

BEACON

the community newspaper

Thirteen Years Of The O.B. Kite Festival

By Robin McCracken

The Ocean Beach Kite Festival has been a tradition in San Diego the past 34 years. I have seen every kite festival over the past thirteen years. I recall my first one in 1969; I was five years old and the kites seemed rather large to me. I remember a couple of them had illustrations of Snoopy or Charlie Brown, some with peace symbols and other political expressions of that time. Most of the kites were then basic two stick diamond kites or box kites. I flew a commercial paper kite that time with great success.

A couple of years later I made some kites at the Rec. Center. Most of them didn't fly because I painted them too heavily. One spectacular year for the festival was 1973 which was the silver (25th) anniversary of the kite festival. Appropriately, the sky was full of dragon kites as well as a few other larger kites made out of silver mylar (an aluminum coated plastic, which is now illegal on commercially produced kites). Mylar is dangerous because it conducts electricity and appears on radar. I made a barn door shaped kite that year. The winds were a bit strong and several kites were damaged.

In 1976 some of the largest kites I had ever seen were flown. I almost won a prize for the "biggest" but a group of people had made a larger one. Several of the larger kites had trouble staying in the air. There were thousands of kites competing for air space. In talking to others who were there, I heard of another large kite which became unstable and "knocked" many smaller kites out of its way. When there is a large turnout, there are some pretty massive aerial tangles. It is quite a sight when a bunch of kites collide over Newport or Santa Monica Avenue.

During the next kite festival in 1977 I gathered many kites that

34th Annual Ocean Beach Kite Festival

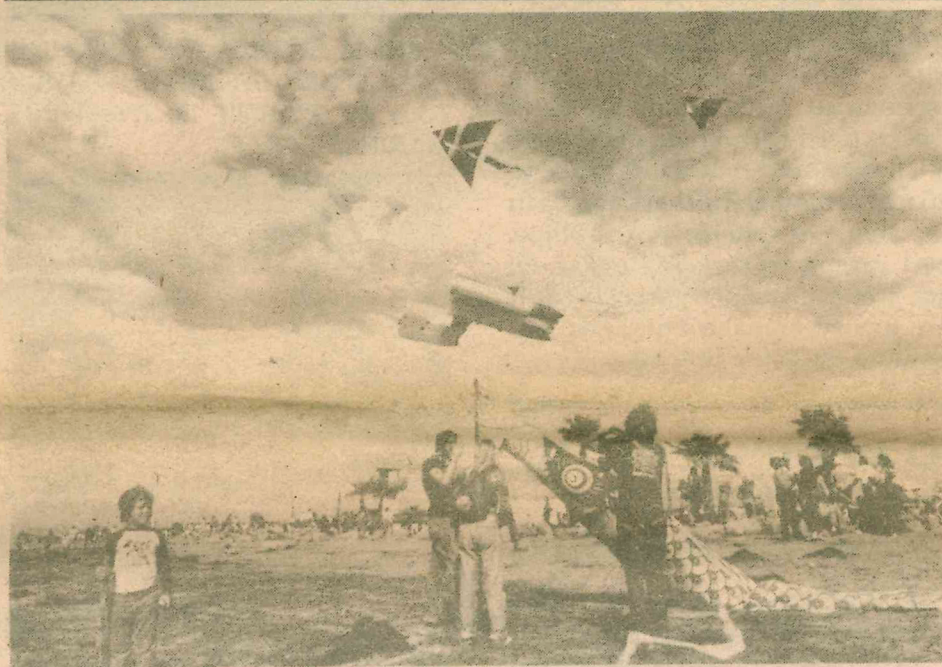


PHOTO BY BILL MAIER

With tuppence for paper and string, you can have your own set of wings. With your feet on the ground, you're a bird in flight with your fist holding tight to the string of your kite.

... Mary Poppins

others had lost. I spent most of my time chasing after loose kites or trying to remove them from wires and trees. I ended up with around ten kites for my collection that day.

In 1978 the festival was nearly postponed because of a storm, but it cleared and the contest went on as scheduled. The winds were variable; everything went as planned until 45 minutes after the parade arrived at the beach. A big storm moved in over O.B. and the winds, moving at 20 mile knots, wiped the whole sky clean. Kites went sailing over the hills as the rain started. Two box-kites survived the winds and flew in the rain, but they too went down when the wind died a short time later.

In 1979 the kite festival was considerably larger than the year before. The winds were perfect for flying kites. One radio station flew a large clear delta. This was the year that many "hard core" kite enthusiasts came out with an array of unique homemade kites. Everyone was impressed with the new shapes produced by the kite flying experts.

In 1980 some new kites were introduced. Those that made heads turn were constructed from cloth and nylon; mainly in large delta shapes. Victor Heredia, who manufactures fighter-kites put on an excellent show of kiting maneuvers for spectators at the beach. '81 was basically the same, but with a bit more wind than 1980. The weather was beautifully clear and a good crowd watched the kites at the beach.

Over the last thirteen years of kite festivals my life has changed considerably. I have pursued my interest in kite flying and have become involved with many activities concerning kites. I print a small newsletter every month named "San Diego Kites," and go to Ski Beach in Mission Bay to fly my kites with many other kites. I still pick up stray kites once in a while. You can bet I will be at the O.B. Kite Festival on Saturday, March 13th.

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