

Jim Gustafson's Maniac Memories

Contributed by Jim Gustafson

MANIAC MEMORIES BY JIM GUSTAFSON

WHAT DO YOU DO

What do you say when they say "What do you do?" I say I play the blues on my red kazoo. That I teach yoga to yahoos. That I have a ranch in Australia where I breed blue suede kangaroos. I steal women's shoes and sell them to perverts over an 800 line. I do gardening with lasers. I clean houses with plastic explosives. I'm on welfare. I'm on heroin. I'm on parole. I teach the art of Ninja to ninnies. I'm a professional identity designer. Nothing, I'm rich. Nothing, I'm emotionally crippled. I'm a media mogul who moonlights as a Chippendale dancer. I manufacture ladies lingerie for Frederick's of Krakow. I play golf with beatniks. I design then live in the cities of the future... which sometimes takes all afternoon. I sell gizmos to gooks. I wholesale freeze-dried mail order brides. I design Boy Kaddafi's stage outfits and sometimes read him his fan mail. What do I do? Well, I'm waiting for this think tank thing to come through so I can get tanked and think of new ways to screw citizens out of the dollar or two they'd like to use to buy brew but instead goes to you know who. I loot shopping malls in radiation zones. I cruise the art zoos looking for what's new in mutations. I sell crack at the United Nations. I don't have just one occupation. I'm an amalgamation, a confederation, a conspiracy and a conglomerate. I do what I have to do because I'm a man... that's spelled M A N. I don't do anything, I'm just a writer.

SUDDENLY

for Roy Castleberry

Suddenly I was no longer petrified of being lucid. Suddenly being wet and hungry and a thousand miles from home held no further surprises. Suddenly the summer swooped down like a raven unto a big juicy hambone. Suddenly it was winter again, and there we were with a half-gallon of frozen cactus juice. Suddenly the Blue Absolutely granted us a reprieve. Suddenly, without even a warning grunt, the wounded warthog of real life lowered its head and charged. Suddenly you were stricken with tusk luck. Suddenly sensation swelled and the white room hushed. Suddenly enlightened bloat seemed adequate but we kept looking for something to compare it with anyway. Suddenly the Curse of Immediate Gratification lifted. Suddenly you were granted your exit visa and could leave for Big Lights Bright City but didn't want to. Suddenly being an American in America seemed like a pretty good idea. Suddenly everyone latched on to your philosophy of never doing the same dance step twice and you were hailed as a great liberator. Suddenly the procession took a sharp right into the private courtyard of the Clown King and all Hell broke loose. Suddenly surrender seemed so perfunctory as to be ludicrous and surviving so real as to be surreal. Suddenly there was another sham-o-rama mythology wrapped in synthetic pathos and held together by dung-flavored gum that needed to be debunked. Suddenly Lotto Mentality nosed out Work Ethic on the backstretch of the decade and the tote board lit up and everybody who won gathered up their filthy lucre and got out of your way. Suddenly the elevator stopped between the 20th and 21st centuries. Suddenly we counted ourselves among the unvanquished. Suddenly lives without middles merged in miracles. Suddenly the thrill was back, stronger than ever.

A COMMON MAN

I'm a common man, a lunkhead, a stumbling predator, a devotee

of bitter indulgences. I'm just an ordinary guy with some extremely frisky demons, an intimate with certain angels, and on speaking terms with my personal version of God. I'm a flaunter of basic virtue, a victim of luminescent tragedy, an occasional calamity of exuberance, an unskilled dreamer, a squirming statistic. I'm a magenta hombre, a toxic tactician, a refuge from convenient reason, a slobbering suitor, a recent visitor, the midnight ranter at rest in the warm afternoon sun. I'm a churning hunk of frenetic funk, a misprogrammed meat torpedo, rock and roll in a rented tuxedo, a brain with a food hole, a high performance heart with no brakes. I'm King Shit Deluxe, Kid Avalanche, Jumpcity Geronimo. I'm the fool who just wishes he was tired. The boy next door...who you never see because I'm kept locked in a closet. A quiet man with an elaborate arsenal. I'm the karma chameleon who's grown up to be a dragon lizard, the former lizard poet who now could use a steady job. I'm Mr. Wonderful miscast as a miasma of memory and menace. I'm just a happily married man, a Prudential agent suddenly possessed by the spirit of Howling Wolf. "You gotta do/ what you gotta do/ to protect/ your family/ you fam-i-lyyyyyy...yeah.." I'm a common man, a consensus sweetheart, a condescending adult, a fugitive from the do-not-file file, an exile from every Main Street from Naples to Nantucket, Goos Bay to Ozone Park. I drinks whiskey when I'm thirsty but only eats zucchini if I'm drunk. I labor to control my destiny, struggle to meet my simple needs, try to manage more dangerous impulses. I'm quick-tempered, wrong-hearted, short-sighted, but I want to be right, I ache to be good, and I'm trying, so help me, I'm trying.

INTRODUCING THE MANIAC SAINTS

There we were winging it through the Wonder Years, fugitives from the Wampum Wars, fearless exiles with self-proclaimed exemptions, enchanted deadbeats barhopping down the Bunny trail toward the Blue Absolutely. These were the Halcyon days of Vitality upon Demand. And fortified by mega-doses of Instant On and Virtue on the half-shell, we, the Perpetual Celebrants and Private Comedians sashayed forth with great intensity, determined to save the world and win valuable prizes while getting paid to have fun. We were almost grown and fully realized, on a divine mission to rid the world of corrupt pop, hostile boogie, and wicked melody; to rescue the music from the distortion of the dangerous times. In the course of our travels we would assault the sultry agitator, seduce the splendid beasties with verses, and bedazzle the reluctant co-conspirator with our mystical energy and homeboy chutzpuh. We were the ultimate sensibility commandoes, the Kali-baiters, the annihilation professionals, the wanton vigilantes who stalked the Death Angel through the gardens and knolls, the alleys and arroyos. We were the fools hired to make Moloch feel lucky! They dared us to live forever and we were just crazy enough to try.

SNAPSVILLE (2)

I tell you, I was feeling fragile, Nigel. Like I had a head full of Digel. I tell you, I was living on Digel, Night-All, and a fear of Hell at the Anywhere-but-Here Motel. Didn't have a Canadian nickel to my name. Didn't even have a name... sold it to an Australian fist-fucker for a Fosters. Or was he a Tasmanian fear-fluxer? A Philistine phudpucker? A Filipino pud-puller? Oh poop and pee, why should it matter to me? I mean does it bother you?... I mean really get to you? Gee, you're lucky, it really drives me nuts. The other day was as clear as of say can you see, and I was walking around downtown as the offices were getting out of work. I'd felt much disturbo all day-o... daaaaaaayyy-ooo, say can you see, oh... Anyway, I was noting the state of the strange and without thinking

started singing this song. It's called Administrative Assistants Walking To The Parking Lot and if I can get the Talking Heads to do it I'd make enough moolah to make Moloch meow. I was working on it on a bench watching the parade. I love to watch people get off work, but don't understand why they don't all kiss the turf when they clear the last guardbooth. I abhor work. But now that I don't have any I'm real poor, scraping by with just enough for a pint of low-test per diem. This would all soon change. I was making hundreds of notes for my song. Administrative assistants...in tight skirts...in short skirts...in slit skirts...walking to the parking lot...Computer programmers...with fuck me pumps...with visible panty lines...walking to the parking lot...Staff attorney ...with mean expressions...and chubby ankles...walking...walking...walking...walking to the parking lots...Life is hot... Is it not?...for administrative assistants walking to the parking lot. All the while I was noticing that the time and temperature sign was completely out of whack. I looked up at 4:46 and it was 81, then at 4:47 it was 84. At 4:48 it was 87, and 4:49 it was 82. This is exactly the sort of thing that crazy people say "they" do to them to drive them crazy. At 4:51 it was down to 79, at 4:52 it was 81 again, and at 4:53 it was an even 90... a record for this date. Have you ever noticed what life does? How it moves along like a broken surf board down the Snapsville Viaduct? It can be so extravagantly serious. So flamboyantly real. Fantabulously formidable. Then it's a complete zilch. Zed. Absolute zero. Zuma Beach at dawn, and you're thinking of swimming to Samoa. I can't stand it. I long for imposed order, for the dignity of form, continuity of expression... But this shit... 5:06 and it's 76. and I looked at my watch and it was a quarter to nine and I was dancing with a woman who was twice my size... reeling and a rocking. Reeling and rocking with reality on a late summer afternoon. 5:11 and I'm halfway to Heaven watching managerial women with soiled panty hose and secret fantasies walking to the parking lot. Parking lots so full of cars, red cars, police cars... third one in five minutes. 5:17 and it's time to split the scene, 74 degrees and dropping and I'm bopping. Splitting the bench, this life, getting out of Snapsville... Technical writers in mauve blouses with one unbuttoned button too many exposing the top of her pale bra walking to the parking lot...

SNAPSVILLE (3)

I was feeling like a smushed spaniel, Daniel. And my maternal mama didn't raise any confounded bottom-feeder. But I sure seemed to be snorkeling for crumbs. Toiling for t-shirts. Salivating for subsistence. Drooling for dinero. I was tired of being a marginal yahoo with nothing to do but cruise for stew washed down by an imaginary brew or two and think about you. Whoever you are. Or were. Or could've been. I felt like I'd been double-crossed, triple-gelded, and left to sing my shame down a stinkhole. I felt like a mushed mix-breed mutt in a dog eat gazpacho world. So rejected I barely qualified as a furball. I was just one, puny, non-malignant polyp completely ignored amidst the greater body of disease. The world was full of serious illness and I was just a minor irritation, like mange. I felt like an imploded poodle, a microwaved miniature Schnauzer. No blue ribbon for this boy bowser. I'd been neutered and excluded. I'm one sick puppy, Pablo. More barf than bite, one lonely foamer, no yummys for me. No rhinestone collar. I felt like singing "How much is that doggie in the dumpster? the one with three legs and no tail..." Just let me know when the guy with the dart gun is coming and I'll hoist my rump into the wind.

THE RELENTLESS ROMP (accompanied by The Ventures' Walk Don't Run)

Â Â Â Â Â Â Well, we dance loud while standing still, and think best while swinging sledge hammers.Â We insult the slackmasters, rock with the wizards of angst, and celebrate finding lollypops in the snow.Â We are the sentimental guys left in charge of the evacuation plans, the stoned soldiers left to preside over the lost cities.Â We're the sweetheart word-crunchers laboring to explain the true nature of the Relentless Romp.Â We sing:Â "Minute by minute/Â we're deeper within it/Â Minute by minute/Â we're closer to it."Â Somehow we have propelled ourselves from accident to interlude, from breakthrough to secret passion to manic absolution to final argument.Â We try to maintain our good nature, our love of well being, our simple kindness.Â We try to proceed rather than wallow, to laugh rather than screech.Â We're the ones who fall down the Stairway to Heaven backwards while carrying a drink and never spill a drop.Â We realize we have a few problems.Â We also realize we are full of love, and that others love us, though not usually in the way we'd prefer.Â We know that since we can't get out of it, we might as well keep doing it.Â To go as if we knew where we were going.Â To do as if we knew what we were doing.Â Onward and upward, through the fog and across the night, the relentless romp, the relentless romp, the relentless romp.

ONE OF THOSE FEELINGS

Â Â Â Â Â Â It was one of those eerie feelings.Â I just knew that somewhere someone was singing Me And Booby McGee about me as she did her laundry or graded homework or wrote out checks for bills I ran up.Â Ah yes, I thought as I flopped on the motel bed and took another deep gulp of Tennessee Instant Enlightened Formula, FREEDOM!Â It felt like an ice pick in the tail-bone.

from MANIAC MEMORIES, soon to appear from Trembling Pillow Press, 2009