

## PROLOGUE:

# Woodstock History

I appreciate that you're reading my book and will accompany me on this visit back to Woodstock, which originally took place August 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> 1969. The weekend I remember, or at least I think I remember, is true. The joke has always been, "If you remember Woodstock, you weren't there." That is based on the fact that there was sex, drugs, and Rock & Roll. Today the saying should be, "If you remember Woodstock, you have a great memory since you are old and on your last leg." For it's over 47 years ago when the hippies of Woodstock had the best time of their lives. I was there, I remember. It was the best time in my life and why wouldn't it be, there was sex, drugs and Rock & Roll. Strangely that's all I can remember of these days. Most of my memory is based on the fact that I have told the stories over and over again. Is it fact? It was once said in a movie, I saw, *The Man that Shot Liberty Valance*, that "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." This story should be considered historical fiction, and I will take you back there myself, to the Woodstock Festival, the way it was on that weekend back in August, 1969.

First, I want to assure all you readers that I was truly there. Everyone has a story, and, as well, I have mine, but I also have 47 years on top of that. That means I can look back on Woodstock, but I can also look forward from it. The bulk of the story takes place from August 14, just one day before the start of the festival until August 18, one day after the festival was suppose to end, with a few detours through the future thrown in.

My book is as much about my generation as it is about a wonderful weekend. Nearly everyone in the world has heard about Woodstock. When I meet people and tell them I was there, I seem to sense a hint of jealousy, but at the same time it tells the person more about me than I can explain. It's never hindered me when meeting people. It was a weekend of growing up, and I know it changed my life.

It wasn't Woodstock that made that weekend famous; it's the people that made Woodstock famous. You need to know that. Everyone came for the music, wanting to see the groups that sang the songs that made up our lives, the songs played on the radio, on our turntables, in our ears and emitted from our souls. We came to Yasgur's farm as individuals with the same belief, that the world can be a better place with love and music. It turned out to be the biggest and best party one could ever go to, a place in the American music world that brought attention to my generation. I'm happy to have been at Woodstock. It's this farm, this party, and this concert to end all concerts that will be the background to a love story, my love story.

Before we take the journey back let me explain why Woodstock. The town of Woodstock, New York, was established in 1787, and through the late 1800s various painters from many schools would come to Woodstock. In the early 1900s an Arts and Crafts Movement came to Woodstock, and it became known as an Artist Colony. I have found that one of the major groups was Hervey White's Maverick Art Colony, and from 1915 through 1931, they held the Maverick Festival each summer where people turned out for art, theater, music, and lots of partying. Let's flash forward to the 1960s, where the likes of Richie Havens, Paul Butterfield, Bob Dylan and The Band, and even Janis Joplin would turn out to play. I mention these to show the caliber of musicians that were in the area and other than Bob Dylan the others all played at the Woodstock Festival.

It was this town's reputation that inspired the promoters to have their music festival in this area and call it the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, but I found that their plan was squashed when the town turned down their request for permits. Ouch! That site was Mills Industrial Park in Wallkill, New York, and the rejection to the permits was based on some cockamamie reason that the port-a-potties wouldn't meet the town's code. I would say, "That's a lot of shit." Michael Lang had expected 50,000 people although at a time closer to the concert, he projected 200,000 people. Still wrong.

Michael found and got in touch with Max Yasgur, who had a 600-acre dairy farm. They met, they talked, and they agreed on a price of \$75,000, which was ten times more than they had been expecting to pay at the other site. Max was no dummy. This price surely helped Max, since it hadn't been a very profitable year so far.

I actually agree with Michael's choice, he couldn't have found a better spot to hold this festival because of the contour of the land, especially the bowl-shaped field where the concert itself was held. So now that you know about the farm, let me review for you the players. If you really want to learn more about them and their roles, you can read their books, but here is a synopsis.

John Roberts and Joel Rosenman were very much the Ivy-league, preppy type of guys. John was the heir to the Polident Denture Cream fortune and grew up in New Jersey. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1966 and looked like he came out of a Brooks Brothers commercial.

Strangely enough Joel Rosenman was the son of a dentist and grew up in Long Island. He graduated from Princeton and went on to also graduate from the Yale Law School. John and Joel met in 1966 and became such good friends that they moved in together in New York City.

They quit their jobs a year later to do their own venture together and found themselves with a proposal to build a recording studio in Manhattan. They opened the studio under the name Media Sound on 57<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and it became very popular, so by 1968 they found themselves very much in the music business.

They were inspired to take out an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* that read, "YOUNG MEN WITH UNLIMITED CAPITAL looking for interesting legitimate investment opportunities and business propositions. X1739 Times."

Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld were very much on a completely different track than John and Joel, not even in the same train station. Michael left his home in Brooklyn at 16 and later dropped out of NYU. He moved to Florida and opened one of the first head shops in Miami. He also promoted rock bands and would put on small rock festivals.

Artie was also born in Brooklyn, but by 1968 he was already in the music field having written over 30 songs. He was also a producer and the vice president of Capitol Records.

At the end of 1968 Michael had moved up north in the back woods of the Woodstock area and was managing a group. When he called Capitol Records to discuss the group, he and Artie found out they were from the same neighborhood, so Artie sets up an appointment. They, like John and Joel, quickly became friends and both came up with an idea of a festival to help kick-start a recording studio, which Michael thought was needed at Woodstock. There were many musicians there as I mentioned earlier, so it seemed like a great retreat where artists could record.

Michael and Artie wanted their own recording studio while John and Joel had already established one in New York City. Miles Lourie, a lawyer who had dealt with all four of them, called Joel to set up a meeting. When the two hippies walked in, that being Michael and Artie, John and Joel were taken aback. The original proposal was slapped down on the table, but what John was intrigued by was what he read at the bottom of the proposal, which stated something similar to this, "Since there are many musicians living up in Woodstock we think we can get some to do a concert for the opening of the studio." John and Joel had this great idea to have the concert first to generate funds for the recording studio. Since the Monterey Pop Festival had been only 18 months earlier and the movie of that event was just released during the Christmas of 1968, in John's mind he thought, "We'll have another Monterey Pop Festival." There you have it, the *Reader's Digest* version of how Woodstock, the greatest Rock & Roll Festival of all time, got started.

So in even a briefer summation, John Roberts and Joel Rosenman had the money. Artie Kornfeld, more the speaker and Michael Lang, more the hippie-looking guy, had the idea to start a recording studio. They collaborated with the moneymen and planned a concert to introduce the studio to musicians, but then decide on a festival first. Snow-balling from there, Woodstock is born. It was these four men that were considered the promoters of the Woodstock Music and Art Fair that registered the name Woodstock Ventures Inc. They made history.

Artie Kornfeld is known as The Father of Woodstock. Artie is considered responsible for signing up the groups, some even signed just before going on stage and credited for hiring the award winning director Michael Wadleigh to shoot the film. As I have learned since then, he is also credited with playing a big role in stopping development on Yasgur's farm after Max sold it. He is the writer of the book, *The Pied Piper of Woodstock*.

Michael Lang, who has now been introduced to you, is considered half the developer of the concept of a major festival, which he did with Artie Kornfeld. Michael helped find the site. As I have learned since then, he produced Woodstock 94 and Woodstock 99, anniversaries of the original 1969 Woodstock. He is the writer of the book, *The Road to Woodstock*.

Joel Rosenman and John Roberts were the financial investors. Joel is involved with investments and financing. John, I'm sorry to say, died from cancer in 2001 at the age of 56. Their book is *Young Men with Unlimited Capital: The Inside Story of the Legendary Woodstock Festival Told by the Two People Who Paid for It*.