

Books

NEW JERSEY AUTHORS

Mark Voger was a sixth-grader at Holy Rosary School in the Diocese of Camden when he was introduced to the larger, groovier world that was just outside his reach in the 1960s. His new book, "Groovy: When Flower Power Bloomed in Pop Culture," takes a fun look back at that period, highlighted by interviews with stars from that era. *TwoMorrows*



Far out! A good read for the near hippies



Jacqueline Cutler
jacqueline.cutler@gmail.com

OK, true confessions time. Did you gasp when you heard David Cassidy died, and get a painful shock when you realized he was 67? Do you still think black-light posters and hanging ferns really pull a room together?

Then it may be time to face it: You're a real child of the '60s — perhaps too young to have seen the Beatles at Shea, but old enough to remember when they broke up.

You may not have been part of the revolution. But you were the tween it was marketed to.

And you're the perfect audience for "Groovy," Mark Voger's colorful salute to the whole patchouli-scented, flower-power period.

Voger, an Ocean Township resident, writes from a perspective couldn't turn on, tune in and drop out because he was too busy studying for sixth-grade tests. He could, though, beg his mom to drive him to the Moorestown Mall, where Tiny Tim was signing autographs.

And that's the point of "Groovy" — not the truly mind-blowing art the hippies embraced, but the pseudo-psychedelia peddled to their younger siblings.

There are entries here on the Beatles, Jefferson Airplane and other top bands, to be sure. But the brightest parts of the book come, ironically, from lesser lights — groups such as the Cowsills, TV shows like "Laugh-In" and comics about a Wonder Woman now running a boutique selling really far-out threads.

A veteran journalist — first at the Asbury Park Press, and now for The Star-Ledger — Voger got into the business around the time a lot of these performers and artists were clinging to their fame.

He seems to have caught nearly everyone as they made the rounds of fan conventions. For some, time and their fading fame afforded the chance to reflect.

Cassidy, for example, is honest about the awkwardness of being a teen idol: "I mean, when you're 19, you want your other friends who are 19 and 20 to think you're cool. You don't want to be with 12- and 13-year-olds. ... I wanted to make records for people my age."

Yet he appreciates the time he had on top, the friends he made and that one night in '75 when John Lennon dropped by his house.

"We got drunk together in my bedroom and played songs all night," Cassidy remembers. "I got to sing all of Paul's



"Groovy: When Flower Power Bloomed in Pop Culture"

By Mark Voger (TwoMorrows Publishing, 192 pp., \$39.95)

parts. That was the greatest musical night of my life, because those guys are the reason that I picked up a guitar in the first place."

For others, though — well, things weren't so groovy.

Such as a weary El Plumb from "The Brady Bunch." No, she doesn't have a favorite episode, no, she doesn't know why middle-child Jan was a fan favorite ("I'm not a sociologist") and no, she doesn't regret that the Brady Bunch concerts in 1972 were never broadcast.

"Thank God they weren't," she says. "It was like low-level Osmonds."

But while "Groovy" spends most of its pages digging into the family-friendly kitsch of sitcoms and bubble-gum pop, it also makes room for genuine touchstones of the era, including Woodstock, Altamont and "Easy Rider," with Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper as druggy outlaws on the road.

"I realized this is going to be a lot of fun," Fonda says of starting to shoot the seminal biker flick. "I was thinking, 'Gee, Dennis is being an (expletive). But I kept that for myself. I took that as an actor and wore an enigmatic look on my face, being that person on that bike.'"

Similar to "Monster Mash," Voger's previous book on the baby boom's creature-feature mania, the volume depends heavily on whatever old interviews he can pull from his files. And clearly he has saved everything — although, perhaps, sometimes he shouldn't have.

A Q&A with poor, damaged Brian Wilson is so monosyllabic as to be almost useless. (That's not a criticism of the interview; I had the same experience with Wilson. The question is if it should have been included.) And access isn't enough of an explanation as to why the Monkees warrant more than 10 pages, but Jerry Garcia and the rest of the Dead have to be grateful for mere, occasional mentions.

Still, this is a fun, colorful book, crammed with interviews and interesting art. Save a place for it under the Christmas tree — or next to your lava lamp.

BIOGRAPHY

Bringing a legendary CIA spymaster to life

When Americans think about the CIA today — if they think about it at all — they probably picture a secluded compound in Langley, Va., where Matt Damon matches wits with Joan Allen.

But those who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s conjure a very different image: an agency shrouded in rumors of LSD experiments, foreign assassination plots and booby-trapped cigars — all of which seemed thoroughly outlandish until proven true by the relentless investigators of the Senate Intelligence Committee and Seymour Hersh of the New York Times.

Jefferson Morley is of that generation, and he has brought the investigative tools of a veteran journalist to that murky era — specifically, to the career of James Jesus Angleton, the CIA's legendary chain-smoking, orchid-growing, poetry-quoting chief of counterintelligence. The result is "The Ghost," a page-turning biography of an eccentric spy hunter. But it's also a carefully documented argument that the CIA, an agency created to defend the ideals of democracy from fascism and communism, wound up tarnishing those ideals instead.

In Angleton, he has a character beyond the imagination of John LeCarré, perhaps even of Patricia Highsmith. The son of a wealthy expatriate American businessman, Angleton grew up in Milan, studied English at Yale, published an influential literary magazine before he turned 20, and befriended the



"The Ghost"

By Jefferson Morley (St. Martin's Press, 336 pp., \$27.99)

brilliant but bigoted poet Ezra Pound. Then, obsessed with fascism and foreign affairs, he talked his way into a job with U.S. Army intelligence as World War II broke out.

Angleton was, as they say, in the right time at the right time. He met and charmed Allen Dulles, soon to be the first civilian director of the CIA. For training, he was dispatched to Bletchley Park, the British espionage headquarters, where he apprenticed with legendary British spies such as Kim Philby.

Readers who recognize Philby's name will understand that Angleton was entering treacherous territory. And it got treacherous fast.

Morley makes a gripping yarn of this material, but he also weaves a deeply tragic web.

— Dave Hage, *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis)

BEST OF 2017 WASHINGTON POST

The top 10: Looking back on a year of excellence

"Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst"

By Robert M. Sapolsky (Penguin Press, \$35): If you ever thought that neuroscience was too boring or complicated for pleasurable reading, "Behave" will change your mind. You'll find yourself guffawing at Sapolsky's quirky humor. A professor of biology and neurology at Stanford University and a recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant, Sapolsky brings together a variety of scientific disciplines to tackle a fundamental mystery: What drives humans to harm each other or help each other?

"The Future Is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia"

By Masha Gessen (Riverhead, \$28): Vladimir Putin has inspired a number of books seeking to explain his remarkable rise — and his remarkable hold on power. Few accounts are as ambitious, insightful and unsparing as Gessen's "The Future Is History." This is a sweeping intellectual history of Russia over the past four decades. It makes a convincing case that Homo Sovieticus, the unique species created a century ago with the Bolshevik Revolution, did not die out along with the Soviet Union.

"I Can't Breathe: A Killing on Bay Street"

By Matt Taibbi (Spiegel & Grau, \$28): This gut-wrenching account of the death and life of Eric Garner is a deep dive into every aspect of the case. Most revealing are the stories Taibbi tells about other African-Americans, mostly male and poor, who were stopped and frisked, strip-searched, sexually abused, set up, beaten or killed for the single reason that racist cops didn't like them or the even more tragic one that those kinds of humiliations are ordained by U.S. law and policy.

"I Was Told to Come Alone: My Journey Behind the Lines of Jihad"

By Souad Mekhennet (Henry Holt, \$30): In her memoir of 15 years of covering jihadists, journalist Mekhennet sets out to answer a perennial question: Why do they hate us? As a Muslim woman and brave, resourceful reporter, Mekhennet seems well-suited to the task. She explains the nature of reporting on jihad in her role as a Washington Post national security correspondent, the time spent waiting for sources to call back, puzzling over whom to trust.

"Less"

By Andrew Sean Greer (Lee Boudreaux, \$26): Too often, our standards of literary greatness exclude comic novels. But you should make more room for "Less." A writer named Arthur Less is depressed about turning 49. His anxiety about aging has been exacerbated by news that his former boyfriend is about to get married to a younger man. This is the comedy of disappointment distilled to a sweet elixir.

"Lincoln in the Bardo"

By George Saunders (Random House, \$28): "Lincoln in the Bardo" is an extended national ghost story, an erratically funny and piteous séance of grief. The spirit of the story arises from when President Abraham Lincoln's 11-year-old son, Willie, died of typhoid fever during the Civil War. Everything about Saunders' novel never confounds our expectations of what a novelist should look and sound like. The heart of the story remains Lincoln, the shattered father who rides alone to the graveyard at night.

"The Power"

By Naomi Alderman (Little, Brown, \$26): Excitement about this dystopian novel has been arcing across the Atlantic since it won the Women's Prize for Fiction. Alderman's premise is simple, her execution endlessly inventive: Teenage girls everywhere suddenly discover that their bodies can produce a deadly electrical charge. The capacity of women to shock and awe quickly disrupts the structure of civilization.

"Rising Star: The Making of Barack Obama"

By David J. Garrow (William Morrow, \$45): This probing biography explores the calculations Barack Obama made in the decades leading up to winning the presidency. Garrow portrays Obama as a man who ruthlessly compartmentalized his existence. Every step — whether his foray into community organizing, Harvard Law School, even his choice of whom to love — was not just about living a life but also about fulfilling a destiny.

"Saints for All Occasions"

By J. Courtney Sullivan (Knopf, \$26.95): From the outside, nothing about this plot seems noteworthy: Irish Catholics settling in Boston; they drink too much; they struggle with the church; they gather for a loved one's wake. But in a style that never commits a flutter of extravagance, Sullivan draws us into the lives of the Raffertys and, in the rare miracle of fiction, makes us care about them as if they were our own family.

"Sing, Unburied, Sing"

By Jesmyn Ward (Scribner, \$26): "Sing, Unburied, Sing" is built around an arduous car trip when a black woman and her children drive to a state penitentiary to pick up their white father. The narration passes back and forth between the convict's 13-year-old son and his drug-addled mother, Leonie. Ward draws us deep into the bile of a woman who sometimes dislikes her children and often resents their claims on her. These are people "pulling all the weight of history."