

CHAOS

**Charles Manson,
the CIA, and the
Secret History of
the Sixties**

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with **DAN PIEPENBRING**



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remained closed this time, and I finally left. Two years later, in 2010, he died.

As I drove away, my mind was awash with possibilities. I always wondered about the crime-scene discrepancies. I wondered if Bowser, just by alleging that the crime scene had been presented incorrectly or possibly even staged, was pointing to other reasons for the murders, or other people, perhaps, involved in covering up what had really happened. I had to think of Reeve Whitson, and his claim of having gone to the crime scene after the murders but before the police had arrived.

All of this is compelling evidence of a different scenario for the crimes, but I'll be the first to admit that it proves nothing for certain. I do believe it's possible that there was another reason for the Tate-LaBianca murders. And I do believe the crime scene suggests that the sequence of events as we know it is wrong. But our best chance to learn the truth vanished in November 1969, when the DA's office put Susan Atkins's testimony on lockdown. The question remaining was: *Why?*

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Manson's Get-Out-of-Jail-Free Card

No More Extensions

Good reporting takes time—vast and often unreasonable amounts of time. Behind every solid lead, quotable interview, and bombshell document, I put in weeks of scut work that led to dozens of dead ends. My Freedom of Information Act requests alone would stretch on for months, as I quibbled with bureaucrats over redactions and minutiae. Since my three-month assignment from *Premiere* had long since evolved into a years-long project, I'd accepted that the Manson case was something akin to a calling, like it or not. Even in the longueurs between my major breakthroughs, I worked diligently with the confidence—and, sometimes, the hubris—that comes with the hunch that you're onto something big.

That confidence would've been nothing if my editors at *Premiere* didn't share it. The camaraderie and support they offered was critical, but more basically than that, they were keeping me alive.

For almost a year and a half, through one deadline extension after another, they paid me a generous monthly stipend to keep reporting, on top of the standard fee from my original contract. Even then, I knew that these paychecks were a tremendous act of faith, and I didn't take them lightly. I wanted to deliver a news-making piece, unlike the usual stuff printed in entertainment magazines, and I thought I could do it. I just needed time.

But there were limits to *Premiere's* largesse. In November 2000, Jim Meigs—the editor in chief, who'd sat on the floor of my apartment, examining documents with me—was fired. I heard a rumor, which I could never confirm, that the handsome monthly payments he'd authorized for me were part of the problem. Whatever the case, *Premiere's* new regime got down to brass tacks right away. In total, including expenses, they'd paid me a king's ransom at that point, and now they demanded the goods. Immediately.

Looking back, maybe I was too full of pride. I still can't decide if what I did next was best for me in the long run. But I did it: I walked away from *Premiere*. I thought I had a historic story, and to publish it in that condition, with loose ends and so much research left to be done, would've been giving too much away. The minute I let it go, I thought, the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Washington Post* would put six reporters on the story to finish what I couldn't. If they got the big scoop that had eluded me—the story of what *really* happened, as opposed to the millions of tiny holes in what was *supposed* to have happened—all the glory would be theirs, and I would be only a footnote.

A writer friend had referred me to her literary agent, who took me on, convinced that I had an important book on my hands. If I could write up a proposal and sell it to a publisher, he said, I'd get the time and the money I needed to put my reporting to bed. He disentangled me from my obligation to *Premiere* and I started right away.

It took more than a year to write the first draft of the proposal. My friends, many of whom were writers, could never understand why it was taking so long. Why not just sit down and crank the thing out? I was constantly on the defensive with them, looking for justifications. The problem, of course, was that I was still reporting. Because that's what I always did. I never stopped.

Without the backing of an institution like *Premiere*, my mindset started to change—it was expanding. I found myself looking into Manson's year in San Francisco. He was there for the summer of love, in 1967. It was where he'd formed the Family. I was flummoxed by the authority figures who'd surrounded Manson at this time: his parole officer and the locally renowned physician who ran the clinic where he and his followers received free health care. Neither of them had spoken much to the press, and neither had testified at the trial, despite the fact that each man had seen Manson almost daily in the critical period when he'd started his cult.

These weren't fringe figures like Reeve Whitson or William Herrmann: they were well-known and respected in the Bay Area, and, even better for me, they were still alive. So when I plunged into their stories with Manson and found evidence of serial dishonesty—again, often connected to federal law enforcement and intelligence agencies—I had to ask myself if I was crazy to be doing all of this.

The question wasn't whether it was “worth it”; I thought it was, assuming the truth could be wrested out of aging scientists, reformed hippies, and dusty government files. The question was how much of myself I was willing to give, irrespective of any consequences to my reputation or well-being. I was haunted by something Paul Krassner, a journalist who'd covered the trial for the legendary counterculture magazine *The Realist*, had told me after a lunch in the first months of my investigation. At a Venice Beach sushi bar, we'd been discussing our belief that the reasons behind

the murders had been misrepresented. "Be careful, Tom," he said as we parted ways. "This will take over your life if you let it."

I'd shrugged it off at the time. Now it felt like a prophecy. But if I wanted my book, or even just my proposal for the book, to be more complete than my *Premiere* piece would've been, I had to let the story consume me.

Scot-Free in Mendocino

To understand my fascination with Manson's parole officer, you might pick up where we left off: with Susan Atkins. She was plainly pushed around by the DA's office. Her story was cut and polished until it glimmered for the prosecutors, bringing indictments, convictions, and a raft of publicity.

The more I learned about Atkins's past, though, the stranger her manipulation became to me. In the years before the Family's rise to notoriety, the justice system afforded her a shocking amount of latitude. If anything, she'd gotten away with far too *much* in those years. When she was on probation, she broke the law regularly, but her arrests never put her in any further legal jeopardy. Instead, there was a pattern of catch-and-release. Whenever the police brought her in, she'd find herself cut loose within a few days. Why was law enforcement so lenient with her?

The events of June 4, 1969—about two months before the Tate-LaBianca murders—are as good a starting point as any. At 3:30 that morning, an LAPD patrolman pulled over a '68 Plymouth for speeding in the San Fernando Valley, ordering the driver to step out of the car. A small, long-haired man emerged, staggering toward him, his arms flailing in "wild gyrations." "He appeared under the influence of some unknown intoxicant," the officer later reported.

It was Charles Manson. He was arrested and charged with driving under the influence, being on drugs, and operating a vehicle

without a license. He had four passengers in the car, all arrested for being under the influence: Thomas J. Walleman, Nancy Pitman, Leslie Van Houten, and Susan Atkins.

Within twenty-four hours, all of them—including Manson, who'd informed the booking officers that he was on federal parole—were released with no charges. All except Atkins. She was held for more than two weeks.

The police had discovered a warrant for Atkins, not even a week old. On May 29, hundreds of miles away in Mendocino, a judge had ordered her arrest for violating five conditions of her probation. (Atkins had gotten a three-year probation sentence in 1968, after an arrest near Ukiah, California.) Now, notified of her arrest in Los Angeles, two Mendocino County sheriff's deputies drove 1050 miles round-trip to scoop her up and bring her back up north. On June 7, she was booked into the Mendocino County jail.

The state had a strong case against Atkins. She had probation officers in both L.A. and Mendocino, and neither was happy with her. According to their reports, she'd brazenly defied all attempts at supervision since her sentence was imposed. Since she'd received a courtesy transfer of her probation from Mendocino to Los Angeles County, she'd changed her address more than six times without permission. She hadn't sought employment. She'd failed to check in for almost every monthly appointment. And most recently, she'd told the probation office that, although she knew it was forbidden, she was moving to the Mojave Desert with her friends, with no plan to return to L.A.

Describing Atkins's whereabouts as "totally unknown," the probation office's report advised, "The best thing is to revoke the defendant's probation as it appears she has no intentions of abiding by it."

Despite that recommendation, at a hearing that month, Judge Wayne Burke of Mendocino County Superior Court decided that

"the defendant has not violated probation. She has complied with the terms. Probation is reinstated and modified to terminate forthwith. She is released." Not only did the ruling defy the probation office—it seemed to reward Atkins's bad behavior, "terminating" her probation more than two years before it was scheduled to conclude. And off she went, soon to participate in the murders of at least eight people. The fact that she was nearly sent to prison so soon before the killings has never been reported.

Hoping to shed some light on the deceased Judge Burke's decision, I found the head of the Mendocino County Probation Office in 1969, Thomas Martin, who'd appeared at the hearing. I also spoke to Atkins's L.A. probation officer, Margo Tompkins, who'd written the recommendation for her revocation. Both recalled their shock at the ruling. Calling it "very strange," Tompkins said, "Judges almost always went along with a probation officer's recommendation. Clearly she had not had any employment, no fixed addresses... I have no idea why [he] would have done that."

Martin said he'd never experienced anything like it in thirty-two years on the job. He was especially galled because they'd gone to the trouble of sending two police officers on the thousand-mile journey to retrieve Atkins. "That seldom, if ever, happened," he said. Martin remembered Burke well; he felt the ruling must have had some ulterior motive. "Judge Burke was not just somebody in the woods," he said. "There was something in his mind. Something that he knew that he never shared with us."

Whatever that something was, it had worked to Atkins's benefit before. A year and a half earlier, an entirely different set of probation officers—in another state—had tried to have her probation revoked, and they met with an almost identical response from a different judge.

Atkins was living in San Francisco then. She'd fallen in with a

strange man who promised to change her life, and her probation officers weren't thrilled about it. Her sudden infatuation with this "Charlie" meant she might backslide into the recklessness that had gotten her arrested in the first place, when she'd been found in a stolen car in Oregon with two ex-cons, one of whom she'd met while working as a stripper. It was the end of a crime spree for the trio. They'd stolen the car in California, driven it across the state line into Oregon, and held up a string of gas stations and convenience stores, with Atkins at the wheel.

When they were apprehended outside Salem, she told the officer she would've shot and killed him if he hadn't caught them by surprise. Then only eighteen, Atkins was convicted of being in possession of stolen goods and a concealed weapon. Her three-year probation sentence was transferred to San Francisco, where she promised to clean up her act. And so she had, until the summer of '67, when she'd fallen under Manson's spell.

According to probation records, Atkins phoned her San Francisco probation officer, Mary Yates, that November 10, saying that she'd joined a communal marriage with seven other women. They were all hitched to a "traveling minister" by the name of Charlie, fresh out of federal prison. Atkins and Charlie's other "wives," many of them pregnant by him, would soon be leaving San Francisco in a "big yellow bus" bound for Southern California, Florida, and ultimately Mexico.

Yates had been supervising Atkins for a year, and she was surprised by her charge's sudden change in character. True, Atkins had always been "flighty," but she'd also been respectful and polite, and she'd never failed to follow the rules. Now she sounded defiant, if also lackadaisical. She didn't seem to understand, or care, that her behavior would land her in prison.

After that disturbing phone call, Yates wrote to the head office in Sacramento to fill them in. "Charlie," she wrote, not knowing

his last name, "is in love with all of them and they all love each other." Yates had told Atkins not to leave, but she was "certain she will do as she pleases." She recommended getting Atkins in court to decide whether her probation should be revoked. She closed her letter with chillingly prophetic words: "Hopefully, she won't get into further difficulties with Charlie and the other seven girls."

The phone call had so worried Yates that she got in touch with *another* probation officer, M. E. Madison, of Oregon, where Atkins had originally been sentenced. Madison, who also kept tabs on Atkins, raised an alarm of his own. He'd spoken to Atkins, too, and he didn't like what he heard. "Her speech was quite disorganized," he wrote to his superiors, "and she repeated several times... that 'Love is everything; everything is nothing.'" He told her she couldn't go; she said she was leaving anyway.

The officers tried to track her down, to no avail. November faded into December. Feeling they'd exhausted their options, they wrote to the original sentencing judge, George Jones, of Marion County, Oregon, advising that the court take action. That was on December 12. Afterward, the paper record abruptly stopped. For twenty-three days, there were no more documents, memos, or court filings regarding the truant probationer.

Then, on January 4, 1968, Judge Jones signed an order *terminating* Susan Atkins's probation. Probation officials in two states had gone so far as to warn Atkins that her return to prison was inevitable. Instead, the judge rewarded her by releasing her from all obligations to law enforcement.

As in the later case, there was no record explaining the judge's decision. He knew the nature of her crimes; he knew how serious a threat she could become. Why would he have reversed himself? Why would another judge have followed suit? Atkins hardly seemed the type to win over two separate judges. Only one thing had changed when these reversals occurred: she was with Manson. As long as she stayed on his side, it seemed the rules didn't apply.

Roger Smith, "the Friendly Fed"

The law afforded special privileges to everyone in Manson's orbit. Once I was absorbed in the Family's origin story, I found evidence everywhere of a curious leniency, always helped along by a hand from the outside. Of special note was an incident in June 1968 that earned Atkins her second probation sentence, the one that almost—*almost*—had her off the streets for good before the Tate-LaBianca murders.

It began in the small outpost of Ukiah. As the seat for Mendocino County—one of the Family's favorite getaways—Ukiah by 1968 had become a haven for hippies fleeing San Francisco, which was no longer the untrammelled paradise it had been a few years before. In Haight-Ashbury, speed was now the drug of choice, and with it came violence, con men, bikers, dope peddlers, and runaways. Worst were the tourists, who'd started to congregate in the Haight to admire the psychedelic memorabilia for sale: tie-dyed shirts, MAKE LOVE NOT WAR buttons, beads, baubles, and bell-bottoms.

Mendocino County, 150 miles northwest of the Golden Gate Bridge, was an oasis by comparison. Rolling acres of land and dense forests of centuries-old redwoods stretched all the way to the sea. Small towns speckled the landscape with a patchwork quilt of groves and orchards. Communes had sprouted up as early as 1965, but they increased tenfold after the implosion of the Haight. In early June 1968, Manson sent his girls there to win some recruits for their own commune.

The delegation of five women—Susan Atkins, Ella Jo Bailey, Patricia Krenwinkel, Stephanie Rowe, and Mary Brunner—used a technique that they'd refined into an art form. They sought out impressionable young men, invited them to an all-girl orgy, and offered them a plethora of narcotics, including marijuana quietly spiked with LSD. Unfortunately, that day in Ukiah, they snared

three underage boys. More unfortunately, one of them happened to be the son of a Mendocino County deputy sheriff.

The seventeen-year-old awoke in a tangle of limbs, extricated himself, and darted home, telling his parents that his "legs looked like snakes" and that he "saw flashes when he closed his eyes." Soon all five women had been charged with felony drug possession and contributing to the delinquency of minors. They were locked up in the Mendocino County jail.

The outlook was grim for the Manson girls. Two of them were already in the probation office's sights—Atkins had just been released from her sentence, and Brunner's had just begun. But all they had to do was make one phone call and they were as good as gone.

The man they called was Roger Smith, Manson's parole officer in San Francisco. Or rather, his former parole officer. At the time of these arrests, Smith had recently left his job, and you'd think he would have severed ties with his one remaining parolee: Manson. But the two had grown close. Smith, who called Manson "Charlie," ended up becoming one of the most vital figures in my investigation—more than anyone else, he knew how and why Manson had formed the Family, because he'd watched it happen. And legally, he wielded immense power over Manson. He could've sent him back to prison at any time.

Instead, he acted more as Manson's guardian. Their bond was such that, when Manson's disciples called him from Ukiah that day in June, Smith and his wife decided to drive up to Mendocino County to check on them. They had no professional obligation to do this.

Brunner had recently given birth to a son, Michael Valentine, and with the girls in jail, the baby had no one to take care of him. (Manson was the father, of course; Michael Valentine, sometimes known as "Pooh Bear," was the Family's first child.) Smith and his wife took an extraordinary step: they got the court to appoint them

as Pooh Bear's temporary foster parents, and they returned to the Bay Area with the baby, looking after him for eight weeks.

In the meantime, a friend of Smith named Alan Rose repaired to Mendocino County to get the girls out of jail. Rose, a college dropout who met the Family through Smith, made a valiant effort. He'd become enamored of the girls. He visited them almost daily, hired lawyers for them, and testified as a character witness at their preliminary hearings. And finally he raised their bail money, winning their freedom until the trial at the end of the summer.

All the while, Manson remained in L.A., ensconced in the comfort of Dennis Wilson's home. He received periodic updates about the girls, but he never seemed terribly concerned. Why should he have been? By that time, he'd been through enough to know that he was golden: with Roger Smith watching over him, crimes had no consequences.

In the end, charges were dropped against three of the women for lack of evidence. Atkins and Brunner pleaded guilty to possessing narcotics. In exchange, the charges that they'd furnished drugs to minors were dismissed.

Then the court shocked the community by granting Atkins probation instead of sending her to prison. Brunner was already on probation in L.A., or one assumes she would've gotten it, too. The sixty days they'd already spent in the county jail was apparently punishment enough—they were free.

As we now know, Atkins would violate her probation in June 1969, forcing her to be spirited away from the Family and carted back to Mendocino County by police. And her violation wouldn't matter—the beneficent Judge Burke would return her to the fold, no questions asked.

Once again the pattern held: when it came to women in the orbit of Charles Manson, the court was unusually forgiving, ruling against the wishes of police and prosecutors.

I wanted to find the reasons behind the court's clemency. I

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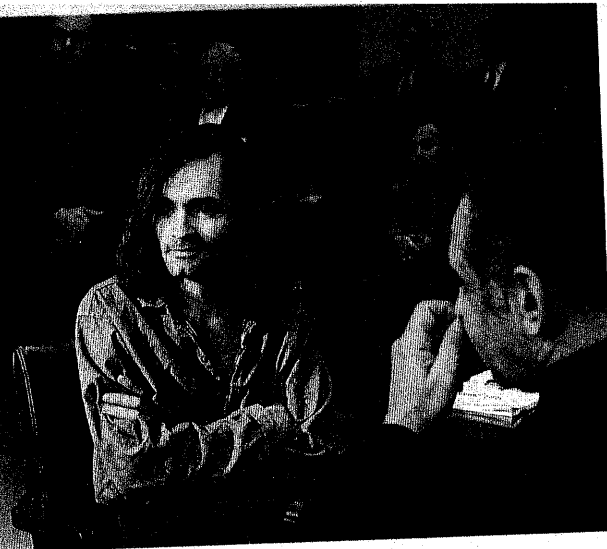
called the Superior Court in Ukiah and bought the entire file for the Mendocino case, including the record of the probation investigations for Atkins and Brunner.

It turned out that both women had received glowing appraisals and impassioned pleas for leniency from none other than Roger Smith. In his petitions, Smith identified himself as a "former federal parole officer," but he neglected to mention that his most recent and final parole client was Charles Manson—the very man who'd sent Atkins and Brunner to Mendocino in the first place.

If the court knew about Smith's relationship to Manson, there's no record of it. And the judges weren't the only ones from whom Smith withheld this information. David Mandel, a Mendocino County probation officer who filed the sentencing report for Atkins and Brunner, wrote extensively about Manson and his "guru"-like hold over the women, and he spoke to Roger Smith—without realizing the two were connected. Neither Smith nor his wife, who'd also advocated for the girls' release, ever saw fit to mention their relationship with Manson. (Smith's wife, Carol, who divorced him in 1981, denied any involvement in the recommendations, suggesting that Smith had used her name without her knowledge.)

Mandel put a lot of stock in Smith's word. He was impressed that a former federal parole officer would put his weight behind a slouch like Atkins, whom he described as "hostile and possibly vengeful." Smith and his wife swore that Atkins would "comply willingly with any probationary conditions." And while Mandel saw Brunner as "much influenced and often manipulated by her present group," the Smiths praised her as an emblem of "traditional Christian values."

Of course, Smith had spent a long time with the Family by then. He knew that Brunner and Atkins had every intention of returning to the man who dictated their lives, often inciting them to criminality. And sure enough, when the court let them go, they

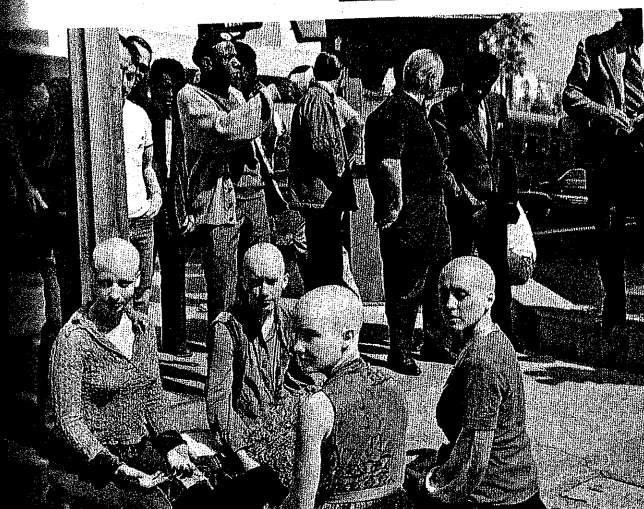


Charles Manson sitting opposite his lawyer, Irving Kanarek, at the 1970 trial for the Tate-LaBianca murders. (Bettmann Archive)

Vincent Bugliosi, chief prosecutor in the Tate-LaBianca trial, speaking with reporters outside the courtroom in 1971. (Associated Press)



Four of Manson's followers (from left: Cathy Gillies, Kitty Lutesinger, Sandy Good, and Brenda McCann) kneel on the sidewalk outside the Los Angeles Hall of Justice, March 1971. (Associated Press)



fled Mendocino immediately for the Spahn Ranch, where Manson was now situated.

In 2008, I met with David Mandel in Marin County. I was the first to tell him that Roger Smith had been Manson's parole officer.

"Of course it should have been disclosed," said Mandel, poring over the documents I'd brought. "It's a huge conflict of interest!"

Mandel remembered visiting the Smiths at their home in Tiburon, outside San Francisco. He noticed that the couple cared enough for Mary Brunner to have petitioned for temporary custody of her child. The couple was a major factor in his decision to recommend probation, he said, shaking his head. "I should've put two and two together."

One other strange fact bears mentioning, even though I've never known what to make of it. Six months after the Ukiah trial, one of the judges, Robert Winslow, lost his reelection bid to the bench—in no small part, according to one insider, because of his leniency with the Manson girls. Winslow resurfaced in Los Angeles. Remarkably, he'd become the attorney for Doris Day and her son, Terry Melcher. It was Winslow who prepped Melcher for his appearances at the Tate-LaBianca trial, and Winslow who accompanied him in the courtroom as he testified, incorrectly, about the number of times he'd met Manson. Ironically, Winslow was helping Melcher speak out against the same group he'd helped the year before. Neither he nor Melcher ever made a public comment about the sheer unlikeliness of it all.

"A Totally Irresponsible Individual"

Even before I got the probation records, I was convinced that something was off about Roger Smith's relationship with the Family. My interest in the federal officer coincided with my deep dive



The Family in Death Valley, November 1968, in a never-before-published photograph. Manson appears in the back row, fourth from the left. (Special Collections department, University of Nevada)

into COINTELPRO and CHAOS, both of which were active in the Bay Area in 1967.

I wanted to know everything about Smith and Manson. How had Smith become Manson's parole officer? Why were they so close? And what made Smith so inclined to treat Manson like a harmless hippie rather than a dangerous ex-con?

The answers came mainly from a pivotal chapter of Manson's life, one that Bugliosi glossed over in *Helter Skelter*: the summer of love. From the late spring of 1967 to June 1968, Manson lived in Haight-Ashbury, the hotbed of the counterculture. Given how often Manson is characterized as a curdled hippie—a perversion of the principles of free love—you'd think his year in the Haight would attract more attention. It was the crucible in which his identity was forged. He arrived there an ex-con and left a confident, long-haired cult leader. It was in the Haight that he began to use LSD. He learned how to attract weak, susceptible people, and how to use drugs to keep them under his thumb. And he internalized the psychological methods that would make his followers do anything for him.

This would've been all but impossible without Roger Smith.

The two came together in a roundabout way. Manson had been released from Terminal Island prison in Los Angeles County on March 21, 1967. He'd served seven and a half years for forging a government check. When he stepped out that day, he was thirty-two, and he'd spent nearly half his life in prisons and juvenile detention centers. As Bugliosi would marvel in *Helter Skelter*, prison supervisors had largely assessed Manson as nonviolent. Though he'd faced juvenile convictions of armed robbery and homosexual rape, and had beaten his wife, these didn't add up, in the eyes of the state, to a "sustained history of violence." Nor, as Bugliosi noted, did they fit the profile of a mass murderer in 1969.

Another peculiarity: all of Manson's prison time was at the fed-

eral level. Bugliosi found this startling. "Probably ninety-nine out of one-hundred criminals never see the inside of a federal court," he noted. Manson had been described as "criminally sophisticated," but had he been convicted at the state level, he would've faced a fraction of the time behind bars—maybe less than five years, versus seventeen.

Within days of his release, Manson violated his parole. Unless he had explicit permission, he was supposed to stay put; he was forbidden from leaving Los Angeles under penalty of automatic repatriation to prison. But practically immediately, he headed to Berkeley, California.

Years earlier, Manson had had his parole revoked just for failing to report to his supervisor. Now, for some reason, the police bureaucracy of an entirely different city welcomed him with open arms. When he called up the San Francisco Federal Parole Office to announce himself, they simply filed some routine paperwork transferring him to the supervision of Roger Smith, an officer and a student at UC Berkeley's School of Criminology.

Helter Skelter is deeply misleading on this point. Bugliosi writes simply that Manson "requested and received permission to go to San Francisco." The prosecutor had a copy of Manson's parole file, so he knew this wasn't true.

I wanted that file, too. After a FOIA request and months of negotiations and appeals, I received a portion of it in 2000. It contained a letter from the San Francisco parole office to the Los Angeles office, dated April 11, 1967—three weeks after Manson's release. "This man called our San Francisco Federal Parole Office to announce that he had been paroled and was now within the city of Berkeley, California," the letter begins.

He had no parole documents (he impresses as a totally irresponsible individual)...the institution at Terminal Island tells us that this man was paroled on March 21, 1967, to the

Central District of California (Los Angeles). Since this man indicates his intention to stay within the San Francisco Metropolitan area for the indefinite future we now indicate our willingness to accept transfer of supervision to this Northern District of California.

And so began Manson's assignment to Roger Smith, whom the ex-con came to revere.

As the months passed, Manson granted Smith a special role as "protector" in the abstruse mythology he'd begun to construct around himself. The Haight had introduced him to *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Robert Heinlein's provocative 1961 sci-fi novel. Manson was obsessed with the book. He carried a worn copy with him at all times, and though he was barely literate, he seemed to grasp the nuances of its dense narrative and its invented language.

There's no saying who might have read the book to him or told him about it, but in its hero, Valentine Michael, Manson recognized himself, so much so that he named his first child after him. Roger Smith got a nickname from Manson, too: "Jubal Harshaw," the most important character in the hero's life, his lawyer, teacher, protector, and spiritual guide on Earth.

The plot of *Stranger in a Strange Land* has eerie parallels to Manson's rise, so much so that, after the murders, fans of the novel went out of their way to disavow Manson's connection to it. Valentine Michael, a human raised on Mars, is endowed with hypnotic powers. He descends to Earth to foster a new and perfect race. Guarded by Jubal, he assembles a "nest" with about twenty others, almost all women, whom he initiates through sex. He demands that his followers surrender their egos to him in a spirit of total submission. They worship the innocence of children and yearn to exist in a state of such pure consciousness that they can communicate tele-

pathically. The group sleeps and eats together; one of their most sacred rituals is the act of "sharing water," which takes on vaguely druggy undertones. In Valentine Michael's philosophy, there is no death, only "discorporation"; killing people saves their souls, giving them a second chance through reincarnation. The group begins to discorporate their enemies with impunity. In time, Valentine Michael draws strength from the "nest" and, like Christ, saves the world.

After the Family was caught, *Time* magazine picked up on the bizarre parallels between *Stranger in a Strange Land* and Manson's own "nest." In January 1970, it ran a piece called "A Martian Model?" arguing that Manson had "no powers of invention at all... He may have murdered by the book."

But Roger Smith approved of Manson's fascination with the novel. He thought it was good that Manson saw his own fantasies in it; there was no harm in his desire to become a savior. If that meant that Smith himself took on the role of Jubal, so be it.

When we spoke, Smith was hazy on the details of how he became Manson's parole officer. Manson had been assigned to him as a part of the so-called San Francisco Project, an experimental parole program funded by the National Institute of Mental Health that monitored the rehabilitative progress of newly released felons. When Manson arrived in the Bay Area in March 1967, he was attached to the program—and to Roger Smith.

Manson's participation in the San Francisco Project has never been reported. In part, it explains why the two men had developed such a powerful bond—because Smith spent much more time with Manson than the average parole officer would. The project studied the relationship between federal parolees and their supervisors; researchers wanted to know how varying degrees of oversight affected recidivism rates. The six participating parole officers, all of whom had advanced degrees in criminology, were assigned one of

three caseloads: "normal," averaging about one hundred clients; "ideal," numbering forty clients; or "intensive," twenty clients.

Roger Smith fell into the middle group. He met with his clients once a week, per project guidelines. But at some point, his "ideal" caseload became even more intense than his colleagues' "intensives." By the end of '67, he'd winnowed his set of parolees from forty down to just one: Manson.

I was shocked that Manson had become Smith's one and only client, but I could never figure out why. Hoping to learn more, I interviewed Smith's research assistant from that time, Gail Sadalla. Although Smith had assured me that he'd never met Manson before becoming his parole officer, Sadalla had a different recollection. Smith told her in 1968 that Manson became his charge because he'd already been his probation officer years earlier—in the early sixties, at the Joliet Federal Prison in Illinois. Admittedly, this seemed all but impossible. Manson had never been in the Illinois parole system, and he'd only been incarcerated in the state for a few days in 1956. But Sadalla was convinced that the two had met previously. When I told her that her former boss had no memory of meeting Manson before March 1967, she was stunned.

"He didn't remember that?" she asked. "I'm surprised... It was always my understanding. That's why there was this *connection*."

I didn't know what to believe, but if Sadalla was correct, it might explain how Manson was able to move to San Francisco without being sent back to prison for violating the terms of his parole: he may have been sent there.

"Wipe Your Eyes and See"

As a doctoral student at the Berkeley School of Criminology, Roger Smith studied the link between drug use and violent behavior in Oakland gang members. In April 1967, the study had seen

enough success to merit a press conference. As the *New York Times* reported, Smith and his colleagues had found that a gang's drug use, rather than "mellowing them out," more often triggered violent behavior. The students wanted to distinguish between gang members who fell into violence because of inherent sociopathic tendencies and those who became sociopathic because of drugs.

Smith conducted research through his own "immersion." He and the other researchers created "outposts" in the Oakland slums, hanging around at community centers and churches, befriending gang members under less-than-transparent circumstances. They embraced a "participant-observer" approach to social research, which Smith would further incorporate into his methods in the years to come.

By 1967, Smith was regarded as an expert on gangs, collective behavior, violence, and drugs. Manson, his one and only parole supervisee, would go on to control the collective behavior of a gang through violence and drugs.

Smith described himself to me as a "rock-ribbed Republican"—he never struck me as someone with much tolerance for the counterculture. And yet it was his idea, he admitted, to send Manson to live in the Haight. He hoped that Manson could "soak up" some of the "vibes" of the peace and love movement exploding in the district that summer. Maybe it would allay some of Manson's hostility.

So Manson moved from Berkeley to Haight-Ashbury, crashing wherever he could and never paying rent. The hippie movement was nearing its high point. Bohemians were dispensing with boundaries, giving away clothes, drugs, sex, music, and hours of talk about tolerance. Anarchists called for the end of racism, capitalism, and imperialism; the mere act of picking up a guitar had a new ideological voltage. The length of your hair said everything about you. Drawn by the psychedelic aesthetic, teens flocked from

around the country to get laid, to try to bring enduring peace to the world, or to try pot and LSD, the latter of which had only recently been made illegal in California.

It was a concerted, grassroots effort to reject middle-class morality. But where some saw earthshaking radicalism, others saw only Dionysian excess. George Harrison, of Manson's life-defining band, the Beatles, stopped by the Haight that summer and came away unimpressed: "The summer of love was just a bunch of spotty kids on drugs," he said. A press release for the Human Be-In, a sprawling gathering a few months before Manson came to town, gives a sense of the era's transformative rhetoric: "A new nation has grown inside the robot flesh of the old... Hang your fear at the door and join the future. If you do not believe, please wipe your eyes and see."

When Manson went to wipe his eyes and see, he wasted no time adopting the folkways and postures of the flower children. Once he landed in the Haight, he dropped acid on a daily basis. It took just one trip to foment the most abrupt change that Roger Smith had ever witnessed in one of his charges. Manson "seemed to accept the world" after LSD, Smith wrote. Seemingly overnight, he transformed himself into an archetypal hippie, his worldview suddenly inflected with spiritualism. He grew out his hair and played guitar in the street, panhandling and scrounging for food. Although only in his early thirties, he presented himself as a father figure, attracting young, down-and-out men and women as they embarked on the spiritual quest that had led them to the Haight.

If Manson was eager to portray himself as Jesus, then Roger Smith would've been John. According to one of my sources, no one knew Manson better than his parole officer did. It would be surprising if Smith didn't know that his ward was breaking the law—a lot. But he had only praise for his sole client. "Mr. Manson

has made excellent progress," he wrote in one of several reports he made to the head parole office in Washington, D.C. "He appears to be in better shape personally than he has been in a long time."

Smith wrote those words on July 31, 1967. At the time, Manson was sitting in a jail cell. A few days earlier, in Ukiah, he'd been convicted of interfering with a police officer in the line of duty—a felony. He'd been trying to prevent the arrest of Ruth Ann Moorehouse, aka Ouisch, one of his newly recruited underage girls. Though the charge was reduced to a misdemeanor, Manson was given a thirty-day suspended sentence and three years' probation. (The arrest merited only a footnote in *Helter Skelter*—and Bugliosi didn't say that it resulted in a conviction.) Instead of being sent back to prison, Manson, who'd been out for only four months then, was back on the streets again in a few days.

That incident continued the distressing pattern of amnesty that Roger Smith could never explain. In part, Smith benefited, and continues to benefit, from a veil of secrecy. Manson's complete parole file has never been released. It wasn't even permitted into evidence during the trial. During the death-penalty phase, the defense's Irving Kanarek had subpoenaed the file, hoping he could use some part of it to argue for his client's life. Not only did the United States Attorney General, John Mitchell, refuse to release it, he dispatched David Anderson, an official from the Justice Department, to aid Bugliosi in his effort to quash the subpoena. It was an almost unprecedented action. During death-penalty arguments, when a defendant's life hangs in the balance, anything that could be introduced to save that life is routinely allowed into evidence. In the courtroom, stunned that the government wouldn't allow Manson access to his own file, Kanarek asked Anderson if it contained information that would "incriminate the Attorney General." Bugliosi objected; the judge sustained, and Anderson didn't have to

answer. Ultimately, the judge upheld the prosecution's motion to quash the subpoena. The file was never allowed into evidence, and the whole episode was excluded from *Helter Skelter*.

The fifty-five parole documents turned over to me (later sixty-nine, after exhaustive FOIA appeals) by the federal Parole Commission represent only a sliver of Manson's total file, which was described as "four inches thick" at his trial. Still, those pages have enough raw data to show that during Manson's first fourteen months of freedom in San Francisco—months during which he attracted the followers that became the Family—he was given virtual immunity from parole revocation by Roger Smith. Under Smith's supervision, Manson was repeatedly arrested and even convicted without ever being sent back to prison. It was up to Smith to revoke Manson's parole—it was ultimately his decision. But he never even reported any of his client's violations to his supervisors.

In interviews with me, Smith claimed not to have known about Manson's conviction in Ukiah, even though it had occurred under his watch. In fact, in the same July 1967 letter that should have mentioned Manson's conviction—the letter that lauded his "excellent progress"—Smith requested permission for Manson to travel to Mexico, where he would've been totally unsupervised, for a gig with a hotel band. (Smith failed to note the fact that Manson had been arrested in Mexico in 1959, resulting in his deportation to the United States and the revocation of his federal probation.)

"Manson is not to leave the Northern District of California," the parole board responded, noting that Manson's "history does not mention any employment as musician," and that his record was "lengthy and serious."

And yet, two weeks later, Smith tried again—he really wanted to send Manson to Mexico. He told the parole board that Manson had been offered a second job there by "a general distributor for the Perma-Guard Corporation of Phoenix Arizona named Mr. Dean

Moorehouse," who wanted Manson to survey "the market for insecticides, soil additives and mineral food supplements." Smith neglected to mention that Moorehouse was on probation—regulations barred associations between parolees and probationers—and one of Manson's newest recruits, the father of the fifteen-year-old whose arrest Manson had tried to prevent three weeks earlier.

The parole board rejected this second request, too. Interestingly, at the same time Smith made these requests, he'd launched a criminological study of Mexican drug trafficking for the federal government. He'd attempted to send Manson to Mazatlán, which was the main port city of Sinaloa, the drug trafficking capital of Central America in the 1960s.

"In hindsight," Smith told me when I presented him with the documents, "it was not a good decision." Then he reversed course a bit, saying that he probably made the requests "just to show Manson they wouldn't let him go."

"But, twice?" I asked. "And at the expense of your own credibility?"

He erupted. "If you want to be conspiratorial," he said, "yes, I was doing research on Mexican drug trafficking at the same time I was trying to send him there. So, yes, you could make it look like that, but that wasn't what it was. I wasn't a career PO. I only did it for a couple of years because I needed the money while I did my dissertation. My wife was a teacher, but we had no money. Was I a career, committed parole officer? *No!*"

Committed or not, Smith had official responsibilities—and the paper trail, in its sparseness, suggests that these didn't much weigh on him. After those two Mexico requests, Smith generated only two more documents regarding Manson for another five months. Both were simple form letters authorizing Manson to travel to Florida to meet with "recording agents."

Those interested me for several reasons. First, they violated

Smith's orders from Washington—he was to forbid Manson from leaving the Northern District of California under any circumstances. Second, Smith had postdated them, suggesting that he wrote them *after* Manson had already left town, safeguarding him from another potential violation. And third, there's no sign that Manson and the Family ever actually went to Florida. If they went anywhere, the only available evidence suggests, it was to Mexico.

Smith's letters are from November 1967. On the very day that Susan Atkins's probation officers were frantically trying to prevent her from traveling, she, Manson, and the others were pulling out of San Francisco in their big yellow bus with permission from Roger Smith.

Manson was required to send postcards to Smith; there's no record that he did. Later, probation reports noted that Atkins and Mary Brunner had said they spent quite a bit of time in Mexico with Manson that winter. Otherwise, their whereabouts for November and December 1967 are entirely unaccounted for.

Fourteen Naked Hippies in a Ditch

After the Florida letters, the record of Manson's supervision stops for another five months—a period during which Manson reported to Smith on a weekly and sometimes daily basis, as he turned his soul-searching followers into programmed killers and planned for a race war.

There should be an avalanche of paperwork on Manson from this time. While certainly Smith wrote reports, the Parole Commission released only twelve documents from his fourteen-month supervision. The Los Angeles portion of Manson's file—covering approximately May 1968 to October 1969—is nearly as incomplete, with sixteen letters from agency officials and Samuel Barrett, who succeeded Smith as Manson's parole officer.

As few as they are, those letters depict an unmanageable parolee at odds with the “excellent progress” described by Smith a year earlier. Barrett once wrote to Manson, “Considering the nature of your last two arrests, and the suspicion you have aroused with law enforcement in this district, the reflection of your status leaves much to be desired.”

Despite this admonishment, Barrett was the parole officer Bugliosi singled out for blame at the trial and in *Helter Skelter*. Not Smith, the foster parent to Manson's baby; not Smith, the proud possessor of an affectionate nickname from Manson; not Smith, the parole officer who praised Manson's “progress” three days after he was criminally convicted. By smearing Barrett, Bugliosi diverted attention from Smith's far graver sins. After all, where Smith's caseload had dwindled from forty to just one, Barrett had between two hundred fifty and three hundred parole cases between 1967 and 1969. But in *Helter Skelter's* more than seven hundred pages, Bugliosi could spare only twenty-one words for Roger Smith, whom he never called to testify at trial. Smith told me that he was never questioned about Manson by Bugliosi, the police, or any federal agency—ever.

I knew there had to be more papers from Smith's time as Manson's parole officer. Remember, under oath at the trial, Barrett had described Manson's parole file as “about four inches thick.” I asked the Parole Commission spokesperson, Pamela A. Posch, how it could have been reduced to what I'd been told was only 138 pages, and why I could see only 69 of these, extensively redacted. The Bureau of Prisons “apparently did not retain all of the parole documents pertaining to Mr. Manson,” Posch wrote, conceding that this was unusual. The bureau had a policy to preserve the files of “notorious felons” for history's sake. Manson was about as notorious as a felon could be.

I thought I'd exhausted my options, but then I remembered that Smith and Manson were part of the San Francisco Project. Since it was a federal study funded by NIMH, it would have

required even closer scrutiny of Manson's activities; according to Smith, its clients were to be tracked, analyzed, and recorded in a separate file. But it practically goes without saying: that file was missing, too.

If Smith maintained a close record of Manson, he kept a lot of people in the dark, including his own colleagues. He provided so few details that the parole offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco didn't even know where Manson was living.

In April 1968, Smith's carelessness blew up in his face when, yet again, Manson was arrested. And there was no covering it up this time—too many papers had gotten the story. When Smith's colleagues at the parole office read about it, they flipped out and tried to do what Smith hadn't: send Manson back to prison.

The headline in the *Los Angeles Times* read, "Wayward Bus Stuck in Ditch: Deputy Finds Nude Hippies Asleep in Weeds." Other papers picked up the news, too. Their articles were the first to describe what the world would soon know as the Manson Family.

The *Times* staff writer Charles Hillinger described an Oxnard deputy on a late-night patrol who stumbled on a broken-down bus in a ditch by the Pacific Coast Highway. When he saw the bodies scattered in the weeds—nine women, five men—he thought they were dead. Then he realized they were only sleeping. After running a check on the bus's tags, he learned it had been reported stolen from Haight-Ashbury. Waking the group, he told them to get dressed and wait for the county bus he'd ordered, which would take them all to jail. Before they left, one of the women (later identified as Mary Brunner) said, "Wait, my baby's on the bus." She went back to pick up her child, then only a week old. He was sick, with grime and open sores all over his body.

The article identified the "self-proclaimed leader of the band of

wanderers" as Charles Manson, adding that he was booked on suspicion of grand theft. Brunner was charged with endangering the life of a child. She was later convicted and received two years' probation.

Within several days, the chief of the San Francisco probation office, Albert Wahl, was alerted to an article about the arrest in the *Oakland Tribune*: "14 Nude Hippies Found Beside Wayward Bus." Of course, one of those hippies was a parolee under his office's supervision.

Wahl flew into a rage, writing to his counterpart in Los Angeles, Angus McEachen, for assistance in finding Manson and sending him back to San Francisco. Wahl had to admit, embarrassingly, that his office's file on Manson was "incomplete," but "apparently" he had been traveling "freely between San Francisco and Los Angeles" for months. Wahl didn't know if Manson had permission to travel, but one thing was clear, he added in a moment of supreme understatement: "regulations weren't followed." Smith's name didn't come up in the letter, but surely Wahl had him in mind when he wrote, "The officer who was handling the case is no longer attached to this office."

Wahl also wrote of two more arrests in McEachen's district, noting that Manson had failed to report them, as required. For good measure, he sent a copy of his letter to the head of the national office in Washington, adding a copy of the *Tribune* story and a handwritten note: "Be sure to read the clipping—there are people like this."

"You Have Nothing More Important to Do"

So far, the "people like this" had yet to suffer any consequences for their actions. Having been found the legal owner of the bus, Manson spent one day in jail. Then he was released, along with the rest of the group.

McEachen, the chief of the Los Angeles probation office, was not happy about this. He had something of a personal stake in Manson's fate. All the way back in May 1960, he'd been the one to violate Manson's probation for failing to report to his supervisor, sending Manson back to federal prison. He had every intention of following a similar course this time—but he soon learned that, while Manson's probation had been easy to violate in 1960, things were different now.

In a letter to Wahl, McEachen said that Manson had “personally appeared in our office to bring us up-to-date on his adventuresome nature.” Claiming to have no interest in money or work—“he has over 3,000 friends who are willing to give him any needed assistance”—Manson said that he owned the school bus and that he and his “girls” had been traveling between San Francisco and Los Angeles in it for months. If anyone from the probation office needed to contact him, he could be reached through a “friend named Gary Hinman of Topanga Canyon”—the same Hinman whom the Family would murder about a year later.

Manson had gall, but McEachen thought he'd gained the upper hand—because Manson had since been arrested *again*, this time on a drug charge. Apparently he was at that moment sitting in the Los Angeles County jail awaiting arraignment.

Sadly, McEachen was wrong: Manson had been released the previous day. For unknown reasons, the DA had declined to file charges. Not to be deterred, McEachen and Wahl tried to rein in their wandering, lawbreaking parolee. As the highest-ranking figures in their offices, they had a lot of clout—but not enough to catch Manson.

Wahl's most vigorous attempt came on June 3, 1968, when he sent a stern ultimatum to Manson's last two known addresses in San Francisco and Los Angeles. (The latter belonged to Dennis Wilson.) Because Wahl didn't know Manson's exact whereabouts, he was forced to give him two options: report to the U.S. proba-

tion office in either city immediately. “Failure to follow this direction,” he wrote, “will result in my recommending that a warrant for mandatory release violation be issued”:

From this point on, you are not to leave your current residence without written permission from a U.S. Probation Officer. Any permission given you by Mr. Smith, who is no longer connected with this Service, is hereby canceled. Give this matter your immediate attention. You have nothing more important to do.

Manson defied the orders. Rather than showing up in person, he made a phone call to Wahl, who was out of the office—and furious to learn, in a message taken by a subordinate, that Manson had said he was living at Dennis Wilson's place and had been offered a \$20,000 annual recording contract by the Beach Boys' label. As Wahl later wrote to McEachen, “It would appear that Mr. Manson is on another LSD trip.”

Still, at least they knew where Manson was living now. That was a step in the right direction, wasn't it? On June 6, they sent Samuel Barrett, his new parole officer, to make an unannounced visit. As Barrett reported back, “Manson and some of his hippie followers, mostly female,” had “found a haven” at Wilson's home; “apparently [Wilson] has succumbed to Manson's obsequious manner.”

Just how deeply had Wilson “succumbed,” though? Could it really be true that their delinquent parolee had sweet-talked a Beach Boy into giving him a record deal? McEachen must've been relieved to hear from Nick Grillo, the Beach Boys' manager. Requesting anonymity, Grillo complained that “Manson and his followers are proving to be a threatening factor to the music company.” The record label “would have to be idiotic” to have signed him.

The parole office decided they had to order Manson back to

San Francisco, making it clear that he'd return to prison if he failed to comply. On June 12, Barrett sent a letter giving him twelve days to return.

Someone must have intervened. There's no record of what happened between June 12 and the June 24 deadline, but apparently that deadline evaporated. The next letters came in late July and early August. Making no mention of the skipped deadline, McEachen reported to Washington, D.C., that he'd received a phone call from Manson, who had moved on to the Spahn Ranch, where he was "receiving free room and board in exchange for his work as a ranch hand." By then, someone above Wahl, McEachen, and Barrett must've decided that it was best to just let Manson be.

Manson built the Family right under his federal supervisors' noses. From then on, the federal government, as well as local and state law enforcement, only backed further away from the group as they more brazenly broke the law.

The only one who didn't was Roger Smith. Well after his supervision of Manson ended, he was still writing letters to the Mendocino County court about Atkins's and Brunner's sterling characters, and he was caring for Manson's son. Smith and his wife even hosted Manson at their home. With all I'd learned, I still couldn't grasp how a "rock-ribbed Republican" would fall in with an aspirant hippie like Manson—and why their friendship persisted beyond the dissolution of their official relationship.

Coda: The Speed Scene

Smith may have had ulterior motives when he told Manson to move to Haight-Ashbury. As part of his criminology research, he'd been tapped to lead a study on amphetamines and their role in the violent behavior of Haight-Ashbury hippies. The National Institute of Mental Health funded this study, as they had the San Francisco Project. In 1976, a FOIA request forced NIMH to acknowledge that it

had allowed itself to be used by the CIA as a funding front in the sixties.

Smith hoped to learn why some people, but not others, became psychotically violent on amphetamines—and to see if this violence could be controlled. The goals of the Amphetamine Research Project (ARP), as he dubbed it, were to "illuminate three major areas" of the "speed scene" in the Haight: the "individual" experience, the "collective or group experience," and the "way in which violence is generated within the speed marketplace." Smith studied hippie collectives by observing them in their daily routines, and he enjoined his researchers to participate, too. He later recalled that when he was appointed to lead the study, "[I] took off my gray-flannel suit and my wing-tip shoes and grew a moustache. Soon the kids on Haight Street were calling me the Friendly Fed and asking me to help them with the law."

There's no indication that his technique proved useful—because there's not much indication that the ARP ever happened at all. Smith never published his research. Two papers about the ARP were scheduled to appear in the *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, but they never materialized. The closest thing to a record of the ARP is Smith's unpublished dissertation, submitted to Berkeley a month before the Manson murders. Even this, however, contains no actual "participation-observation" data—it is mainly secondhand anecdotes and statistical analysis.

But the paper, "The Marketplace of Speed: Violence and Compulsive Methamphetamine Abuse," does describe the nature of participant-observation, which, Smith wrote, forced a social scientist to break the law. Hiding in a "deviant group," he had to convince drug users

that they can trust him with information which, in other hands, would place them in jeopardy, and perhaps most important, he must resolve the moral dilemma of being part

of something which he may find morally objectionable (at best), probably by association he could himself be arrested... in a very real sense, he becomes a co-conspirator... with information and insight which under normal conditions the average citizen would be obliged to share with law enforcement... he must try to understand what individuals within the group feel, how they view the "straight" world, how they avoid arrest or detection...

To ensure success, Smith argued, researchers had to protect their subjects from criminal prosecution, concealing their activities from the police and granting them anonymity in all reports. The ARP, then, had something resembling police immunity baked into its very mission.

Smith ran the ARP out of the Haight-Ashbury Free Medical Clinic (HAFMC), which had just opened the previous summer. Soon, he was spending so much time there that he made a proposition to his only parole client: instead of meeting with Manson in downtown San Francisco, where Smith had an office, why not just meet at the clinic? It was more convenient for both of them, and anyway, by that time Manson and "his girls" had started to contract sexually transmitted diseases; the clinic could treat those for free.

Soon Manson became a mainstay at the HAFMC. Between visiting Smith and receiving medical care, there were some weeks when he appeared at the clinic every day. He became a familiar presence to a number of the doctors there, including several who, like Smith, had received federal funds to research drug use among hippies.

Smith got the ARP off the ground at the same time he was supervising Manson for the San Francisco Project. It was during this overlap that the record of Manson's parole supervision was either spotty, nonexistent, or later expunged. This funny, scruffy

little visitor to the clinic, always with his retinue of girls, was taking a ton of drugs and forming the Family. By the time he and his followers turned up in that ditch by the side of the Pacific Coast Highway in April 1968, the girls had traded the flowers in their hair for steel knives, sheathed in leather and strapped to their thighs beneath long flowing dresses. I was convinced that Roger Smith had played some part in this transformation; now I began to wonder whether the HAFMC, with its emphasis on hippies, drugs, and research, had some role, too.