

## **RICK SKOGSBERG (Ricksko)**

Rochester, VT

American, b. 1948

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I was born in a time (after WW II, the year between 6/47 and 6/48) that still holds the record for most births ever, in a given year's span. It was the second Great Generation come to America, right in succession. Others would follow, each with increasingly elaborated and complex social through-lines. But in the fifties and sixties, at first, shit was pretty simple.

I grew up, the eldest of three brothers, in a military family, albeit one less regimented than loving and fun. Both my parents had been in combat through four years of WWII: Mom as an Army Nurse in a mobile evacuation (tent) hospital, Dad, second-in-command of the 1st Recon Troop, attached to the 1st Infantry Division (Patton's). They met early, in North Africa, as that campaign was winding down, and after corresponding vigorously (mail took six weeks) for the next four years—having one weekend leave together in Paris (after Anzio (Mom) and D-Day (Dad)), just before the final hard push across Germany—and at the end, near Berlin, they found their units once more conveniently juxtaposed.

After returning to the States, they were married eighteen months later, in Jan. '47, the same week my Dad's divorce from a pre-war hometown arranged marriage became final. Dad managed to stay with the Army's now vastly reduced Regular Army officer corps (doing another year in combat, in Korea, in '51) until I was a senior in high school. By then, we had already moved twelve times, twice after only a year, usually it was three. This was the literal bane of my existence. First, Going (which followed a prior Leaving), then, Leaving again, this over and over. Both were agonizing. I started smoking at 12, as one does, to cure the ache. AM radio was ruling America with its pop-inflected rock and roll, every teenager in town in every big-finned car, leaping to life as one to the opening sounds of their favorite songs. Football was king. Things were about to change forever.

I was one month shy of my 16th birthday when the Beatles landed in America. What timing. You had to be there. Suffice it to say, King Football's crown was lost overnight to the new king, Guitar, still reigning, to this day. I was a mediocre football player, but simultaneously, a mediocre guitar player. So I was ready. But not for being torn from the pinnacle of my high school career, to spend a dull senior year in Florida. That was just the first of a couple more hardship tours through America's warrior classes. Finally, after two years of reeling drunkenly and often violently through the various environs of the '65 ATO House at Florida State (the original 'animal' house, I'm afraid, at Fla. St. anyway), in leafy Tallahassee, Florida's 'other' state university, I suddenly, to my everlasting benefit, found my drug-of-choice.

Actually, there were two, both endemic to the times, both here-named (marijuana and LSD (incl. equivalent psychedelics) for their life-long significance to my growth as an artist, but equally so for the profound influence they have had on me as a person, right from the very first bringing me far more intelligence and spiritual maturity than I had ever even imagined could accompany me through my life, shedding my nascent social programming as easily as an ill-fitting suit, then growing another for better fit; re-integrating my self with new eclectic experiences, heretofore unimagined, as well with the skills I gained thereby, molting into an avid practitioner of a strictly self-motivated lifestyle that would include a steady regimen of awareness-heightening disciplines and techniques that fed straight into a developing spiritual maturity that quickly redefined both my life's plan (such as there was) and the potential and enthusiasm I would bring to this new avocation. But feeling the restimulation brought on by any thoughts of America in the 60s, I'm getting just a few years ahead of myself, where, still...

...Halfway through college, I still lacked the faintest shred of ambition towards anything I could imagine, so I was pointed at a former target, that is, in the direction of Navy Flight School, the military's elite. They take the selection process so enormously seriously, understandably, that they spend a year just checking out your native abilities to see if you are well-suited to the program. But by the time they called me, the Navy had receded so far into the recesses of my former self, I can barely remember a single thing that was said. The caller sounded exuberant. I remember that. So, they must have thought I was a worthy candidate; had been, actually, would say it better. Because, in any case, I had to explain that, in the extended meantime, I'd been arrested and temporarily jailed (3 days) for selling two ounces of pot to a peripheral friend, who'd been flipped and set us up. Now, I was awaiting trial, facing fifteen to life... Click. But, happily, dear reader, I beat that bad rap; still beginners at the drug war they fell to so enthusiastically, the dirty coppers had barged in, guns waving, failing to even announce any search warrant, much less showing us one prior to their invasion.

I dropped out of FSU, during my last semester, due to the incarceration before finals prior. I never did get a Bachelor's degree, although I have a Master's now (an MFA in Poetry—finally, when almost 50, thinking I knew what I wanted to be when I grew up, I went back to school, as well, in the 90s, but again, not quite yet). I had set out after college to fill the potential of my striking aptitude for psychedelics (LSD, etc.) As a young man, I figured there was going to be a real need for people like me. So, I moved to southern California near the end of '68. Laguna and great LSD (Orange Sunshine, 250 mics, take two, so fresh it steamed up the baggies it sold from, a dollar a hit), were but 12 miles south down the coast highway at the Taco Bell, just across Hwy 101 from the Mystic Arts Bookstore.

I had begun to imitate the underground abstract cartooning I found, mostly by R.Crumb and Rick Griffin, and did a lot of new and revived styles of lettering, mostly inspired by Griffin.

I came back to Florida with updated plans of moving to this wildly extended community (we read: 'commune') in the woods of Vermont that had a Forest Wizard, an elderly gent of 62 who claimed to be a yogi from a hundred years ago. He'd show you the photograph, and you'd have to admit there was some resemblance. I spent the summer there, cycling between losing my girlfriend and regaining her again, etc. I went to the 'Woodstock' Festival from Vermont, and, staying over in Vermont that winter in a local town, I was more surprised than I probably should have been, when I got drafted, ordered to report for a physical, which if passed would lead to immediate induction into the US Army. Instead, I returned to Florida and buckled down to somehow beating the draft. I had returned their original form filled in in orange crayon, claiming to be a subversive anarchist, which, though I was strictly an amateur, was totally true. I was by now far from Army material (this a year after getting picked for Navy Flight). The draft board came back with a vengeful and emphatic 1A, which stood for cannon fodder, as in, induct ASAP.

But I wasn't done yet. It wasn't until the final can't miss physical, imposed on me again, that I saw that all my desperate efforts had come to nothing. Then, a miracle was bestowed—at the last station, leading to the bus to induction, I could actually see the bus's open door waiting outside the center—my urine showed traces of protein, whatever that means. What it meant to me was a six month deferment. It was the boost I needed to escape their clutches for good; first they instituted a lottery, my number was 200, but they only reached 199 that first year. Alas, since I had been deferred, I would still be in their draft pool. I did actually get drafted again but by then, they had finally begun to reconsider what kind of men they were really looking for. When I sent them an extremely paranoid letter threatening court action, if they did not leave me alone this time, they decided, at last, correctly, that I was not their man. I returned to the commune in Vermont and stayed 24 more years, till '95; fathering my first child, a son, in '73, and my second, a daughter, in '79). During that time, I had made black and white nonrepresentational drawing my own (I thought) and in the early 80's, I began painting, without any

instruction or training, in oils and acrylics, with mixed results, some encouraging. I continued painting furiously but also returned to school, at UVM, studying Calculus and Computer Science, clocking a 3.89 GPA over three semesters, but having to drop out (due to finances) still prior to any sight of a degree in this new seeming career path. But then, that eventually became a programming job, working with a crew of my hippie friends, one of whom had a friend in IBM International. That was really good money for about ten years, the only I ever made, except for the next job, a one year stint spent commuting to Boston for three days at a span, working from home the rest. Laid off in the First Great Software Slowdown, I worked two hard Vermont winters outside, in a parking lot at the hospital, for minimum wage. By then I had moved to town and fathered another daughter. She's now about to graduate college, and I still live there, where, since being fired from my last straight job in 2008, I've been making art, mostly non-stop and around the clock.

Since then, I've done 250 black and white drawings in three differing, related series, then worked strictly graphically for two years to learn how to do so. I then returned to black and white drawing; now also manipulating scans of my drawings, and as well, graphic files in color. I did a designated year's time seeing how many paper pates I would draw to full design in black and white pen. Then suddenly three or four years ago I started doing shoes and boots, painting in excess of 300 pairs in a couple years' time. I showed many of those at Miami Art Basel in 2016, receiving some good press from it.

In January, 2018 I began painting holiday china, plates and platters and silver trays. 'Commemorative and recycled' from my parents' era is what I've sought. And I've found them everywhere...

In partnership with BigTown Gallery, I recently exhibited (Jan., 2019) both some of the shoes and a collection of the Plates and Platters and Trays at The Outsider Art Fair in NYC.