

► "Power . . . is not an end in itself, but is an instrument that must be used toward an end."  
— Jeane Kirkpatrick, diplomat

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# Crying, waiting, hoping

Forty years later, throngs still journey to Clear Lake, Iowa, to keep alive the music of three fallen rock 'n' roll icons who crashed here.

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CLEAR LAKE, IOWA — Rock 'n' roll's holiest shrine sits in a cornfield 4 miles north of Clear Lake, preserved by farmers as a sacred trust. Long before Elvis died at Graceland or John Lennon was shot outside the Dakota in New

York, Buddy Holly crashed here, creating the myth of the rock martyr.

There's a whiff of hog on the stiff southerly wind as pilgrims navigate the 600

yards of hard-packed snow along the fence line. Finally they reach a small stainless-steel cutout of a guitar and three records that marks the spot where a plane carrying Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper came to rest at about 1:08 a.m. on Feb. 3, 1959, 40 years ago.

The seekers are among nearly 4,000 who have journeyed to Clear Lake for the 20th annual tribute to the fallen stars. For several days last week at the Surf Ballroom — Holly's final gig — they danced, cheered on gray-haired rockers, dressed up as teenagers, closed their eyes and dreamed of a sweeter time.

"This is a sacred place," said Jeff Nicholas, 41, whose family farms the land, and who leads

tours to the crash site. "People come here from all over the world. They're reliving their childhood, reliving the '50s."

Scotty Stets, 29, of Boston, a classical music major at the University of Massachusetts, played his Fender Stratocaster and sang "Crying, Waiting, Hoping" by Holly and "American Pie," Don McLean's memorial.

"This is the alleged place where the music

died," Stets said. "But I don't believe it."

Ghosts live in the sound of small planes flying overhead — ghosts of an America when rock 'n' roll's rebellion was measured in hot rods and poodle skirts — not drugs, protest and studded flesh. That America lives each year for a few days in this town.

Clear Lake is much like Albert Lea or Fairmont, Minn., prosperous farm towns set on large prairie lakes. Folks joke that the only two things that have happened in Clear Lake are that Aunt Bertha's cows got out and Buddy Holly died here.

"It's important to Clear Lake's identity — economically and culturally — to keep the Holly tribute alive," Nicholas said. "I never planned for this. But now I'm hooked on it."

**HOLLY continues on E6**



Irma Norton, comforted by her husband, Randy, wept at the site of the plane crash in which her brother, Ritchie Valens, died. "I can't stand to think of him lost



Scotty Stets of Boston strummed his Fender Stratocaster as he sang a Buddy Holly tune at the crash site.