

## “Whole earth” origin...

*The following is an account I wrote in 1976 for an excellent book titled THE SIXTIES, edited by Lynda Obst and Rolling Stone...*

It was one month after the Trips Festival at Longshoreman’s Hall when the “whole earth” in *The Whole Earth Catalog* came to me with the help of one hundred micrograms of lysergic acid diethylamide. I was sitting on a gravelly roof in San Francisco’s North Beach. It was February 1966. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were waning toward Mexico. I was twenty-eight.

In those days, the standard response to boredom and uncertainty was LSD followed by grandiose scheming. So there I sat, wrapped in a blanket in the chill afternoon sun, trembling with cold and inchoate emotion, gazing at the San Francisco Skyline, waiting for my vision.

The buildings were not parallel—because the earth curved under them, and me, and all of us; it closed on itself. I remembered that Buckminster Fuller had been harping on this at a recent lecture—that people perceived the earth as flat and infinite, and that that was the root of all their misbehavior. Now from my altitude of three stories and one hundred mikes, I could *see* that it was curved, think it, and finally feel it.

But how to broadcast it? It had to be broadcast, this fundamental point of leverage on the world’s ills. I herded my trembling thoughts together as the winds blew and time passed. A photograph would do it—a color photograph from space of the earth. There it would be for all to see, the earth complete, tiny, adrift, and no one would ever perceive things the same way.

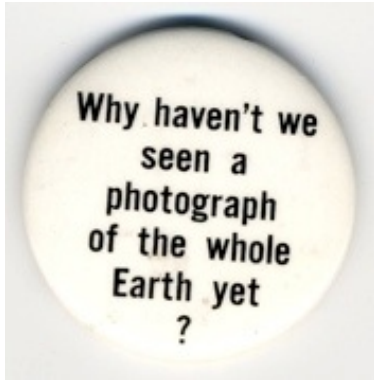
But how to accomplish this? How could I induce NASA or the Russians to finally turn the cameras backwards? We could make a button! A button with the demand “Take a photograph of the entire earth.” No, it had to be made a question. Use the great American resource of paranoia... “Why haven’t they made a photograph of the entire earth?” There was something wrong with “entire.” Something wrong with “they.”

“Why haven’t we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?” Ah. That was it.

The next day I ordered the printing of several hundred buttons and posters. While they were being made I spent a couple hours in the San Francisco library looking up the

names and addresses of all the relevant NASA officials, the members of Congress *and* their secretaries, Soviet scientists and diplomats, UN officials, Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller.

When the buttons were ready I sent them off. Then I prepared a Da-Glo sandwich board with a little sales shelf on the front, decked myself out in a white jump suit, boots and costume top hat with crystal heart and flower, and went to make my debut at the Sather Gate of the University of California in Berkeley, selling my buttons for twenty-five cents.



Lois Jennings, a newly arrived Ottawa Indian lady that I later married, helped me override the stage fright. It went perfectly.

The dean's office threw me off the campus, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported it, and I had my broadcast.

It was so enjoyable, conducting street-clown seminars on space and civilization, that I kept returning to Cal. Then I branched out to Stanford. And then to Columbia, Harvard, MIT. "Who the hell's that?" asked an MIT dean, watching hordes of his students buying my buttons. "That's my brother," said my brother Pete, an MIT instructor.

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[This story has been translated into French [here](#).]