



Jake's Adventures

(Jan. 17, 2002) Maybe you can take the boy out of Buffalo, but Jake finds that you can't necessarily take the Buffalo out of the boy. Especially when rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous. – *Bill Heard, Editor*

Buffalo May Have Been Frigid, But California Was Really Cool

By JAKE SATIN-JACOBS

I grew up in Buffalo, New York. It's a great place to be FROM. I think life in Buffalo was best summed up by a character in the musical "A Chorus Line."

"I once considered suicide," he says, "But I didn't do it because I was living in Buffalo at the time and thought it would be redundant."

Last week, Buffalo got eight feet of snow in four days. It made me smile. I remembered months of being trapped in the over-heated, tightly sealed house with my three-pack-a-day smoking mother, where the only alternative to a slow death by asphyxiation was a slow death by hypothermia. I remember hearing that hypothermia was a painless way to go. I considered it often.

There is actually a style of hypothermic death called "Buffalo Syndrome." It occurs particularly among older people. Near the end of February, the hideous boredom and depression of life indoors finally debilitates people to the point where they decide to go out walking aimlessly in the snow. Sometimes they just pace back and forth in front of their houses until they freeze to death.

Maybe it's the result of all that snow, but Buffalo is not a great cultural hotbed. When I was growing up, the area was known for its steel -- now gone, its chemical plants (Does Love Canal ring a bell?), the hardiness of its Eastern European immigrant population, and its sausages.

The Palace Burlesque had been the flower of the northeast girlie show circuit and I was there to see the farewell performance of Rathouse Rosie, who could spin her tassels in opposite directions. At one time, Buffalo had had one of the finest art galleries in the country; but over the years, has sold off the bulk of its important works to pay its heating bill.

Unaccustomed to celebrities

Very few famous people have come out of Buffalo. Lucille Ball grew up in Jamestown, sixty miles south of the city. Dick Shawn -- a comic I never really understood or appreciated and who is now deceased -- claimed Cheektawaga, a Buffalo's suburb, for his home. Most notably, the finest folk rock musician of all times -- Ani DiFranco -- lives in Buffalo to this day, but she wasn't even a gleam in her father's eye till I had left the city. So, needless to say, I was not used to interacting socially with celebrities.

I had shaken Bobby Kennedy's hand (smaller and more delicate than I had

presumed) at a political rally; and I had gotten Mary (of Peter, Paul and...) Travers' autograph on the cuff of a shirt that I treasured, unwashed, until my first wife decided it needed laundering and therewith erased my most intimate contact with celebrity. But, all in all, I had not rubbed shoulders with famous people until I moved to California.

In 1974, when my first wife and I first moved here, we got a very nice rental condo next to the race track on the beach in Del Mar. The home was owned by race folks, who rented it out in the off-season. Our stay was limited to the time between the end of one racing season and the beginning of the next. So, it was cheap and the neighborhood was far better than we could otherwise have afforded. Our neighbors in that posh coastal community included, among others, Desi Arnaz, Jimmy Durante, Angie Dickenson and Burt Bacharach.

This list may not seem all that impressive today. And, admittedly, Jimmy and Desi were both near death, so neither of them was ever out walking around. But Angie Dickenson had the hottest show on television at the time and; her husband, Burt Bacharach, with a little help from Dionne Warwick between tarot card readings, had become the musical genius of the hour. And remember, I was just out of Buffalo. Everything impressed and overwhelmed me.

One day, I was walking my dog along the beach, skipping rocks, looking for sand dollars, whistling and generally enjoying the beach life. Suddenly, I noticed Burt Bacharach in the distance, walking toward me. I panicked. What would I say? How would I act?

Cool was the rule

I decided I would just be one of the friendly neighbors. The coolest approach – and cool was the order of the day – would be to smile politely, greet him by name, say nothing fan-like and move along in the same way any of his other neighbors might have. I walked; I whistled; I skipped stones. Burt passed.

"Hi, Burt. How you doin'?" I asked.

"Great. You?" he replied.

"Just great." I answered.

I continued along my way, satisfied that I had not betrayed my failure to have previously rubbed shoulders with greatness. I continued whistling.

Then, puffy, red-faced humiliation swept from my lips to my toes. Throughout the encounter, I had been whistling, "Rain Drops Keep Falling on my Head" – Burt's then current hit song.

Moral of the story:

You can run, but you can't hide. Life has a way of attaching that piece of toilet tissue to your shoe, pulling out your shirttail or unzipping your fly at will.

Jake Satin-Jacobs is a Chief Administrative Analyst in Transit Operations

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