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Mendocino In The Seventies

People, Places and Events of California's Mendocino Coast
by Nicholas Wilson, Photographer

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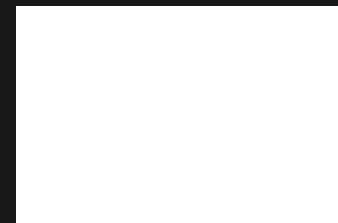
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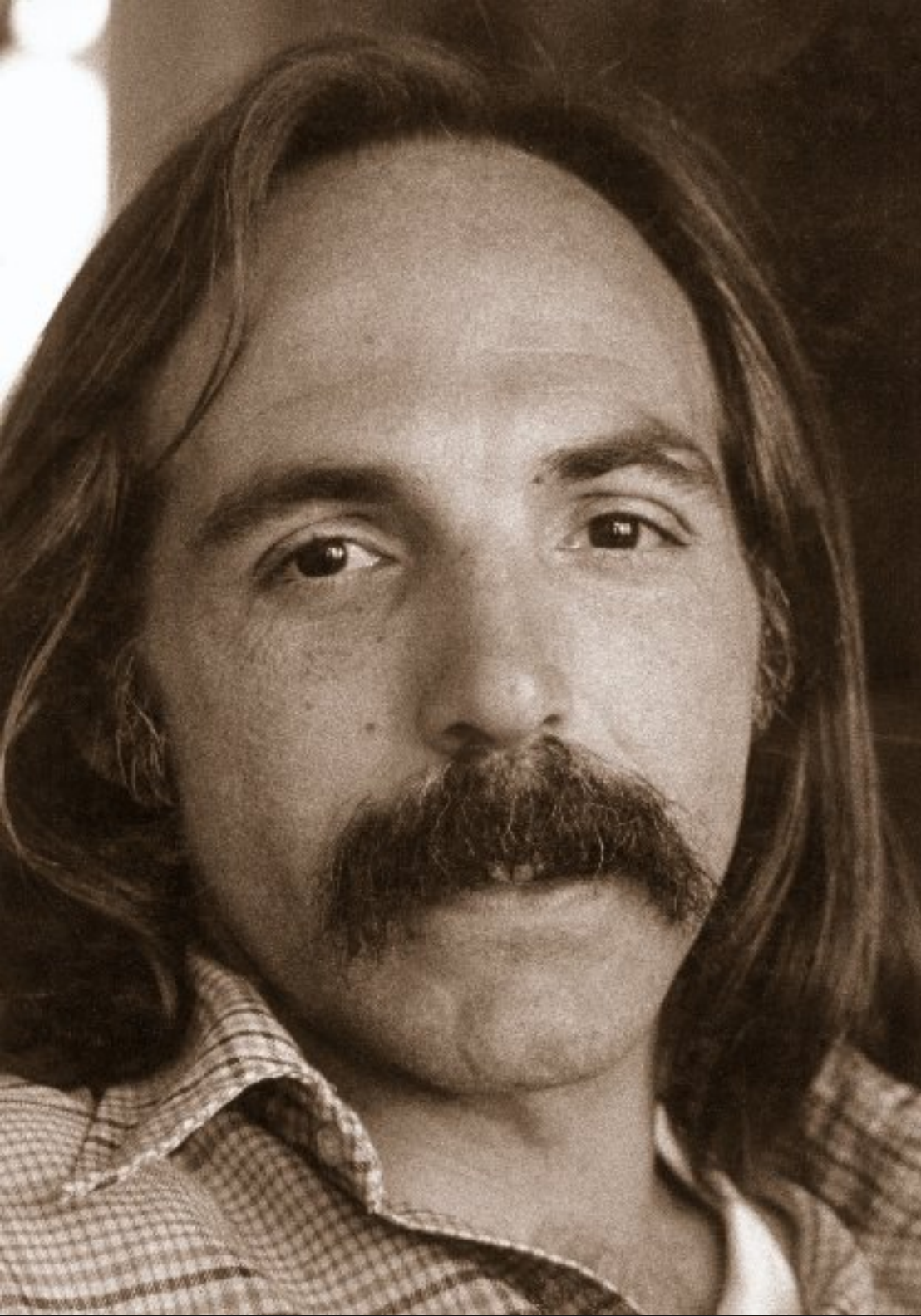
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Bob Smith in his San Francisco apartment, 1977

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Bob Smith, singer, songwriter and keyboard player with Cat Mother.

Bob was born July 7, 1942 in Jacksonville, Florida, and died March 21, 1991 in San Francisco. Bob and Roy Michaels started Cat Mother And The All-Night Newsboys in New York's Greenwich Village in 1967. Bob, wife Alice and baby Jennifer migrated to the West Coast with the rest of the band in 1969, and they lived in Elk for several years. Bob was kind, funny, talented, and beloved by all.

With Cat Mother and its many offshoots, mutations and revivals, Bob wrote many of the songs which enlivened the times, and live on in our memories today.

—*Nicholas Wilson*



Introduction

The Mendocino Coast of Northern California is a magical place of stunning natural beauty, dotted with little towns built of lumber from the giant redwoods that drew Euro-American settlers there in the early 1850s. By 1970, the once vast old-growth forests had been logged, and the timber boom that had powered the economy for 120 years was going bust. Land and rentals were cheap. A four-bedroom house out Little Lake Road rented for \$50 a month — not just a room, the whole house! A salmon dinner at the Pyewacket cost \$2.75, coffee was 20 cents (with free refills) and their famous lumpydump muffins were 10 cents.

There was a wave of mostly young adults who wanted to escape the crowded, polluted cities and live a simpler, more natural life in the country. Word spread quickly that Mendocino was a special place, a cultural oasis of sorts. It became a magnet for artists, craftspeople, writers, poets, musicians, actors, beatniks, back-to-the-land folks, communards, bohemians, trust-funders, do-it-yourself homebuilders, self-employed artisans, and small business entrepreneurs, among others. Some of them were able to find a niche, a place to live and a way to

cover the modest cost of living, at least for a while. In a sense they were new pioneers.

The Mendocino Coast drew many, but selected only a few to stay — a few hundred, perhaps a thousand men, women and children spread up and down the coast's ridges and valleys. Many came in the cool, rain-free summer months when the living was easy, only to be driven away by howling winter storms and long months of wind and rain, short days and long nights. Those who learned to adapt were those who lasted.

Back in the seventies, the unincorporated town of Mendocino was beautifully funky! Many old buildings had weathered, unpainted redwood siding and wood-shingled roofs, or they were coated in a limited palette of flaking paint. Many of them had been built in the 1800s by craftsman carpenters from the Northeast, giving the town a genuine New England look. Set on a rocky, cliff-rimmed peninsula with the Pacific Ocean on three sides, the town provided abundant inspiration for painters and photographers. Most Mendocino houses were still homes back then, with local folks living in them. It was before gentrification began in the mid-eighties and nineties, driven by developers and speculators, vastly inflating real estate prices and drawing yet another new wave of migrants, this time well-off second-homers, retirees and boutique merchants catering to tourists. It was before the town became "Mendocino Village," the cute Victorian tourist destination.

This book is intended as a pictorial memento of an earlier, simpler time, created especially for those who lived on the Mendocino Coast back then, or wish they did. — *Nicholas Wilson*

Disclaimer

This book includes photos from 1970 to 1983, mostly from the seventies, hence the book's title. The book is not comprehensive. It is only one man's view of his friends, acquaintances and neighbors who allowed him to photograph them and document the places and events they were part of. The idea for the book came in mid-September, 2006, but it had to be done quickly to be ready in December. So it is inevitable that many people, places and events that should be included in the book are left out. There are over 50,000 images in my files, and it would take months to search, catalog select and scan them. My apologies to anyone who feels left out. If there is enough interest, there may be a volume two in the future. My apologies too if I included your picture but left out your name, spelled it wrong, or mixed up names and faces. Nothing in this book is intended to show anyone in a false light, or mock, belittle or embarrass anyone, hurt their feelings or invade their privacy. Every effort will be made to correct any errors that are brought to my attention in a later edition. This book should not be relied on as an authority on dates, names or facts, because there was not enough time to fact check every assertion. Despite its limitations, I hope people will enjoy having this collection of photos of a very special time in a very special place. — *Nicholas Wilson*



Cat Mother publicity photo, December 1971. From left: Charlie Prichard, Roy Michaels, Bob Smith, Steve Davidson and Michael Equine, with little Jennifer Smith in front. This shot from my first roll of black and white film launched my career as a professional photographer. The band members were waiting for a hired photographer to set up his gear, and were just talking when I took this candid shot. They liked it better than the posed shots the other guy did, and they paid me for using it as their new publicity photo, thereby making me an instant "pro."

A Brief History of Cat Mother

by Ellen Callas

Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys was a band born during the late spring of 1967 in New York's Greenwich Village, the brainchild of musical collaborators Roy Michaels and Bob Smith. Combining amplified violin, mandolin, banjo and a basic rock quartet, with complex melodies and intelligent lyrics, *Cat Mother* was an instant NYC success.

The band's socio/political views often found them organizing for activist causes. In New York City, they held benefits for the War Resisters League, WBAI and a variety of other community groups. While living upstate in the summer of 1968 they held a bi-weekly outdoor "Woodstock Festival of Sound and Light" that became the inspiration for the famous 1969 festival.

After their Top-Ten hit "Good Old Rock and Roll," a stint as "The Electric Circus" house band and extensive national touring with Jimi Hendrix (who produced the first of their four albums), *Cat Mother* migrated west to California. In late 1969 *Cat Mother* with families in tow landed quite accidentally in Mendocino. On December 31, that laid back community danced wildly into 1970 to the electric sounds of its newest residents.

For the next decade, keyboardist Smith, bassist Michaels, drummer Michael Equine, new percussionist Steve Davidson and a variety of guitarists would be the musical epicenter of the Mendocino Coast community. They held regular dances, outdoor "boogies", voter registration drives and countless benefits. Continuing touring and recording, *Cat Mother* eventually morphed into the *Gonzo Bandits*, and then *Horse Badorties* and *Smith*. For many Mendocinians, they remain the soundtrack of our memories.



Ed and Jay were hitchhikers who steered me to Mendocino in the summer of 1970 by offering a place to stay in my Volkswagen camper. This is their camp on the north side of Jughandle Creek on my first morning in Mendocino County.

Another campsite off Gibney Lane, just north of Jughandle Creek. Life was easy in the dry summer months.



Old Austin Texas friends Terry Dyke and Liz Helenchild joined the campers off Gibney Lane in September of 1970.





Old Austin friends Jim and Karin Benson moved to Mendocino in 1971. Jim gave me a darkroom setup he no longer wanted and encouraged me to take up photography full time. At the time, I rented a room in their house at the end of Jackson St. in Mendocino.



Mendocino's Main St. at Kasten St. in 1971, with Bob and Betty Dostal's clock shop at left, and Bill Zacha's original Bay Window Gallery upstairs behind the window that gave the gallery its name.



Tony and Ella Russell and son Jesse posed in front of the view from their home on Greenwood Ridge Road in Elk, looking every bit the "New Pioneer Family." It was 1972, but looks a century older.



This 1973 view from Cuffey's Cove looks down the coast toward Elk, Manchester and Point Arena. The corrals in the foreground were built by Charlie Nonella, who lived in the big ranch house across Highway One.