

Creative Creatures

The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.



46 / William & Anaïs Yeager, dreamers and humanitarians, Cottonwood Falls, Kansas

You don't believe your eyes when, walking somewhere out on the prairie and surrounded by thousands of acres of grasslands, you find yourself standing rooted to the spot and watching, baffled, the approach of a tall guy with long sun-bleached hair who carries a surf board (a *surf board*? The nearest good wave is 1,800 miles to the west...) and who is accompanied by a small, young, dark-haired woman, clearly of Iberian descent you notice after they've come closer, who dreamily dances along with him. This is what happened to me not too long ago somewhere in Chase County. It could have happened just as well elsewhere, for instance while hiking in the Sahara-like sand dunes of California's Death Valley. Listening to their stories I learn that these two apparitions have explored much of the U.S. and are now to be met often on the prairie because they decided to make their home base in the Flint Hills of Kansas, smack in the middle of the continent, halfway between the two oceans.

These guys—they are William and Anaïs Yeager. Billy is a musician and film maker who performed with some of the great names in the industry; he is the surfer of the two. Anaïs is the Spanish dancer. Together they form a dream team who experience creative living to the hilt. They forfeited living in society, left everything behind them, and live light and bright as far away from the idiocies of the world as they can get; they concentrate on the good old earth and kind, thoughtful people, and on themselves. They deliver proof that their ideals and dreams are not the products of whimsical impulses; they have lived many years on the road already, they've frequented many beaches, deserts and plains, and they have documented most of their exploits in great detail, altogether assembling scores of hours of film. Time and again they created quite a buzz, although they are most happy and content when their creations are solely experienced by themselves, without a public becoming aware of them. They are not "For Sale" nor are their creations turned into a business. If they had wanted, they could have reached a much greater fame and probably collected the financial rewards that come with a high profile. On the contrary, they are wary of "business" and especially fast commercialization, and they condemn any form of money grabbing and faddish spending.

Billy is widely known as “Jesus of Malibu,” which is an indication of the impact he made while surfing the Pacific waves and playing his own compositions on California beaches. The epithet tells you that Billy is a preacher as well as a surfer—he can talk for hours about the worries of the world and his philosophical approach to life. He is not trying to convert anyone, although the fervor of his words might be taken for proselytizing by someone who doesn’t pay close attention. Billy is trying to make people understand what he is standing for, and that *the good* is better than *the bad* and *the ugly*; he hates short-sightedness and narrow-mindedness and cringes from the wrong turns steered by stupidity and greed. This does not mean that Billy and Anaïs have no sense of humor. A few examples of the contrary.

The location is Florida, Biscayne Bay to be precise. On a certain morning Miami woke up with noticing a castaway piano sitting on a small sandbar in the middle of the bay. No one understood how it got there and who got it there. Rumors galore; the marooned piano remained the focus of guessing for days until Billy and Anaïs, sick of the discussions, while sitting in a beach bar nonchalantly mentioned they were the guilty ones. Their statement traveled from Miami to the rest of Florida and beyond. All major news channels—CBS, CNN, Fox, BBC, Spanish-language stations—sent anchors to Miami to interview the duo, which gave Billy the chance to manipulate them a little and also to spread his good word. The mystery that had baffled Miami, the nation, for days was solved at last! No one ever learned it weren’t Billy and Anaïs who’d sailed the piano out—or did they? Let me say it’s still a mystery. I think I have seen them hauling pianos in other locations...

And years before the piano incident, Billy, after long years of struggle with the music industry, got an idea how to get his music out into the world. He blackened his face and dyed his hair and stepped forward as the long-lost secret son of Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy’s voodoo child with the blond Sunshine. Fake birth documents, correspondence, and photos of “Mom, Dad, and me” were published in Time Magazine, New Musical Express, everywhere. His song ‘Devil’s Got a Sweater’ was recognized as “definitely a Jimmy Hendrix composition. I’d love to play it with the kid,” said an old Hendrix buddy. Well, the song fooled the world. Billy pulled it off and made a documentary film (‘Jimmy’s Story’) full of conspiracy and deception about what in the end was shown to be a hoax—and Billy’s revenge to the music industry.

These “projects” were just for fun and to confront “the fast world.” Other, much more serious, Billy & Anaïs productions are ‘Sebastian Beach--One Fine Day’ and ‘The Film that Changed the World’, a documentary about the making of the monumental film ‘Jesus of Malibu’. This film, their major opus, took more than three years in the making and is only shown at private screenings, which have to be three day events, with proceeds going to landmine victims. It follows the duo on their long spiritual journey into the desert to discover truth and freedom of the mind. In Death Valley Junction they hooked up with Martha Beckett, the performance artist Ans and I also met (in 1996) and greatly admired for her gutsy endeavors in the middle of nowhere on the California/Nevada border, which included the founding of the Amargosa Opera House on the *plaza* of that desolate ghost town. Years ago, when there were only dusty dirt roads in the area and tourists hadn’t yet discovered its hot magnificence, and before air-conditioning made travel easier and desert life more comfortable, Martha Becket, then a “journeywoman” dancer who found her home in New York City, had managed to buy the whole town and scores of acres around it for a mere \$40,000, and nurtured it to life in her own unique way. But that’s another story.