



LICKS #5 (May 1992) is written and produced by Rob Hansen of 144 Plashet Grove, East Ham, London E6 1AB, for the 219th FAPA mailing.

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WAITING FOR GERI

Geri Sullivan, the woman Arnie Katz has perceptively dubbed "the Geri Sullivan of the 1990s", was coming to stay with us and it was up to me, Avedon imperiously proclaimed, to provide her with touristy experiences she hadn't had on her last trip.

"What you need to come up with," said Avedon, "is something quintessentially British, a genuine cultural experience."

"That's easy," I replied, "I'll take her over to Barking and we can hang out at the mall and eat Big Macs."

Avedon gave me a baleful look, the sort of look that has been known to wither the goolies of grown men and Martin Smith.

"It's really neat," I continued, ignoring that look with a nonchalance born of long experience and small goolies. "The last time I was there a man tried to sell me a membership in the Automobile Association. I told him I didn't have a car, and he replied: 'Our favourite sort of member!'"

Strangely, Avedon insisted on vetoing a trip to Barking mall, something I was still puzzling over when I went to meet Geri and Vinđ Clarke (who had gone to Gatwick Airport at some ungodly hour to welcome her to Britain) at Victoria Railway Station. It had been a strange week here in London, what with the IRA making a powerful political statement by bombing a public lavatory one day and a burger bar the next, and I was worried that another such incident might close down the Southern Region rail network leaving Vinđ and Geri stranded at Gatwick. After all, this was the same British Rail that has in the past cancelled trains, and I am not making this up, because of 'leaves on the track' and a fall of 'the wrong sort of snow'. Giving them a plausible excuse for once, and a bomb has a lot of plausibility, could close the whole British Rail network down for months. Fortunately, there was no bomb. There was also no sign of Vinđ and Geri.

Train after train arrived during the hours I waited at Victoria, all of them woefully devoid of fans, and I started to get cold. I rang Avedon at one point, and plaintively wailed: "My nose is froze!" I never did get a satisfactory explanation of just what the hold up was but, finally, Vinđ and Geri appeared. We hugged and, ignoring Geri's warning that her suitcase was "a little heavy", I grabbed her bags and headed for the tube. Now Geri Sullivan has many fine and sterling qualities, and I won't hear anyone say otherwise, but she is too trusting and all too often allows herself to be taken in by sneaky and deceitful people like Chuck Harris. Why else, after all, would she be smuggling lead into Britain in her luggage? Here she was, expecting to see the sights of Daventry, meagre as they are, when she visited Chuck and Sue later in her trip and all along he was planning to send her up on the roof to repair their lead flashing. You bastard, Harris.

One positive thing about carrying Geri's luggage was that it quickly warmed me up. Too quickly. In no time at all, sweat was dripping from my nose.

"When I get hot," I explained to Geri, "I turn into Niagara Falls."
"That must amuse the tourists," she commented, wryly.
"Sure does. Some of them try to go over me in a barrel."

She chuckled at that, and then we all headed back to palatial 144 Plasket Grove. Over a meal of hash browns, eggs, beans and croissants (Big Macs were off) we studied her CORFLU 9 pictures, marvelling over all those people Arnie Katz had brought along as part of his pathetic attempt to convince the rest of us that he, Joyce, and Bill Kunkel aren't the only fans in Las Vegas. Some of them looked almost like fans, it's true, but hiring that guy from CHEERS really gave the game away. The Geri Sullivan of the 1990s and I had a good laugh at that one.

ROOTS

A few months back, Chuck Harris sent me a letter in which he reminisced about his childhood in London's pre-war East End. At that time the area was predominantly Jewish and, since his grandparents were named Solomon & Sarah and his features were no less semitic than those of his playmates, Chuck has long suspected that he must be at least partly-Jewish, despite family denials. It was a wonderful piece of writing, both evocative and moving, and Avedon wanted to rush right into print with it. In the letter Chuck had said he intended to re-work the piece for his own Q, however, so we didn't push the issue. Imagine our disappointment when he then offered it to Dick Lynch for MIMOSA. So it goes.

A couple of weeks ago, Avedon and I spent the weekend in Wales visiting with my family, and my father showed me a pile of old documents that had belonged to his father, Henry, which he'd dug out for my brother, who's decided to research the family tree. Among these were Henry's union cards, the earliest of which dated from 1912 and the latest from 1929. My grandfather was born in 1898, went to sea at the age of twelve, and served in the merchant navy during the World War I. Hatred of the Germans was far greater in that war than during WWII and Henry, with his German-sounding surname, fair hair and piercing blue eyes, came in for a lot of trouble from shipmates who took him for German. It got so bad that he had to go before a board to get official documentation to prove he was British. Henry's father, Christian Hansen, was Norweigan, hence the family surname. Christian married an Irish woman, they settled in Britain, and Henry was born at Ardrossan in Scotland. Until he dug my grandfather's papers out, my father had always believed that his grandparents had moved down to Cardiff (the capital of Wales, and his birthplace and mine) from Scotland following Henry's birth but that doesn't appear to have been the case. Among the paper's is a copy of Henry's birth certificate that shows his parents to have been married in Cardiff. But if they lived in Cardiff, why was my grandfather born in Scotland? Also, the birth certificate gives Christian Hansen's nationality as British, when we know he was Norweigan. It seems there are mysteries for my brother to uncover. Since he's a police detective that should be right up his street.

My father's maternal grandmother was also Irish, and the two woman are apparently the reason why his half of the family is Catholic. My mother's family is Welsh as far back as anyone can remember, yet her maiden name was Julian. Another mystery.

I wrote to Chuck, in response to his letter, agreeing that he probably was part-Jewish and giving him my own background, essentially a shorter version of the above, concluding:

"This stuff is interesting but, as you say, ultimately irrelevant. We are who we are and should be judged on that alone, not on who or what our forbears may or may not have been."

MAILING COMMENTS

Brandt: ct Stone: You note that in the 1940 film WHITE CARGO the passion of the lead character for Hedy Lamarr is "a shameful violation of social taboos" since her character is an Arab, and say "I suspect Hollywood may not have been entirely accurate in its portrayal here of English attitudes towards the races". Too true. Back then there was an almost inborn assumption of superiority among the upper classes, not only to those of other races but also to those of their fellow countrymen who belonged to the lower classes. Indeed, the 'taboo' being tackled in LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER was 'class miscegenation'. This didn't have the potentially lethal consequences it still has in many parts of India thanks to that country's caste system, but social ostracism was pretty much guaranteed. Oddly enough, despite the superior attitude the English then took towards other races (and, to some extent, still do - like whites everywhere, unfortunately) notions of 'fair play' and correct treatment were also important and, in at least one instance during World War II, led to friction with the US military. Back then, as you're doubtless aware, the US had segregated armed forces. When America entered the war, and her troops were stationed over here, the British authorities were asked to provide separate facilities for blacks and whites. They refused, quite reasonably arguing that to do so would be offensive to coloured troops from all parts of the Empire who were also stationed in Britain and prepared to lay down their lives in her defence. In order to prepare their troops for this, the US Army put together a number of short films. I saw one of these on a documentary about this very issue some years ago. In the film a black G.I. and a white G.I. are sharing a train compartment with an elderly English woman and they are all chatting. When they get out at the end of the journey the woman invites them both for tea at her house that weekend. When she leaves, the white G.I. (who was played by the young Burgess Meredith) sends the black G.I. off to get him a pack of cigarettes then turns to the camera and says, if memory serves:

"Well fellas, you and I know that wouldn't happen back home but we're in a different country now and we're all gonna have get to used to the fact that they do things differently here."

The same documentary told the story of two US bases in East Anglia occupied by troops from the American South, one white and one black. There was a village near the bases where soldiers from both went when they were allowed off base, the black soldiers being more popular with village girls than the white. This led to knife-fights breaking out, started by the resentful white soldiers, and to the US Army making the village out-of-bounds to one of the groups. Guess which one. The documentary makers interviewed some of those village girls, forty-five years on, and asked them why the black soldiers were more popular. One reason given was novelty (none of them had ever seen a black person before), but one interviewee said "they were so polite, and just nicer. We used to say that we really liked the Americans but that we didn't think much of those white blokes they brought over with them".

Black emigration to the UK didn't truly start until 1948, when the first shipload of men from the West Indies arrived on a ship called the Empire Windrush (the fortieth anniversary of its arrival was commemorated with a TV documentary in 1988). Prior to that, the few small black communities in the UK tended to be located near the dockland areas of the major ports, so at the time of WWII most Britons probably would never have seen a black person.

Eney: You note: "the story about it being harder for a Brit to do an American accent than vice versa". The perception over here is exactly the opposite, for obvious reasons. The Brit accents American actors attempt sound fine to you, just as the American accents British actors attempt sound fine to us. However, we can almost always tell when an actor is American and not

British. Far from the situation being as your brother describes, that "neither group finds it difficult" the accents attempted by, for example, James Doohan on STAR TREK and Dick van Dyke in MARY POPPINS have been the cause of much hilarity over here down the years. Some actors - Meryl Streep springs to mind - can do accents flawlessly, but it's a rare talent. Whenever shows such as MURDER SHE WROTE or COLUMBO did episodes supposedly set over here their portrayal of modern Britain was so bizarre, and the accents so fucking godawful, that I couldn't bear to watch them. UK and US writers usually make as big a mess of things when they set a story on the other side of the Atlantic and few are able to write one so that it strikes no dischordant notes with a native reader. In all my years of reading books by American writers I've only ever come across one, John M. Ford, who could set a book over here and not get anything wrong. (The mistakes, of course, are usually idiomatic and cultural.) Avedon has experienced the same problems with books by UK writers that are set in the US. She cites John Brunner as one of the few who usually gets it right.

Katz: I enjoy a good hoax as much as the next fan, Arnie, but don't you think that four fanzines in one FAPA mailing, in order to convince us that Las Vegas fandom actually exists, is a bit of an overkill? Clearly the pressure was getting to you when, as 'Laurie Yates', you were putting together CATACHRESIS since you managed to end the piece published under your own name in mid-sentence. Any chance of us seeing the missing bit at some time? You gave yourself away in too many ways for a Trufan to be fooled by your hoax, of course. Not being able to resist running pieces under your own name here and in MARQUEE was pushing things a bit, as was making MARQUEE and GLITZ so visually similar. Doing LAGNIAPPE as 'Peggy Burke' sans artwork and fancy DTP headings was a nice touch, but printing it on the same green paper you used for MARQUEE and GLITZ...?! Sloppy, Arnie, sloppy. You'll never get in the Hoaxsters Hall of Fame this way.

Eisen: Liked your suggested PC children's classic, 'Three Visually Challenged Mice'. The same linguistic pussyfooting is creeping in over here, too, and I was greatly cheered a while back, when catching part of a radio phone-in show, to hear a blind caller object to being called 'visually challenged'. "I'm not visually challenged, I'm blind!" he insisted, and then went on to rip into those who come up with these terms arguing, quite reasonably, that since 'blind' is a purely descriptive term and not perjorative it doesn't need replacing. I was horrified to discover that the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons (ASPRS) had officially recognised small breasts as a disfiguring illness. As ASPRS tried to explain to the FDA almost ten years ago:

"There is a substantial and enlarging body of medical information and opinion to the effect that these deformities [small breasts] are really a disease."

In an essay lampooning this for TIME magazine following the recent scare about the safety of breast implants, Barbara Ehrenreich christened the condition 'micromastia':

"In the past, small groups of health-conscious males, typically gathered at construction sites, would offer free diagnoses to women passersby...Though nearly 2 million micromastia victims in the US have been cured, millions more remain untreated, as shown by the continued existence of the plague's dread symbol - the A-cup bra."

It seems to me that, taking the rules of PC terminology into consideration, the many women whose lives are blighted by this terrible affliction should be referred to as 'cleavage impaired'. Which is enough of that for one issue. This is your poor (wealth impaired) and humble (assertiveness challenged) scribe who, tragically, is also balding (differently haired), signing off. See you next time.