

THE  
POSTCARD  
MIMEOGRAPH

HORNSPIPE SERIES      NUMBER ONE

# THE POSTCARD MIMEOGRAPH

**T**HE JESSUP BROTHERS, Tim and George, had known Sanders Fisk, whom everybody called Sandy, for a year and more, ever since he came to work at the Melendez machine shop in the flatlands of Berkeley. They had never looked him up at home before, though. They weren't that close friends, despite the fact that Sandy and George worked together once in a while, and the three of them ate lunch together about twice a week.

About the only time they ever thought of him when he wasn't in plain sight was one afternoon when they were washing up after work. Sandy Fisk was on vacation that week. George finished first, and picked up his lunch bucket. He dumped some salami rinds and broken eggshells into the trash barrel.

"Did you ever notice Sandy Fisk?" he said to Tim. "He always eats ham and cheese sandwiches for lunch. Just four of them on rye, with mustard. Ham and cheese sandwiches, that's all."

"I guess he just likes ham sandwiches," Tim said. He ran a comb through his wet hair and put on his Stetson.

George slammed shut his lunch bucket. "Sure, but every day? Jesus, that boy's got no imagination!"

Then, one Saturday afternoon, Tim spotted a guitar for sale in a pawn shop over on Broadway in downtown Oakland that he decided he just had to have. Fingering his wallet he realized he was about ten bucks short of having the purchase price. He and George pondered over who they knew that might lend them the money till payday, and ended up with the name of Sandy Fisk. They knew he was a bachelor and so far as they could tell from his conversation he had no expensive habits like wine, women, or weed. He probably had some money in the bank, or better yet, some money in his jeans. He was always referring to his walk-about money. So they looked him up in the phone book, and drove over to his place in the grimy edge of Emeryville.

He lived, they discovered, in a little room above an old garage, perhaps converted from a barn, behind a ramshackle house



on Hartzell street. The sound of their tromping up the outside stair alerted him to his visitors, but he didn't have time to put anything away before they walked in the open door. There wasn't much in the room. In one corner was a foam mattress on the floor, with the covers thrown back and rumpled just the way they were when he rose out of bed that morning. There were a couple of kitchen chairs, a TV set, and on a rickety table at the near end of the room a hot-plate and a counter-top refrigerator. Clothes, old newspapers, and empty beer cans were scattered around in casual disarray. It was the thing perched on the refrigerator that drew their attention.

"Lately when I retired to my home, determined as far as possible to bother about nothing except spending the little life I have left in rest and privacy, it seemed to me I could do my mind no greater favor than to let it entertain itself in idleness and stay and settle in itself, which I hoped it might do more easily now, having become heavier and more mature with time. But I find 'Ever idle hours breed wandering thoughts' -- that on the contrary, like a runaway horse, it gives itself a hundred times more trouble than it took for others, and gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their strangeness and foolishness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make even my mind ashamed of them."

-- MONTAIGNE

"What in hell's that?" Tim said, flanking Sandy a little, so the latter's bulk didn't hide the thing from view.

Sandy was a chubby, middleaged man with a bristly mustache and thin, receding hair, who spent much of his time staring at the floor. He was secretive by nature, but not very good at hiding secrets. They could see his mind churning around, trying to think of a plausible lie, but there wasn't much he could say. He decided to tell the truth.

"Why, it's a mimeograph -- a postcard mimeograph," he said, and fell silent. Then, realizing that he needed to say more than that, he added sheepishly, "I found it in a St Vincent de Paul thrift shop, selling for a buck seventy-five, with about a hundred stencils and maybe a million postcards thrown in."

The Jessup brothers stared at the gadget curiously. Neither of them had ever heard of a mimeograph before. It was a small machine with a blue mottled finish smudged with black. A cylinder with a lateral axis was fastened at one end. It was turned by a metal arm on the side, and about a third of it was open, showing a black perforated interior. This cylinder was covered with a yellow sheet of some sort of paper with a few black holes punched in it. A platform on the lefthand side of the machine was stacked with blank cards upon which a rubber-disk foot rested. A metal tag on the side of the machine said "PRINT-O-MATIC, Model A-2."

"What does it do?" Tim started to say, while George asked, more practically, "How does it work?" Tim reached for the crank and started to twirl it. Sandy stopped him. "Here, I'll show you," he said reluctantly. Carefully he turned the crank counter-clockwise, holding down the machine with his other hand. A card was flicked through beneath the turning cylinder and plopped down amid an untidy heap of similar cards at the other end of the machine. George picked it up, getting a smudge on his fingers from the fresh glistening ink on its surface. Despite Sandy's calling it a postcard he saw it was really a 3 x 5 file card. It was blank on the other side. On the side with the ink it said:

SANDERS LAMONT FISK

\*\*\*\*\* LOVE CONQUERS ALL \*\*\*\*\*



George thought that was sort of a strange thing for a lifelong bachelor to say. And the brevity of the message puzzled him. He wondered if something had been left out. But then he saw the litter of similar cards on the refrigerator top, and they all said the same thing.

"Hey, that's pretty neat," Tim said. He had forgotten all about the purpose of their visit. Sandy had stepped self-consciously away from the machine, and Tim reached out and turned the crank. Another card oozed through and came out at the other side. He had turned the crank a little clumsily, and as a result the printing was thick and smudgy, and across the lefthand part of the card was a blotch of wet ink.

Sandy looked at it, and threw it into a trashcan alongside the table. He picked up the rest of the printed cards on the table and handled them like they were a Bee deck. He jogged them into a neat stack, then fanned them out in his calloused fingers. Tim looked at them, and like his brother noticed that they all had Sandy's name at the top and the same motto underneath, "LOVE CONQUERS ALL." Sandy sat down in a kitchen chair and riffled them gently. He studied the cards and didn't say anything.

"That's all?" Tim said, sounding a little disappointed.

Sandy looked up and grinned shamefacedly. "It's fun to print things," he said. "Ever since I bought the machine a couple of months ago I spend the whole damn weekend tinkering with it."

"Love Conquers All?" George said.

"Oh, I've printed other things," Sandy said. He waved his hand, and they looked over at the window-sill above the bed, all stacked up with cards. Tim went over and studied the top card in each stack. They each had Sandy's name on them, only sometimes without the "Lamont" in the middle but just the initial "L". One stack of cards had an error in the name, with no space between "Sanders" and "Lamont," and another left out the "a" in "Lamont."

Underneath the name other mottoes replaced "LOVE CONQUERS ALL." One of them said "DOANT COUNT YOUR CHIKENS BEFOR THER HACHED." Another said, "GO 49ERS," and still another, "SHELLY LONG PRETIEST GIRL ON TV." Tim rubbed his nose reflectively.

Sandy belatedly remembered his manners, and said, "There's beer in the reefer, boys."

George opened the counter-top refrigerator and saw that the only thing in it were numerous cans of Meister Brau. He took out three cans, handed one each to Tim and Sandy, and opened one for himself. Tim picked up one of the cards and after taking a long swig of beer, said, "How the hell do you get the printing on these cards?"

Sandy wiped foam from his mustache and looked puzzled at first. "You just saw. Oh, I see what you mean. You type out a stencil on the typewriter there. I bought it from the thrift shop too. Five bucks in the 'As Is' shed." He indicated an ancient-looking machine sitting on the floor. It was olive-drab, with open sides, and said, "L. C. Smith" in gilt paint on the front.

Tim looked restless. "Well?" he said. "What do you do?"

Sandy heaved a sigh. He took a long swig from his beer can, and set it on the floor beside his chair. "You use one of these stencils," he said. He pulled a waxy-looking sheet of yellow paper from under the heap of cards on the refrigerator top. He rolled it into the typewriter, squatting to do so and standing up with a creak of bones. "Go ahead. All you do is hit the right letters. It's all set to go."

Tim sat down at the typewriter, cross-legged on the floor. He reached out and hit one key with his right forefinger. Sandy grimaced at the click, and picked up his can of beer. George watched his brother intently, standing behind and peering down.

Tim found the throes of authorship a little painful. After a few tentative letters tapped out with his forefingers, he stood up and paced back and forth, a frown on his face. George and Sandy regarded him tolerantly, and said nothing as he returned to the typewriter and finished the job.

"Now how do I print this?" he asked. "Where the hell's my beer?" George handed him his beer while Sandy took the small stencil from him. He removed the stencil already on the postcard mimeograph and lay it on a stack of newspapers and affixed the

fresh one in its place. He picked up a narrow paintbrush and added a swab of ink from a small jar of ink to the inside of the drum of the machine.

"Fire away," he said to Tim.

Tim twirled the crank tentatively and watched as a blank card slid forward and squeezed through the machine. He picked up the card, being careful not to smear the ink. He stared at it critically as the others crowded around to read it too. It said, "B DGX MR. TIMTY RAYMOND JESSUP OF 2260-68TH STR. OAKLND MIESTER BRAU ONLY TAST EXPENSIVE."

"I made some mistakes typing the thing," Tim admitted. "I can do it better."

"It looks fine," George said with an insincere smile. "Besides, it's my turn now. Right?"

Sandy gave him a fresh stencil and watched as he, too, sat on the floor in front of the L. C. Smith. Although he stopped from time to time to fan himself with his hat George cut the stencil a little more expertly than his brother had, having improved his skill by observing the process beforehand. Sandy finished his beer, and went over and took another from the refrigerator. Meantime Tim bent over the postcard mimeograph and twisted out a dozen more copies of his card. From time to time he picked them up and pushed them into a neat stack. He smiled and ran off a dozen more.

"What are you going to do with all those cards?" Sandy asked at last. He seemed worried about the waste of all those cards.

Tim looked surprised as he turned the crank and added another card to the heap. "I guess I can take 'em down to the shop and show all the guys," he said, thinking it over. "They're like postcards, aren't they, so I could send 'em to all our old buddies back in Guthrie, Oklahoma. Funny, isn't it, how this little toy thing turns out the goddamndest cards you ever saw in your life. I never saw the like."

He added a few more cards to the stack. Then he asked Sandy, "What are you going to do with your cards?" He looked over at



the window-sill loaded with stacks of cards that said "GO 49ERS" and "GOV. DEUKREAGAN" and other things.

Sandy shook his head and thought about it. He took another meditative swig of beer. "I don't know that I'm going to do a damn thing with them. It's enough just to have them. After I run off a batch of cards I sit here and look at them and drink a couple cans of beer and look at all the cards in the stack. I don't know what it is, but I feel good about it. I guess I feel like I've created something." He thought some more. "Yes, that's it. I've created something."

"If that's all, you might as well write with spray paint on the walls," George said, getting up from the typewriter. He gave the stencil to Sandy and waited as Sandy attached it to the post-card mimeograph. Then he cranked out the first copy of his card. This one said, "GEORGE J. JESSUP AGE @\$ 24 ELIGABLE BATCHLER % 6 FT. 2 INCH. GET YR NAME ON LIST. KIND & LOVIN 660-0111."

"It pays to advertise," George said. "I can tack these cards up on phone poles around the neighborhood." He laughed to show that he was half-kidding. He ran off a few more cards experimentally, watching with approval as they came out gleaming with wet black ink.

Tim grinned appreciatively, but Sandy shook his head. "You don't understand. It's not for any use, you know. It's just for having a voice. When you've got this little machine in the house you can say anything at all -- just like Shakespeare and -- and Herb Caen," he finished, waving his hands. "Even better than them," he added after thinking it over. "I own the goddam little machine and nobody is going to tell me what to write. Why, boys, I'm the king of the world."

-- Redd Boggs

Thanks to DAVE RIKE for technical advice about the Print-O-Matic.

=====  
THE POSTCARD MIMEOGRAPH : Hornpipe Series Number One. February 1986. Published by Redd Boggs, P. O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701. At the Sign of the Idle Gestetner: THE GAFIA PRESS.  
=====