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# Life Lessons Learned Along the Way: Dancing to the Music

By David M. Saperstein

*We continue our series of personal, impactful stories that have shaped how we practice law.*

“The Grateful Dead are putting out an 80-disc live box set. No word yet on which Grateful Dead song it will be.”  
– Conan O’Brien, June 2, 2015

They say professional athletes want to be rock stars. And rock stars want to be professional athletes. How about lawyers? That’s easy. Many are desperately seeking some connection to either one.

I don’t play guitar, and you certainly wouldn’t want to hear to me sing. But, I do know something about how to write. So, when the Grateful Dead announced last year that they were accepting submissions for fans to write about a memorable experience related to the band, I was interested. Rhino Records planned to include a selection of these submissions as part of a commemorative booklet to accompany their massive, 73-hour, 80-CD collection of live concerts entitled, “30 Trips Around the World.”

My submission for the Dead album – a story about traveling with a good friend to Berkeley, California for our first Grateful Dead concert – did not earn any literary prizes. Nor did it win a big case for my clients or their carriers. But, that was not the goal. Rather, I hoped to have readers remember what it was like 32 years ago when we were all younger, with time on our hands, and an adventurous spirit. Apparently, someone liked my story well enough that it was included in the box set’s booklet.

Looking back on that weekend, my middle-aged mind wonders what our Plan B was. What if we had not found a place to stay? Would we have ended up shivering on a park bench in the early dawn, our sleeping bags moist from the morning dew?

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Yet, at the same time, how many times do we allow ourselves to settle, because aiming higher seems unreasonable? In my youth, persistence and the generosity of strangers helped me find free tickets to two sold-out concerts. As an adult, I recognize that the “miracle” was not an accident. Rather, persistence re-frames what is possible, and helps us achieve the impossible. As Nelson Mandela said, “It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

For those of you who waited to order your copy of “30 Trips Around the World,” I am sorry to report that the collection is sold out. However, if what you really wanted was to read my account of my first Grateful Dead concert in 1984, I can’t wait to hear from you.

*When David is not debating which music to select if marooned on a desert island, he can be reached at 248-827-1885 or [dsaperstein@maddinhauser.com](mailto:dsaperstein@maddinhauser.com). His full article, “Dark Star” can be read in its entirety below.*

Our [second article](#) this month is The Case against Expert Witness Malpractice by Jesse L. Roth.

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## Dark Star

[David M. Saperstein](#)

Summer vacation had just started, I was still in high school. My friends and I had wheels, but nowhere to go.

My friend Mark called. “Do you have plans this weekend?” “No. What do you have in mind?” I asked. “Let’s drive to Berkeley,” Mark suggested. “The Dead are playing there this weekend.”

Mark and I had grown up together through music. We had attended dozens of concerts together, listened to albums together, traded tapes. But I didn’t really know the Dead’s music. I only knew two songs – Truckin’ and Casey Jones. So, I hesitated. “Aren’t they a heavy metal band?” I asked. “No,” Mark answered. “They’re totally mellow. You’ll love it.”

So, off we went. No place to stay, no tickets, no plan, but ready for adventure.

The first show was Friday night. I have many fond memories of going to sporting

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events with my father without tickets. Just wait until game time, he taught me. That's when ticket prices start dropping. Mark and I walked up and down the street outside the Greek Theater Friday night looking for tickets. Eventually, just before the show was about to start, someone gave us two tickets.

I didn't know the songs, but Mark was right. I loved it. As the Dead played their encore, they projected a slide show with images from space onto a movie screen – the moon, the stars. Everyone was freaking out. Someone said they saw a shooting star in the sky. We were two happy campers by the time we crashed that night on the couch of some fraternity that took pity on the two high school kids with no place to stay.

The next day, no tickets came through. Even though we were disappointed that we hadn't made it in, we knew that Sunday would be another day. In fact, we discovered as we talked about it Saturday night, we had enjoyed the scene outside the theater – just walking around talking to people. I told Mark about a conversation I had with this "old" woman (she was probably 30). I told her how I wished I had grown up in the 60's – so much had happened then. I still remember her reply. "You were born at exactly the right time for you."

All in all, a perfect weekend – two beautiful summer nights (we got in Sunday) in the Berkeley hills with good music, and a good friend. It wasn't long before we both became more involved in the scene. We bought their albums, and became familiar with the catalog. After we started college, we attended shows more regularly. We started to write down the playlists of the shows that we each went to. When Mark came across the tape of a particularly good show, he would send it to me. I would do the same for him.

A couple years after our first show, Mark and I were talking. "Do you remember the first Dead show we went to?" Mark asked. "What kind of question is that?" I answered. "Of course I remember." Mark pressed on. "Do you remember the encore?" I assured Mark that I had not been to many concerts with an astronomical slide show. Mark interrupted, "Do you know why people were freaking out so much?" "No," I confessed. "It wasn't the slide show?" "No, it wasn't." Mark reported. "When they had that slide show going, they were playing Dark Star. That was the first time they had played Dark Star in 167 shows."

So, that night wasn't just history for me and my buddy, Mark Pinkus. It was also history for the Deadhead community. Unforgettable.

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