

# The Story of “Light,” the famous “Woodstock Bus”

Most of this story is excerpted from an article first appearing in *Goldmine Magazine*, July 31, 2009. The year was 1968, and artist Dr. Bob Hieronimus was commissioned to paint a mural at Johns Hopkins University. That summer, though, he got a better offer. “I embarked on a very interesting summer visiting backstage with rock and rollers like **Jimi Hendrix**,” he recalls. “We would share information on various things like UFOs, Atlantis, reincarnation, and especially the eye in the triangle and pyramid found on the back of the \$1 bill.”

Around the same time, Bob Grimm, who sang with the group Light, approached Hieronimus about another painting project — namely, Grimm asked him to “turn his tour bus into a ‘magic bus.’” Putting off his Johns Hopkins project — one that would result in a 2,700-squarefoot design titled “Apocalypse” — for the time being, Hieronimus went to work on the Light bus, a 1963 Kombi VW that Grimm named after his band. Grimm, along with friends and fellow bandmates, would drive the bus, painted by Hieronimus, to Woodstock. That bus would become famous.



Left to right: Vicki Hieronimus assisting with the painting the “Light” bus in 1968; Bob Grimm practicing guitar in front of the recently completed bus; and Bob Hieronimus working on the original “Light” bus in 1968.

“I had heard that pictures of it had appeared in *Rolling Stone* in 1969, but did not see it until the early 1970s from friends who sent it to me,” says Hieronimus. “Then I started seeing it pop up in CD retrospectives and in anniversary articles.” The most famous image of the bus was taken by the Associated Press. It features Light members



One of the hundreds of sketches and copious notes in Hieronimus’s research journals showing the deep study into esoteric symbolism behind the meticulous designs of the Woodstock Bus, not at all the average “hippie” psychedelic painted bus.

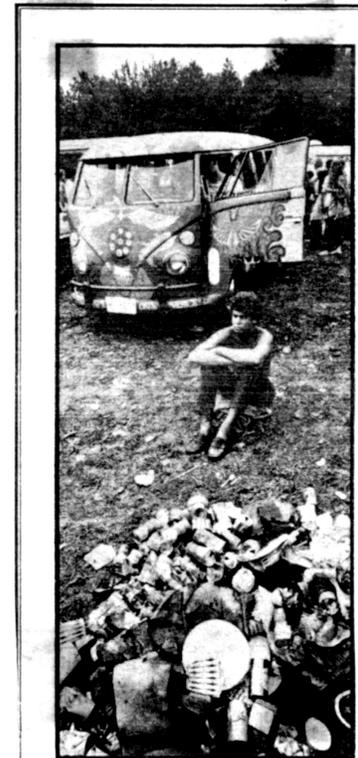


Trudy Morgan and Rick Peters sitting on top holding an umbrella to protect them against the rain. “This photo has been used around the world without my knowing anything about it,” says Hieronimus. “I think it was used because the symbols on the bus helped convey the message of Woodstock.” According to Hieronimus, many of the symbols and themes included in his “Apocalypse” mural are reflected in “Light,” a.k.a. the Woodstock Bus. “They were both painted during an intense period of study for me,” remembers Hieronimus. “I was immersed in the study of symbols and their effect on the collective unconscious.”

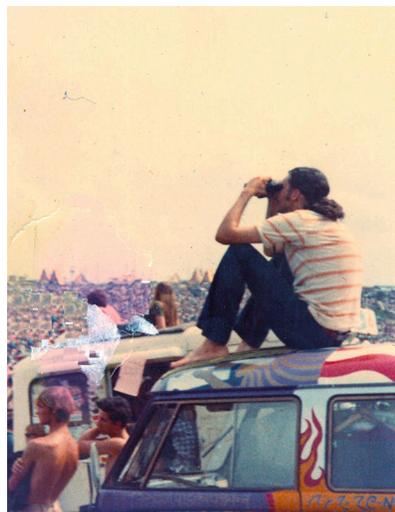
The most famous photo of the Hieronimus Woodstock Bus was taken by an Associated Press photographer at Woodstock in 1969, and has been reprinted hundreds of times.



ROLLING STONE/SEPTEMBER 20, 1969



Vivid and colorful, the Woodstock Bus has, in itself, become a symbol of the '60s. And with celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Woodstock well under way, what better time for a collectors' diecast model of the bus to come out? Due out in August [2009] is a fully detailed replica of the painted VW bus “Light” from SunStar Diecast as a 1/12 scale model. A 16-page booklet on the history and symbolic interpretation of the bus is included with it. Ordering information is available at [www.WoodstockBus.com](http://www.WoodstockBus.com).



Above: Bob Grimm sits on top of the Light bus watching the performances at Woodstock 1969.; right: the Hieronimus Woodstock Bus seen in *Rolling Stone's* report on the festival; above right: the Hieronimus bus seen in *Life Magazine's* report on the Woodstock festival.



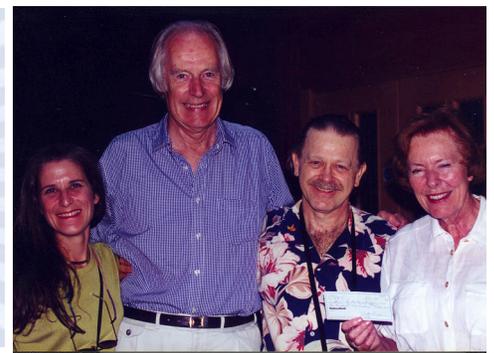
The exact reproduction of the Hieronimus Woodstock Bus was created by Sunstar Diecast in 2009 at a 1/12 scale, with fully functioning doors and gear, [www.WoodstockBus.com](http://www.WoodstockBus.com). Below left the bus is admired by Steve Boone of the Lovin' Spoonful, and below right, Sir George Martin and Lady Judy Martin enjoying their time with Zohara and Bob Hieronimus.



"What a treasure! I had no idea it would be so big and detailed. It is terrific and will be something to hand down for generation to generation."

**- Sir George Martin**

Producer of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Elton John, etc.



"With hindsight it is interesting that the symbols I painted on this bus were very much in harmony with the powerful event at Woodstock. Those with eyes to see and ears to hear realized that it carried the message of who we are and the purpose of life on Planet Earth: serving others as we evolve toward cosmic consciousness."

Hieronimus remembers seeing his bus featured in *Rolling Stone* magazine, not just in the original reporting of the festival in their 1969 article, but several times after that, most recently in 2002, when they selected it as part of their story on "Ultra Cool Cars." In 2002 *Rolling Stone* called the Volkswagen bus, "the hangout as a political statement. **There's never been more of a youth cult ride than this relic.** VW replaced it in '79 with the family friendly uncool Vanagon."



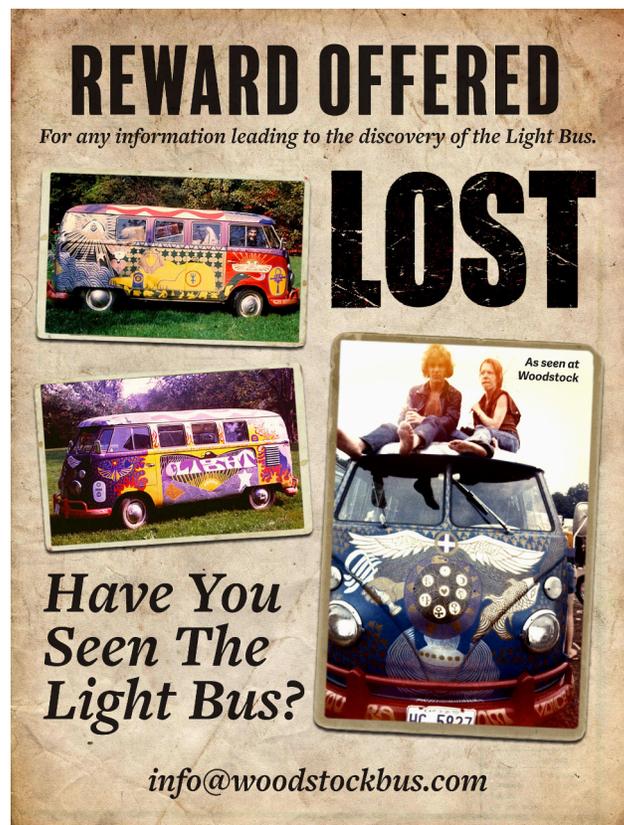
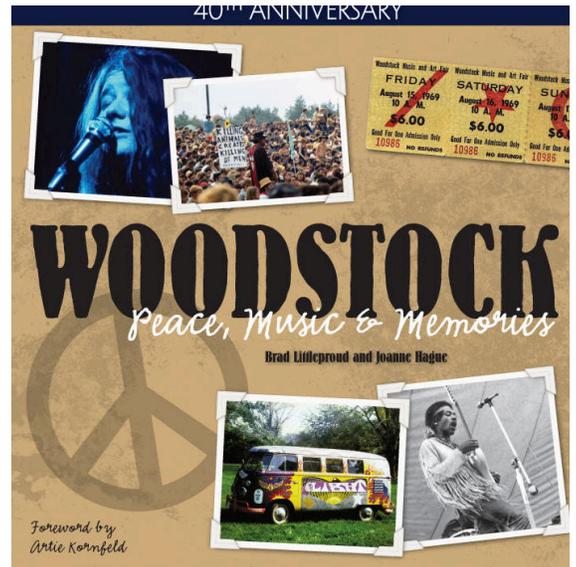
The Woodstock Light Bus has been depicted in numerous documentaries and books. David and Cee Eccles summarized the impact of the Woodstock Bus in their best-selling book *Travelling with the VW Bus and Camper* (Abbeville Press, 2007):

"Not only was Light one of the first VW campers to be painted in this way, but its Woodstock heritage adds to its importance and influence on the future. It is not just another 'hippie bus,' but a work of art in its own right, which captures the mood and aspirations of a

generation searching for its own identity and place in the universal scheme of things. The bus may have passed into legend, but its legacy as inspiration for new generations of camper owners lives on.

“Woodstock summed up the mood and feeling of a generation who could dream that the bombers riding shotgun in the skies could turn into butterflies, and that a world of peace and harmony was still possible. A press photographer at Woodstock snapped a shot of a couple listening to the music on the roof of their brightly painted VW camper, which was subsequently reproduced in many papers and magazines (and even figured on the Woodstock Album inner sleeve). For many, this shot summed up the atmosphere and spirit of the event, and the VW camper had its image changed forever, as a new generation, who naively shouted about dying before they got old, claimed it as their own.”

On the cover of Brad Littleproud and Joanne Hague’s book *Woodstock Peace, Music and Memories* (Krause Publications, 2009, above right) a photo of the Light bus is seen overlapping a photo of Jimi Hendrix playing at Woodstock. This is especially fitting since the time Hieronimus spent painting the bus overlapped with the time he spent hanging out with Jimi Hendrix. Volkswagen International also paid tribute to the Hieronimus Light Bus in a special goodbye tribute film to the Kombi VW camper vans (a short film that won several awards at Cannes), which was created as an homage to this beloved vehicle when the last factory producing them was shut down in Brazil in 2014.



At the beginning of another documentary, “Jimi Hendrix: Live at Woodstock,” produced by Warner Brothers in 2005, the organizer of the Woodstock festival, Michael Lang, claims that Woodstock was, “not just a rock and roll show. It was not just about the music. It was really about that decade and that culture.” When he says “It was really about that decade and that culture,” the camera pans across the Hieronimus Woodstock Bus because it illustrates this quote perfectly. The Hieronimus Woodstock Bus also was about that decade and that culture and perfectly captures the essence of the greatest expression of peace and love to come out of this generation.

So, what happened to the original bus? “The original bus, unfortunately, was last seen partially being held together by the paint job,” says Hieronimus. “Its eventual demise is a bit of mystery to us in this day and age. It wasn’t my bus, after all. I painted it on commission for Bob Grimm, who after Light broke up, headed to England to tour with the Four Seasons ... today neither one of us can remember what eventually happened to the bus in the end. But we are determined to locate what’s left of it and recreate it for Woodstock’s 50th anniversary in August 2019.”▲