

# HELP!

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Gina & Norm Clarke



# OUT OF MY LIFE AND MIND

-- NORM CLARKE

IT WAS ONE OF NORM CLARKE's increasingly infrequent appearances -- at least those public appearances as opposed to the Society Affairs where he lately deigns to provide his enigmatic presence -- and the crowd wasn't giving him the attention an artist of his stature and girth deserves.

"And now I'd like to play a lil number," he muttered into the microphone, apparently unaware that it was "broken," as the technicians say, "called 'For Christ's Sake Potatoes.'" Waves of apathy swept through the crowd.

"Or..." he added with his devilish leer. Few in the laidback audience recognized that he was doing one of his superb Morey Amsterdam schticklech. A near-witless grin weakened his classic features as he strolled over to the drummer and engaged him in a barrage of nonsensical re-bop syllables; took a deep hit of Old Crow; and turned once more to the microphone (his eyes upturned behind his "shades" towards who knows what faroff visions he beheld there through the drifting clouds of smoke and beerfarts).

In 1958 and 1959 Norm Clarke was already the eminence grise whose famous caterwaulings had provided the ineluctable fire that simmered the tepid cauldron of Ottawa (Ont) rock&roll into the furious boil that was to culminate in the steaming overflow of Twist Contests in the early '60s. Who can forget the upheaval of those days? Certainly not Norm Clarke.

"I remember one night at the Palace Hotel in Fuckingham, Quebec," he reminisces, his reddish eyes seeming to twinkle with merriment and/or regret, "I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped things that were happening at the time; but suddenly I found that by playing the upper intervals of a chord and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. R&B -- or maybe R&R, I'm not sure -- came alive for me. The next thing I knew, I was outta work."

For some years after that, Norm wandered the streets, his naked saxophone under his clothed arm: playing for dimes and quarters and, on some occasions, fifty-dollar bills. "I was considered 'weird' in them days," he is fond of recalling, "I'm sure I can't imagine why."

Then came the Big Break, the story of which is of course familiar to all Norm Clarke fans (or "buffs" as he calls them, jovially). But let Norm tell it:

"I got a gig playin in a circus -- a 'carnie' as we call it. I really got off blowin behine them broads. Some buns!" he affirms, then goes on in a more serious vein, "Meanwhile, though, my music was progressin apace. I began to think of strings. Thass when I wrote my famous, though never-released, 'Airin' A G-String.'"

Perhaps we shall never know, due to the recording ban imposed upon him at that time (some hassle with the Ripoff Musicians' Union), just what farout changes his head was going through. Or perhaps we shall. Sadly, Norm does not seem to remember, either; or, more likely, he simply refuses to talk about it, to dwell in the past. A veil of reticence seems to fall over him at times, times when he seems to have fallen into a profound nap.

But back to Now: up there on the stage, something is happening. The golden horn thrusts suddenly upward from where it had lain flaccidly against that sad and pudgy thigh; the deep-throated power is tapped; and from that fiery eagle whose beak is kissed by those stony lips screams a shrill wild cry. A hush falls, and then a murmur from the crowd begins: "Hrm." And up there on the garish bandstand, spraddle-legged in a pool of anemic light, Norm Clarke thrusts his horn out at the crowd. "MOO!" he goes, "HONK! SKREE!"

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And That's Jazz

It really doesn't matter, of course, but to recapitulate: Ted White slandered a phenomenon (of some two decades ago) called "Jazz at the Philharmonic"; and then I maligned Ted White, his status as Jazz Critic, and possibly his ancestry and legitimacy as well; and then Ted White made an admirably restrained, for him, response to my blast by reiterating his opinion of JATP as "inferior ... mediocre jazz" and adding a little personal zinger to the effect that my idea of jazz is of "an r&b musician who plays beer joints while squatting on one knee with the other foot in the air." "I'm told it's all he (( I ...njc)) can do," Ted added, cunningly.

Last point first:

wrong again, Ted. That not only is not "all I can do," but I've never done it ... played with foot in air, etc, I mean. I certainly have played in "beer joints," though. So has every jazz musician in the world, at least every one deserving of the name. And I surely have played "r&b" and I'm not in the least ashamed of that. I'm a bit curious, though, about why Ted White thinks "r&b" is a putdown term, but "rock" isn't. (I'm not really curious: Ted realized, a few years ago, that it was Hip to Dig Rock and to Smoke Dope ... but I digress, not altogether unintentionally.)

I've played almost every kind of music you can think of, excepting "classical." My very first professional gig was on a riverboat, fittingly enough, and the very first professional tune I played was "Lullaby of Birdland," a "jazz tune" for sure. The leader on that gig, a definite jazz musician who had just got out of jail, said "Yeah man, I dig your sound!" Within a few minutes, though, he discovered that "Lullaby of Birdland" was just about the only tune I knew. After that I spent years playing all kinds of non-jazz with an amazing spectrum of bands, one of the most important of which (in terms of my learning how to play) was a small Western Swing band, whose leader played amplified fiddle. I learned how to play in five and six sharps in that band. Anyway, not to make it a "This Is My Life" sort of thing: I've been a pro musician for almost twenty years now; and I've played in big bands and small -- including backing extravagant floorshows in nightclubs, playing in a Pit Band for Broadway Musicals, sitting in the sax section of a TV house band, doing recording sessions in Toronto and Montreal with singers and groups, and, not least of all, playing Jazz on radio and TV with many groups, some of them under my leadership and many of them not. But not once, that I can recall, did I squat on one knee, nor did I lie on my back and kick my feet in the air. No, mostly I just stand flatfooted and blow my horn. And everything I play is jazz.

Enough about me (Ted won't understand that last sentence, anyway): let me reiterate, for the last time -- oh lord, I'm tired -- that Jazz at the Philharmonic was good, unpretentious jazz. It was jazz taken from the few little clubs of New York and California, and brought to the boondocks. This is why I fiercely defend JATP: if not for Norman Granz, its impresario, I might never have become a musician; and there's nothing else in the world I want to be.

When JATP came to Ottawa, I was about sixteen: I had never heard of JATP, but I had heard of Roy Eldridge. I had one album (not LP) called "The Great Jazz Trumpets" featuring Armstrong and Bunny Berigan and probably Harry James ... and Roy Eldridge's version of "Stardust." So I went to that JATP concert, naively hoping that Eldridge would play that song. He didn't, and at intermission I pushed through a crowd of autograph-hounds and said, "Mister Eldridge, are you gonna play Stardust?" The jazzfans gasped and glowered. Mister Eldridge said, "Why should I?" "Well..." I said, redfaced, "It's a good song." And slunk away. (That's when I first learned about Hip and Square.) But that's when I first heard -- at least, became aware of -- tenor saxophones: Jacquet and Lester Young, to be precise.

For some years after that, I collected JATP albums as well as singles (on the Mercury label) "supervised by Norman Granz." All of

them. Or, rather, all that I could get my hands on. Jazz records were rare and precious things to discover in music stores in Ottawa in the early '50s. So: slowly I began to discover, by association with JATP, records by Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and on and on. And finally, at the age of twenty, bought a secondhand tenor saxophone for one hundred bucks (I got a bank loan); and at the age of twenty-one I joined the Musicians' Union.

So I am grateful to Norman Granz and Jazz at the Phil: without them, I might never have known that there was more to jazz than Tommy Dorsey et al.

But it's not just nostalgia and reverence that I feel when I play those old scratchy records: I still feel that that is the jazz. When I say that, I am not defining a Style as "the one true jazz." No: I'm saying that live jazz is it: jazz played before an audience of people who get turned on by the music, and who in turn inspire the musicians.

Playing in a studio is the natural thing for Orchestras, for "Serious" Musicians. It is not conducive to jazz, at least the jazz I believe in and love. No no, I don't want to get into Definitions, except to repeat that, to me, jazz means this and maybe only this: a man blowing. Well, I guess I am defining; so be it. I wouldn't call even Count Basie's a "jazz" band, but rather a well-disciplined Swing Machine. And as for the Kentons and Hermans and Riches and so on ... fine Orchestras, great Arrangements, but . . . .

But all that is beside the point. What I want to say is that the kind of jazz on those old JATP records is my kinda jazz; and that doesn't mean all Honking and Skreeing, Ted White. Flip Phillips is the culprit who, in JATP's latter years, made the one-note-endlessly-repeated de rigueur. But he did it mechanically: No-one -- least of all I -- would deny that Jacquet did that sort of honking. But dig this: so did Lester Young, and not just at JATP concerts. Ted White says, "When Lester Young is reduced to playing ... one note endlessly repeated ..."; and I guess Ted never heard or listened to -- either or both terms are applicable -- Lester's earliest recordings with Basie in the '30s. Lester started that one-note Honking. And there ain't a goddam thing wrong with it, if it swings and feels right. (And with Lester, it sure did; with Jacquet, too; but ... Flip Phillips???)

In closing, dear brethren and sistern, I must add that those old and rare JATP albums are commanding EEEenormous prices, these days. I asked a Collector, recently, if he could get me a copy of Volume Five (I think: one featuring Jacquet, Les Paul, Nat Cole, J J Johnson and others playing a Jazz Composition entitled "Blues") and he told me that there is an auction-by-mail going on, that he knew of, and that bids started at 25 or 30 bucks. Well! I'm not that big a jazz fan. In fact, I am just yer simple jazz musician, not really a Jazz Fan at all, as Ted White is.

And there's a great Billie Holiday Fandom these days, since That Movie came out. Diana Ross did a good job in that flick, I guess; but Lady Day she ain't, nor ever will be. Well: happens I have an album (two, actually: one mine, one belonging to the former Dutch Ellis) called "Billie Holiday at Jazz at the Philharmonic." On this album -- recorded Live, of course -- Billie sings "Strange Fruit." I can hardly bear to listen to it, even after all these years: it is heartbreaking, for Billie literally cries out the last few words. It is an unbelievable recording of a heartstopping moment in time when that magnificent woman poured her soul out to the people sitting there, in an auditorium, hushed and transfixed (except for those clods who yelled "Yahoo!" at intervals).

Okay, Ted, I don't want to Invective you; indeed, I apologize for my "little blast." But, suh, you were speaking of the jazz I love; and I guess I felt, angrily, that you spoke ill of the dead. And I wish that the spirit of JATP were still alive.

Hoping you are, etc.

A Burroughs Bibliophile Is Infanticide

Are you ready for a new game? Dave Johnstone started this one with us today, but he didn't invent it: he got it from Maggie Grant, a Canadian columnist who probably didn't invent it either. The premise is this: priests are "defrocked," lawyers are "disbarred," and so on. Now, what words can you come up with to describe people of other professions who are expelled? The first obvious examples are: a photographers' model is Deposed; well, that's the only obvious example I can come up with, now, because the Jonstones and Gina and Jenny and I have just spent hours Playing The Game, and my head is still reeling out there in the farthest reaches.

We didn't really get into it for a few minutes, as Dave went on telling us a few of the more Obvious ones -- the ones I forget now -- but then he said, "A musician could be defunct." My head snapped up. "A drummer could be expounded," I mused. Jenny chimed in (a few hours later, it must be admitted) with, "A musician of the Middle Ages could be diluted."

And away we went. It was a strange sort of social gathering: there'd be these long silences, and then someone would yell, "AHA!" and come up with "a cowboy could be deranged!" As the hours went on, the Reachings became wider and wilder, some of them falling far outside the original Rules of the game (finding the right word that is analogous to "defrocking" for some other occuration), such as the definition of someone returning home from a Mexican vacation as "distraight."

Anyway, here are some of the terms we came up with.

- A pro ice-skater is Disfigured. ("A fag skater is Unscathed.")
- A tailor is depleted.
- A foulmouthed Olympics athlete is Discussed.
- A tennisplayer is exceeded.

Jenny startled us all, and proved that she is Getting To Be A Big Girl, when she suggested that  
A prostitute is delayed.

We continued:

- An author is Decomposed.
- A preacher is decreed.
- Haile Selassie is exempt.

A furrier is expelt ("Detailed!" shouted someone, and someone else said that that applies more to Jenny's Delayed Whores.) ("De ferred," someone else muttered.)

"In that case, then a banished employee of a hydro-electric company is Degenerate." "A detective is excluded." "A Greek traitor is excreted!" "Prince Hamlet was disdained!"

The party was beginning to get rough. "A philosppher is exhumed." "No: decanted!"

- A Black Panther is erased.
- A ballplayer is debased.

We knew it was getting late when we started saying things like "A Harvard professor conducting experiments with LSD is delirious." "An entire posse who failed to head 'em off at the pass is disgorged."

Finally and immodestly, I must lay claim to this one, DooDoo joke though it is. I literally fell down when it popped into my head, and it took me five minutes of hysterics before I was able to say it:

A washroom attendant is Deterred.

--MCs by NJC

Actually, I've left it far too close to deadline before starting; so what follows will probably not be Full-Length Mailing Comments, but more just Snippets of Egoboo. Remember: if your zine is not commented upon, it's probably just because I didn't read it, or else I thought it was garbage. Let's get on with it, then.

JACK SPEER: "Wroster?" "Wroster?" You must be having us on. What a thin, grammarian cackle you must have wheezed when you typed, "My zip code is wrong on the wroster." It's probably some incredibly subtle fapish allusion -- to Rotsler, I wonder? -- or else one that is so blatantly obvious that everyone will miss it. I'll be glad when you explain that "wroster" to us, Jack.

Of course I'm just a novice at this game of yours, but for the life of me I can't see why you think the apostrophe is misused in the example, "Members ... and the above's spouses"; surely you wouldn't pluralize "above" to agree in number with "members"? "Members ... and the aboves' spouses"? Oh, surely not. And you can't just eliminate the apostrophe altogether, to make it "Members ... and the above spouses," for presumably the spouses were not mentioned "above." What the hell, mr speer? (Actually, I frown upon the use of "the above": Why not simply "Members ... and their spouses" or "Members ... and members' spouses." And now can we please forget about those bloody members and their wretched spice?)

Yes, juffas, that sentence of mine meant exactly what I intended it to mean: "For those of you who are not too Hip and Aware -- some 3 or 4 percent of our hand-picked mailing list, tops --," except, of course, that I wrote it in a sardonic tone of typer, which perhaps escaped you.

AND THAT'S MAILING COMMENTS on the February mailing (1/2). No kidding. Now, let's see if there's anything worthwhile in #143.

... Well, by golly, there isn't. But maybe I can jam out some mailing comments anyway, since it is wellknown that MCs are my forte. Actually, I'd like to start (or continue) with jack speer; but I don't want to seem to be playing favorites, so ...

TED WHITE: This might amaze you, Ted, but I agree with you about 200 Motels: "I liked it fine and thought it was worth the money." More than that I won't, or can't, say. I got the album later, and liked it much less than the movie. But I'd like to see the movie again.

DICK GEIS: The Alien Critic, eh? Well, I've got nothing against Aliens (my sister married one), but Critics are lazy and shiftless and have been scientifically shown to have smaller brains than the average Ethnic. How many times are you going to do this trick, anyway? When are you next going to revive Psychotic? Come to think of it, who cares?

JOHN D BERRY: Well, Will Straw was certainly sloshy drunk; and if you believe that about Will, you'll believe anything. Why, you might even believe that the classic Queebshots were produced at Drunken Oneshot Sessions. In answer to your question(s): the Taproom is just a plain ol room, with tables and chairs, and the draft beer was 25¢ a glass (it has since been raised to 30¢). I don't know why Poyd thinks it is a "very Hip beer-parlor." What are the drinking laws of Quebec? I dunno; they change frequently. Basically: age 18 is legal drinking age, and 3 a.m. is legal closing time. For Hotels and Bars. But "taverns" must close at midnight, and must remain closed on Sundays, unlike the Hotels and Bars. It's all too weird for me: I rarely patronize Boozeries.

I guess I'm going to be able to sample Gallo's Hearty Burgundy, for I understand that one Mr Raeburn is making arrangements to have huge quantities imported for his Cellar. Well, one will see, one will see.

Fine comments (the sort sometimes called "kissy") to Boggs; his writing deserves every compliment it gets, and more. (I wish he'd hurry up and send me the \$25.00 he promised to pay me for casting a blackball vote against Metcalf, though.)

PAUL WYSZKOWSKI: I was going to attempt to have you thrown out of FAPA. I mean, sure, you're a friend of mine; but I wasn't going to let that stand in the way of my Ethical Stance. "Gina," I yelled, "Peng is pulling a Fast One here on the nodding Fapans who so often let Moskowitz's unconstitutional stuff slither by them. What I mean by that is," I amplified, "that Paul has slipped some stuff in under the wire in order to renew his credentials. I know, I know beyond doubt that I have read this The Girls I Remember previous to this mailing. I know it. And I will have Paul kicked out, for he can't do that to this trusting organization. Shame on him," I added, "But of course you can't trust a Pollock."

"You dummy," Gina said, "Paul gave us a copy of that when we visited him in Toronto in 1970. He never ran it through FAPA."

That certainly is true; and yet it certainly astonished me, because I hadn't realized that Gina knew anything about FAPA. I shall have to re-think this entire situation.

Hi, Paul.

But seriously, now: you introduced Sharon Towle to me, sometime in the mid-sixties, and I liked her instantly. It was saddening to read her poems that you printed here in Blind Starling, especially the final stanza of "Now": "The wind repeats your singing/ in a language of its own/ and sends it winging sometimes -- / but I can't recall your song." I remember a song I played for Sharon, that night in the Aylmer Hotel (though I know the reference in her poem is not to me): it was a beautiful night, one I'll always remember.

"Aylmer stuff" (is) infallibly ... funny every time." The compliment is accepted gracefully; but I must do a speertrick, now, and chide you gently for that "infallibly." I'm not the Pope, Paul; why, I'm not even a Catholic, nor is Gina. Blushing madly, I dare to suggest that "Aylmer stuff" is merely "unfailingly" funny. Well, maybe it isn't. We aren't infallible, though.

Right: I think it's damned silly for anyone to start smoking. No, maybe I don't. I was going to go on to say "... or start drinking, or Experimenting With Drugs." But it's not silly at all: it's all Relative, is what. It's just as silly for someone who has never tried it, to Knock It (whatever) by saying "I'm sure I don't see what you get out of it." I'm quite sure that Smoking and Drinking are going to aid in the process of killing me; but so is everything else. One Health-Nut says Ya Gotta Eat Eggs; and another says Eggs Got Cholesterol. Screw it: something's gonna do us all in; and at Croakin Time, it won't make the slightest difference if we've lived forty or eighty years. Live it up. But, as long as I'm being Philosophical and Profound, let me add another maxim: "Moderation in all things, including Moderation." Or, as my friend Pete Fleming (who recently had a heart attack) says, "You don't have to quit everything. Just remember: instead of having three, have two. Drinks, eggs, packs of cigarets, whatever."

I think that's good advice.

I was gonna do three pages of mailing comments tonight; but I'll force myself to stop at two.

-- Norm

SATURDAY AFTERNOON THE PHONE RANG about six o'clock, just as I was getting ready to go to work for eight. "Hi," said the voice, "This is Betty!" "Betty?" "Yeah! Betty, uh, Sinnett!" "Oh ... yeah." That Betty, of a team of Artists (by their own description) known as Betty&Bill, who used to do Sketches of Jazz Musicians, and who had moved to Toronto years ago, but had managed to keep in touch with me and other Jazz Musicians mainly by phoning at 4 or 5 a.m. (a practice I frown upon). "Oh uh, hi there Betty," I said. "Listen," she said, "I'd love to see ya. Where are you working now?" "Well, tonight I'm playing for a highschool graduation dance. It's restricted, I'm afraid..." "Well, I'd love to see ya. You knew Bill and I separated, of course?" "Well, I ..." "So Larry and I decided we'd love to come visit Ottawa and Aylmer and could you put us up? Of course if there's any hangup, why, we could just sleep on your lawn. We're free spirits, we just sleep on people's lawns or anywhere." "Well I uh guess you can sleep in our guest room. Right in our house." "Oh wonderful! I'm dying to see ya. How are you fixed for booze?" "Well the liquor stores just closed a few minutes ago and ..." "Look, we'll bring a quart of Scotch, okay?" "Oh fine. Say, where are you calling from?" "Toronto." "You're going to drive down tonight?" "Oh sure. Larry drives fast, averages about ninety." "Yeah? Okay, I'll meet you at" (instructions, directions) "about one o'clock. My gig finishes at 12:30. See ya."

So about one a.m. I walk into the Blind Pig, which is the room where Ric, my drummer pal from down the street, is bandleader. He's wrapping it up, and it sounds like "America Drinks And Goes Home." "Nite all," Ric is bawling into the mike while the band (piano, banjo, drums) throbs out the final chorus of "In Heaven There Is No Beer" and teen agents dance on the tabletops, "Nice seein ya Murph! Jrinkup evvabody! Don't forgetta twiss contess nex Wenzdee!"

I spot Betty, and she spots me, and beckons madly for me to come join her table. I shamle over, lugging my gear, and she leaps up and clutches me in an unrestrained embrace. She's one of yer embracers. She is also a large woman: Junoesque. Big tits, all that. Now, I may be a bit fat, but I'm also little; and being squashed in public by a big broad is not in conformity with my dignified self-image. "Oof," I said, "Hello, Betty."

She introduced me to Larry, a "black" man. I enquote it like that because I think the term "black" is ridiculus. "Nigger" isn't the best of all possible words, but "black" don't make it either; not does "white." I'm far from being white: why, my face and nose are redder than those of yer average indigénous native American savage. The hell with color-typing.

So: Larry was, and probably still is, A Negro. I'm sorry, but I don't know any better word; and in fact I'm tired of all such pigeon-holing words; and I'm sick and tired of having to bother with such identifications; but it seemed important to Betty, and probably to Larry too.

"Well, let's be goin to Aylmer," I cried enthusiastically. "Larry," I said, "Betty tells me you drive 90 miles an hour!" "Yeh," he beamed. "Well don't," I said, "or I walk." We got up to go, and Larry limped horribly. I didn't want to make any personal remarks, so I didn't; but then Betty told me, "Larry fell off a car today!" "Terrific, Lar," I joshed witha certain grimness, "You Timmy! And you're gonna drive me home? Get in the trunk, dummy."

So Larry drove ("Slow down, slow down!") and Betty babbled while I huddled in the back seat and surreptitiously gulped bourbon from my flask.

When we finally reached 9 Bancroft, Betty and Larry started hauling overnight stuff out of the car. "Here's your bottle of Scotch," I said helpfully, noting that there was about two inches of booze left in the bottle. "Where's the other one?" Betty yelled. "Now shut up,"



Larry muttered. "I know they's another one," Betty insisted, scrabbling about. "No they ain't," muttered Larry. "Here it is!" cried Betty. "Shee-it!" muttered Larry. I wasn't too thrilled by the discovery, though. I had spotted that second bottle earlier, and noted that it, too, contained an inch or so of whiskey.

We went inside, and Betty fetched glasses and poured drinks for Larry and herself. "You?" she said to me, vaguely. "Me? Oh no, I got a lil taste of borbon, still."

We settled down to converse. "Oh, I am in such pain," said Larry, "My ankle is killin me." "He fell off a car today," Betty said. "Oh, ah," I replied. Then Betty went on to tell me all about how Larry had fallen off a car: I can't remember the details, except that they were boring. "Yeah, I'm a speedboat racer," Larry non-sequitured, "and I can take a lotta pain. But a twisted ankle can really hurt. Oh ow," he said. "I caught my thumb in a car door once ..." I began. "Oh Jee-zuss but I am in pain!" said Larry. "Let me take care of you, baby," Betty murmured, and grabbed Larry's ankle. "Ee-yow!" Larry remarked. "Like to hear some sides?" I asked, and went to put on a ~~side~~ long-playing stereophonic high-fidelity recording. "I'm from DEE-troit, man," said Larry, "Did you know that almost all the big stars in Show Biz is from DEE-troit?" "Oh yeah. Hank Jones and them," I nodded, "an Kenny Burrell. Do you dig Dexter Gordon, though? I don't know where he's from." I put on an LP called More Power. Larry's foot (the good one) tapped for a minute, and then he nodded; and Betty began to talk. I don't know what about. Well, yes I do. About Betty.

Larry stirred, after awhile, and mumbled, "I, uh, I gotta ..." "You wanna crash?" I said. "Huh?" "Would you like me to show you to your room?" "Yes .. yes I would. Oh my ankle. I am in pain." I led him upstairs and tucked him in, then came back down to Betty, whose monologue was continuing. "... and I know that I am an Artist, and to hell with Conventions," she was saying, "It's just my way of living. I know people put me down when they see me on the street with a Black Man, but I ..." "Uh huh, yes I see ..." "... and Larry is so amazed by the Freedom up here in Canada where no-one thinks anything of a Black Man being with a White Woman..." "Oh no of course" "... and what does it really mean after all that he is a Black Man and I am a White Woman..." "No no of course" "... and why should there be any notice of the fact that he is Black ..." "I should think not" "... because after all, we're all people, aren't we?" "Certainly. Certainly are."

It was getting late, or early. I really wanted to go to bed, by now. "I am writing poetry," said Betty, slyly, "Would you like to read some of my poems?" "Oh, well ..." "Now here is the first one I wrote, said Betty, "It is called 'Me.'" ← Or something like that ...Ed. Note→ She read it to me, then let me read it with my own eyes:

"Who am I? ... What ... What am I?  
I who perceive so clearly ...  
Does no one else know ... or see  
... what I feel ...  
Why? Why? I ask myself.  
And what is God anyways?..."

It went on like that for a few pages. "Mm," I said, "Hm." "Now here's another one, my second," said Betty, "I was goin through changes at the time." She read relentlessly:

"What is Love? ... I, alone ...  
feeling and CARING ... so much, so much ...  
I ask the Universe, What Is Love? ..."

Eventually, about six a.m., I managed to convince Betty that I really had to be Toddling Along now. Just before crashing into glorious sleep, I nudged Gina and said, "They're in your hands now." So let Gina tell you the rest ...

# Obscenity, from Toronto to Tuktoyaktuk

-or-

*Fragrant trash*

*from Gina*

## SUNDAY

This is by way of taking up the story Norm began\* about our visitation by Betty-the-artist and Larry-the-speedboat-racer.

I slept through the preliminary phase in which, as you will recall, Norm got babbled at all night. That was only fair, since I'd spent the earlier part of the evening being babbled at by one of the other Crazy Ladies, and when I got up on Sunday it was to face the early shift with Betty and Larry.

Actually I had been wakened briefly in the middle of the night by a bass-baritone bellow of pain as Betty, jumping into the guest bed, had landed on Larry's sore ankle which, *as you will recall,* he'd hurt falling off a sidewalk.

Anyway, Betty was up early. She wore a purple caftan slit up the sides. She's a very striking-looking woman, between 45 and 50, with long, black, grey-streaked hair, black eyes and a strongly modeled face. She claims to be part Indian (the only reason I express a smidgeon of doubt is that a couple years ago half of our weirder friends, including that other Crazy

Lady mentioned above, suddenly claimed to be part-Indian--it was very *in* that year) and is gradually weaning her old acquaintances from 'Betty' to 'Elue' ('Eh-loo'), her 'Indian name'. She's a little overweight, but has kept her figure. When she (finally!) left, she changed to tight pants and sweater, still sans bra, and looked damned good.

Anyway, as soon as she spotted me she galloped up and gave me a big hug, jelly to jelly and belly to belly. Very weird squirmy feeling. I must say that one advantage bras had was keeping women at arm's length from each other.

Then she launched into her everlasting chorus of "beautiful-beautiful." Everything was beautiful. I was beautiful, our house was beautiful, my green-and-purple bathroom was especially beautiful, even Ratso the hamster was beautiful.

I hate beautiful-beautiful people. My idea of conversation is jokes about everything and everyone (except me, of course), and I find adjusting myself to a beautiful-beautiful person very exhausting. I like to laugh, but hate smiling. Makes my face ache. And all that beautiful makes my teeth ache. Can't make jokes with beautiful-beautiful people--they're utterly humorless.

*A comic for Greg Benford:-*



→ *the transcendental witch*

*\* Or maybe he didn't. If not, this can stand on its own.*



Anyway, I asked Betty if she'd like something to eat. No, but she'd love a beer. Well, okay. And then she'd love a second.

Larry came tromping down the stairs, all six five and 200-plus of him. He was a dinosaur--you know the type: Large, lumbering, with his main brain at the lower end of his spine and only a small, auxiliary at the top. He didn't want nothin' to eat, thanks, but he could use a cup of coffee. When he got it, he up-ended a bottle of Norm's scotch into it. "Hey, that looks good," cried Betty, so she had a cup too. Then they both had seconds.

Larry sprawled across the dining-room table, and three or four chairs, perusing a Peanuts book from the kids' bookshelf, while Betty burred and babbled and blithered, and 'let' me read her pomes. They were all about Where-Has-Love-Gone and Who-Am-I and Beautiful-Beautiful and watching-from-the-shore-while-Larry races.

Now I happen to think poetry is an \*unnatural act\* and should be done, if at all, behind closed doors and in solitude, not out in the street where it scares the horses. If anybody wants to read the stuff, they can sneak in the back door of a bookstore and smuggle some home in a plain wrapped package and read it in the bathroom. Being handed a pome to read makes me as embarrassed as if somebody wanted me to admire them getting a bull's-eye on a lightbulb or finding true love with an egg-plant.

Anyway, I took the pomes, forced my eyes up and down the stanzas, and then returned them, eyes lowered, and muttered, "Well, uh, that's, well, beautiful..."

And she'd hand me another.

Then we looked at her sketchpad and her collection of photographs. Yes, Boyd, she carries this stuff with her wherever she goes.

Included were photos of the paintings she's proudest of. Poor Betty. Her favorite was of a white-featured 'Indian' maiden, garbed in Hollywood bucksin, kneeling to admire her reflection in a pool beneath a waterfall. Rather reminiscent of the White Rock Lady. Quite well done, in a calendar kind of way, except that the proportions were a little out. It was the sort of thing that a fairly-talented, over-romantic high-schooler might produce.

Then she began presenting me with things I'd no doubt like to have--a photograph of herself, an envelope addressed to her at her former address, her business-card ("Paintings and Portraits by Elue"), and other memorabilia.

All this time Larry is guffawing and slapping his thigh over the Peanuts strips and interrupting us frequently to show us especially beautiful ones.

***No loss for conversation  
with these little grabbers***

Then Betty spotted our Pimms No. One and they each had a glass of that, straight, without even a stick of cucumber, and promptly killed off that poor tommy.

Norm stumbled downstairs about then and went into shock at the ravages being perpetrated upon his liquor stock. Quickly, to divert them from the good stuff, he offered them some grappa. He doesn't like it. I don't like it. Boyd likes it, tho.

And Larry and Betty loved it. They poured themselves a tumbler each and knocked it back. "Hey, man, that's good stuff!" Larry declared. "My tongue is numb."

Larry then launched into a rambling dissertation on how he was an engineering genius and if he'd pursued this he'd have been a millionaire several times over but he was only interested in racing his speedboats but he'd invented this wonderful device, see, to cut down on car pollution and it only required cheap water to bubble the exhaust through which you can fill up from your kitchen tap while the car manufacturers are fiddling around with expensive platinum whatzits that have to be changed every 300 miles at vast expense but he always insisted on having his Saturdays free so he could race his speedboats, so Dee-troit fired him. Bad ole Dee-troit. "Well," I said, "uh, that's, well, beautiful..."

"Gee," Betty gushed. "I always get such good vibes when I visit here." While Norm and I sat across the table from her gritting our teeth.

Finally Norm persuaded them that we had to leave now for a previous engagement and they should go visit another acquaintance down the street.

He presented them with the grappa bottle and managed to steer them to the front door. They kept popping back in, tho, for forgotten clothes and shoes and pomes...

Finally they departed. They piled themselves and their possessions into Larry's enormous station-wagon (it looked like a speedboat on wheels) and boomed away--one hundred feet to Rick's place, three houses down.

We locked our doors and windows, hopped into our car and left town, not returning until Rick gave us the all-clear.

### MONDAY

A messenger-boy just came in with an envelope. He apologized because it was wet at the top. "I was carrying it in my mouth," he explained. "Oh," I said. "So," he continued, "I could hang onto both handlebars of my bike."

\* \* \*

*Man in our office is moving west - taking all his worldly goods in a trailer.*

He was talking about the last time he took a trailer west. "I went 1,800 miles without stopping," he said. "I only meant to go a couple hundred miles after supper, but I was barely underway when I hit a family of skunks.

"After that I couldn't stop. Couldn't eat or sleep in the trailer. Couldn't leave it parked anywhere. Couldn't get into a motel. Couldn't even get my car filled--had to do it myself and leave the money. The garage attendants wouldn't come near me..."

### TUESDAY

The woman in the Aylmer delicatessen asked me if I ever got threats because of the things I write for the local paper.



I was rather startled. I told her that Norm sometimes said the town council might raise my assessment on me if I picked on them too much, but they never did.

Actually I did get a sort-of threat once. I got a registered letter from my grimy friend Jack, a literal dirty old man, the proprietor of "The World's Nicest Poolroom," who declared he was going to \*see his lawyer\* because I poked fun at his articles in the same paper in which he was forever saying, "It is the consensus of the Aylmer Historical Society that..." when the said Society consisted of he, him and himself. But I ignored this threat and it went away, and old Jack resumed trying to interest me in also writing storees about 'Aylmer (yawn) history', much of which springs full-blown from his imagination.

But there are benefits. At the council meeting the other night one of the councillors brought a big jug of ice-water and glasses over to the press table because I'd written a column about my state of parchement, try that again, about my being parched while the Councillors swilled their water <sup>in front</sup> of us.

That was a lovely meeting. There were 47 items on it, one of which would have taken 3 or 4 hours all by itself (reading a 200-page by-law twice, once in English and once in French). except that it was

mercifully postponed to another night. I left after the one interesting item because the daily I string for (is that the right usage?) had sent a Real Reporter in the expectation of a \*big story\*, and the local weekly had shut down for two weeks' holiday.

I whispered to the daily man usurping me that I'd be thinking of him as I went home to a nice cool drink, a long cool bath and an early bed-time, while he sweated it out till midnight.

I lied, though. I promptly forgot him.

WEDNESDAY

I phoned the laundromat this morning to tell them I'd left my sheets in a dryer last night and were they still there.

"Just a minute," the clerk said. She was back in a moment saying, "The only things I can find is an old pile of filthy sheets that obviously haven't been washed and on top is an enormous pair of bright pink shorts."

"Gee," I said, "that doesn't sound like my laundry."

When I arrived the clerk took me round back and with a stick she gingerly lifted up the edges of this heap of ghastly laundry. Well, the sheets are showing signs of age, and those odd



purple and green stains come from a tie-dyeing experiment, but I had washed them, and, gee, I'd clean forgotten that I did indeed own an enormous pair of bright pink shorts.

I scooped up my miserable pile and slunk away.

THURSDAY

We were driving along behind this car wondering where it came from. "Get a little closer so we can make the license out," said Norm.

I edged up a little. "Ah," I said, "Illinois--Land of Lakes."

"*Wha?* How can you read that? You wear glasses. I don't wear glasses and I can't read that."

Norm has this strange idea that glasses are a species of white cane--a warning to the world that a blindie is abroad and likely to tromp on your toes.

FRIDAY

I told Norm about an article in PSYCHOLOGY TODAY (there's Psycho Yesterday and Psycho Today, but tomorrow The World)(well, if not tomorrow, then Saturday Night)\* (ignore the foregoing) which said it's natural to be prejudiced in favor of light things (sunlight) and against dark things (night), but to help undercut this factor in race relations we should conscientiously avoid expressions like 'black-hearted' etc., and not refer to people as 'black' and 'white', but as 'Afros' and 'Euros.'

"Euros," said Norm. "That sounds like a disease."

"Well," I suggested, "maybe we could call ourselves Caucs."

*Baboons start eating MP's car*

\* got confused here between U.S. Sat. Review & Canadian Saturday Night.

SUNDAY

Not just Sat. Nite--the whole day has disappeared.

Sunday was one of those days. Took the kids swimming in the morning, got back at noon. Door locked. Keys in house. Didn't want to wake Norm. Roared back into Hull and got kids a Col. Saunders for lunch. Back home at 12.30. Norm's awake after all. Has been awake for hours. Is mad.

Get in car for Sunday drive. Where to? Well, let's just go. Drive into country. Roar through quaint little towns full of quaint little buildings we must come back and look at some day. Roar past inviting beaches and parks we must come back and try out sometime. Gotta get back to town to meet Johnstones for picnic supper.

Meet Johnstones. Well, what should we get? Gee, I don't know, what do you people like? Finally we split up, go to different stores, rendezvous at park, spread out blanket, sit down, start to eat--and rain falls. For 10 min. Just long enough for us to finish eating while crouched under station-wagon back-extending thing.

We walk Johnstones' kid Devon, age 2, down to the wading pool, just in time to watch the water gurgling out--it's drain-the-pool time.

Then Norm remembers Edward Murrow -vs- Joe McCarthy is on tv tonight and we rush home to catch it. Burst thru door at 8, find program was on at 6.

And besides that it was 95 above (101 by the humidex) all day and 85 all night.

FRIDAY (deadline day)

Just proofreading the page and the stuff opposite) inspired a few thots--Someone who hates blacks (or Afros) could be said to want to see the world safe for Caucs, or a Cauc-safe world. ...Chinese could stop referring to us as round-eyes and call us Cauc-eyed... .., must be things to be done with Cauc-tail and Cauc-a-mamy and ~~Cauc+at+old~~...