

HEY JOE!

OUR FAVOURITE
CURMUDGEON
JOE BAGEANT TAKES US
FOR A TRIP AROUND HIS
HOME TOWN — WITH
TWO STOPS FOR BEER

A PHOTO ESSAY BY SEAN GALLAGHER
WORDS BY JOE BAGEANT

ColdType



AROUND MY HOME TOWN (WITH TWO STOPS FOR BEER)

*These photos of Winchester, Virginia and nearby West Virginia were taken by New York photographer, **Sean Gallagher**. Most of my essays and stories are set and rooted in this old town and the surrounding historic Shenandoah Valley. The first Bageant came here in 1755. We've been here ever since, and seem to have chiefly occupied our time getting fatter and more religious. This is my home. Home to everything thoughtless and dangerous about America these days, home to most of the people I have loved and certainly home to all my ghosts. **JOE BAGEANT***

● This is my house at 102 Peyton Street. From the rear balcony I can look down on the grave of my original ancestor in America, who came to America in 1755 with the British Army and served with the young George Washington in the army of General Edward Braddock. The house was a fixer-upper when my wife and I bought it in 2000, and it's still hollering to be fixed. We call it "Chateau de Fatback." It is walking distance from all my needs, the bank, the beer-joints and the barbershop. But especially the beer joints, so let's take a pictorial stroll down to the Royal Lunch Tavern.



● Two blocks from my house lies what we call the "giant mutant Jim Crow apple." Many of the old line families who keep our town under their thumb made their money with apple plantations. They kept wages at starvation levels so people would always be willing to pick. Now they bring in third world pickers. The local apple business is pretty much kaput, thanks to China, but they still cram the old apple propaganda down everyone's throats. Everything is apple this and apple that. Thus we suffer such indignities as this big red pimple on the streetscape.



● Two more blocks and you come to our noble 1840 courthouse, Confederate statue and all. We call the statue Ole Reb and it was a high school tradition to do things to Ole Reb at graduation, like put a bra on him, or hang a rubber on him or a German helmet, whatever... These days such vandalism is a serious crime. My main experience in the courthouse was being tried for sale of marijuana when I was younger. I was the town's first pot bust in 1967 and was acquitted because the police managed to arrest me for the one sale I didn't make.



● Believe it or not, this is my local bank. During the Civil War it was a hospital, as was every nearly other building in the old core of Winchester. After the Battle of Gettysburg a ten-mile long wagon train of wounded arrived in Winchester, itself the scene of four major battles and over seventy smaller engagements. Which makes it a bit easier to grasp why these people cannot seem to forget the Civil War. Then again, if Europe can put World War II behind it and get along between nations, why can't a bunch of crackers in the American South do the same? Huh?

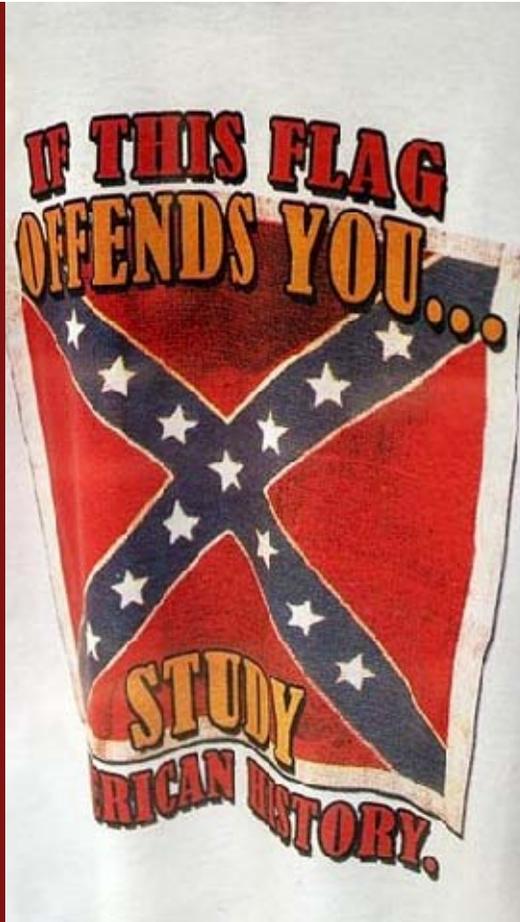
● Along the way ... This fundamentalist mission is right around the corner from the Royal Lunch tavern. The town is encrusted with fundamentalist churches and missions of every stripe. Near this one is a creationist church that blasts anti-Darwin tapes and runs videos about dinosaurs being "Jesus horses" in its storefront windows. It sometimes has an anti-Christ rubber monkey that much resembles Bill Clinton in the window that the campy folks in New York would kill for.



● The Royal sits hard by the railroad that slices right through town and the trains still run several times a day. When the engineer hits the air horn it will rattle your teeth right out into your beer. How much this train affects your life is a good barometer of your status here. It is the absolute line of social demarcation. Has been since the Civil War. On one side of the tracks everybody has insurance, a car. On the other side you find people with a mouth full of rotten teeth and "sporting nothing but a rubber heel" as they say down here.



● A Confederate flag hand towel for sale in a shop window. Folks in Winchester just cannot figure out why Yankees, queers and liberals make such a big deal about the Confederate flag. After all, they are white people too, right? And besides, we all know the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery. Study your history! It's all right there in the Bible about the "children of Ham."



● At last, the Royal Lunch Tavern, which bears an, uh, remarkable resemblance to Burt's Tavern in my essays. It is the last real neighborhood tavern in Winchester, an after-work joint in such a real sense that it does not even open much on weekends. Keeps the college pukes and the yuppie riff raff out.

● Me and Larry, owner of the Royal. Larry is the one hometown boy I sent my writing to during all the years I was out West, because I knew most of the rest of Winchester would never get it. He is one of the most soulful people on earth and has managed bars and clubs all his life. Which is why the Royal is perfection as taverns go.



- This is Larry's wife Anne. Between beers we all lust after Anne. She'd smack me upside the head for saying that



- Lack of space never kept anyone from dancing at the Royal. Some say it's because there is so much Irish blood here.



- Over the course of a day or an evening spent at the Royal it pays to take a navigational reading. Do I need a cab? Is the door swirling around too fast to dive through?

- I'd be the first to admit that I sometimes have a little too much fun at the Royal. Well, OK. Always.



● My photographer Sean wanted to see a real roadhouse, a roadside honky tonk. So I took him to the Troubadour, a few miles up the road just across the West Virginia state line. On the way we passed one of the roadside fundamentalist shrines – “cult groves” I call ‘em – that dot the area. I’ve always taken them for granted, kinda like roadside beer cans or dead deer, but Sean made me realize just how friggin strange they are.



● And here we are at the Troubadour up on a mountain by the Shenandoah Valley. The "Troob" is one of the last tonk joints in our area. Suburbanization has driven them out. But the Troubadour still has a remote feel in that it is up on top of a mountain a couple of miles across the nearby Virginia/West Virginia State Line.



● A booth at the Troubadour. It speaks for itself. If you can't find hillbilly love here, honey, you are probably a Yankee.



● Black-and-white checked floor, cutouts of country singers. The Troob's dance floor. The owner, Joltin' Jim McCoy used to play with Ernest Tubb and other early icons of country music. The cutouts of Patsy, Hank and Ernest on the stage are symbolic stand-ins for those great artists, sort of personal ghosts for Jim.



● The morning after. Unfortunately, there ain't no morning after pill for this kind of beer carnage. There is a saying here: "If he's too drunk to sing, make him drive." But like this fella, sometimes you are too drunk to even ride along.





● Leaving the Troubadour with the Blue Ridge hills all around. Damn, it sure is drunk out this evening.