable with war. After being discharged, he followed an attraction to the Northern California Beat scene—stoked by readings of Alan Ginsberg's *Howl!* and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Coney Island of the Mind*—and ended up in Auburn at Sierra College. His love of literature ingratiated the reticent, soft-spoken man to Wise (who introduced Sands to marijuana), and the pair became close friends after a Jack Kerouac-inspired cross-country trip to Miami. But Wise did not share Sands's bent toward radical politics: “He thought the communists were conservative, he was so far left,” Wise remembered; “he was an anarchist and serious about it.”⁴³

After moving to the Bay Area in 1961, Sands met a student at San Jose State named Sandra “Sandy” Palmer, a Washington state native who had grown up in Cloverdale, California. The two of them were involved in a ban-the-bomb activist commune called Acts for Peace. They eventually married and left the commune; by the time the Wises had embraced Christianity, the Sandeses had two children, and Danny was living in an old ramshackle house in a mostly black Berkeley neighborhood, working as a painter, and stealing car parts and hustling drugs on the side.⁴⁴

By the time Ted Wise had converted to Christianity, he was beginning to see Sands as a major drag on his life: “I wanted him out of my life; I was tired of [his] direction, his morality, everything.” Still, the friendship hung on, with Wise trying to evangelize Sands, and Sands trying to get Wise to reconsider his new faith. But during a long, late-night conversation in early 1967—fueled by some speed (amphetamines) provided by one of Wise's coworkers at the sail shop—Sands finally came to the realization that he was ready to claim “Jesus as his Lord and Savior.” Sands's wife was initially less than thrilled but came around shortly and became, as she noted years later, “totally into it!”⁴⁵ A nucleus of hip, Bible-fixated, evangelically inclined Christians had been formed and was ready to start spreading their beliefs among their friends and contacts in the emerging counterculture—the first manifestation of what would eventually become known as the Jesus People movement.

Holding All Things in Common—Christian Communal Living?

Like Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, the Grateful Dead, the Diggers, Hells Angels, and 20,000 or so other old Beats, young rebels, and free spirits, Ted and Elizabeth Wise—members of the First Baptist Church of Mill Valley—were in attendance at the famous gathering of the tribes that took place at the Human Be-In at San

San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. Amid all the hip revelers arrayed in their face paint and colorful costumes, the Wises had their own little tribe, a party of eight adults and a herd of children camped out on an old silken spinnaker, picnicking and enjoying the day's speeches, music, and general good-time vibes. They avoided the acid that was making the rounds that day but freely partook of the marijuana joints that were circulating in the crowd. Jim Doop looked back on that day many years later and remembered that it was like nothing he had ever experienced:

There was a wonderful feeling of love with all these people. I had never been in such a positive atmosphere with people like this in my life. Nobody scowled at anybody. Everyone just smiled at each other, and greeted one another. I had never felt love from strangers before.⁴⁶

But for most of the adults in the Wise tribe that day, the Human Be-In portended an even deeper reality than the heady mixture of cultural ferment and Aquarian optimism that fueled the rest of the throng. Doop recalled that as he sat in the sunshine and listened to the music of the Grateful Dead, there could be only one metaphor that got at what he was feeling: "I expected Christ to return at any moment. I couldn't believe that it could get any better than this." By the time the Jefferson Airplane had started their set, Doop remembered, "I thought I was pretty close to heaven. I just didn't know that it was available to experience anything so spiritually high. . . . I was so grateful to God for allowing me to be a part of this phenomenon."⁴⁷

By this time, the Wises and their hip, born-again friends were well on their way to forming a Christian commune. Their enthusiasm was fueled by a number of factors. First was the increasingly ubiquitous experimentation with communal living within the developing counterculture. Second were their own readings of verses 44 and 45 of chapter 2 in the Acts of the Apostles describing the early days of the Church in Jerusalem: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."⁴⁸ If the Bible said it, that was good enough reason to experience it. A statement made years later by Ted Wise got at the operating assumption that was beginning to drive much of their thought as they read this passage: "[we] agreed on one thing: that we ought to live out the Book of Acts like a script."⁴⁹

Within the group's inner dynamic, Dan Sands led the charge for communal living, fueled by his readings of the New Testament, his experience in the Acts of Peace community, and a course on communal living he had just taken at a free college in Berkeley. Most of the rest of the group was also bullish on the idea; Ted Wise was more reticent about the endeavor but, given the moment, was willing to go along with the rest of the group. But the most determinedly resistant to the setup was Sandi Heefner. She had pretty much written off her Catholic

upbringing and, while positive about the new spiritual direction of her husband and the others, was taking a lot of the God-talk she had been hearing with a grain of salt. Moreover, her first exposure to the Sands's ruffled brand of housekeeping (at a potluck dinner during which combining households was a major topic of conversation) only steeled her resolve to protect her family's lifestyle.⁵⁰

In March 1967, Sands, newly inspired by Jesus' challenge to the rich young ruler in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, sold, or put into storage, most of his belongings. Packing up an old 1954 Dodge station wagon for an extended camping trip, he loaded up his wife and daughters and set off roaming the state of California. Although part of his mission was evangelistic, a major component of it was his conviction that if God meant for them to have a Christian commune, some prime spot—or some chance meeting—would show up during his sojourn on the road. Several properties did come to their attention, but no immediate possibilities turned up.⁵¹

Within several weeks after the Sandeses set off on the road, the drive toward communal living was given a practical boost from the forces of economic reality. In April 1967, Steve and Sandi Heefner decided to walk away from a rent-to-buy arrangement they had on their Mill Valley house and moved in with their long-time friends, the Doops. At about the same time, Ted Wise was fired from his sail-making job. The root of the problem was his conversion. One source of friction was a foreman who had formerly been his closest friend in the shop; alienated from his mother's Pentecostalism, he had reacted extremely negatively to Wise's newfound Christianity. Another bone of contention was Wise's decision to resign his membership at a prestigious yacht club—a membership he had obtained through his employer's influence. Wise reasoned that his new Christian loyalties didn't leave him enough time and money to belong to a yacht club. He sent a letter of resignation explaining his new priorities and asking to be removed from membership. Unfortunately for Wise, the letter left the members of the club feeling that he thought they were a bunch of heathens. Confronted by his embarrassed boss, Wise claimed that they reached a mutual parting of the ways.⁵²

As the story of his firing was translated to MacDonald, however, it seemed like persecution for the gospel's sake.⁵³ Sympathetic to Wise's plight, the church stepped in with some financial help and tried to find him another job—until MacDonald had a chat with Wise's former boss. According to MacDonald, he maintained that Wise had been fired because of all the time he was devoting to evangelizing coworkers, deliverymen, and customers and claimed that he had "exercised much patience...bending over backward" to accommodate his sailmaker's religious enthusiasm. Nonetheless, the minister was told that Wise had become "so aggressively argumentative" that not only was his own work being disrupted but also the whole shop was being affected. Wise's case was not helped in MacDonald's eyes by the fact that he wanted a similar job in the boatyards to the one that he had

been fired from and was “unwilling to take just any job”—an attitude that did not quite line up with the Protestant work ethic that reigned in the church. To make the situation all the more tense, MacDonald lamented that “prospective employers we knew couldn’t overlook [Wise’s] even modified hippie appearance.” As a result, Baptist benevolence for the Wise household began to dry up.⁵⁴

Around this same time, Dan Sands and his family had wandered back into the Bay Area, camping near San Anselmo. Running on financial empty, they were, like the Wises, looking for a way to stretch their resources. Viewing the current situation, it became obvious to their minds that the Lord had graciously opened the door to Christian communal living; the Sandses moved in with the Wises, sharing their apartment. Scraping to make ends meet, they limped on through small gifts and occasional chip-in money from their non-Christian hippie friends—some of whom would crash at the Wise-Sands apartment for the odd night or two.⁵⁵

The four couples continued to discuss the possibility of joining their two mini-communes in a larger effort but found the Heefners to be a logistical obstacle to the endeavor. Steve was out of sorts because he was down to hosting his weekend *Perspectives* talk show on KFRC, having just been relieved of his weeknight disc jockey duties because the station management had tired of his inclination to talk about his spiritual journey and interject biblical banter in between playing songs by the Beatles and Jefferson Airplane.⁵⁶ Understandably, this new reality added to the stress in their marriage, which—despite the fact that Steve had jettisoned his girlfriend upon his new spiritual commitment—was still on shaky ground, to say the least. Everything came to a head on a mid-May weekend camping getaway with their son and the Doops’ daughter. Arguing non-stop all the way down to Monterey, the trip turned into an exercise in icy marital silence. One night she grabbed her sleeping bag and staked out a spot by herself on the beach. Over the next few hours, she wrestled with her situation, her life, and the constant witness about Jesus that her husband and their friends had been laying on her. At that point, she “gave in to the Lord” and felt an immediate sense of peace and elation.⁵⁷ But there was more. Recalling the experience years later, she said that while she was lying there, she noticed something strange up in the night sky:

When I looked up in the sky there was a huge figure-eight made out of stars.... I’m not into flights of fancy. I rubbed my eyes and looked away and did all the things they do in the movies and kept looking and peeking up and there it was as strong and as bright as ever. Anyway it was an “eight” and I knew what it meant—that I would be the eighth person [in the communal group].... From that point on, I couldn’t stop talking about Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

Coming home all smiles from their camping trip, the Heefners enthusiastically decided to plunge ahead with their spiritual commitment. Soon thereafter, KFRC’s major rock ‘n’ roll competitor in the Bay Area, KYA, offered Steve O’Shea a new job

as the disc jockey in the afternoon drive slot. With the Heefners fully on board and with the expectation that Steve's relatively lucrative salary would cover the group's basic expenses, the four couples decided that the current situation was about as good a time as any to give living in Christian community a whirl. The first step was unloading the things that were anchoring them down. Jim Doop gave notice at Philip Morris, effective in early June, and put his house on the market for a quick sale. The slicker cars in the group—Heefner's 1960 Jaguar and Doop's 1965 Ford Crown Victoria—were sold to add to the group's collective treasury. They also hunted for a place big enough—and cheap enough—to accommodate eight adults and seven children. This quest proved to be more of a problem than they anticipated: It seemed that many of the solid citizens of Marin County were not particularly eager to rent their properties to a hippie-looking commune, Christian or not.⁵⁹

When the deadline arrived for the Doops and Heefners to be out of their house, the group had still been unable to turn up anything that would suit their collective needs. As a stopgap measure, the two families found a house located at the Tam Junction on Highway One, just south of Mill Valley. Closer to the Wise-Sands apartment, it was now easier for the families to spend time together and pursue their Kingdom Gospel work. That summer, some of the women helped out with First Baptist's vacation Bible school. The men, meanwhile, decided to start heading down to the Haight. Up until this time, they had been going informally to the burgeoning hippie district to hang out, see friends, and talk to people about Christ. But the more they talked, the more they felt the need to do something more organized. Steve Heefner remembers that Wise announced he and Sands were going to the Haight with some food to hand out and "talk to the people about the Lord."⁶⁰

Jim Doop later looked back and pinpointed that day as Monday, June 19; he and Heefner drove across the Golden Gate Bridge to meet Wise and Sands in the Drogo Store eatery at the corner of Haight and Masonic. The agenda called for Heefner to eventually leave to do his shift at the radio station and then meet them early in the evening, either in the Haight or over in Golden Gate Park, where they might talk to small groups of people on Hippie Hill. Over the next few weeks, the expedition became a routine, with the men going to the Haight on the weekdays, and various combinations of the married couples heading back into the hippie district on the weekends.⁶¹ The first indigenous attempt of counterculturally friendly bohemian Christians to evangelize the hippies had been launched. But the Establishment evangelical church was close behind; aware of this new mission field and the small group of hip evangelists, it was attempting to back their efforts and create a larger, more organized outreach into the counterculture.

Reaching Out to the Hippies

Parallel to the move to communal living during the spring of 1967, the gulf between Wise and his friends and the conservative mind-set of the people at

First Baptist had also come to a head (figure 1.2). The main point of contention was the plight of the thousands of young seekers who were expected to pour into San Francisco in the weeks and months ahead. Wise became acutely aware of this through his many friendly contacts in the Haight, which included several members of the Diggers, a local artist-anarchist group. The Diggers had just been ordered to evacuate their Free Store on Page Street because of the San Francisco city health department's attempt to crack down on the Haight. With an order to vacate the premises, the group's food distribution and housing programs were in danger of being eradicated at a time when the hippie district's population was growing day by day. Distressed by the Diggers' predicament and the ongoing reality of thousands of young people flooding into the city with little prospect for food and shelter, Wise felt this was the perfect opportunity for Christians to show their love and concern. "I told John that all of these people were going to come," he remembered in an interview years later, "and they were going to be needy and that they were going to need food... there was a great opportunity here if we had a way to feed people." So Wise approached MacDonald with a modest proposal to work full-time trying to reach the hippies, starting by getting the church to lend its facilities to the Diggers (figure 1.2).⁶²

MacDonald now found himself impaled on the tripartite horns of an ethical, evangelistic, and pragmatic dilemma: How might he actually address the physical and spiritual situation, avoid alienating his erstwhile bohemian acolyte, and yet manage to somehow hang onto his congregation? Knowing that Wise's scheme had zero chance with his deacon board, the pastor hemmed and hawed about insurance liabilities and Mill Valley's being across the Golden Gate Bridge from

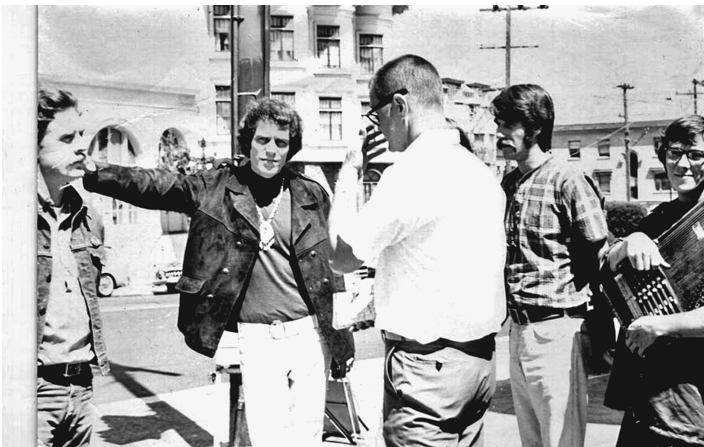


FIGURE 1.2 On the streets of the Haight, fall 1967: left to right, Ted Wise, Steve Heefner, unidentified, Jim Doop, unidentified.

Courtesy of Karl Kahler.