



# Scary Stuff

Last August Aileen and I took a road trip. We decided to travel to Des Moines to visit her family and spend Aileen's birthday with them. Sound simple enough? Read on, dear reader.

Aileen gets off work at 4 AM so we decided to leave as soon as we could after work. She would sleep in the back of the car while I drove us into Utah (and with luck into Colorado). Of course, sleeping in a car is difficult for anyone, but we own a small (real small) car. The back seat is just about right for Billy Barty, but Aileen is a normal sized person. (Anyone doesn't know who Billy Barty is? Most recently he played the older wizard in the movie Willow.)

Anyway, Aileen gallantly curled up in the back and I put on my head phones (so my music wouldn't disturb her) and with the sounds of Danny Elfman and the rest of Oingo Boingo be-bopping in my ear, we drove off into the sunrise. Somewhere around Cedar City, Utah, (about 3 hours from Las Vegas) Aileen sat up and declared that she had slept enough. I didn't agree with her but if she couldn't sleep, she couldn't sleep. Time for breakfast!

Now, Cedar City, Utah is about as Mormon as any town outside of Salt Lake City, except it is also very small. The streets are clean, the signs are clean, the people are clean, hell, even the dogs are clean. And early in the morning, it was eerie. (Picture, if you will, two travelers driving into a small, idyllic southern Utah town. They don't know it yet, but they've just driven into... The Mormon Zone... do do do do do do do do do do.)

When we stopped for gas, we asked the attendant his suggestions for a good restaurant for breakfast

"Right up the street, here, just a few blocks, on the right," he answered with no hesitation, pointing in the direction he indicated.

"Thanks."

"No problem, neighbor."

(Neighbor?... do do do do do do do do do do.)

Did I slowly and calmly climb back into the car and streak out of the town, tires screaming? No, of course not. We were hungry and I wanted coffee... do do do do do do do do do do.

We found the place easily enough. A hand painted sign in pastel blue directed us to the front door. It didn't look like a restaurant any more than Arnie and Joyce's place does, but the sign assured us that we were in the right place.

Once inside the front door, complete with a door knob, (Who puts door knobs on a restaurant front door?) we found ourselves in a pastel paradise of putridly pretty paraphernalia. Cute little crafty things like cows with bows and cats wearing ball gowns decorated the walls and counters. Yech! But I smelled coffee... do do do do do do do do do do... so we forged ahead.

A waitress showed us to a booth across the room, there was no smoking section so she didn't even ask. (Aileen and I don't smoke but here in Las Vegas, "Smoking or Nonsmoking?" is so common we have come to expect it.) The waitress was blond haired, blue eyed and perky even though it was still early.

"Orange juice?" she asked as she laid down two menus.

"Uh, yes, and two coffees please."

"Decaf?"

"No, fully caffeinated, please," Aileen responded.

Our waitress got a quizzical look in her face, almost as if she was thinking to herself "Do we have any?"

"Okay," she responded, brightly.

You would think that by now I'd have figured out that we were in Utah and deep into Mormon country, but I was a little groggy from driving and still wanted my caffeine.

I looked around the place and at the few other customers there. Something was wrong, seriously wrong! Something was missing! Then it dicked... there was not one single steaming cup of Joe anywhere to be seen. No one was drinking coffee. That's when it struck me, we were in Utah. (No shit, Sherlock.)

"Aileen, we're in Utah," I whispered to my sleepy wife.

"Yea, so?" she reasonably asked.

"Crisp and clean, no caffeine," I quoted, "I wonder if they know how to brew coffee?"

As it turned out, the breakfast was good and the coffee was acceptable and they didn't lynch us, so it didn't turn out too bad. After eating, and paying our check, we escaped that pastel place got back on to our journey.

Midnight, a day and a half later, found us in Des Moines, Iowa at Aileen's parents' front door. They live on the outskirts of the city, almost in rural Iowa. Crickets chirped, but there were few other sounds as we pulled into the driveway.

"Are they still up?" I asked.

"I don't think so," Aileen answered, "but I know where the key is."

"I didn't think they locked their front door."

"They didn't used to, but I think mom's getting a little more paranoid so dad locks the door now."

Aileen's parents raised her to believe that the "Communists" were going to be knocking on the door any day now. "Keep your guns handy in case the 'Red Scourge' ever attacks." I couldn't imagine what she meant by "a little more paranoid."

Sure enough, the door was locked and true to her word, Aileen produce a key from under the mat. (I doubt they even remember there's a key there.)

We crept into the house so as not to startle them. I expected their little Chihuahua to come out yapping at us any minute, but he didn't

"Chico," she whispered, "come here Chico."

Nothing.

"I wonder where he is?"

"Maybe they got rid of him," I offered.

"No, they wouldn't have done that...Chico," she called, a little louder. Nothing.

Aileen tiptoed into her parents' room, no one was sleeping in the bed. She looked in the other room where their grandsons (or other guests) usually stayed when visiting. The two single beds were occupied so Aileen assumed that Chuck and Nick (the afore mentioned grandsons) were visiting.

"I wonder where mom and dad are?"

"Maybe they went out, or something."

"Not at midnight...hmmmm."

We went back outside to unload the car and bring our stuff inside. Luggage, trash, loose clothes, coats, etcetera ended up in their living room. We were trying to be quiet but we weren't silent.

After unloading everything, Aileen went back into the guest room to further investigate.

Her parents were sleeping in the guest beds, leaving their queen sized bed for us. Aileen woke her father up with a shake of his foot.

"Dad, wake up, we're here."

"Um, what, oh, hi honey. Where's Chico?" he asked sleepily.

"I don't know, Dad, we thought he'd wake you up."

They got up, put on robes and walked into the living room to greet us.

"Hi Dad, I'm sorry it's so late," I apologized.

"That's okay, lad." (He always calls me 'lad.' I feel like a collie whenever I see him.)

"Bark, bark, bark," Chico suddenly appeared, bounding out from under the covers.

"What a useless dog," Aileen's Dad commented.

"I thought he'd wake us up. Come here, you useless mutt," he said affectionately, reaching down to pick up his dog.

"Why aren't you sleeping in your bed?" Aileen asked.

"We thought you'd be more comfortable sleeping in our bed," her mother responded.

It turns out that this bed is the same bed they got when they were married some 35 years ago. When Aileen and I climbed into it, it creaked. When we rolled over, it creaked. When kissed good night, it creaked. When we breathed, it creaked.

"I guess we won't be making love this week," I commented.

"There's always the floor," Aileen reminded me.

A few days later, there was a small family reunion so Aileen could see some of her large, extended family. (Most of them still live in or around Des Moines (those that aren't in jail, that is.))

"I bought five pounds of chicken for the reunion," Mom declared. "How should I prepare it?"

"Why not barbecue it? I like barbecued chicken," I offered.

"No thank you," was her answer.

Aileen later told me that they never barbecue anything.

"They think it tastes burnt. They don't even own a barbecue. This is the Midwest," was her explanation.

"No, I think I'll fry it. This will give me a chance to use some of that lard I rendered a couple of months ago," Mom decided.

Lard? Rendered? Who renders lard these days?

"You rendered your own lard?"

"Of course," she said, matter of factly.

When the day of the reunion came, I sat in the kitchen, watching her cook. Now I must say, my Mother-in-law is not the greatest cook in the world. In fact, I can't think of a worse cook. Once she was baking a cake and was out of baking powder. She substituted baking soda instead. For those of you who've never tried it...flour, salt, water and baking soda makes clay, much like Play-Doh. I shudder to think what the cake was like, but back to the chicken.

When you fry chicken, the frying substance, whether it be oil, fat, or lard, needs to be hot. If it isn't hot enough, the chicken absorbs the fat like a sponge. Mom decided to slow cook her fried chicken.

I watched in horror as she poured half a quart of home rendered lard into a cast iron frying skillet, floured pieces of chicken and carefully laid them into the warm fat.

Forty-five minutes and a quart-and-a-half of lard later she proudly displayed a plate of "fried" chicken. (Where's all the lard? You're soaking in it.) Just looking at the plate, I felt my arteries hardening and my cholesterol count jump sky high. My gosh, I was going to die of a heart attack in Iowa!

When dinner was served, I actually took a piece, (out of politeness). I nibbled at it, but the odor of lard and the incredible grease content of just the outside part of it made me gag. I'm glad I like incredible or else I would have gone without dinner that night.

As ever, Apa-tizer is brought to you by the sick and twisted mind of Ken Forman  
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I got a call from Karl Kreder today while I was working on this diddy. He asked me to distribute his address and phone number. I think he's lonely and misses the Vegrants. Send him your fanzine and/or give him a call.

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