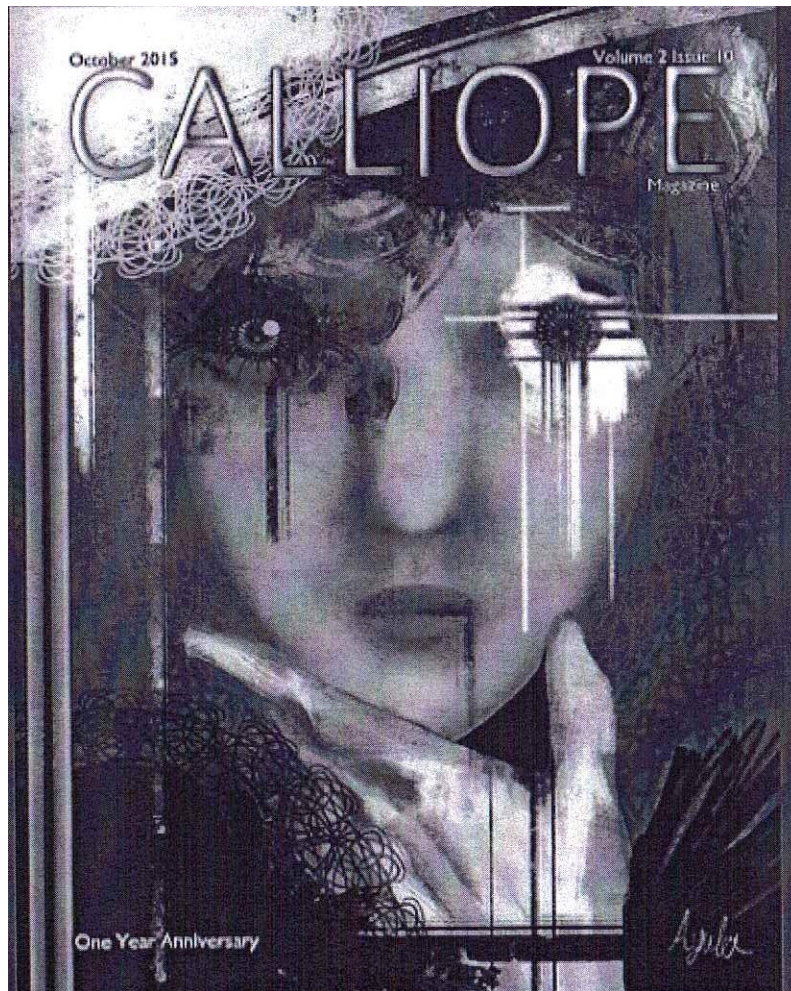


STALKING THE BEATLES

by

Kathryn Holzman



Mom loaded the family into the blue Belair station wagon to see the Beatles. The musicians were on their first visit to the US. The local paper reported that the mop tops from Liverpool were staying at a luxury hotel near the freeway. As they made the turn off of 101, Katie could see the hotel's circular drive, crowded with masses of teenage girls bearing signs saying "Paul, we love you."

As always, Mom had a plan. It was highly unlikely that the Beatles would make their way through the crush of screaming girls. Instead, she directed Dad to drive to an unmarked rear entrance to the hotel. Amenable, he snaked the car through an alley used by maintenance men and hotel employees and parked next to garbage dumpster at the rear of the hotel. Two other cars followed in the hope that the family had inside information.

Stalking the Beatles was way more exciting than the usual after dinner field trips. Most nights, after mom loaded the dinner dishes into the dishwasher, they went to ogle the ashes of train wrecks, house fires or plane crashes. On calmer days, they would park beneath the runways at SFO, waiting for a calamity but settling for the thunder of landing gear being lowered and reversed engines bringing the massive vehicle to a vehement halt.

Dad drove, as usual following her mother's directions. He held his cigarette outside the car window.

The crowd in front of the hotel was growing fast. From her perch in the middle the backseat, Katie experienced the wave of anticipation, felt the heat of the mass of bodies crushing against each other. The idea of so much adoration brought tears to her eyes. She was so willing.

Her brother was two years older. "God this is so embarrassing."

Her little sister wore pajamas in the back seat. "Where are they?" she kept asking.

They waited. At some point, the roar of the crowd filled the air competing with the wail of police sirens. A crescendo shook the ground, rattling the metal of the malodorous dumpster. It was happening. The arrival of the Beatles in America was a big, big deal.

The five of them loaded into the station wagon on a quest for adventure, her mother at the helm, fueled by martinis and an unquenchable thirst for excitement that she would never satisfy. Katie, in the back seat, waiting for George, the spiritual Beatle, clutching a Teen Beat in her lap,

Her parents' drinking was becoming a problem. When her father took his hands off the steering wheel to light a new cigarette, the car careened for a moment, almost out of control. "Dad!!" the three children called out in unison, afraid of crashing.

The roar of that crowd was just the beginning. The whole world knew. The Beatles were about to change everything.