

THE GREAT

Sneaky Watans

AND HIS EXCELLENT BAND

EASTERN TOUR 1974



DESCANT 24

CLARKES OF AYLMER

BEFORE GOING ON WITH OUR STORY ...

So you've never heard of Sneezy Waters, eh? Well, neither had I, until a few months ago. But then my longtime friend, trumpetman Carl Bova, told me about a strange radio gig he'd done with this Sneezy dude. "I can't tell you about it," he said, "Weird! He's sort of a cowboy singer, or folksinger, I dunno. He wanted me to play jazz behind his cowboy songs. But I dunno. It's not really cowboy songs. Weird." That's how I first heard about Sneezy Waters. The next thing I knew I was working with him.

Weird.

In fact you might say "Bizarre." That's what Sneezy says a lot. Or when he's not saying "Bizarre" he's saying "Excellent!" These two words make up Sneezy's entire vocabulary. Or so it seems, and at that it seems excellent, if perhaps a bit bizarre.

So anyway, there I was, hired to play in the Sneezy Waters Band at the National Arts Centre, a heavily prestigious and infact Arty place, far removed from the saloons and bowling banquets where I have pursued my art these many years. The Arts Centre. The People's Culture Palace (closed Sundays, the People's Day Off).

Of course there were rehearsals before this highclass engagement. Unfortunately, I was able to attend only one of them, and at that I was ravaged by some vile disease that impelled me to dash from the room at intervals. No matter. Monday night Sneezy Waters and Band opened at the Arts Centre, and from the very first note it was a triumph and a wonder and an absolute musical delight to me and, I am sure, to all the other musicians involved. And the audience. The people loved Sneezy, gave him their wapt attention and their uproarious applause. I've never seen anything like it, never been part of anything like it. What can I tell you? It was a love affair. The guys in the band just beamed at each other all week, the people yelled their approval, and Sneezy grinned in all directions: "Excellent."

What kind of music was it? Oh ... old cowboy songs and stuff: "In The Jailhouse Now," for one, and some Tex-Mex old top-forty thing, and a Woody Guthrie social-consciousness sort of song, all more or less outside of my bag, or so I'd have thought. But I loved it all, and not least of all the great feeling of togetherness and joy backstage before, between, and after the shows. Not just the fine dope that went round and round, either. It was ... magic. And I think that Sneezy himself was the catalytic vizard who brought it all together.

Some people say he's going to be a Big Star. I don't know. For one thing, it's always been an alien concept to me, this Star thing: the guys I know and like best and feel at home with are just musicians whose sole hope is to be able to play the kind of music they love ... once in a while, anyway. But the other thing I don't know is what makes a Big Star: if it's as simple a matter as making audiences love you, then I think Sneezy Waters could indeed be a Big Star, and indeed he should be one already (he's been around a long time: he makes passing references to "them young hippies (excellent)" and calls himself an Old Man, but I don't know ... he may be thirty, give or take a decade). I don't know: I think Big Stars have to be ruthless and obsessed and driven. And Sneezy ain't. "Easy Sneezy," that's him.

Nah, Sneezy Waters ain't gonna be anybody's Big Star, though I hope he'll continue to be a small one: just going on as he has done, making friends and picking up enough bread to go on his Easy Sneezy way.

This sounds pretty kissy, doesn't it? Sounds as though I am a fawning acolyte of Sneezy Waters? Well, close. I think that the week I spent in the Sneezy Waters Band at the Nationable Artsy Centre was the best musical moment of my life. How could I follow that? The only way I could think of was to take my Arts Centre money and go to a Sci-Fi Convention. Now read on.

WEDNESDAY

At five a.m. I woke Gina. She'd been warned in advance, but who is really ready to be awakened at five in the morning? "Coffee, coffee," she whimpered as I led her to the car; and we got some coffee at a Truck Stop somewhere along the road to Ottawa and the Bus Terminal where I was board a coach at 6 a.m., headed for Montreal and the train station.

I nodded and dozed fitfully on the bus, coming fully awake only as we began to enter the outskirts of the city; and once more I was amazed and offended to see that almost all of the billboards and other Big Business signs that greet the travellers' eyes are unilingual: English. My train was to leave from Windsor Station, another Wasp monument with a War Memorial in the main concourse, a memorial to those who died "for King and Country" in WWs I and II. The King and Country of England, that is. Canada wasn't a country in those days, just a Dominion; and Quebec wasn't a Nation, just a suspect and benighted province.

The train was old and creaky, and the seats were fairly shabby. I loved it. Amtrak has recently re-instituted train service from Montreal to New York; and it seems that the night train is enormously popular, so much so that reservations are required. I, however, took the day trip: departure time 9:30, ETA in New York 7:15.

The itinerary took us dead south along the New York/Vermont border (for the first leg) and I was able to look across Lake Champlain at the beautiful mountains of Vermont, and to wish I were travelling through them rather than through the familiar drear of NY state. Yes folks, the train passed through Plattsburgh, that town through which I have passed far too many times already; and it passed through some other towns and grungey vistas about which I took notes. These are they (ahem):

Lake Champlain, Hudson River -- scenery somehow northern, scrubby, marshy, dying trees --

Fort Ticonderoga, mid-aft: grey, very fin-de-saison. Hudson R. dwindles to scummy, weedy creek. Boats a-mud.

Whitehall: supergrunge (grey clapboard)

Albany, P'kipsie -- dismal

My notes dwindled away like that. Downer and downer. The morning had been bright and beautiful (even considering my bleary sleeplessness) when I left Aylmer, Ottawa, and Montreal: the farther I penetrated into The States -- or the State of NY -- the gloomier it became. Finally, nearing New York City itself, the train plowed into the nadir of its southern plunge: the skies barfed on us. It wasn't just rain, it was a nasty watery blurt. The train leaked; water, unpleasant water, ran in the aisles. The engine broke down, and the train stopped. Not once, not twice: three times. And the bar car was closed; and I had run out of cigarettes; and I was ravaged by sleeplessness. And finally we were rolling into beautiful Manhattan, in to Grand Central Station, past hideous tenements whose inhabitants looked out of their windows as we passed. And I stared into fragments of lives flashing by and wondered what madness had brought me to this frightful city for the first time in -- mighod! -- twenty years.

As I got off the train, in Grand Central Station ("Here I am in Grand Central Fucking Station!"), two lovely young girls approached me. ("This is New York alright," I said to myself) "Hey," one of them said, "aren't you the saxophone player in Sneezy Waters' band?" I swear to you that this is true, though I didn't believe it myself at the time. I mean: I knew I was famous, but not all that famous in New York City.

Andy

Porter, bless him, was waiting for me; and he had been waiting for hours, because of the train's several breakdowns. He whisked me off to Brooklyn Heights, took me to a deli (and to a liquor store, where I bought a pint of bourbon) and to a little park with a View of Manhattan (I loved it); and tucked me in on his sofa. Z.

THURSDAY

Andy Porter nudged me awake about eight o'clock; I was to meet Steve Stiles at 9:30 in Penn Station, and that required my going -- all by myself, alone and Canadian -- down into the depths of the fearsome subway system. Well, at least it was in daylight. And so, after a brief breakfast of Diet Grape Drink, I took leave of Andy and went out into the early morning streets of Brooklyn Heights, made the correct turns and found myself at the turnstiles. Andy Porter had given me a subway token, but I thought I'd like to keep it as a souvenir of my brief visit to New York City, so I approached the teller's cage (or whatever it's called) and said, "How much is the cash fare?" I hauled out a handful of US coins from my pocket, and extended my palm openly and I hoped pleasantly towards the woman behind the wicket. "You got a token," she said with but the flicker of a glance at the heap in my hands, "right there." "Mm yes, indeed, quite so, quite," I muttered in Canadian and backed away towards the turnstiles, where I dithered for what seemed the longest time as I tried to find the slot and the woman behind the wicket stared at me with one eyebrow cocked on high.

The train came roaring in, gaudily spray-painted by vandals who furtively go about desecrating public property (in fact, I was quite taken with this truly Pop Art, and wondered about the vast reserves of raw artistic urge and expression that had impelled these Ghetto Youth to brighten the dismal subterranean tubes). It was still early morning, and the rush hour was almost over, and yet the fetor and heat hung oppressively over the car whose seated passengers nodded in sleep; and those who stood and hung by straps carefully avoided each other's eyes. Summoning my courage, I timorously asked a neighbouring upstander if we were nearing the Penn Station exit, fully expecting to get the New York sneer in response. Not at all: the gentleman courteously informed me exactly how many stops there were to go, directed me to the proper exit, and wished me a Nice Day when I reached my stop.

And there I was in Penn Station, looking around for Stiles or anyone fannish. Nine:thirty came, but no Stiles. I have something of a punctuality fetish, and I began to fidget: I still had to get my train ticket to DC. I was waiting, and fidgeting, at a designated spot; and there were a couple of others standing waiting right beside me, so I asked one of them, "Are you by any chance waiting for Steve Stiles?" "Why yes," he said, "and you are...?" "My name's Norm Clarke," I said, "I'm waiting for Steve too." "Oh, Norm Clarke," the fellow said, "Here's your train ticket." I croggled. I had never heard this man's name before -- and I blush that I cannot remember it now, though I hope to find it out and make acknowledgement before the end of this report -- but there he was, this total stranger, handing me a train ticket that he himself had bought presumably to save me from the hassle of standing in line at the last minute before the train's departure. I was completely overcome with amazement and gratitude, and some embarrassment. "I can't pay you for it right now," I said, "All I have is some traveler's cheques." He waved a hand airily: "I'll see you later."

And then along came Stiles and Barry Smotroff and Moshe Feder: we had a quick coffee together, and then it was time to board the train for Washington. The train was jammed. Someone said, "It looks like we'll have to stand." "Oh no," I groaned inwardly. "The air-conditioning isn't working either," someone else pointed out. "Oh no, oh NO," I groaned aloud, as we pushed our way through crowded cars. We passed the toilet. Well, it was more like a Toilet Room: there was a bench, and a sink, and ... hey, it was unoccupied. Stiles and I about-faced and lunged to the unoccupied bench in the Men's Powder Room. And there we sat, in reasonable comfort, for the entire journey. The air-conditioning did not, in fact, appear to be working; but there was a sink and a cold water tap at hand, so that one could rise and splash one's face from time to time.

The hours passed quickly as the train sped through four brand-new (to me) states: New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Maryland (oh, the strange red earth in Maryland). It was a pleasure indeed to sit there and rap with Steve Stiles, long-ago correspondent and fellow Apexian and once-lilapan, and to listen to him spilling all the fannish gossip. It made me think, fondly, of the good old days when I was in on fannish gossip; and I was suddenly reminded of the cover of a Thom Perry fanzine, a cover drawn by Steve Stiles himself. It loses something without the inimitable Stiles visual impact, but the paneled monologue -- by a nameless fannish penitent -- went something like this: "I broke a DNQ once ... And at first it was a REAL THRILL! ... But it began to dawn on me: I was addicted! ... I began to break bigger DNQs, and BIGGER ones! ... AND BIGGER! ... A N D B I G G E R! ... until I finally ruined the reputation of the best friend I had in fandom." And the last panel pictures this nameless Jophan, wearing an incredibly sly and smirky look, muttering, "... and speaking of him, that reminds me"

And ships-that-pass dept: At some point, a musician joined Stiles and me, there in the Men's Lounge. We talked some shop together, mainly about the perils and scanty rewards of working in nightclubs; and he said he'd been to Ottawa once, and might come back again sometime, and I started to say, "Well, look me up ..." but we both laughed and knew we'd never meet again. This is a trivial thing, I guess, and perhaps not worthy of including here in this momentous Convention Report; but meeting and talking with a brother in a strange land is almost always a fine and together occasion. Oh, the vibes were good on this train, this trip.

And then we were in Washington. Hot, hot, hot. Ninety-plus temperature, and galloping humidity. Steve and I got into a cab, but the driver waited around until he got three more people headed in the same direction as we were going. One guy got into the back seat with us, and then two elderly ladies got in the front. Right away one of them began complaining, "Oooh, can't you turn down the air-conditioning? It's so coocold!" Quickly and gallantly I offered to change seats with her; and so she got into the back to play kneesies with Stiles, while I selflessly sat in the front and submitted myself without complaint to the torrents of cool air that blew over my sweaty and faintly funky body. And watched Washington go by, on our way to the hotel.

The hotel was something of a shock, at first glance. It looked like a hospital. Not one of those glassy towers, like in Boston, nor an impressive old landmark, like in Toronto, but a sprawling, many-winged institutional building of some seven stories, with trees and lawns and stuff. Sid Coleman pointed out, later, that the reason the hotel looks like a hospital is that, like a hospital, it has just grown over the years, adding a wing here, an annex there. In some ways it is an abominable hotel -- the atrocious service, the ripoff prices in bars, etc -- but its layout seemed to mitigate the hugeness of the convention: there rarely seemed to be vast hordes of fans and Trekkies jostling one another, and little knots of like-minded people clustered together in one area or another quite easily and naturally.

Steve Stiles registered and led me to his room, where I had asked him if I might shower and leave my stuff before looking around for someplace to crash. I was at this con as a bona fide member of Broke Fandom, and was counting my pennies very carefully indeed. We got to Steve's room, which was supposed to be a single. There were two beds in it. "Well, Norm, you are welcome to crash right here," Steve said. Lovely words. And a bed of my own, when I'd been expecting, at best, a bit of floor space. Look, this con was going to be beautiful. And here it was, only Thursday afternoon.

Shower, change of clothes -- my other shirt and pants -- and then Steve and I went to the bar for a drink. The convention began.

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Steve and I left the bar and went on our separate ways, for a while. I chose to slouch in a lobby chair and watch the fans register: I watched Susan Wood (lookin mighty good) talking to Mae Strelkov, and I noted Bruce Felz festooned with cameras, and then there was Will Straw (once a hoax, like any true Canadian fan, but now as real as Boyd Raeburn). Will and I strolled along, comparing travel notes: he had taken a bus directly from Ottawa to Washington, and it didn't sound like heaps of fun. Then we ran into Bob Tucker, who suggested that we go immediately to the dark and fairly deserted balcony of the Sheraton Hall (that is, the Big Room where all the Big events were to be held); and of course that did sound like heaps of fun, especially considering that there was a rehearsal going on there. Not in the balcony, but downstairs. Yes, there was rehearsal of "2001: A SPACE OPERA" (A Musical Comedy) going on; and it was thrilling indeed to sit there in the balcony, unbeknownst to the Players, and to swig bourbon and snicker. Finally our snickering grew too loud and raucous, and someone on the stage below hollered, "You up there in the balcony! Get out!" "It's only me, good ol Wilson 'Hoy' Tucker," Bob Tucker hollered back. "Get out! Get out!" yelled HAL 9000 (I think).

Not a little miffed, but not a lot, Tucker and Will and I decided to go out and eat (prudently agreeing that we should ease off on the bourbon for a while); and so we left the hotel and went to a nearby taco joint, where the food was cheap and okay by me. Bob and Will kept saying, "Hoo boy! Hot stuff!" while I kept dumping more and more Hot Sauce into my plate and sighing at the mildness of it all, for the fiery native Canadian cuisine jades one's palate quite early in life. Bob Tucker -- oops, excuse me: at this moment it was Wilson Tucker -- hauled out the dustjacket of his forthcoming novel, and passed it to Will and me for inspection; and we fell into a serious discussion of science fiction, etc etc. A couple seated at a nearby table (directly behind Tucker) seemed to me to be goggling and eavesdropping mightily, so I began to wave the dustjacket around, displaying title and author's name flagrantly. "I must say, Wilson old boy, that I expect this to be critical and popular success equalled only by your acclaimed Long Loud Silence," I boomed. Finally, the couple at the next table could contain themselves no longer. "Are you ... Wilson Tucker?" the man asked, springing to Tucker's side. "Why yes I am," Tucker replied smoothly; "Are you a faaaan?" "Wha?" queried the man, as his lady trembled behind him. "Are you here for the convention?" Tucker pursued. "Convention?" "Yes, there's a science fiction convention here in Washington this weekend, right across the street." "No kidding? Naw, Mister Tucker, I just read all your books and it's a pleasure to meet you and ..." And so forth. I don't mean to sound as though I'm making fun of the incident, for indeed it was gas to be there and watch Bob Tucker being egoboo'd by some plain ol ManOff The Street. He handled it graciously and expansively: "Hey, come on over and join in the fun! You'll meet lots of fine people." "I just might, I just might at that," the man said, taking his leave. I doubt that he actually did come to visit the con, but who knows?

So then it was back to the hotel -- after a brief sidetrip to a liquor store, of course, where I went into near-shock at the sight of shelf after shelf of obscure brands of bourbon (finally settling on a quart of Old Setter) -- and back to the cozy balcony, where we relaxed once more. And fans began to join us: John D Berry came along, and I think Terry Hughes was with him. And various other shadowy fannish figures gathered around; and the jugs and perhaps the joints passed from hand to hand; and at intervals the bloodcurdling cry of "SMOOOOOOOOTH!" sludged the darkened hall. And then I have but vague recall: I think that perhaps it was rich brown and Will Straw who finished off the evening with Steve Stiles and me (somehow back in Steve's room); and then there was a resounding Crash.

And that was Thursday.

FRIDAY

Steve Stiles had it firmly fixed in his mind that he wanted a real American breakfast; he would not be persuaded to go for, say, bagels&lox at the nearby Deli. "Pancakes and coffee, that's what I want," said Mr Stiles. So together we investigated The Strip. The Strip, yeah, the gaudy commercial block of restaurants, sidewalk cafes, and liquor stores that made up the only nearby alternative to the hotel's dubious gustatory attractions. We passed a few ethnicky places (Spanish, Italian, Mex, Chinese, SoulBro) and then Steve spotted just what he'd been looking for. "There's a People's Drug Store!" he shouted, "We can't go wrong there." We went in and sat down at the counter, Steve apparently oblivious of the sign that read "This Section Closed." A man beside us said to a waitress, "I'll have the bacon and eggs." The waitress spoke to heaven or someone unseen, back turned to anyone, "I wonder where he was when I said this section is closin." "Steve," I said, "we aren't going to get served here." He was intently studying the menu. "Hey Fred," the waitress yelled, "I'm goin home now." "Steve," I said, "it's no use. This section is closed. In fact," I added, looking around, "all sections are closed. We aren't going to be served. We better go find someplace else to have breakfast." "Oh shit, okay," Stiles sighed; and we got up from our stools. Two people who had just come in immediately slid into the places we had just vacated, and the waitress instantly handed them menus, glasses of water, and a sunny smile: "Would you like to order now?" And everywhere else along the jampacked counter, it suddenly seemed, people were being served briskly and efficiently. There wasn't an empty stool in the place. Stiles gave me a long look of reproach. "Where now?" he asked. "Back to the hotel?" I suggested, "It can't be that bad." But it was. They had no pancakes (or buckwheat cakes, or flapjacks, or whatever, although they were all on the menu) but there were waffles offered at some scandalous price; and there was a "Bottomless Cup of Coffee" (at 50¢ the bottomless cup). We got the waffles, after only a half hour's wait; and we managed to eat almost half of our orders, because we were so hungry. It must require a great deal of skill to be able to make mushy waffles, and a great deal of chutzpah to serve them so cold that a pat of ersatz butter sits unheating atop the inch-high stack; but the hotel staff had obviously been superbly trained. We managed to get an extra splash of "coffee" doled out to us into our Bottomless Cups, too -- not that we wanted to drink it, of course. We were just curious.

And then we went out to see the panda bears at the Washington Zoo. Of course we went in the wrong direction for a while, through a sedate residential area (which is what the hotel was boringly surrounded by, except for that Strip, of course). Turned around properly, and walking purposefully, I suggested to Steve that we should stop in somewhere and have a beer. And so we went into a kind of German Biergarten, where we had excellent draught Lowenbrau (light) plus absolutely free crackers and cheese and -- an added fillip -- garlic toast. And the waitress was cheery and friendly. "What a nice place!" I beamed at the waitress, "We've had such surly service so far in DC. We'll be back, and we'll tell all our friends." Steve picked up the tab. That's one more I owe him, I thought at the time. But I didn't realize how much I owed him until next day when I went back to that German joint by myself, and found that a glass of draught beer cost \$1.60. And there wasn't any garlic toast this time, either. And the jolly waitress smirked at me, "Where's your friend?" and I realized that she thought Steve and I were Fruits (I must add that Steve gave me his assurance that he isn't). Once again: you can't go back again.

But back to the Friday morning, and the trip to the zoo. Sure enough, there they were: the Richard M Nixon Memorial Pandas. Brought back from what used to be known (to Nixon) as "Red China," tangible evidence of Nixon's Herculean efforts to bring about World Peace, the pandas lay inert, caged and trapped in America, uncaring/shuffling lines of gawkers went by them, complaining: "Is that all there is?" These pandas are Nixon's lasting legacy.

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Back at the hotel once more. And there was Sid Coleman, fellow Nixonologist (or "Dickophobe"). "Sid, it just ain't the same any more, is it? What kind of world is it where one can no longer leap up each morning and turn on the radio and hear another bombshell exploding? But seriously, Sidney, how did you feel upon first hearing about Nixon's resignation?" "Well," Sid Coleman said seriously, "I felt as though I were a spectator, an aficionado, at a bullfight and suddenly there came an announcement that the bull would have to retire from the arena because he had lost the support of the picadors." Sidney went on to say that he had been in France at the time (in a bar, I think, called Chez Studley) and some French announcer came on "le telez" as it is called in France and began sputtering in French. "I knew something was going on," Sidney said, "even though I know no French. Well, I know maybe four or five hundred words of French, but they are all names of disgusting menu items. But here was the French announcer saying, 'buhbuh Nixon ... bibblebible President Ford oomlyoomly Maison Blanche ...' and I leapt up shouting 'Something is happening in America!' and rushed to find a shortwave radio, and eventually heard the calm voice of the BBC disclosing the details of the resignation, and I did a little song&dance. How was the news covered in Canada?" "Different," I said, "I was snapping the dial around from one US channel to the other -- we get CBS and NBC by cable -- and it was all very solemn and sombre, with even Dan Rather saying stuff like 'This is indeed a profoundly moving ...'; and then I'd switch to the CBC and, wow, the Commentators were rolling on the floor, and there were filmclips of the Checkers speech and the 'I am not a crook' statement, and the shoving-of-Ziegler bit. I am ashamed to admit that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation treated Nixon's resignation as a kind of super news-brightener."

Sidney was so pleased by my account that he took me to the "Meet The Pros" gathering, where I met Wilson Tucker.

Connecting once more with Will Straw: he and I went with Steve Stiles and Jay Kinney to eat at some semipseudowop sidewalk cafe. I had what was called on the menu, "Veal Parmigiano with spaghetti"; and ordered a glass of Chianti. The veal was some kind of breaded hockey puck, the spaghetti was right out of a Chef Boy-Ar-Dee can, and the "Chianti" was a red sodapop. But the company was fine -- Stiles and Kinney talking shop in that strange jargon of Artists: "ink" and "pencil" and "money," stuff like that -- and there was a tremendous thunderstorm going on, one that made me homesick briefly (Washington DC weather, or climate, seemed just like Ottawa's, by federal govt decree, I suppose).

And speaking of homesick, I must mention right here that I very much missed Gina, throughout the convention (and missed the kids, too); it would have been so nice to be able to get away with her, at times when I was feeling a bit over-fanned, and to walk around somewhere by ourselves. And I missed Boyd, too (though not in the same way): I kept expecting him to show up, though I knew he wouldn't. In fact, I happened to bump into John Millard (BNF of Toronto Confandom) and he said, "Is Boyd here?" "No, Boyd's not coming to this Con." "Oh, he'll be here, he'll be here," John Millard said, and I almost believed him.

It was time for the "2001 Space Opera," so I found myself once more in the balcony with Tucker and a mob of Harlan Ellison fans who were waiting patiently for the Opera to finish so that the showing of A Roy & His Dog could begin. Tucker kept watching the projectionist. "He doesn't know what he's doing," Tucker kept saying, as he watched the guy trying to thread the reel (or whatever the technical term is). Tucker kept muttering to himself and, aside, to me. "Boy, I could spotlight Harlan," he muttered, eying the unattended spotlight (or whatever the term is). Suddenly I noticed that Tucker was gone from my side; and then I noticed some guy hurtling towards the spotlight, bellowing with rage. Then I noticed him waving his arms and his fists at Tucker, who had, in a moment of carefree fannishness, liberated the light and had indeed trained it on Harlan. Tucker came back to sit beside me. "Remember," he hissed, "if anyone asks, I'm not in the Union." He belted some bourbon, and recovered some composure. "Hoo boy," he whispered, "is that guy mad." I don't think he meant Harlan.

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A Boy and his Dog came on; and I left, after two minutes or less. It is probable that I am prejudiced, but I won't hold that against me if you won't. I wandered some, and then found the Kansas City Suite. At least, I think it was about then that I discovered KC. All I know is that I had found a haven: there were comfortable chairs, not too many people, and the bartender was superb. In fact he was either the owner or the manager of the hotel in Kansas City that hoped to host the 1976 worldcon; and he was one hell of a genial host. When one (I) shyly requested, "Bourbon! BOURBON!" he would pour, baby. I don't know how I got out of that room. (I was told, later, that the KC suite had dispensed seven hundred dollars' worth of freeloading booze that Friday night, and upwards of a thousand dollars' worth the next night -- all provided by the prospective convention hotel.)

Eventually, though, even I had had enough of the free booze. So I left the Kansas City Suite, carrying with me a small tumblerful of bourbon, just enough to tide me over until I found my way back to Stiles's room. There was a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign hanging from the doorknob; and of course I had no key, for I was not a registered guest of the hotel (or of the convention). What to do? I hammered on the door.

Steve's flushed face appeared in the minute crack of the barely opened doorway. "Here's the key," Stiles said, "Come back in a few hours." The door slammed.

And there I was, alone in the hallway, just me and my tumblerful of bourbon. What now? I wondered, and found my way back to the Kansas City Suite, where I stayed awhile. Oh, it got pretty hazy. I know that eventually I decided it was time to leave the KC party, and to explore the rest of the hotel. There were a few other rooms, it seems, and then there was an encounter with Ted White and John Berry, somewhere -- I remember that I was lucid and witty at the time -- and down then into the bowels of the hotel, where I heard a piano being played.

My glass of whiskey and I moved dreamily into an almost-deserted Function Room. There was a piano, and someone playing it. Imagine a hand-held camera. That's what I was, wobbling through empty tables and discarded papers, my POV wandering from walls to ceiling to my objective: the piano.

"Pyano man, pyano man," I muttered, sliding onto the bench beside this guy who was playing some blues -- in the key of C, I noted. My key, my key. All right! I started to one-finger my way up in the treble while the guy beside me rumbled some boogie and flatted some ninths. My blurred eyes finally deciphered the name on his membership card: "Laurence Janifer." "Larry!" I shouted. I knew the name, still know that there's a "Larry Janifer" in my memory@banks; but I don't know why, or whence. Is "Larry Janifer" an old-time Fan, or Pro? A name from the '50s, I presume; and I think I asked various people about him; and maybe I even got answers. But I still don't know who is Larry Janifer. All I know is that we jammed on that piano, that night, for a longish time; and I kept saying, "I wish I had my horn here." I was pretty drunk alright, and it was really late; but I know the guy played excellent piano. If anyone can tell me who he is, or was, and where he might be now, please do; for I'd like to send him a note of thanks for a fine musical hour.

But oh, it was late.

I lurched back to Room E-223 (aside: somehow, it seems important to me to remember the numbers of all the convention hotelrooms I've ever stayed in, even though I forget them all now; still, they're immortalized in some convention report or other that I have written and lost): the DO NOT DISTURB sign was still up, but I had the key to the room, right?

I used it.

No-one challenged me as I entered the room. There was deep, heavy, but even breathing from Steve Stiles's bed. "Bless you, my children," I whispered prayerfully, softly so as not to disturb them, "and may the Good Lord take a lightning to ya." I fell into my bed, and into oblivion. End Friday.

WE'RE A LITTLE LATE, FOLKS

This conreport was finished almost a year ago, and was to have appeared in the Sept 1974 mailing. Unfortunately I have come to depend on Gina's office Xerox for duplicating (haven't touched a mimeo in years, and in fact don't even own one in working condition); and this past year has been one long uproar where Gina works, culminating in a move to another building. So there just wasn't any opportunity to Xerox stuff until just a couple of weeks ago, when I was starting to get twitchy: "Gina, it's July already. We need eight pages in the August mailing." (And so much for my good intentions of a couple of years ago, when I announced my hopes to have something, however little, in every mailing.)

Well, anyway. Gina was finally able to run off about half of my DisCon report. Hell, it breaks off at Friday night, when the convention had barely begun. I'd really like to publish the rest of it, and Mention Your Name maybe, so it's To Be Continued, whether as a postmailing or not I don't know. Maybe next year ... no, no!

HR TDY & OUT T'OTHR (cutty MCs)

SUSAN WOOD: I'm looking forward to your DisCon report, especially the part about Sneezy Waters fandom. Maybe some day we can work out a double bill: Humphrey & the Dumptrucks plus The Great Sneezy Waters & His Excellent Band. Playing in Vancouver, of course. You wanna be our agent? ## Sorry Gina and I missed you when you were in Ottawa.

DAG: Good to see a Bleen-like zine after all these years, even if hidden away in the middle of a oneshot. Come to think of it, that was a superior oneshot; please convey my congratulations and appreciation to those who shat it with you, just in case they don't read comments not addressed to them. J CAUGHRAN: I dimly remember getting a strange something in the mail a long time ago -- maybe a newspaper clipping -- and the envelope had an unfamiliar return address but no name; and I think I eventually decided that it probably came from you, for it seemed to me I'd seen in the FA that you'd moved to Canada. Drop me a line sometime and refresh my memory; better still, come visit. (But phone or write first.) ## Well, some French (and other) wine prices are starting to fall, but not yet nearly as much as they ought to. ## Did you ever meet Paul (Peng) Wyszowski? I think you^{met} at the Cleveland con of 1966 or so. Anyway, he's living in your general area (in Mississauga); maybe you could look him up. ANDY PORTER: "Qui le merde est les chemins de fer ..."? That's not me you're quoting there, buddy; why, that's not even joual. ## Are you able to pick up CBC radio only late at night? Too bad, if so; there's a stunningly good phone-cut (worldwide interviews) program called "As It Happens" every weekday evening from 6:30 until 8:00. Try to pick it up; even if it comes in only faintly, I'm sure you'll find it well worth the earstrain.

WASHINGTON IN '77: Sounds good to me. SUSAN again: I'll try to remember to say "Yippity shit" next time I'm talking to Richard or Will, although strictly speaking I am not part of Ottawa fandom, but really of Aylmer fandom, which is autonomous culturally and otherwise. Aylmer fandom is a fandom not like the others. Vive le Queebshot libre! BJO: Aha! Kids do say cute things, eh, you mother you? (Not a snotty remark, just a figurative elbow-nudge.) And speaking of mothers, yours is sure enough something else, whew. DAVE HULAN: ^{damn} Why indeed? "Prestige," hah. HARRY WARNER: I believe I have (reading since birth, for I certainly don't remember learning to read, just reading. And I remember breaking up a roomful of adults when I was very small (long before schoolage) by asking my mother if we couldn't go "someplace elsewhere," a word I could only have picked up from reading, for I doubt that "elsewhere" was used in informal conversation around our house. It's probably been found that this (early reading) is a common fannish experience, like being a firstborn or an only child. WALTER BREEN (from mlg 150) No, bourbon is not bourBon wherever one drinks it; that is, it is not All The Same. 100-proof bourbons have much fuller flavor than those at 86. And bourbons sold here are none over 80°. Sure I'd drink bourbon in France if possible. And local wines with meals. ## For now,

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