

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Woodstock, 1969

Personal Experience

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KENNETH MALLORY

Interviewed

by

Chris Helm

on

August 8, 1995

KENNETH MALLORY

Kenneth Mallory, currently age 47, represents the living epitome of the 1960s musical, social, philosophical and political scene. Born near Kent, Ohio, Ken's experiences began while attending Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. By a combination of providence, luck, and self-determination, Ken found himself at the turbulent epicenter of the 1960s environment.

His fantastic journey began in the fall of 1967, during his freshman year at Ohio University. Ken, as well as a myriad of other students, religiously read the Associated Press and United Press International reports describing the tragedies of Vietnam which were placed in the window of a nearby music store/coffee shop. Ken attributes these daily postings, along with other local forces, for contributing to the wave of counter culture activity that took place at Ohio University in the late 1960s.

The Woodstock Festival of 1969 represents only one of Ken's vast array of marvelous experiences with some of the most colorful and popular figures of the era. These include Jerry Garcia and Joe Walsh. Ken reveled in the sights and sounds of Woodstock after stepping off the mammoth green church bus he and his friends used for transportation to the event. A lover of music, art and philosophy, Ken blended perfectly with the Woodstock crowd. As with the other interviewees, he described a ubiquitous sense of peace and sharing at the concert. Also, on a sincere note, Ken remembers his friends that passed away in Vietnam. Although a time of emotional, political and cultural turbulence, Ken firmly believes he lived during one of the greatest eras in American history. Kenneth Mallory, more than any other previous interview, was, and still is, the 1960s.

H This is an interview with Kenneth Mallory for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Chris Helm, at 3430 White Beach Lane, on August 8, 1995, at 3:15 p m

Why do you not start by telling me your name, your birthday, and where you are from.

M. My name is Ken Mallory I am 46 years old I was born November 8, 1948 in Akron, Ohio I was reared predominately in Portage County in Ohio, a little town called Atwater, and some of my youth in a little town called Shalote, North Carolina, where my mother's family is from

H Okay, Ken, generally speaking, what were the late 1960s like for you?

M Invigorating, exciting, full of doubt, insecurity, and chaos.

H Do you care to elaborate on that at all?

M The invigoration began for me at my freshman orientation at Ohio University. There were 8,000 students there. My graduating class was 47. I guess that kind of put me through the position of going through a massive culture shock at that point in time. Actually, I have never seen so many beautiful women in one place in my entire life, except the beach in North Carolina, but never even quite that many. That was my introduction to college It was a good year and a half to adjust Politically, I was not affiliated with anything, nor very active when I first arrived at school As you are probably aware, at that time -- or may not be -- Ohio University was a very volatile place, as were many campuses. Political awakening arose when my sports career was over. It was after a couple of debilitating injuries We will not even get into that part of the situation This interview is more focused on other events.

I would say it would have to have happened probably in the spring of 1969 Trying to remember dates at this point in time is rather difficult A lot of the events of those years were kind of blurs There was a man named Koons at a music store in Athens It was right on court street, the main street through town As the war was getting bloodier and bloodier, he was putting AP and UPI news releases up in the window. Old man Koons is a pretty interesting character, kind of a failed musician, but satisfied with that in his life. He took a lot of interest in the students He did not really care about what was going on in the world, evidently, or he would not have posted those. He probably would have maintained a lot lower profile relative to the rest of the community Those bulletins posted in the window on a daily basis, even an hourly basis, awakened a lot of people to what was really going on because we could see a progression of things We did not like it It is funny, we come here for a discussion about

Woodstock and we talk about politics

At any rate, that is when the counter culture sort of grabbed me. A lot of deep thought went into where I was and where I was going in relation to the rest of the world. It is pretty interesting. There were some organizations on campus that I did not agree with, at least their approach to things, their awareness of what was so aggravating about the powers that would be. That part I could agree with. How they dealt with it, I could not. Protest was one thing, violence was another. Getting people to riot beyond the level of what is reasonable protest to make your point, I could not stomach at all. There seemed to be a lot of underpinnings of other powers at work on the campus that just did not make things taste right. I guess I should ask at this point, what was the question?

H What as the late 1960s like for you?

M Interesting and an enlightening era for everyone, I think. You could still see that little resemblance of doubt chasing everybody around. Is what I am doing right? Is how I feel right? It is a very hard era to describe. It was an era of feeling, I think, more than anything else, anything that can truly be put into words. Life does not feel the same now. It did not before. It is like a window on something that opened, it occurred, and it closed.

H I have heard that analogy before. Jerry Garcia made that analogy of the late 1960s in particular. He said the same thing. He thought it was basically a window.

M I have never heard him say that, but I do know him. I have had the opportunity to meet him numerous times. At Ohio University, it seemed like The Grateful Dead would land there once a year, regardless of what was going on anywhere else. They played in the old memorial auditorium up on the college green. An interesting bunch of people. I guess I have essentially been a "Dead Head" ever since.

H Really?

M Hanging around with those people at that time was pretty interesting. They were kind of in the forefront of things that were going on, but still far ahead of everybody else because they had a sense of benevolence about them that was really neat. I think it made us all that were associated with them want to be in a position to be able to do what they were doing. They are the fund raisers for Moran County to this day, not to mention what they do for other people around the world, too.

H Since it is applicable, what was your particular affiliation with them? What were some of your experiences?

M. Sitting around back stage shooting the breeze, for the most part I am sure they had people like that on every campus they visited Not being a groupy type, but just having falling into this or that experience politics, music, you name it, it was discussed, women, whatever

H Great typical subjects at the time?

M There were more of course, but I will not get into that part of it

H It is prior to the summer of 1969 What was a typical day like? Describe what you did in a typical day

M For me, that summer I was going to summer school, trying to make up for some lost time relative to my culture shock to the previous two years. I suppose whatever it was to try and do I did. Experience, it was kind of like a machine gun; very rapid fire That summer was hot, muggy, pretty bizarre in regard to that being the first summer I had spent there A chance to get out of Dodge was a good idea. There were a bunch of people heading to New York for this concert. I do not even remember it being advertised in any way, not much more than word of mouth Nobody really knew what we were in for. Believe it or not, August was even hotter than July, so it was a really good idea to get out of Dodge. There was a group of people getting together in this old church bus. I could see it to this day I do not remember what the name of the church was, but it was green, rickety Nobody was sure we were even going to make it, but we took a shot. After we got there nobody was sure we were going to get out of there. What a mess

H You do not recall, specifically, how you heard of it originally?

M Not really, just word of mouth. It was kind of a blurry, foggy weekend, if you know what I mean, without going into any details, for just about everybody on that bus I am surprised we even found our way to New York. A lot of hurry up and wait Nobody really cared We were having an adventure An adventure it was There is no doubt about that, the mud, the rain, the people. It was another one of those windows that opened and closed. I do not think anybody involved with it or anybody there expected it to be what it became.

H That leads us to another topic Would it be okay if I turned this off?

M Sure.

H That actually leads us to the next question What were your expectations and how do they measure up to say when you first arrived? What were your impressions?

M I think expectations were not even present. The only expectation we had was getting out of town, taking a break, making a move, doing something to deplete the hum-drum of Athens in the summer time, when it becomes a sleepy little town with very few people there. It was boring, is what it was. The excitement was in the trip. I really do not think anybody held out any expectations, other than the music. Even that you could not hear very well. I sure did not expect to see so many people.

H: You are in the green bus pulling up. You finally got through the traffic. You are off the bus. Do you recall what you did at all during the day? What was the first day like? What were the sights, the smells, the sounds, the feeling?

M: The smells were typical of any gathering at that time of a lot of long-haired people. Those feelings are tough to revisit. It is actually kind of comical when you think about it. Who would have thought that many people would show up in the middle of a farm to listen to some music? You could smell the weather, literally. When the rain came, it was really unbelievable; it would be raining that much and it would be that muddy. Everybody would not even care to look for shelter, other than what they had available themselves. A lot of sharing going on. It was kind of neat in that way. All the announcements of bad drugs and where first aid could be obtained, in a way, was almost like a concentration camp when you think back to things that occurred in history before. You could leave. You could get out of there, but I do not think anybody wanted to. I am sure some did. I do not think anybody was prepared for the weather. A change of clothes was something you did not really think about, for the most part. Nobody really planned real well for food. When you get right down to the basics, I think we all just expected things to be like going to a baseball game.

H You mentioned something about sharing, and I came across a lot of people that talked about a sense of community and a sense of sharing. Was that tangible for you at all?

M Yes, it was definitely present, people you did not even know would help you or you would help them. I have not revisited this in a long time. Prior to the interview I purposely did that, not to sit down and try to program anything to you. I wanted it to be as spontaneous as possible.

H A certain amount of that is only natural.

M: Things are kind of rolling through me head. It is kind of bizarre. For specific incidents of things, I remember the young lady I was with and myself, sharing a blanket with some other people from God knows where. I do not even know where they were from. I cannot remember at this point in time. I cannot even remember her name. I am sure if she was going through this she would not even remember mine. Life was lived in a lot of first name basis at that time. A

person's history probably did not go any further than where they were from. I had the recent experience to visit people that went to Woodstock II. One family in particular from Chicago, they stopped in my restaurant on the way back. You could see just a hint of that same exhilaration that occurred for most of the people that were there at the first one. Obviously the commercialism of it was considerably different. It was neat.

H Any bands or artist in particular you looked forward to?

M All of them. Syntony was real big in my mind at the time. I always liked Carlos Syntony's music. To me that was the best. Richie Havens was okay. Hendrix was like an alarm clock. It was funny, after we got there a lot of the reasons for being there -- originally for the music -- but after we got there that was not even that important anymore. When you mention the sense of community, that was kind of the word I was searching for with the sharing aspect. It was interesting, talking to people about this, that, and everything. It did not matter that much what we discussed. That was not even an issue there. I think what came in the forefront was that sense of community.

H Was there a sense of empowerment at all?

M You were limited in what you could share on the physical side. I guess it was a case of right makes might from the philosophical. It was also short lived, though. It was like stepping out of reality and having to go back. I am sure a lot of people did not want it to end because of that sense of community. On the same token, there were a lot of people getting hurt and a lot of people not faring so well with their choices in regard to the drugs they ate or whatever. That was the bad side.

H Speaking of stepping out of reality and having to come back, what roll did drugs play in the entire scene?

M It obviously was not a primary roll, but it was important to a lot of people. It was the age of that culture. I do not think anybody really went there to find something new. I am certain if those who went there never touched anything still felt that sense of un-reality about it. It was prominent from a personal view point, it was not primary in any stretch. Like I said before, we got out of Athens just for the opportunity of getting out.

H You said that once after you arrived, music became somewhat secondary. What roll or importance did music play prior in your life in general, even now?

M Music is important, there is no doubt about that. That musical era, I think, created an outlet for so many talented people that had never really been able to express before, from Buddy Holly on up through the years. It was an opportunity for the uncensored creativity to come before, I guess. It was a chance for people

to not duplicate an experiment and move on. I think that is where drugs entered into the situation in a big way. Think about all the musicians who did themselves in because of the drugs, probably more so because of themselves. They got hooked up into something that they just could not get away from. I think a good bit of the reason they got involved was to further unleash their untapped creativity. It was kind of a shame. It is a real shame that some of them did themselves in. You wonder where they would be or what they would be doing today. Joplin, Morrison, Hendrix. I think Jimmy Hendrix was a genius, but pretty stupid when it came to drugs.

H: It is strange, how it affects you when things like that occur.

M: It was like losing a very close friend. You may have never met them before in your life.

H: Of the people attending Woodstock, what do you think it said to their parents?

M: I pretty much know what it said to mine.

H: That is a good start.

M: The first question they had was, "Did you know there were going to be that many people there?" "No." "Really? Why did you go?" I told them for the same reason I stated before, "I just needed to get out of Athens. It was boring. There was nothing to do. This sounded like something interesting to do, so we did it." I probably further reinforced their belief in the rebellion in youth. I do not think it was anything too drastic for them to think about. There was probably a certain level of worry. I am sure there were a lot of parents who did not even know their kids went. At that time, I was almost 21 and they figured, "You know what is best for you." My parents were always kind of like that. I think they may have ended up getting brow-beaten over the whole thing. I really have no concept of that.

H: When you were on your way back to Athens, did you have any impressions? What did you take home with you at the time? Did you say anything to yourself regarding the whole thing, the trip itself?

M: That, I do remember. I do not know how this all came to be, but it will never happen again. It was like there was some kind of metaphysical focus on that particular spot, at that particular stretch of time, that will never be duplicated. Why? Because it has never been done, and we all had an opportunity to be a part of it.

H: What importance did the spontaneity have in all of that?

M: It was a part of that focus. I think that is probably the primary focus of it. The

chance for that many people to get together, you think of a city that size. You have to admit, aside from the drugs, the crime rate was not very high. So that sense of community could never be revisited unless it was under circumstances that truly demanded, in regard to survival of the race.

H: What do you think Woodstock did for the social movement of that whole era? Did it do anything for it?

M: I guess that is where it peaked and after that there was probably a sense of, "Well, we cannot top that." I think it was the beginning of the diffusion of the whole situation, the whole era. Other events came to follow that started giving it a bad name, or a worse name than it already had, depending on your viewpoint. Some things certainly seemed different after that. Of course, I guess at that time I was getting a little older and my experiences had been that, the older you get, the more conservative you become to protect what it is that you have, or you think you have. I do not know that it had that big of an effect on the maturing process but, as an experience, it certainly showed us a lot of what people are capable of. For that era I think, it was the beginning which was further pushed on by other events of the time. What was the next big concert after that?

H: There was one in Atlantic City, one in New Orleans. Chronologically, I do not remember them exactly. You mean large scale?

M: I think Ultima really spelled the doom of the era. How many people were killed? One or two, I do not even remember now. It kind of soured everything. Whoever that Hell's Angel was that fired that shot or used that knife, whichever way that particular person was done in, probably had no idea what affect he had on the culture, but he did.

H: Are you glad you lived when you did?

M: Would not trade it for anything. Like I said, that window opened, then it closed. The people that were involved at that time cannot even begin to have a concept of what it was like. A lot of people referred to it as an era of superficiality; a choice of lifestyle that promoted superficiality. Like I said, a lot of people knew people on a first name basis, but that did not really spell the depth involved. Again, it is so hard to describe. It was an age of innocence, yet there was a lot of wisdom out there.

H: A lot of times you will hear that era in Woodstock characterized to go as far as to say dismissed, very superficial, as an era of everybody was in a haste. Everything sort of happened. I was curious what your response to that is?

M: My response to that is people who say that were not there. They never felt those feelings, probably never will, so they do not have any right to say that. It gets

dismissed more and more by people as they get older, but they get in touch with who they were, where they were, and what they were doing I think they might put a little more stock in it, a little more appreciation of what it was, and not forget the lessons that were there I can honestly say that, having lived in that era, experienced what I did, having pursued the political activity that I did at the time, having lost friends that I did, face down in a rice patty or whatever, the circumstance in that little country in south east Asia made me appreciate life a lot more, and the people in it I said I would not trade that era for anything How can people possibly say--you just turn on the television everyday and you talk about superficiality--give me a break You look at California and 95 percent of the people walking around there have a publicity person working for them Do not tell me about superficial. Who are they really? If they are who they are, they do not need that person, do they? No, they do not

I would have to say that, probably until 1974 or 1975, I was probably still stuck in the 1960s like a lot of people It is hard to say what made me finally walk out, crack the window and leave I will not say it was an age of futility, not by any lengths It is very hard to pin down, what it meant because I think it meant so many different things to so many different people I think Woodstock is a combination of the age

H If you could put it into as few words as possible, what was the most important characteristic or value that came out of it? Maybe to rephrase, what was its greatest characteristic?

M The event itself?

H. Yes, and for the future

M Not to sound superficial, but I guess it goes back to what I said before about the coming together of so many people in the rain and in the mud, there to listen to a lot of music who suddenly discovered the music was secondary to their being there, and that many people could pull together for a common goal, which essentially boiled down to making it through the weekend The culture, what I said before about it being the combination of everything, the beginning of the end

H It will never be duplicated?

M I sincerely doubt that In generations from now it will, but nobody will realize the correlation It is kind of like technology had to be a certain place, there had to be certain kinds of people involved in a certain place Who knows, the Asbers farm could be a shopping mall by the time this comes to be again, covered with pavement. It could be a cinder, too It is hard to say. It is not hard to say, it is impossible to say, but I do not think it will be duplicated because no one expected it to be Now that it has happened, way back in somebody's mind

going to an event of some similar nature they will have that wonder, that thought Will this be something extraordinary like Woodstock? No, it cannot because nothing like that had happened before under those circumstances

H Are there any final thoughts or comments you would like to make on permanent record [laughter]

M I just wonder on how many people reflect back on it with fondness and how many do not, now that I have dredged up all these thoughts and memories It is interesting.

H. I thank you for your time today

M You are welcome

End Of Interview