

## Ding Dong The Wicked Dick Is Dead



"Well, when the president does it, that means it is not illegal."  
– Richard Milhous Nixon

It was 1974 before I realized the 60s were over. Some people date its demise to the summer of 68; some the summer of 69 with Woodstock. Some thought it ended with the Manson murders. My pal R.J. cut his shoulder length hair the night we saw Easy Rider. I lost my nerve the night we burned the ROTC building, after Cambodia and Kent State. But it didn't really sink in until the day Nixon resigned. Someone, I forget who, thought it a fitting epitaph to the decade that 'the man who couldn't be trusted to sell you a used car, picked a used Ford to replace himself'.

I had nothing to do that day and no one to do it with when I heard the news on the radio. Then I heard of a party being held in the park up in Hartford; some bands I had never heard of and one that I had: Blood, Sweat & Tears. Bah! I hated their facile brand of white suburban blues; shallow as a puddle of spit, it gets you humming then leaves you with a hollow ringing in your head. I went anyway. It was free and I felt like celebrating. The radio told me it started at noon but I got there early. I'm always early; a trait that can aggravate as much as being late. But I was

there more to mingle than to hear music. Music is seldom the issue at such events. The issue is to 'crawl in the craw'. And I was crawling.

I started out zig-zagging the turf, a little shocked that the crowd didn't seem as smooth as I was used to. It occurred to me that my sphere was shrinking. This was a working class crowd, young twenties, some families. Very few Yuppies. But then the term had yet to be coined. It was an homogenous group but I have the distinct feeling that everyone knows I am not from these parts. Relax, I tell myself, that's just cannabis paranoia. No one knows. No one cares. No one is watching.

### **The Family**

I gravitate towards the pre-warm-up musicians scattered amidst the crowd. This one is called FoxFire. Part of the crowd watching them we will call the family. I observe the family for the first hour or so waiting for IT to begin. The family spreads out from a core of: Mama, wearing a 'Big Apple' t-shirt with '*Taken*' stamped across her enormous bosom. Papa is a fortyish beatnik type wearing a bush jacket. He has a huge, pus-packed, purple canker on his neck which I try to avoid looking at. Yet it fascinates me like a scab that wants to be picked. I sneak a few looks and repress the urge to pop it.

Mama and Papa have a blanket, a plastic lounge chair, a large cooler filled with food and two large jugs of punch. One of the jugs is punched even further with Jose Cuervo. There is also a pile of garbage that is trying its best to become an eyesore. I never did get a fix on how big the family was but they represent the attitude that can prevail at gatherings such as this. The attitude is to be with others, pure and simple. It is also a form of testing ones endurance and I knew it soon after arriving.

Mama and Papa are laid back types. Papa, I recall, broke his silence seldom and reluctantly. Once he said 'yes' when a sixteen year old girl said, 'shall I roll for you, Daddy John?'. He threw her a baggie and she grumbled about the papers. "I can't roll with these."

On the second blanket there were three nine year olds who seemed to be responsible for a six year old. One of the niners had a brown vial of what appeared to be chemicals. Mama says, "What you got there, Honey? Downers?"

"Yeah, downers," she sticks her tongue out in disgust.

"I don't want you givin' him no downs, y'hear?" Mama said as she ladled out another cup of Cuervo punch and took a toke.

Tattoos are big here. One of the daughters had a faded ballpoint cross on a hill, radiating like a sunrise. Lots of real tattoos too. Not much mascara though. These folks look a little rough. The crowd fans out from the stage, also like a sunrise, the blankets are laid out in irregular shapes forming Y-patterns – like mud cracking in the sun. The spaces between the blankets became the paths and streets of what is fast becoming a community.

Still no music from the stage. I start checking out t-shirts more fully and try to imagine a room somewhere with no written information. I ponder graffiti in various forms. I suppress the urge to compose The Great American Bumper Sticker. My mind is clicking now – approaching sensory overload. I may short circuit soon and it irritates me that I have failed to bring any recording devices. I want to get it all down. Damn, I say to myself, I'll just have to sharpen my memory.

The family (and I now include myself since Mama passed me a joint) is listening to FoxFire jamming with some unfamiliar musicians. They hit a few good licks but mostly they are too timid with time.

The Community is building. The beautiful people have started to arrive. It is about two now and if things were on time, BS&T would just about be starting. The beautiful People always seem to know when to arrive, that's what makes them beautiful; a sense of timing, being at the right place at the right time. Things here are not on time, however, and the crowd is getting surly.

Re: surly crowds. I once sat in the Fox Theater in Minneapolis for three hours with Terry The Teacher, waiting for PigPen to show up for a Dead Concert. The audience laid back, got high, ate chocolates, passed around oranges, milled around, talked to friends, suffered through a couple of really bogus warmup groups, etc. And the only hostile remark I heard was when Pigpen was finally setting up his drums. Someone yelled, "You better be good tonight, Pig."

That was a laid-back crowd. This present crowd, on the other hand, is not filled with Dead Heads. Much more of this silence and I am no longer responsible. Still no word from the stage.

About this time the third sunrise of the day appeared on the well-rounded blue-jean cheek of a lovely eighteener standing next to me. I could say she had her ass thrust in my face but that may not be true. The truth is: I was looking and the view was getting better all the time.

A vision appeared briefly and a group of guys behind me were tuned to it. The response was appropriate and well timed; a group groan emerged from the hum of the crowd. The frustration was shared by me and derived from the absolute certainty that she was not going to come over and sit on my lap. After that vision, everything looked a little pale, except for "Red" who appeared very briefly and then disappeared.

Red was wearing a Santa Claus red knit halter off one shoulder and store bleached denim shorts. She had blonde on blonde hair and a small

puppy to match. The puppy was cute and I hate cute puppies so I almost lost interest. But she had red eye shadow and a mean body, walkin' fine. I missed her when she left.

This is a way of moving that I can usually only do alone. Though when it gets good I wish there was someone along to share it. The crowd is not enough. The same feeling hits me when I am on the road for a few weeks, sleeping in the car half the time and eating apple pie ala mode in greasy spoon diners. Ridiculous, right? But it feels so good after a few days of this, to check into a motel early, swim, shower, drink Margaritas or Rum Cokes, get high and watch color TV. It's way late when I plug quarters into Magic Fingers and sleep until noon.

*"Well I'm runnin' down the road, tryin' ta loosen my load, got seven women on my mind..."* FoxFire is working up that number by Jackson Browne out of the Eagles. It draws my attention. The audience has grown and it applauds. The response draws out the shy musicians and the jam builds. We hear some hard-charging harmonica and guitar blues, then, sssssccccsk~kI~eeericcccchhehIxxree .... Squaaaaal ... pppth.. scr lsssss. The crowd quiets to a level where I can hear the trees blowing in the breeze. The silence only lasts for a few minutes. Just feedback. There will be no word yet from the stage.

It is almost three. The sun is peeking through, hot and muggy thirst forces itself upon me. Free coke (Coca-Cola) on the other side of the park. I must begin to think about moving. But hey – what's this? Real sounds coming over the P. A. The P. A . is squeaking but the group is not bad. Irish sounding folk stuff, nice fiddle but the piano vocal is not coming through. I decide to make my move. It has just begun and I am crapping out already. I smoke a joint and then light a finger sized Davidoff while I check out peoples costumes. I check out bodies; people who look interesting; people

who look boring; good looking men. Good looking men? Time to move.

## **The Community**

*" .... Doctor my eyes have seen the years and the slow parade of fears without hiding, you must help me understand."*

That's JB again via Foxfire. The community is welcoming and waving goodbye to people at all times. It has reached the point where it is difficult to move. The spaces between blankets now have people parked on them. In the distance I can see highways being formed to the PorToilets and the Coke trucks. The music has continued to spit and sputter; more time spent between groups than time kept. There is no common pulse generated. I am amazed at the patience being shown. There is a very good blues band now working up a sweat. Ina May Woll, trying to work Maria Muldaur out of her system and doing a pretty good job of it. I have just weaved my way, stoned, through the masses for two cups of tepid Coke and am now looking for a new spot. Stage left looked good; next to and about six feet in front of a bank of speakers. I will later regret this but for now it affords me a position to watch the stars and satellites.

Red is here again and prowling backstage. She has an orange tag tied to her belt. My first impression was that she was just swacked. But she was more complex than that. She was apart from the crowd, performing, drawing us out and being drawn in until she became a bother. The fat man, lead singer from Mountain encouraged her to cool it. Fat Man was wearing black leather in 90 degree heat and was sufficiently swacked himself to be unimpressed with Red. His first response was to give her a boot in the ass. I thought then that, maybe, she was part of the act. A sort of one-up on Jagger; abuse a bitch on stage. I'm still not sure that wasn't the case. The band had that look of kinky chic; early punk, Hell's Angels crap. The sound

was ear shattering. I needed earplugs and once again realized how ill-prepared I was for this caper.

Red had definitely become the focus of my attention. She had a butch black fox with her as shadow and keeper of the puppy. Fat Man from Mountain was freaking' with his feedback trying to conjure the ghost of Hendriks. Fucking with the amp. Push! Push! Can it take it? He backs off. What a relief. Then, maybe five seconds later, the biggest speakers blow a huge cloud of smoke out over Fat Man's head. The crowd is loose to that. "Aaaaallll Riiiiight," we scream. "Blast all those fuckers." I couldn't hear myself and thought the bastard had damaged me.

Red had joined the act again, on the ground at first but soon she sprang like a cat-dancer onto the stage. She stuck her ass out at the crowd and wiggled it like a cork screw. Fat Man and the band pretend to ignore her. This proved fatal. It only encouraged her. She found space on the stage quite nicely. From where I stood, she was a welcome addition to a barely tolerable bunch of noisemakers. The drummer does a cute trick, throwing his sticks to the crowd as if by accident. It's a rather puny phallus so he compensates with abundance what he lacks in finesse. Some teeny bopper throws a t-shirt towards the stage but it falls short, in a lump on the head of another teeny bopper.

Red is still working out but the Fat Man in black leather has made a superb move on her. Without loosing his stride, he plops her, jitter-bug style, over one hip and pivots her off stage. He is back in control but slipping fast. The bitch is cutting his act pretty good. Red doesn't quit right away but you can see she is beaten. I'm pulling for her. She sits down for a minute than slowly works her ass back on stage. She wants encouragement but we don't supply it quickly enough. The word is out, "Hey Roadie," Fat Man says, "git this bitch spayed."

By now I love her madly and FLASH, she does in an instant what I knew was coming. Crossing her hands in front of her stomach in one smooth movement, a blur of red and the halter is off, exposing spectacular tanned titties. (I knew they would be tanned.) That was it! She was gone.

Later, I saw her backstage trying to work up some steam but she seemed to have run out. I tried to hit on her but she had lost her puppy and was crying as she looked right through me. Just as well; I never could have kept up with her.

I wished once again that I had my camera. My memory was slipping fast and for some reason I wanted to recall these events. It is possible, I thought, that I had pushed myself too far. A headache began to insinuate hell to pay if I didn't find some food. I hadn't eaten anything all day except for a Mister Softee and those two Cokes. Luckily I hadn't been drinking beer or I would have had to contend with the lines to the PorToilets.

In between there were photos I had missed. There were red blue green and yellow balloons floating in front of a sunlit copper mirrored skyscraper on the edge of the park. There was a pair of foam rubber shower clogs lying in the grass with foot prints worn into the soles. I stood there determined to watch them until the ghost returned to step into them. Ten minutes and my determination was less than firm. Everyone, except me, knows what they are doing, I am convinced. Anything I can identify is real. Simple. Sweat is flowing freely. Where is the Blood? We have seen the Tears. A small breeze kisses me and I spin around in hope that it was Red. I can hold out. My endurance had just passed a checkpoint. The announcer says, one more no name band and then BS&T. Well, the crowd is not going to stand for that. A communal groan convinces the announcer to amend his last statement. All right, he decided, BS&T will be next.

I decide to guts it out and got diverted momentarily by the roadies trying in vain to keep folks off the U-Haul trucks. Without a PA the Roadies find, they have no authority. This town has a will of its own and no two-bit deputy can push it around. Behind me a race riot threatens to erupt. A brother tries to cool it but the riot was never going to get out of hand. A black teener was swinging his 10 speed bike over his head and bumped a white girl. Her boyfriend says, "Hey! Watch it stupid." The black kid steps back and SLAP, against his thigh, out comes a blade. He's yelling, "you wanna rumble?" and those of us in the vicinity laugh loudly. We all thought 'rumble' went out with West Side Story. The black kid was clearly embarrassed, parked his bike and stormed off. "You wait right here, motha fucka, my bro's got a piece.

The crowd cracked up with nervous laughter, hootin' and hollarin'. Me? I'm stoned and a little scared. And, whereas it was getting dense around there, it was now thinning out. The young black dude came back for his bike and one last "mother fucker" but no blood.

It felt late. It was after five, I gauged from the sun, and still no BS&T. I'm gonna have to move soon. I take a few more hits off the top of a joint and try to make sense of the culture at hand. It has gotten far too crowded. People are being pushed up against the chicken wire fence and the pushers won't lay back. There is no control. It needs release. It needs air. It needs food. I say all this to myself as I move into the less populous fringes. The provinces, ah, the provinces. Coca-Cola paper cups cover the streets of the city as I cop some shade under a tree.

## **Home**

Home is where you go when you are tired of the world. Home is where you can get what you want, when you want it. Home is where you

are happy to be. I hadn't had a true home in some time. But, at that time, home was anywhere except right there, in that city, with that family and separate from that community.

To get home I had to ask directions. And as usual the directions are more than I need to know. As soon as I ask for help, I regret it and didn't really listen to the answer. A man was telling me three ways to get home, when there are only two ways. Into IT or out of IT. I was getting out.

I still hadn't eaten. My ears were ringing and my pulse was exaggerated. I had to slow down, decompress. Driving south, I came upon a suitable decompression chamber in the form of a Middlesex County Bicentennial festival near my new hometown. I drove by the Coca Cola bottling plant and recalled long ago finding a Coke bottle that had made its way from there all the way to Iowa from Middletown, CT.

They were serving the food, ethnic style. They had pizza. They had ribs. They had baked potatoes stuffed with Irish stew and Donegal donuts. They had lox and bagels. They had bratwurst and beer. They had strawberries and ice cream. As an American, I honored my ancestors appropriately. I ate everything.

Wallowing, well-fed, I wandered over to watch a trio of women in green dresses doing an Irish jig. I heard the sound of a P.A. drifting in. I knew what to expect but I followed the sound anyway. Augie Buongiorno was setting up his music stands in a row. They go: AB AB AB AB AB AB.

Three virgins from St. Mary's Mercy High are beginning to sing: 'there's a place for us – somewhere a place for us...'. We were invited to sing along if we knew the chorus. The contrast was unreal. After a day of crawling in the counter culture, there I was, twenty minutes later and twenty miles down the road, in a separate reality. This one was pleasant enough but incredibly boring. I couldn't believe anything I had seen that

day. It was all in the mind. All except Tricky Dick, I was hoping, at least he was really gone and the 60s are finally over.