
This is the first issue of SPUNG, The Fanzine That Stands At Attention.
It is published when I feel like it and sent to those whom I wish to receive it, by Ted White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, VA 22046 USA.
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LET'S TALK: It's been a year and a half since I last did a fanzine, and even had I not been arrested in March of 1986, my collaborative fanzine with Rob Hansen, CRANK, would have folded soon thereafter. It hadn't been working out; our editorial styles clashed. If we'd been living in the same area we might have been able to work our problems out, but the Transatlantic Gap made it too difficult. The only issue of CRANK with which I was modestly happy was #2 (my first) -- and Rob hated it. More precisely, he hated what I did to his material, which he felt I ruined. That depressed me a lot, so I deliberately refrained from the necessary editing I felt his material wanted when I did #4, only to be told that he wished I had. I, in turn, had my own problems with his issues (#s 1, 3 and 5) -- especially the quote from Reagan in #5. So, despite our continuing friendship, it had become obvious to me that coediting a fanzine together would only cause friction between us.

My arrest, on March 20th, simply sped the process up a little: it left me depressed and with no remaining heart for fannish frivolity. (In passing I should remark upon the latest of a series of rumors emanating from a fan in Michigan: It is not true that members of the 1986 Corflu conspired to keep my arrest secret -- that Corflu occurred in February, a full month before said arrest. *Sigh*....)

In the months following my arrest I had a number of court appearances which culminated in my appearance for sentencing (I pled guilty) on September 5, 1986. I went directly from the courtroom to jail, without leaving the building. I did not pass Go.

I served three months in jail before receiving a mandatory parole. For the next six months I was on a minimally-supervised parole (I mailed in a form once a month to my parole officer, whom I saw face to face only three times during that period). Since June 4th I have been a Free Man.

The period between my arrest and sentencing was one of considerable depression: it was hard to watch the news on TV when someone was shown being arrested, under arrest, or incarcerated -- no matter what his crime I empathized with him the experience he was undergoing.

My arrest began with a knock at the door at around 7:30 on a Thursday evening. I had been preparing to go out for an evening of cards with Dan and Lynn Steffan and Rich Brown. Instead, I opened the door to be confronted by two men in suits with drawn guns, which they pointed at me. I was backed into my dining room and handcuffed, while uniformed police poured into the house to begin searching it. After only a few minutes I was taken, coatless, outside to a police car. The temperature was around freezing.

I was held in the police car for perhaps twenty minutes, then taken to the Falls Church police station -- the basement of City Hall. There I was placed in one of the two holding cells to while away the next six or eight hours, interrupted (not often enough) for fingerprinting and an interview. The cell, typically, was a concrete-and-tile room big enough to contain a concrete shelf (three feet wide and seven feet long) and a combination toilet and sink. I spent most of my time sitting or lying on this concrete shelf.

Around 3:00 am, after a magistrate was brought in to sign six charges

(all counts of drug possession) against me and set my bond at \$50,000.00, I was taken to the Fairfax County Adult Detention Center, and put in a drunk tank. It was only Thursday, but the large cell held over twenty men. The room was long and had narrow concrete-bench seats running down each wall, with a waist-high tiled-concrete partition across the far end, beyond which were a sink and a toilet. Men sat or sprawled on all the available bench-space; more were lying on the floor amid cigarette butts and general filth. There was little conversation; most were dozing. I found a spot on the floor and tried to sleep.

At 5:30 in the morning they brought us "breakfast," which was passed in through a slot in the barred door. Breakfast consisted of a tin cup of "coffee" (actually, I learned later, chicory), a half-pint carton of milk, an individual-size box of cereal (I got cornflakes), and a bowl at least one-quarter full of white sugar. I was able to eat relatively little before my gag reflex overcame my appetite.

The open end (barred, of course) of the cell faced the receiving desk, and people came and went noisily. It was hard to sleep in the cell, but there wasn't much else to do. I was asked what I was in for, and when I said "possession with intent to distribute," I was immediately asked what I'd had. "Oh man, I wish I'd of known you when I was Out," one man told me. And they told me some hash had been smuggled in and smoked earlier that night, before my arrival.

I spent only until the middle of the afternoon in that cell before I was released on bail. (The deed to my house and property guaranteed bond.) I had been confined for less than twenty-four hours. But in many ways that first brief period of confinement was worse than the three months I subsequently spent -- the more so because I had not expected it, was not emotionally ready for it, and was both frightened and discomfited by it.

It does something to you when you're chained together with twenty other men and taken to a courtroom in which your gallery is divided from the rest of the room by bulletproof glass. It tells you that the life you've lived and the attitude you had about yourself no longer apply; now you are in the charge of the state.

When I got home I had to wash my hair to rid myself of the stink of that cell.

* * *

TERRY CARR: was my friend for almost thirty-five years, and I am still not fully adjusted to the fact that he is no longer there -- I keep finding myself thinking, about something or other, "I should tell Terry about this," or "I need to discuss this with Terry." Most recently, when I finished my long-overdue chapter ("The Negative Side of Fandom" -- 35 manuscript pages) for Joe Sanders' Science Fiction Fandom, I wanted to send Terry a copy for vetting -- as rich brown had with his chapter (recent fanhistory). I'd had to rewrite a part of it when he died; I'd used an argument we had in Atlanta (over the most appropriate strategy for dealing with the latest WIZ) as the centerpiece for the section on feuds.

I'm sorry I missed the May 30th "Celebration of the Life of Terry Carr" in Berkeley -- as well as a smaller gettogether for the same purpose, on the same day, in New York City. It was financially impossible to attend either. But I needed to, for the most traditional of reasons: to put to rest my own feelings about Terry and his untimely death, to exorcise myself of his ghost.

Despite my absence, or maybe because of it, I asked Greg Benford to write a short piece for this fanzine about the Berkeley gathering.

CALVIN DEMMON HAS GRAY HAIR

By Greg Benford

"A Celebration of the Life of Terry Carr," the invitations said, and so we all gathered on May 30, 1987, in Berkeley's Tilden Park. It was a sunny day and picnickers dotted every set of tables and grills, but as my brother Jim and I approached it was easy to tell the party. "It's their fannish faces," Jim said, and indeed, there was an odd star-spanning sense to them, calling up memories of Laney's ascerbic descriptions.

It felt strange, meeting again people I hadn't seen in perhaps a decade. There was some food and drink, marvelous bright cherries and a cutting chardonnay. But unlike the mundane groups hidden by artful rises or stands of oak, we didn't throw frisbees or play awkward softball games. Like fans everywhere, we talked.

Sid Coleman's droopy moustache twitched as he regaled us with stories of famous theoretical physicists brought up short by life's quirky turns. Debbie Notkin talked about recent great works of modern skiffy. Marta Randall conferred and managed the amiable herd of about sixty fans, all a little pensive and subdued. Dick Lupoff got the formal part going and several Bay Area fans spoke of how Terry had done simple, perceptive things that made his memory so sharp and clear to all of us. I got up and sang the Void Boys Song, remarking that until the day before I'd never realized that there were only a few lines:

We sing songs of fandom,
Hitting out at random,
For we are all coeditors of Void!

--ending with a little root-toot-toot. All these years I'd assumed that in the dark bowels of NYC, Ted and Terry and Pete Graham had dreamed up intricate, amusing putdowns that finished out the song, but were too biting to actually put into the old VOID cartoon covers. Nope -- Ted told me on the phone that they'd never gone beyond the introduction. (The "song" was used to introduce corny vaudeville jokes, like "Why does the rooster wear red pants?" "To keep his pecker up!" -- most of which were used on the cover of V28. After each joke we'd sing the verse of the song...-tw/ Then I read a few paragraphs from a letter of comment Terry had written to an Eric Bentcliffe fanzine (pointed out to me by Dick Ellington). Terry had doubted that 6th Fandom really abounded with fannish love of one's fellows, but I remarked that Terry himself had inspired more respect and love than anyone I knew in fandom, save possibly Willis.

Rebecca Kurland followed with some witty comments on Terry as grammarian, Dick Lupoff led into Sid Coleman, and Sid described a few small incidents that underlined perhaps Terry's greatest gift -- the ability to extract the best from a situation or a person, to see potential rather than error.

This lifted the mood. After the brief remarks, people started laughing more and reminiscing about Terry in a lighthearted way. Some started waging chemical peace fare in observance of the patriotic nature of the Memorial Day weekend (though the holiday itself had been deflected to the Monday before by bureaucratic anti-timebinding fiat of Congress). I met Dave Rike for the first time. Coming upon a knot of earnestly talking fans, I suddenly realized that here was Calvin Demmon, and he had gray hair. He was as funny as ever, and we ruminated about the article we'd written for Terry twenty years before, still to appear in INNUENDO. Redd Boggs was talking about great fannish figures cut off before their time and started, "Well, there was this fellow in 1958--" whereupon others

said, "C'mon, Redd, we all knew Vernon McCain. Died on the operating table in, lessee, March? No..." Timebinding.

Tom Condit, the Silverbergs, Harlan with his new wife Susan, Lenny Bailes, Jan Finder...it was a rich association, warm and casual and different from any fan occasion I've ever attended. Bob Lichtman and I talked extensively about the catalog of Terry's fmz collection he and Carol were nearly finished assembling. SFTIMES and SHAGGY and BURBLINGS and the missing HYPHEN #1.... It's a truly fine collection, and I had been working inside the University of California system to get the Eaton Collection at UC Riverside to buy it. It's time fandom's best work of the last fifty (!) years was assembled where it will last. I'm still working on this, and will report in future. In the long run, we live in the memories of those who will come after...but having your work kept in good conditions can't hurt.

The crowd gradually dwindled as the late afternoon grew cool. Jim and I were among the last, and when we reached his house we had a swim and a toast to Terry. Something had been bothering me all through the afternoon, I remembered; I'd kept looking around, studying the faces. Only later did I realize that I'd been following my old patterns whenever I visited the Bay Area. I'd been looking for Terry, waiting for that gentle chuckle, wanting to tell him a few stories and hear a few back. I suppose I'll be looking for quite a while, still.

--Gregory Benford

* * *

THE LITTLE THINGS stay with you the longest, sometimes. I can no longer type an elipsis ("...") without remembering Terry's admonition to add a fourth period if it concluded a sentence (an example occurs above).

One time Terry and I were reminiscing about the words we learned from reading, but which we'd never heard pronounced -- and which in consequence we mispronounced. "Chaos" and "outré" are two words which many people had this problem with, but Terry had a unique one of his own: "misled." "Oh, I knew the actual word, 'misled,'" Terry said. "I mean, I'd heard it used, all right. But I just didn't connect the word I'd heard with the one spelled 'misled.' I thought that was a separate word, pronounced 'mizzled!'" He broke up. "Can you imagine me going around, saying 'mizzled?'"

* * *

LETTERS FROM PRISON: During my three months in jail I wrote twenty-one Letters From Prison for circulation to many of my friends in fandom. The first fourteen were published (by the Nielsen Haydens, Victor Gonzalez, Mark Kernes, Lucy Huntzinger, and John D. Berry) before my release on December 4th. The Nielsen Haydens and Tom Weber typed up the remaining seven (I'd hand-written them), but once I was out the pressure to publish them diminished. I decided I'd eventually publish them myself, but a variety of other things (like marrying Lynda and integrating her two children with my daughter into a family) seemed more immediately important. Recently Lenny Bailes volunteered to publish some of them in his fanzine; I sent him #15, #16 and half of #17.

The original purpose of the Letters was to maintain communications with my friends and to let them know what life was like in jail. The only remaining purpose in publishing them now is to put into print material already written. Thus, I have edited some of what follows, deleting material which no longer strikes me as of much interest. Space is also a consideration.

LETTERS FROM PRISON

by Ted White

LETTER #17 (continued), October 28: Bill left us this morning -- at about 4:30 am. The guard's voice woke me up: "Lee-may?" Bill's last name is Leamey, pronounced "Leemy," but all the guards habitually mispronounced it and often couldn't find it on their lists when Bill pronounced it correctly for them. By now he was used to it.

"Leamey?" he asked.

"Get your things," the guard said.

"All my things?" Bill asked. "Where am I going?"

"I dunno," the guard said. "Maybe you're going home."

"Oh, I doubt that," Bill said. He had a five-year sentence.

"He went 'down the road,'" is what we told the guy from Commissary when he arrived later that morning with our orders and asked for Bill.

"Give me his candy bars!" Mike demanded. Bill owed candy bars on the outcomes of both the World Series and the Giants-Redskins game the night before. But Sgt. Thompson, who runs the Commissary, just laughed at him.

"Down the road" means a downstate prison or camp. Bill was 62, and had colitis (which caused him to make almost liquid-sounding farts, to everyone's amusement but his), so it's likely he went to a "medical camp" where the duty would be light.

He didn't like to discuss his case, but revealed that he was a retired federal employee who had gotten into real estate speculation. Like those pitchmen on late-night "television seminars," he tried to do it without using his own money -- he mentioned having six mortgages on one piece of property -- and had extensive landholdings. But he cut it a little too close, and was found guilty of fraud. While he was in here half a dozen civil suits were filed against him. I suspect he'll be stripped and financially ruined before he gets out (a matter of a year or so), as a result of those suits, but he was almost unfailingly cheerful.

He sometimes annoyed me with his chirpy good cheer, and he was notable for his absent-mindedness in card playing ("You mean I still had the Queen of Spades? I thought I gave it to you!"), but he was a civilized man, a rarity in here, and I find I miss him.

October 30: Chester finally got a look at Susie today. "Who is that?" he asked. "That a girl or a boy?"

"That's Susie," Jackson said.

"That's a he-she," Mike said.

Chester shook his head. This was totally beyond his comprehension.

A-4 is the gay cell, and today they were getting their hair cut in the barbershop across the hall from us. I heard noise in the hall and wandered to the door to see what was going on. One looks for diversions.

"Susie's getting her hair cut," I announced.

"Come on, Chester, you gotta see this," Mike said, laughing.

"Why do I want to see some goddamned queer?" mumbled Chester.

"Come on, man, you ain't gonna believe this," Mike said. He nudged Chester.

And Chester didn't believe what he saw, either.

Susie is amazingly androgynous, with a small (five feet) body and an almost pretty face. "She" has a feminine voice, chats animatedly, sometimes wears a ponytail, and acts girlishly. I was told "she" had performed a grisley surgery upon herself, cutting off her testicles, and that "she" wanted to be a transsexual.

I was introduced to Susie when I was in A-5, which faces the psychologist's office across the hall. One day Susie was in that office, the door

open, chatting away with the female psychologist, and the guys in A-5 noticed. "Hey, there's Susie!" they said. "You gotta see this, Ted."

I was astonished to see someone so blatant in a jail. "That must take guts, to come on like that in a place like this," I commented.

"You kiddin'?" was the reply, "she loves it."

Apparently that's true. Despite the fag-baiting talk one hears so much of here, Susie seems to inspire admiration and perhaps even lust. One day when I went up to gym "she" was holding court in the hallway outside the volleyball area, surrounded by five or six men, and chatting away animatedly as usual.

Susie gets along well with the guards -- who sometimes have late-night parties in the hall with her, parties which used to keep me awake when I slept out on the floor. One wonders about the sexual favors dispensed at such parties.

"That looks like a girl to me," Chester said. "You sure that ain't no girl?" For once his confidence in his own ignorance was shaken. He couldn't take his eyes off Susie. He shook his head. "If that don't beat all!" he said. "She pretty!"

November 1: Last night I dreamed about jail. This is the first time in more than a month that I did. I dreamed I was out for the day, but had to go back, or I'd be considered a fugitive. To get back, I had to find my way through a fundamentalist Christian encampment of some sort -- very gaudy, almost circus-like. As I got closer to the jail I had to take my belt off, roll it up, and find a place to hide it where it would be safe. I don't think I ever got all the way back to the jail, but in a later episode of my dream I recall explaining to a friend my sleep schedule: "It's all supervised," I said. "I have no choice!"

LETTER #18, November 4: We had a cellblock shakedown today. No particular reason -- just "routine."

The tipoff occurred, had I but recognized it, at lockout. "We're taking that extra mattress today," the asshole guard said as I started to get out of bed.

I've had two mattresses since I moved into this cell, and for a good reason. The mattress I had, out on the floor, was relatively new, and relatively thick, but short and narrow. The mattress in the cell I acquired was longer and wider, but worn very thin in the middle. I'd gotten Wayne's cell, and Wayne weighed over 350 pounds. Wayne had slept on that mattress since March -- more than six months. I put the smaller, thicker mattress under the bigger, thinner one. Together, they were fairly comfortable, relatively speaking. I slept almost well, considering that I was sleeping on mattresses with almost no "give" lying on a concrete shelf.

The morning before the shakedown did not pass without event. I was in the middle of a game of Hearts when the door opened and a guard called, "White! You got a visit!" It wasn't visitor's hours, so when I went out I asked what kind of visit it was. "Professional visit," I was told. That meant my lawyer.

As I went upstairs I wondered why my lawyer was visiting me now. Today marked the day on which exactly one month of my time was left. Was there a new charge? (I'd heard "noll prossed" charges were not truly dropped, but just tabled, and could be revived. I'd had three charges noll prossed. Could they have been revived? Was the state playing games with me? It had happened to others. Some prosecutors are sadists -- they like to let you get close to freedom before slamming the door in your face again. I've even heard of inmates being re-arrested upon their release.)

The professional visitation area is just beyond the (new) regular visit-

ation area. It consists of six or eight little bare "office" cubicles, separate rooms, furnished with a desk and two chairs. I guess lawyers don't feel comfortable without a desk to sit behind. I was put in an empty room, to await my lawyer. Another inmate, who had come up with me, was shown into a room where a young curly-haired lawyer was waiting for him. "Your lawyer will be coming along shortly," the guard who'd put me in the room said. So I waited there.

After ten minutes the guard came back. "He's not here," he said. "I guess he didn't show." He ushered me back to the hallway outside the regular visitation area. I trudged back down the stairs to A-floor, and my cellblock.

"False alarm," I said, picking up my hand of Hearts. The game resumed.

A hand later, the cellblock door again opened. "White! Professional visit!"

"Again?" I asked, as I left the cellblock. "They found him," the guard said.

So once more I climbed the stairs, went down past the row of B-cells; nodded at the guard at the desk in the hallway ("I'm back," I told him), and headed down to the professional visitation area.

The guard who'd been there before met me again. "He's the same one," he said, nodding his head toward the curly-haired lawyer I'd seen before. "He's got both of you. You should've waited."

"What for?" I said. "He's not my lawyer."

The lawyer, in turn, gave me a blank look and asked the guard, "Where is he?"

"This is White," the guard said.

"Geoffrey White?" the lawyer said.

"No," I said, "I'm Theodore White."

"This is the wrong man," the lawyer said, displaying a brilliant grasp of the obvious.

Once again I trudged back to my cellblock. Lunch was being served. The hall guard made me sit on a bench in the hall and wait until all the A-cells had been served, and then gave me two sandwiches (cheese and liverwurst), a small bag of potato chips, and a metal cup of "juice." Once I had these all in my hands, he had the door unlocked and allowed me to fumble it open. Inside, everyone else was nearly finished eating. "Another false alarm," I told them. "They wanted a different White."

Jack chuckled. "They really on the ball, ain't they?"

Less than half an hour later came the shakedown.

The door banged open. Five or six guards swarmed in. "Get your shoes and blues on, and go out in the hall!" one announced in the same tones he might have used to say, "This is a bust!"

"This is a routine shakedown," another explained in a calmer voice.

I had my shoes on already -- one must put them on for any trip out into the hall, including classes, gym, or visits -- so I went out into the hall. There we were lined up, braced against the wall (you know "the position" -- you've seen it on TV a thousand times) and searched, hands running up and down our bodies. Some of us were told to take off our shoes and socks and show the soles of our feet, but I was not. As each of us was searched we were told to go up to the gym, which was empty. We played basketball there -- and Mike and I each ran a hundred laps around the room -- while our cellblock and individual cells were searched. After about half an hour we were returned to A-7.

Things were missing. Sandwiches saved from lunch were gone. The day's Fairfax Journal was gone (small loss). A box in which Jack kept his things was gone, everything that had been in it dumped unceremoniously out on the floor. But left-over potato chips still in their bags remained in plain

sight. I'd noticed my smaller mattress in the hall. Peering through the window in my cell door, I could see my room was disordered, but not what might be missing.

Jack had worn his shower shoes out. They'd taken his tennis shoes -- but did bring them back. The dayroom looked emptier.

After our cells were unlocked, I inventoried my room. My books were all there -- in a pile on my bed. My Commissary goods -- candy, cookies -- were still there. So, amazingly, was the bag of hard-boiled eggs from breakfast (saved for a night-time snack). But the bag with folded up paper bags (in which things had come from Commissary) and a foam cup (rare contraband, left by Wayne) was gone. My letters were mixed up, those I'd kept separate because I'd not yet answered them, and those from Lynda, mixed in with the others. The neatly folded sheet of newspaper Wayne had left as "shelf paper" on the top of my tiny "desk" was gone. So also was the folded-up chunk of newspaper I used to keep my cell door from locking (when I wanted privacy in the evening without locking myself in).

My bed is now hard as a rock -- or, more accurately, concrete.

Joe /a new man, whose arrival I edited out/ still refuses to sleep after breakfast, but bangs around and keeps the rest of us, except Chester, awake. "What do I need with all that sleep?" he asked belligerently. "Ain't nothing to do in here, anyway! Don't need more than four or five hours!"

But for two nights now, he's been crashing -- directly under the phone, making access to it difficult -- in the early evening, around six or six-thirty, lying on his back and snoring loudly.

"Superman!" Jack snorted to Mike, with a nod at Joe.

LETTER #19, November 7: Changes, and more changes: John Jackson left us yesterday, to serve the rest of his time at the Manassas Jail in Prince William County. He'd been there twice recently for court appearances, spending the night in the jail there each time. "It's a lot better, a lot better," he said. "Hot lunches, better breakfasts, better dinners -- oh, it's a lot better," he said. "It was warm enough I could take my clothes off when I went to bed at night!"

I swapped my flat mattress for his. Not a huge improvement, but I slept better.

This afternoon Bernie Loeh moved in. He'd been in A-6 for several months, but got mad at another inmate who, he said, was swiping his cigarettes. The resulting tussle put them both in the Hole for ten days. /Later we found out the other inmate had to be taken to the hospital first./ "And you know," he said, "while I was down there I hear this tapping on my cell door and there he is. 'Got a cigarette, man?' he's saying, and he don't even recognize me. He's had a shower or somethin', and he's wandering around, cadging cigarettes!" Bernie is 40, blond, and almost movie-star handsome, in a slightly ragged way.

"You been to court, been sentenced?" Mike asked him.

"Well, that's the thing," Bernie said. "I been to court, pled guilty to burglary, but the judge, he don't know what to do with me. He said, 'Bring him back in a couple of months.' He asked me what I done, I told him it's like the story about a man, he's pulling this big ol' eighteen-foot chain down the road. A cop comes along, asks him, 'How come you pullin' that big ol' chain down the road?' and the man sez 'You ever tried pushin' one?' My lawyer, he throws all his papers up in the air. I ain't seen him since."

I asked him how it happened. "Did they catch you in the act?"

"I stole a vacuum cleaner -- pulled it down the middle of the street, long ol' cord trailin' behind," he said.

Suddenly I knew who he was. I'd read a feature story in the (spitui!) Fairfax Journal a month or so ago. "That was the State Theatre," I exclaimed, "in the middle of Falls Church!"

He nodded.

"I read about you," I said, trying to remember what else the story had said. "Did you see the piece?"

He had; he'd liked it. "Man came here and interviewed me after I wrote the paper a letter, asking if there was a school for auctioneers." As I recall, the piece treated him as a colorful character, an alcoholic drifter who was basically harmless. "I'm not really a thief," he says. He'd broken into the theater in the early hours of the morning and stolen only the vacuum cleaner, sitting in the lobby -- for reasons he couldn't explain. The newspaper story told his background, and read like a life that -- forty years earlier -- would easily have fit into the adventures of Jack Kerouac in On The Road. I look forward to talking with him. He is a natural story-teller, with a flair for colorful turns of phrase which I've not captured well here.

LETTER #20, November 9: Is not included here, for reasons of space. On November 9th I phoned Lynda Magee in Oregon and proposed marriage to her. She accepted immediately. The bulk of the Letter talked about another new guy, Lewis, who was somewhat deaf, "cupping his ear to hear repeated statements or questions. Bernie, irrepressibly loquacious, talked more to him than any of us -- Bernie will talk to anyone and everyone. (When a medic came to offer aspirins and laxatives, Bernie said to him: 'Here's a question for you. A man is shot and killed while he's in his house, straightening a picture. The picture is of something that is behind his house. What is it?' It turns out the man is Jesse James and the picture is of his horse.)"

LETTER #21, November 11: We didn't get much sleep last night. And we alternated between testiness and humor this morning. Last night was the weirdest and least pleasant since I've been here. Bernie Loeh went around the bend.

It had become increasingly obvious that he was Not Right. Yesterday morning he'd been talking about how he hated to see his (ex-)wife naked. (And this from a man who took four or five showers a day and seemed eager to prance about naked, once telling a guard, from the shower, that he wanted to attend a naked church service.) "She's real good lookin' but I told her to put some panties on and throw a towel over her shoulder, and she'd look a lot better."

I injudiciously said, "To each his own."

That triggered an argumentative rant from him. "You don't like that?" he yelled at me.

"Did I say that?" I countered. "I said, 'To each his own.'"

We went back and forth on that about five times before he finally dropped it. Later on he could even boast, "I was testy this morning, but me and Ted, we worked it out."

Mainly what he worked was his mouth.

"Mr. Kitherow, Mr. Kitherow?" he called through the door to a guard outside. "Bet I can tell you your wife's middle name. Bet I can! Whadya say, is it a bet? Huh? It's Gwendolyn, right?" (Apparently it was.) To Mike he said, "Know how many holes there are in that floor drain?" Mike guessed sixty. "You're close," Bernie said. "You're real close." He shook his head in admiration. "Not counting the screw holes, there are fifty-two holes -- just like in a deck of cards." (Today Chester, having heard that story for the first time, counted the holes in the drain. Fifty-

two, plus two for the screws. "Ain't that somethin'?" he said. "He right about that, anyway.") To another guard Bernie flashed a picture of Eisenhower and asked him to name who it was and the year in which he was most famous. He didn't hold conversations, he conducted quizzes and he orated. He described working conditions on Texas prison farms ("They use three-word sentences"), and enumerated his objections to spending any time in a mental institution (as opposed to his perfect willingness to spend time in any jail): "They stick you in the ass with those needles." He scribbled graffiti on the wall behind the toilet/sink, and on the wall over Phil's bed, in Phil's cell, while he was talking to Phil that evening.

While Bernie was in Phil's cell, Mike, Jack and I discussed him. Mike and I have cells, but Jack had to spend the night out on the floor with Bernie. "That fucker don't let me sleep," Jack said. He said he just might do something about it. I told Jack that if he wanted to write Bernie out, I'd sign. My fear was that Bernie was going to bring the guards down on us. We had a quiet friendly cellblock, one with the best reputation in the jail with the guards. Bernie was attracting a lot more of their attention to us (every cellblock has a closed-circuit TV camera in it, by which the hall guards can monitor us); they were keeping a close watch on him. After supper, while Bernie was all but sermonizing on the subject of mental institutions, waving his arms excitedly, a guard popped in to ask, "Is everything all right?" (Bernie immediately told him an extravagant story, ending with, "You check out your Bible -- Timothy 1-dot-dot-2 -- it'll change your fuckin' life!")

I went to bed around 11:30. An hour or two later I was awakened by the sound of the dayroom toilet flushing, and then the sound of Bernie's voice, an intense low murmur. I didn't hear anyone else (in addition to Jack and Bernie out on the dayroom floor, we had a black man named Joe, in for DUI, who had come in that evening) -- just Bernie, rattling away. I drifted off, only to awaken to hear Bernie calling out to the guards, who were laughing in the hall, "Hey, you guys keep it down -- we got guys trying to sleep in here!" Apparently he got into a conversation with one of them; I heard him asking one of his inane questions.

Joe says Bernie offered him a cigarette, which he refused. "I turned my back on him -- I just wanted to get to sleep." Later he rolled over and saw Bernie kneeling over him, murmuring words at him. "I thought he was a queer," Joe said. "If he'd made a pass at me, I'd a slugged him."

Jack says he never got to sleep. "I told him, 'Keep quiet!' three or four times," he said. "I was ready to lay him out." Jack is about half Bernie's size.

I may have dozed off again, but around 3:00 am his voice woke me again, and this time it was much louder. He was making no effort to keep it down. I have no idea who he was talking to. It might have been himself -- he had gotten himself really wound up.

"Shut the hell up!" I said, giving vent to my growing irritation.

In the next moment he was outside my locked cell door. "What'd you say, you motherfucker?" he demanded.

"I said to shut your goddamned mouth," I said.

"You shut up, faggot!" he shouted.

"Ain't you got no respect?" I said. "Running your mouth all night, how you expect people to sleep?"

"Why don't you come out here and say that, you dirty dope-dealer?" he demanded. "You goddamned filthy muther, you come out here, so's I can smash your face in!"

We both knew the door was locked and neither of us could open it.

"I'm gonna be right here when this door opens -- two or three hours from now! I'll be right here," he promised. "You fuckin' slimey dope-

dealer! I know all 'bout you -- selling that cocaine to little kids. I'm gonna beat the shit outta you! I'm gonna teach you, boy! Pushers like you are the scum of the earth! Yeah, I'm right here, waiting for breakfast to come, waitin' for that door of yours to pop right open!"

Shit, I thought. That's all I need. Get in a fight and you go to the Hole and your time's extended. I'm about three weeks from release, and this has to happen! At the same time I was thinking about what I would have to do when the cell doors unlocked. I decided that since the door swung outwards I'd slam it into him and then hit him with my chair. I was sure his strength was greater than mine -- a crazed person is usually stronger and less able to feel pain -- and the only way I could match him would be to get really angry, a towering rage. Well, I was pissed, but not anything like that angry.

"You better shut up," I told him, "or they're gonna put you back in the Hole!"

"Oh, yes!" he said. "I'll go in the Hole all right! I don't mind! I'll take you with me, cocksucker!" He banged on my door some more and continued ranting. He'd worked himself up with some kind of moral outrage over my alleged cocaine sales to children (which, in retrospect, pissed me off more than anything else he said) and had by now convinced himself that it was his holy mission to wipe the floor with me.

At that point the Lieutenant came in.

"Pack your stuff and let's go," he said.

"What?"

"Pack up your stuff, please."

"What about this dope dealer? You gonna let him just sit in there like that? He sold cocaine to little kids!"

"Come on, let's go. Pack your stuff."

"Don't rush me now!"

"Let's go. Pack it up!"

"Say 'please.' I didn't hear you say 'please.'"

"I'm not going to tell you again -- pack it up!"

"You gonna make me? Huh? You gonna make me? I gotta good mind to hit you -- !"

I didn't see this. But I heard more guards running in and the sounds of a scuffle. By the time I had my glasses on and was standing by my door, looking out, four or five deputies had Bernie on his stomach on the floor, the lieutenant standing over them, and they were putting leg-shackles and handcuffs on him.

"Oh, that cold floor feels good," Bernie said, almost in a croon. "Hard and cold -- just like my second wife!"

"You going to stop this stuff and settle down?" one of the deputies asked.

"Hell no," Bernie said, still struggling. "You gonna have to do it right! You know, I'm gonna get a job as a deputy, you know that? Then I'll show you how it's done!"

By then both Jack and Joe had moved to the far end of the room, and the deputies were packing up Bernie's few possessions. "This your book?" one of them asked him. It was a book I'd loaned to Bernie two days earlier -- which Bernie had never cracked -- Heartland by Robert Douglas Mead.

"Nah, that's that goddamned gray-haired dope dealer's book! You know, he sleeps ten hours a day, has all that money -- 'cause he sells that fuck-in' dope to little kids! That's a western book, an' he ain't never been west of nowhere!" Still ranting nonsense about me, Bernie was hoisted to his feet and taken out. Back to the Hole. "Tell that dope dealer," he called back, "if I ever see him in the hall, I'm gonna give him a kiss -- like a goddamned Georgia whore!"

"Hey, Jack," I said through my door, "you got any idea what time it is?" Jack went to the hall door and looked at the clock in the barbershop.

"It's 3:15," he said.

We all tried to go back to sleep. I found it impossible. And so, I discovered at breakfast, had everyone else -- except Chester, down in the A-cell, who had somehow slept through it all. ("Where Bernie at?" he asked, looking around.) Phil, Jack, Mike and I lingered, after breakfast, talking about it.

"He was going to punch that lieutenant," Phil said. "I'm standing right there, looking through my door, and they're not two feet away from me. 'I'll hit you,' he says to the lieutenant, and I believe he would've, if they hadn't wrestled him down on the floor right then!"

Mike said, "I was laughing. I was watching them and laughing like a motherfucker." I'd heard him. "I went back to bed, I couldn't get back to sleep," he continued. "I like to beat my peter for an hour, an' it stayed limp." He shook his head in wonder.

"I ain't got no sleep yet," Jack said. After half an hour or so of ventilating our feelings, we all went back to bed. I drifted off about half an hour before lockout.

It was a strange day -- and got stranger. Joe Love rejoined us from the Dispensary in the afternoon. Jack looked disgusted. "Here's the snorer," he muttered. Joe listened in amazement as we told him about Bernie.

Then, around 4:45 -- around dusk (on a gray rainy day) -- the fireworks occurred: the transformer outside blew up.

The transformer sits by itself about ten feet from the jail, and about fifteen feet below our window, directly opposite our cellblock. There was a low boom! and a fountain of sparks shot twenty feet into the air -- a spectacular view from our window. Our lights and TV went off, our night lights cutting back on a moment later when the emergency generator kicked in. (The lights in my cell were dim red glows.) When the fireworks were over we could see a hole in the ground next to the transformer, from which smoke still wafted.

Supper -- fried chicken -- was an hour late. The elevator was out and the kitchen staff had to take all the meals up the stairs by hand to the B-floor. Ours were nearly cold, but we were glad to get them. After supper I went into my dark cell and straight to bed, exhausted. It had been more than enough excitement for one day.

-- Ted White (1986)

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