Master Blaster at 59 still at it

World's oldest male stripper headed for Guinness record book

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### December Entertainment

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Action Magazine, December 2017 • 3 •
I am pleased to say that I have met an angel, I began chemotherapy last July for an oral cancer and wound up in the hospital for three days. When admitted I was dehydrated, feverish and slightly disoriented. On the second day, a young woman entered my room and asked if I would like to hear some music. At first I said, "No thank you," because I thought she was a member of the pastoral staff asking if I wanted some background music. But, when I learned she was a musician I said, "Sure. Come on in."

She rolled in a keyboard and began to play and sing for me. Tears flowed from my eyes as she performed. It was extraordinary, as good if not better than I have ever heard. Her name is Constanza Roeder (pronounced "Raider"), and I could tell she had been doing this a while. I would put her in the same performance class as Celine Dion.

Turns out she is a cancer survivor. She was diagnosed with leukemia when she was 13, and after two and-a-half years of chemo, has been cancer free for 14 years. Having a cancer diagnosis had a profound effect on her, as it has had on me. According to Constanza, "The emotional and spiritual impact of cancer did not end with treatment. I struggled for years with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Cancer also isolated me from my peer group. Not only did I have to stay away from social gatherings when the chemo suppressed my immune system but also, few people my age knew what it was like to have cancer.

"Thankfully there was a nonprofit in my hometown that had a support group for teens and young adults with cancer. We would get together and make art. I could use art to honestly express my grief, and frustrations, and anger and transform it into something beautiful and meaningful.

"Throughout my journey, music inspired me, comforted me, and reminded my heart of the powerful resources I had in Christ's love to face any challenge. After I graduated with a degree in music and minor in psychology, I moved to San Antonio with my husband. I found Methodist Hospital and started volunteering to sing for cancer patients. The music made an undeniable impact on patients' wellbeing.

"My patients kept asking for more so, last year, I started a nonprofit called Hearts Need Art: Creative Support for Adults with Cancer. We train local musicians and artists to facilitate art-experiences with patients, family members, and staff on the oncology ward. We provide bedside music, group art classes, corridor concerts, and gentle yoga and meditation classes through a partnership with Yoga Day. "My work gives me a front row seat to see little miracles facilitated through art, creativity, and human connection. From the patient who's pain goes away after I sing for them, to the "grumpy old man" who comes to art class and starts treating the staff with kindness, to a depressed patient who finds inspiration in a song to get out of her room walk like she's supposed to, I get to see that our Hearts really do Need Art."

Constanza, as a performer, is known as Constanza Alleen, which means "Consistent Bringer of Light," according to her bio. Indeed, she brought light into my life that day back in July (I was one of the "grumpy old men").

I asked her whom she was born to be, and she replied, "Well, God is still answering that question. To the best of my knowledge, I was born to facilitate deep, meaningful human connections and to inspire people to come out of hiding and journey with me toward the light. I now am honored to call myself Musician-in-Residence, singing at the bedside of cancer patients in the hospital."

I cannot think of a better application of live music performance than the one Constanza Alleen is using. The light that she has brought into my life is indescribable. In the short time we talked, she helped me realize that life, my life or anyone's life, is lived best when it is lived moment to moment.

Music makes each moment much more livable, IMHO. She is a music angel.
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Action Magazine, December 2017 • 5 •
As stated earlier, I have no words for the Sutherland Springs horror which saw a deranged gunman kill 26 church people.

And I had no words 51 years ago when former Eagle Scout and ex-Marine Charles Joseph Whitman climbed the Texas University clock tower in Austin to complete a shooting rampage that eventually left 17 dead and more than 30 wounded.

I was there for the Whitman slaughter, working as a general assignments reporter for the San Antonio Express and News.

I was what they called a "cub reporter" at the time. I had never before experienced the visceral reaction to the scent of heavy human blood loss, seen a shot-up corpse, or heard the buzz of a live bullet round ricocheting off asphalt. I was a green kid.

The Whitman story was my first major assignment with the Express and News, and it proved to be my baptism of fire in the daily newspaper business.

Before Virginia Tech, Columbine, Sandy Hook, Aurora, and now Sutherland Springs in South Texas, there was the University of Texas infamous "Tower Sniper" Charles Whitman.

Whitman killed both his wife and mother with gun and knife before climbing to the tower's observation deck where he rained leaden death for 96 minutes before two nero cops shot him dead.

The unspeakable horror from Sutherland Springs' little Baptist Church brought it all back to me in technicolor.

It was the late sweltering hot morning of August 1, 1966, when San Antonio Express city editor Ken Kenamer called me at home.

A staff car had already been assigned to veteran photographer Johnny Tarsikes. Some lunatic was on the clock tower observation deck on the University of Texas campus, shooting down and killing people both inside the tower and at ground level.

In those days, the now-defunct San Antonio Light was in fierce competition with the Express and News, and we were all going full throttle to be first with breaking news.

In addition to Tarsikes, the Express and News had legendary photographer Bill Goodspeed, while the Light boasted award-winning camera man Gilbert Barrera.

The Light had a unit on the way to Austin, as did the Houston Chronicle and Houston post, the Fort Worth Star Telegram, and the Dallas Morning News. The Associated Press had reporter Robert Heard covering the carnage, another ex-Marine who was smashed to the asphalt with a bullet through his shoulder.

"The shooter was an incredible shot," Heard later said from his hospital bed. "The bullet that hit me traveled a very long distance."

I am sure there were numerous radio and TV stations with cars heading for Austin to cover the Whitman rampage, but in those days 50 years ago the daily newspapers were the kings when it came to news coverage.

Tarsikes and I left the Express and News building at Avenue E at Third Street on that fateful morning in a white 1962 Chevy II/Nova staff car. The photographer was driving, and I have never forgotten that hair-raising run up IH 35 to Austin.

I recall the Chevrolet speedometer needle hovering near the 100 mph mark most of the way to Austin, and the little car was vibrating hard enough to loosen teeth fillings. The Chevy's engine eventually burned up but not before getting us to Austin and eventually back to San Antonio.

Police reports reflect that Whitman started firing at 11:48 a.m. and was killed at 1:20 p.m.

Austin traffic was light in those days. When Tarsikes and I rolled up to the UT campus Charles Joseph Whitman was still blasting away.

The scene was surreal. Cops were swarming, some trying to cordon off the area around the clock tower. Whitman had already driven off a police light airplane which tried to get a cop sniper close enough for a shot. Tarsikes stopped our car more than two blocks from the tower.

We thought we were well out of rifle range for the tower sniper when a man near our car grabbed his lower leg and hollered, "I think I'm hit. Yeah, I am hit for sure..."

Whitman was a Marine sharpshooter who police later said was dropping victims as far as two blocks from the tower.

Tarsikes and I ducked under an 18-wheeler trailer that was parked on a curb, and we stayed there while Whitman was being taken out by a contingent of super heroes.

Ramiro Martinez was the 29-year-old off-duty cop who ran and crawled to the tower building's main entrance. There he handed a rifle to Allen Crum, an employee of the university's cooperative store. The two men then made their way to the observation deck. Whitman fired at Martinez and missed. Martinez then emptied his revolver at Whitman. Then appeared 26-year-old Austin cop George McCoy who had trailed Martinez and Crum.

McCoy rushed onto the deck and emptied a shotgun at Whitman.

One of Martinez's pistol bullets smashed Whitman's rifle stock and another bullet hit Whitman in the neck. A buckshot pellet from McCoy's shotgun hit Whitman between the eyes, and police said this was the shot that finished him off.

As is the case today, there was the usual cadre of uninformed assholes who would turn the tragedy into another gun control exercise in futility. But the mystery is what it is.

There was also talk of severe headaches and a pecan-sized tumor which an autopsy showed at the base of Whitman's brain. It was never determined if the tumor had any effect on his behavior.

Before climbing the tower, Whitman killed his mom, Kathy Whitman, in her luxury Austin apartment. He killed his wife, Kathleen, as she slept in their Austin apartment. The mother was shot to death, the wife stabbed to death with a ballpoint pen. The pen was Whitman's knife.

Whitman left a note, saying he killed his wife and mother to spare them the embarrassment over what he was fixing to do on the clock tower.

If there is a shrink alive who can explain this kind of thinking, I have yet to meet him. I believe in demons, and I think the mass killers have some big ones.
Randy Lee Ricks knew a massive flock of women when he saw one. "Women in a line more than two blocks long," says Ricks, 59. "All wiggling and giggling and waiting to watch a bunch of naked guys dancing on a stage. I could hardly believe my eyes."

The year was 1980. The allure for all those women was San Antonio's first strip joint featuring all male dancers, a club called LaBare on Rector Street just off San Pedro Avenue.

Randy Ricks was a muscular cowboy body builder and boxer who played linebacker on the Robert E. Lee High School football team. That first visit to LaBare came on a dare from a friend who had heard on the radio of the all-male strip club. "I found it hard to fathom then," says Ricks, "I sometimes find it hard to believe today."

The rest is history. Ricks got a dancing job at LaBare in 1980, and today he is headed for the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest and longest tenured continuous male stripper the world has ever known.

It was on that old LaBare stage that Randy Ricks assumed the nickname Master Blaster, a fairy tale moniker that has defined him through five generations. He had left San Antonio for Dallas when the San Antonio LaBare closed in 1984.

"The largest tip I ever got from a woman fan was a $75,000 cashiers check," says Master Blaster Randy. "And I am now driving a 2017 Cadillac Escalade that one of my women customers recently gave me. On my last birthday party at Hardbodies in September, the tip money exceeded $15,000. I have known some really sweet ladies throughout my career, and I am still meeting them. I have no plans to stop doing what I have been doing over all of these great years."

Other birthday parties for Ricks and net tips from each included $17,000, 2014; $12,000, 2015; and $5,000 2016.

Ricks is soft-spoken but engaging, a likeable sort who takes pride in achievements that range from strip contests to the movies and personal club ownerships. He is also pot-lit with a touch of humility that might seem odd to some considering his chosen profession.


Ricks has been featured in 30 national TV programs and on many talk shows. He owned the largest stripper gram company in the United States from 1989 until 2014, and Master Blaster Randy also owned the Dallas-based Master Blaster Ladies Club from 2007 until 2010. In addition, he has owned two boxing gyms, two personal training gyms, and a small pizza restaurant.

"I bought the LaBare company in Dallas and held it for 10 years," Ricks said. "After I sold out, I retained the trademark name, and there are now LaBare clubs brokered under individual ownership all over the country."

The concept of male stripping is big business to Ricks and select others. The Master Blaster doesn’t smoke or do drugs, and says he has never been drunk in his entire life.

"A good male dancer can make between $2,000 and $10,000 a week," says Master Blaster Rick. "It is a legitimate and very serious business."

The greatest chapter in the Master Blaster legacy will evolve from Ricks’ close association with actor and film producer Joe Manganiello, his connection with the famed Magic Mike film starring Matthew McConaughey, and both a strip club documentary and a Magic Mike sequel in which Master Blaster plays himself.

The allure for all those women is the Hardbodies Club owner and longtime friend of Ricks who now goes by only Kenny Lee. Kenny and his late brother Ronnie (Rockin’ Ronnie) Simpson both danced with Ricks at the old San Antonio LaBare.

Lee says, "There isn’t a female fan of male dancers in the world who doesn’t know about the hit movie Magic Mike, a fictional film which was inspired by the real life story of Master Blaster Randy Ricks. When you write the story of Randy, LaBare, and Hardbodies, just tell the ladies that they can view the real living, breathing Magic Mike"

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Master Blaster

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every Wednesday through Sunday night at Hardbodies Club in San Antonio. He is here performing in great shape and he will be a shoo-in for the Guinness Book of World Records when we submit our application next year.”

Ricks explains that the Magic Mike character portrayed by Matthew McConaughey was actually a reproduction of Master Blaster Randy Ricks.

“I helped advise on the film which was made in Hollywood and Florida,” Ricks said. “Then I collaborated with Joe Manganiello for the documentary film on male stripping which was titled La Bare Dallas.”

The sequel to Magic Mike, the last of three films, is titled Magic Mike XXL (Double Extra Large), a film in which Ricks plays himself.

“The 90-minute documentary film with Joe Manganiello is about male dancing and its origin in a place called La Bare Dallas,” Ricks said. “This place housed the most famous male burlesque show the world has ever known. It is familiar to male strippers the world over.”

Randy Ricks returned to San Antonio to be near his ailing 83-year-old mother Mary Lou, who is confined to a nursing home.

“She lived with me in Dallas, but we came home to San Antonio where our family lives. She had a heart attack and then a stroke which paralyzed her right side,” Randy said. “I see her daily. I have always been a mama’s boy.”

Randy’s father died four years ago. He once owned a family ranch near Marion where the son came naturally by his cowboy trappings.

“I grew up with horses and livestock,” Randy said, “and I started lifting weights in third grade. I loved it then and I still do today.”

Mike Murphy of Dallas opened both La Bare and its female dance club counterpart Baby Dolls on Wurzbach Road in San Antonio, with Bobby Bosworth serving as manager of both clubs.

Randy Ricks was already a familiar figure on the San Antonio nightclub scene, working as door man and bouncer at Ronnie Branham owned discotheques such as Hallelujah Hollywood, Sugar Daddy’s and The Last National Bank.

“I was having a few fights in both the ring and on the streets in those days,” Ricks recalls. “The late Bobby Thomas was helping me train as a boxer, and I had been pumping iron big time before that first visit to LaBare.”

Ricks stands 5-feet-10-inches today and weighs 207 pounds. He is sculpted muscle. When he was first hired at San Antonio’s LaBare he “was all bulked up at 245 pounds” and wearing a T-shirt that said “Superman” on one side and “Master Blaster” on the other.

Explained Ricks: “Master Blaster was a nickname I picked up in high school because of my body building. Joe Weider was the father of body building and Weider was Arnold Schwarzenegger’s mentor. Schwarzenegger always called Weider Master Blaster.”

“That afternoon I first visited LaBare I had figured on applying for a door man job. But the dance manager there looked me over and told me to come back and try dancing that night in the amateur contest. When I got back to LaBare at 7:30 p.m., there were more than a thousand screaming women crowded in the place. It was insane bedlam. Hardy any of the other dancers were from this area. They came from other states and I didn’t know anybody.”

Randy Ricks said he was wearing his Master Blaster/Superman shirt when the LaBare emcee gave him his first introduction.

“They had a sound system equipped with an echo pedal,” Ricks said. “I had never experienced anything like it before. When I spun out onto the stage, the emcee screamed: ‘And there he is, ladies, 245 pounds of twisted steel and sex appeal...San Antonio’s one and only Master Blaster!”’

At this point, Ricks said, the emcee hit the echo pedal.

“The last line was reverberated and echoed throughout the club,” Ricks recalls. “Master Blaster, Master Blaster, Master Blaster... Master Blaster... What seemed like more than a thousand women were going wild, screaming and squealing and all but climbing the walls. That did it for me. I was hooked for life. I was the Master Blaster. I have been dancing since that night, and I have never tired of the sound of screaming women having a good time.”

Both Randy Ricks and Hardbodies owner Kenny Lee would dispel the old ‘dick dancer’ image of barefoot male dancers in G-strings humping and hunching in singular fashion on an ill-lit stage.

“The business has been revolutionized over the years,” says Master Blaster Randy Ricks. “We have traded the old strip joint image for a Vegas-style stage show that appeals to a wide variety of female customers. We wear customized shorts, and some like me even come out in cowboy boots and western hats.”

Hardbodies owner Kenny Lee elaborates.

“We have more than 20 dancers working,” Lee says. “We mostly have group acts, including full production Vegas-style shows. We have a choreographer, gymnasts, backup dancers, spectacular pyrotechnics, acrobats, and singers. You name it, we have it. And as they say in Vegas, what you see at Hardbodies stays at Hardbodies.”

The Master Blaster trains daily at Olympic Gym where he runs MasterBlaster Fitness, a boot-camp for personal training and diet counseling.

“This gives me the opportunity to establish healthy personal relationships with many of the clients who pay to see me dance,” says Master Blaster Ricks. “What woman or girl doesn’t want to be in better shape? What woman doesn’t want to feel better and look better. I have clients in their 80s and 90s. No, this job isn’t all about sex. It is much more. It is about women having fun, letting their hair down, relaxing in a non-threatening atmosphere. This is a fantasy land for many of the clients. We have guys running around in Superman suits. It’s a big fun blast.”

Neither Ricks nor Lee is married, but the Master Blaster has a beautiful 24-year-old daughter, Kelsey Bishop, who was a San Antonio Spurs Silver Dancer.

“It would be hard to

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December 16
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Tex Pop Xmas
Veteran rocker Ty Gavin will bring his new country music show to the South Texas Museum of Popular Culture (Tex Pop) Sunday December 17.

Ty Gavin
Gavin's Hill Country Band will be the main event. Also appearing will be Pete's Best, a Beatles tribute band.

Patsy Torres
Patsy Torres kicked off her Patsy Cline tribute series last month with a good performance at Texas Pride Barbecue.

Watch for a Patsy Torres article in a subsequent issue of Action Magazine. She is a friend from more than a few years ago, and she has improved with age.

Torrres is being backed by Wayne Martin's Lone Star Pickerz Band, comprised mostly of Geronimo Trevino's old group.

Facebook folly
The following Scatter Shots item will be an editorial response to last month's Sam Kindrick column in Action Magazine which was first posted on the Sam Kindrick Facebook page.

Because of the controversial nature of the column and the almost unbelievable internet response it garnered, this Scatter Shots piece will be a first person assessment of last month's Facebook foolishness.

The column, which resulted in more than 1,500 Facebook comments, dealt with Spurs coach Gregg Popovich's insensitive public pronouncement that President Donald Trump is a "soulless coward."

My personal opinion was voiced in that column. I think Gregg Popovich is an overrated windbag who is hurting the basketball team by dividing the fan base with his puerile political prattle.

I have received scores of emails and Facebook posts from former Spurs fans who say they have stopped buying season tickets and attending games because of Popovich's non-basketball agenda.

That Popovich would use his platform as leader of the San Antonio Spurs to denigrate the President of the United States is a reality that pisses me off, and my personal political leanings have nothing to do with any of it.

I made it as clear as I possibly could. I did not vote for Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, and I would never cast a vote for either of them.

My point was and still is that the coach of a successful basketball team should concentrate on his coaching job and keep his snark out of the presidential political arena.

And I made it crystal clear that I have no use for Trump or Clinton.

The column, however, brought the frothy-mouthed Trump haters crawling out of the woodwork, many of them attempting to hang me as a closet Trump lover who just won't own up to the fact that I voted for D.T.

Anyone who knows anything about me will testify that I have never hid the closet for any reason.

If I had voted for Trump or Clinton, I would be the first to admit it.

The real belly beller in this exercise in stupidity are the scrotumless wonder who use fake IDs and Facebook images designed to protect the anonymity of the gutless antagonists.

I truly get a kick out of these faceless fibber-brights who get so vicious they are laughable.

When I was writing a column for the San Antonio Express and News, my constant companion from Shadowland was an anonymous creep who mailed me weekly letters which said only that I was being watched.

These letters were always signed 'The Green Beetle,' and all of them included a crude drawing in green ink of what passed for a beetle.

The Green Beetle followed me from the daily newspaper to Action Magazine, sending an occasional 'Green Beetle' warning. But I had heard from the Beetle in several years, and he was evidently not present for the Facebook frolic.

The start of the recent Facebook barrage was an anonymous malcontent who was clearly Robert Drilbit, who disguises his visage on Facebook with a painted clown face.

This one concentrated on my age, using words like doltage and grandpa while suggesting that my questionable career is flagging fast.

I got my biggest kick out of Robert Drilbit's solemn promise to personally piss on my grave when it is all over and done with. When they promise to personally relieve themselves over your buried remains, it means that these people are dedicated readers who feel very strongly about what you have tossed their way.

I was heartened by Cat Austin's rapid response to this remark, assuring Mr. Drilbit that she would promptly clean up my final resting place, should Robert make good on his threat.

And before I pulled the plug on the clown's FB presence, I did question whether Dribbit would stand to piss on my grave or squat to get his bladder emptied.

"Cowboys" photos
Duo Robinson and his Drugstore Cowboys Band celebrated the group's 45th anniversary last month with a series of parties in San Antonio and across the Hill Country area.

The big one in San Antonio was held at Floore Store in Helotes where Action Magazine photographer Marco Villarreal shot a suitcase load of photographs.

Many of the DST celebration shots appear on the Everybody's Somebody picture past in this issue of the magazine.

Elf help wanted
The Elf Louise Christmas Project can still use help wrapping gifts and other chores.

Contact information is as follows:
Mail: Elf Louise Christmas Project
P.O. Box 39107
San Antonio TX 78281
Telephone: (210) 224-1843
Email elflouise@elflouise.org
The Elf Louise Christmas project is in full swing at this time, but added help is always welcomed.

The Elf Louise Christmas Project website has this to say:
Although, many of our volunteers desire the opportunity to wrap or deliver toys, there are many more opportunities available.

If you are interested in a more in-depth or long-term volunteer commitment, we need volunteers for data entry, toy stockers, wrap room supervisors and greeters, warehouse help and Santa dressing assistants.

We also have core volunteers that work year-round to ensure the Elf Louise Christmas Project is a success each and every year.

Kaiti Blake
Kaiti Blake is the new weekend news girl at KSAT-TV and the Texas Tech graduate who grew up in the Houston area is our all-time favorite among new weathercasters in San Antonio.

This kid is a cutie, okay, but the intangible quality that makes her stand out above the others is something we refer to as class.

She is straight-forward and pleasantly business like with no insipid giggle or other distracting mannerisms.

Elf Louise Christmas Project
P.O. Box 39107
San Antonio TX 78218
Telephone: (210) 224-1843
Email elflouise@elflouise.org
South by Southwest and one human turd as a lasting reminder

Editor's note: This is the last of a two-part narrative by glam rocker Seamus O. Sparks. It's about survival at Austin's South by Southwest freak show.

Part 2
By Seamus O. Sparks

We regrouped the next afternoon. Our first day at Southby had been a drag, but hope swelled amongst us all. Our "official" showcase performance was happening that night and with it came the dense optimism that something wonderful might come of it. Maybe we'd get our lucky break? We loaded our van and headed to downtown Austin for another round on the pitch.

We got to The Oak Room and, after the usual bustle of fighting traffic, loading in, and parking, found a nice spot to set up makeup and get our faces, our energies, and our focus together. The act performing when we arrived was a delicate acoustic combo out of Portland. They looked like a daddy/daughter duo and played all cover songs. Their versions bucked with a kind of earthy soul vibe. He dressed in black, was bald, and sported the notion of a beard while she had cartoon blonde tresses and wore a flowing pink chiffon robe. She dramatically sang, "Gonna' hitch a ride, head for the other side. Oh yeah, oh yeah, leave it all behi-hi-hind, never change my mi-hi-hind. Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah."

I went up to the bartender, a friend of mine, and asked for a soda. "Hey man, I'm excited to see you guys tonight. There's going to be some industry people here for your set!" "Really, what makes you say that?" I asked.

He explained: "There were a couple of guys here earlier. They work for Ballbuster records or something. I told them that they had to check you guys out. I assured them that you'd be playing tonight and told them when. They were intrigued, man, said that would work out perfect because they'd have some time to kill then. How about that, man? Far out, huh?"

Seamus says he may be "the last rock star available."

After carrying on with their full set and showing the night's running order perilously back, they said a few more sharp things and left the stage in disgust. The singer/pianist lost all emotional balance and she broke down in tears. "You suck! You've ruined our whole week. I'll fix you, punk!" The kid just absorbed it. The guitarist came up to me and and urged our band to write a strongly worded letter. I told him we would and would flip off a church too...just to cover all the bases.

The whole scene was awash in jangled vibrations and cruel steam when we took the stage. And the stage was a sight to behold: a viper's nest of jumbled wires and carelessly strung live microphones that hummed and squealed at random intervals. The soundman had no idea what he was doing and never should have been there in the first place. Bless his heart. He was in ruins. It would take a bottle of Dr. Hammond's Brain and Nerve Tonic and a few rude turns with multiple smelly prostitutes in order to bring him back to anything that resembled a connection to humanity.

The room looked dull and nearly vacant, all the tech issues and bad vibes having skunked the energy of the place. When you're a local band you learn to cope with technical snafus, empty rooms, and rotten teeth. We got up and laid into our set, sensing another defeat at the hands of a churlish and disagreeable fate. No monitors, no crowd, and a diabolical chorus of squeals and hums that our sound man had long since banished from his anguished mind. We slogged through our first song. This was it. This was our showcase. Pure Masada, Rock-n-Roll style.

We started our second song and throughout the number we noticed that, little by little, the room started to rustle with new life. The grim fog of the night began to dissipate and people started to make their way in to the venue. At first there were just a few new faces. In a moment or two a few became quite a few, then a bunch. We didn't know what was going on, but we knew better than to question it. The gods are capricious pricks, after all, and when they lay some benevolent hoodoo on you, in this enterprise, you smile and say thanks.

Only a fool pushes back at his healthy luck.

After almost completing

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Seamus O. Sparks  
continued from pg 12  

our set and giving some righteous thanks to this much appreciated and wholly unexpected crowd, we were feeling light and luminous. I decided to offer a toast to the vivid congregation. “Here’s to cigarettes” I chirped. The congregation. “Here’s to cigarettes” I chirped. The yell, “Hell yeah!” followed righteous thanks to this miss. Then I heard a voice luminous. I decided to “God bless Corky Gookin” crophone. He gave me a crush. “I told you I’d bring Corky Gookin. He saw Corky Gookin. He some people” he cackled. Those guys from Ball- 
fusely and went to talk to laughter. I looked out and thought, swing and a salute. We finished strong that equipment trouble “Yeah” he balefully said. “They came in when all here?”  

my friend at the bar. Buster records come in “Hey man, did you see me play had gone on to find theirs by discovering, “the next BIG thing?” “Meh, luck’s a bitch and only the good get eaten by bears. I stopped in front of another club and looked in at the band playing. I listened for a minute. They were great. I could tell they had spent countless hard hours developing their craft. Every struck note was eloquently nurtured and precisely developed. It was well honed, original, and fun. Unfortunately for them, there was no one in the room to appreciate things. I marveled at this lack of interest as people swaggered past; a blasé troupe of smart phones and dull feelings. Too many first world distractions for something as trivial as good music to gain traction. After a billion years of evolution, fat and hype will out. Between the celebrity sex tapes and tween thumping gristle of the Disney machine, the meat grinder was already filled with a surfeit of diversions.  

Loud banging interrupted my reflective stroll. I looked up and saw a stout Korean dude pounding on the windshield of a Honda Civic. The pudgy Hispanic man inside kept his eyes forward and pretended not to notice his assailant. “You piece of shit” the Korean cat shouted. “You almost hit my girlfriend. Step out of this car, babo. I’m gonna’ eat your eyes and use your filthy skin to make a kite.”  

The Honda took off slowly and deliberately as soon as the light changed. Down the street I heard a woman scream with a distinctly urban patina, “Get your hands off me mother fucker!” A few minutes later, three cops on bikes whizzed past. The insiders of the night were spilling out. It all stopped me and my thoughts dead. I looked across the street and saw an open air café lively with people. There was a massive plastic sign that read: HUGO’S WEL­COMES THE VICTORY CULTURE. A thick velvet rope blocked the entryway.

Glam rocker Seamus O. Sparks says “Piss on luck, only eager beavers and insurance salesmen rely on it.”

I walked over to get a better perspective on it all. The guy working the door stopped me and asked, “Can I help you?” He was wearing faded jeans, a grey sweat stained T-Shirt, and eerily resembled the late Lester Bangs. “I'm Continued on pg. 14
Seamus O. Sparks
continued from pg 13
looking for the South by Southwest Miracle" I uttered. "Any idea where it might be?"
He grinned. "It's not in here."
"What is all this?" I asked. "Hell if I know. Some big boned throw down for a hot new distribution racket. They're called, The Victory Culture or something like that."
"The Victory Culture? Sounds horrific." I mumbled. "like the name of a Glenn Beck podcast. Any chance I could come in and take a look around?"
"Fat Chance." he chuckled. "It's a real who's who of industry swingers inside-private event kind of thing. Sorry bud. Maybe next year, huh?"
"If I'm lucky." I winked.

I slunk away slowly, looking past the velvet rope to take it all in. The moon was full and followed me like a spotlight. Maybe I'd catch a glimpse of someone notable? It'd be a real gas to bat my eyes and flash a smile at Elijah Wood or Rod Stewart. Perhaps they'd like my style, invite me in for a drink, and all would be right with the world... just like that...

As I scanned the crowd this young guy drinking a beer came over to the street.

"Hey, man. I know you. He shouted. "We played a show together."

A minute passed and then he continued. "I treated..." I interrupted. "Any idea where it might be?"

They're called, The Victory Culture or something like that..."

"A few gays come in..."

"Oh, hey. How's it going?"

"Maybe this belongs to Dave Groh? Nobody was impressed. As we fixed cheeks by jowl, some burnout looking black cat hobbled up and asked if we could lend him some money."

"I'm a proud Vietnam veteran. He told us and carried his shoulders high. His ears were level with a gai that was somewhere between a shuffle and a limp. "I survived the war, man, but the peace has just about finished me off," he chuckled. "Say, are you all a part of this Southby noise?"

"Sure we are" our drummer said. That was all it took.

He cleared it. "Alright... I like rock stars. I'm a rock star too. I'm the last rock star."

I said, "I wouldn't call us rock stars. More like local musicians."

He looked at me with a grave expression and belled, "My friend, we are ALL local musicians in the eyes of the Lord."

Then he pulled a harmonica and went to work. It sounded like bronchial gasp expression..."

"How about that?" he slurped.

We were cordial. He asked if we wanted to hear him sing. We demurred, but too subtly to prevent him from going into an absolute angelic version of "More Than a Feeling." Not an easy song to sing, much less pull off a capella. But he did it. And there we were. Riveted.

One billion years of evolution...seraphim voice...the better part of him laid out at Khe Sanh...today, the best act in town...all souls and golden pipes...corporate rock plastic fart no way. He was the real deal...it was humiliating. He wandered off a sad cephalophore...to ballbuster records, perhaps...to fame...hopefully...to death undoubtedly...

It was our last gig of South by Southwest. And despite the high from the previous evening, it had been a long few days. Some of Dr. Hammonds Brains and Nerve Tone was definitely in order. Everyone in this local band was ready to be done. No more music. No more pulling death from our throats. Just sanctuaries, free and clear, from the debris of the feast.

We played our little show. The only folks in the audience were the irritated staff members. Outside it was all ghosts and tourists. No one had come in. Not even bad luck for us today. No luck...anywhere. Nothing to press and nothing to curse. At least not in this place. The distance had come to its end.

After the show I went out and walked towards the turb. Hell with it, I thought. I need a souvenir.

So I scraped it up in a plastic bag. Then it occurred to me: the turd said it all...This is what it's like...I whooped. "This deuce is pure rock n roll. It means everything. Ye gods and little fishies...oh man, where in the hell are those two pasteurizing guides boys now that the universe is revealing all?..."

I finally have a straight answer to their crooked question. My bandmates must have thought I had, at long last, tumbled over fools hill. I declared, "It's a miracle...enlightenment in a bag...and by damn, local band or not, we've earned it."

We loaded our gear out and saw a large stockpile of people across the street at STUBBS. "Shit. Must be a real damn show happening there," I said. We gathered our stuff in the van when this redheaded shout at us from her place in the human cluster, "NAZI'S! It's them, it's them. They're all Nazis! Everyone in the line glared at us and started murmuring. We were all rattled and I told my band mates, "Relax, I got it all under control on that freak show."

I couldn't help myself. I took my turd filled bag and flung it at her yelling, "Tell Dave Groh not to leave his personal property just laying around." I got some ugly looks...then I yelled, "Keep Austin weird!" She fingered the bag and cast a queasy look at us. We took off fast.

Seven of us, exhausted in the van. It was finished. No one spoke. Then the song came on. "It's more than a Feeling. When I hear that old song they used to play..."

...how absurdly...I closed my eyes and slipped away...but just for a second. In an instant I came to. And when I did, I surged as mystical as Timothy Treadwell going insane amongst his bears. I told the driver, "Hit you fat butter buck...we can have supper in Mexico!" Hell yeah, enough of this first world chicanery. We can make Coahuila in three hours. Us man! We're Cabeza De Vacas on four wheels..."

I had it all planned out. Once we got there we'd sell the van and equipment then push a trip. Make for the darkest jungles of the Yucatans to live like kings or die like pigs. But we would know where we stood and it would be a fair fight. Either the natives would revere us as holy men or we'd be eaten on sight. It would be out of the hands of the idiots... no more charade...no more middle ground... no more luck. Just us and the noble savages: refugees hiding from the long arm of the victory culture.
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