

ColdType

WRITING WORTH READING | PHOTOS WORTH SEEING

ISSUE 111

SPECIAL ISSUE

LOOKING BACK

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'I'M A THINKING FOOL'**

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THATCHER'S FUNERAL**

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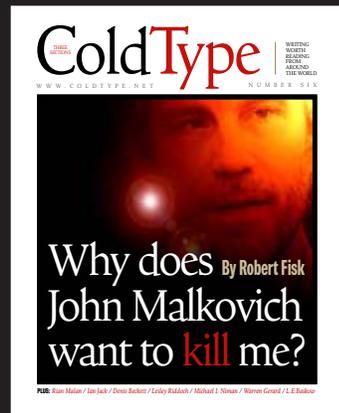
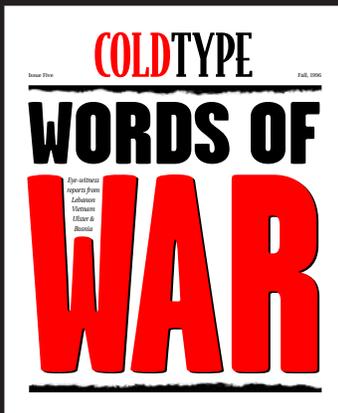
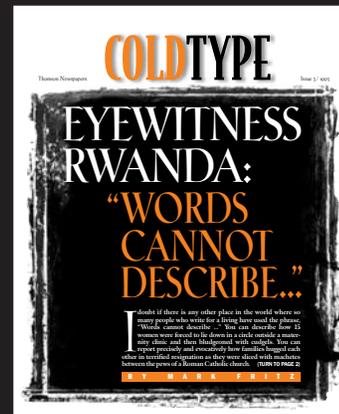
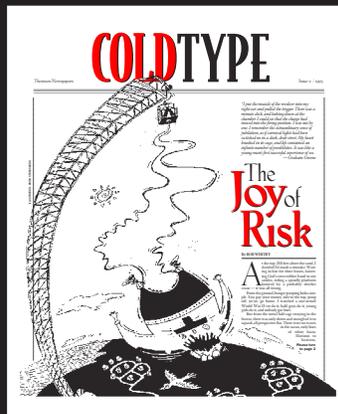
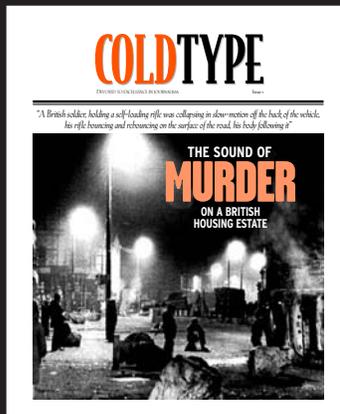
**WITS BLITZ:
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**SHOT DOWN BY
FRANK SINATRA**



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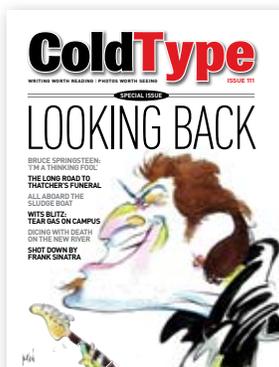
Issue 111 / February 2016

WELCOME to Issue 111 of ColdType, the first special issue of 2016. This month's focus – Looking Back – was inspired by two documents:

The first was veteran music writer **Dave Marsh's** classic Bruce Springsteen interview, originally published in Musician magazine 35 years ago this month. "It's a great time to run with the interview," says Marsh, "because The Ties That Bind, the recently released box set based on the album *The River* includes a lot of film shot at the Tempe, Arizona, show at which the interview took place." That interview runs to 14 very readable pages.

The second inspiration came from a soon-to-be-published book, *Pit Props: Music, International Solidarity and the 1984 Miners' Strike*, from which we took **Peter Dunwell's** photographs of the 2013 funeral of Margaret Thatcher for this issue's eight-page photo essay.

Now, what else should we add to fill the 48 pages? That decision was easy: I was clearing out my office



Cover: Bruce Springsteen.

Art by Antony Jenkins

– www.jenkinsdraws.com

when I came across tabloid copies of the first incarnation of ColdType, the original intent of which was to publish writing that would be as interesting in 20 years' time as when first written. Well, those 20 years have passed by, so read the articles by **Andrew O'Hagan** and **Barry Tuscano**, and let me know whether we fulfilled that pledge.

The last two stories are equally timeless: a first-person account of an anti-apartheid riot, by **Denis Beckett**, former editor of South Africa's long-defunct *Frontline* magazine; and a touch of humour, by **Tom Nugent**, from *NineOnTen*,

another tabloid that I edited a few years ago.

Finally, many thanks to Toronto artist **Tony Jenkins**, a former colleague at the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, for the wonderful cover illustration of Bruce Springsteen.

Let me know what you think of this collection, and if you'd like to see another Looking Back issue later in the year.

Tony Sutton, *editor*

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All aboard the sludge boat

Once the River Clyde teemed with steamboats carrying day trippers and holidaymakers from Glasgow to the outlying islands. Back in 1996, the waters were calmer, but five days a week pensioners packed sandwiches and bingo cards for a free trip downstream. Below the party lurked a less endearing cargo: thousands of tons of sewage, about to be dumped at the mouth of the river. **Andrew O'Hagan** boarded this flagship of the effluent society



From
ColdType
(tabloid version)
Issue 4
1996

THE CLYDE used to be one of the noisiest rivers. Thirty or 40 years ago you could hear the strike of metal against metal, the riveter's bedlam, down most of the narrow channel from Glasgow, at several other shipbuilding towns on the estuary. There was the sound of horns on the water, and of engines turning.

Chains unfurled, and cargoes were lifted; there was chatter on the piers. But it is very quiet now. Seagulls murmur overhead and nip at the banks. You can hear almost nothing. The water might lap a little or ripple when pushed by the wind. But mostly it sits still.

This quietness is broken, five days a week, by the passage of the two ships that carry one of the Clyde's last cargoes: human effluent, sewage, sludge.

Glaswegians call these ships the sludge boats. Every morning, they sail west down the river to turn, eventually, south into the estuary's mouth, the Firth, where they will drop their load into the sea. By this stage of the voyage, their elderly passengers may be dancing on the deck, or,

if the weather is wet or windy, playing bingo in the lounge. Underneath them, a few thousand tons of human sewage (perhaps some of their own, transported from their homes) will be slopping in the holds. There was a time when passengers and cargo set sail from the Clyde to New York, Montreal, Buenos Aires, Calcutta and Bombay in liners equipped to carry awkward things like railway locomotives and difficult people like tea planters. And now, almost alone upon the river, this: tons of shit accompanied by an average complement of 70 old-age pensioners enjoying a grand day out, and travelling free.

This morning it was the ladies – and several gentlemen – of the Holy Redeemers Senior Citizens' Club of Clydebank who were taking a trip down the river. I'd watched them ambling onto the boat from the wharf at Shieldhall Sewage Works, each of them with a plastic bag filled with sandwiches and sweets.

Now I could hear the party arranging itself on the deck above me as I stood down below to watch the sludge being loaded into the ship's eight tanks. It came from the wharf through an enormous red pipe,



Illustration: Anthony Ventura

then into a funnel and then from the funnel into a hopper, which channelled the sludge evenly through the ship's basement. It took about an hour and 30 minutes to load up. As the ship filled – with wakeful passengers and tired sludge – a little fountain of perfume sprinkled silently over the hopper's top.

We were on board the Garroch Head, a handsome ship named after the point near the dumping ground 40 miles downstream and built on the Clyde, as was her sister ship, the Dalmarnock (named after a sewage works).

The Garroch Head can carry 3,500 tons of sludge; the Dalmarnock, 3,000 tons. They are not particularly old ships – both were launched in the 1970s – but neither seems likely to survive the century. After 1998, the process of dumping at sea will be outlawed by a directive from the European Union on grounds of ecology and public health.

And yet this quiet disposal, this burial of a city's intimate wastes in 90 fathoms halfway between the islands of Bute and Arran, once seemed such a neat and clean solution.

UNTIL the 1890s, Glasgow's untreated sewage went straight into the river's upper reaches, where it bubbled under the surface and crept ashore as black mud. Civic concern arose with the stench; the population was still growing in a city made by the first industrial revolution and popularly described as "the workshop of the world." In 1889, the city's engineer, Alexander Frew, read a paper on the sewage question to the Glasgow Philosophical Society and then addressed increasingly heated questions about what was to be done. He opposed dumping at sea and suggested instead that the sewage be spread along the banks of the Clyde, where it would come to form

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fine agricultural land. The city rejected this scheme, though a feeling persisted that something useful (and profitable) might be done with Glasgow's swelling effluent; in London at that time, the Native Guano Company of Kingston-upon-Thames appeared to be setting a trend with this sort of thing. Glasgow's own brand, Globe Fertilizer, was popular for a short while. But here, science was ahead of the game – or behind it – with new artificial fertilizers that were more powerful and cheaper than the processed human stuff.

How did other cities arrange their disposal? A delegation went from Glasgow to Paris to find out and there discovered a great tunnel on either side of the river Seine. Sewage poured out of pipes into these tunnels, which then poured into the Seine some miles from the city. The Seine, however, was clean when compared to the Clyde because (as the delegation noted) the current carried the effluent away from the city to less fortunate towns further downstream and then to the sea. The Clyde, on the other hand, was tidal; sewage went with the ebb and came back up with the flood – a mess that, like an unwanted stray dog, could not be shooed away.

There was also another reason for the Seine's relative purity, which perversely had to do with Glasgow's greater progress in sanitation. Paris had 600,000 closets, or lavatories, but only a third of them were water closets; the rest were dry, their waste carried away by night-soil carts to fields and dumps. Glasgow, thanks to its climate and municipal reservoirs and pipes, had most of its lavatories flushed by water. It had wet sewage rather than dry and much more of it to get rid of.

In 1898, nine years after the Paris trip, another delegation travelled south, this time to London, where it was shown the system of sewers, sewage works and, lastly, sewage ships that carried the capi-

tal's waste to its destination far out in the Thames estuary. The delegation was impressed, and by 1910 Glasgow had a similar system in place – the second-largest (after London) in the world, with three great sewage works sending their products down the Clyde in ships.

The passengers came later, just after the First World War, when a benevolent, but cost-conscious, Glasgow city council (then called the Glasgow Corporation) decided that convalescing servicemen would benefit from a day out on the Clyde. Cruising on pleasure steamers up and down the estuary and across to its islands was then Glasgow's great summer pastime; the sludge boats offered the city council the prospect of killing two birds with one stone.

Their voyages were already paid for out of the rates. The servicemen could travel free. It was seen as an expression of socialist goodwill – allied with the enlightened Victorian municipalism that had given Glasgow its lavish water supply and so many public parks. The vessels were rebuilt to carry passengers, fitted out with more lifeboats and saloons, equipped with deck quoits. By and by, their traffic in convalescing servicemen died away, to be replaced, thanks to the charitable offices of Glasgow Corporation, by old people who couldn't afford cruises on the regular steamships but who may have been encouraged by the doctor to take the air.

AND so it was, in the summer of 1995, that I came to be travelling with the Clydebank Holy Redeemers on top of 3,500 tons of sludge. Everything – or everything visible to the passenger – on the Garroch Head was scrupulously clean. The table and chairs in the lounge shone with polish; the urinals gleamed; the deck was as free of dirt as any deck could be. The haphazard filth and toxic stews of Glasgow were kept

well out of sight. There was a sense among the crew that it was this opposition of cleanliness to filth that carried them and their ship forward on each voyage.

We sailed past the grass and rubble where the shipyards used to be – Connells and Blythswood to starboard, Simons and Lobnitz to port – and I talked to a woman who was leaning on the ship’s rail and enjoying the breeze. She was called Mary Kay McRory, she was 80, and she had a big green cardigan pulled across her chest. Her eyes ran, but she laughed a lot as she spoke. She said the first time she had sailed on the Clyde was in 1921, when she had travelled as a six-year-old with her family on the steamer that took cattle and people from Derry in Ireland to Glasgow and very seldom took the same ones back again. Mary Kay’s father was escaping some bother in Donegal; he heard of work in Glasgow, came over and was employed right away as a lamplighter. Then he summoned his wife and the six children. “We came away from Donegal with biscuits,” Mary Kay said. “Everybody would throw biscuits over the wall to you. They were good biscuits. The food over there was good.”

She had worked as a waitress, when the city was still full of tearooms, and then on the Glasgow trams for 25 years. I asked her if Glasgow had changed much, and she got me by the arm. “Ye can say what ye like,” she said, “but there’s no poverty now, none.” She talked a lot about sanitation, about toilets and baths, in the way many old Glaswegians do. Those who remember lavatories shared with neighbors and trips to the public bathhouse tend to talk more about these matters than people like me, who grew up thinking it was nothing special to have porcelain bits at the top of the stairs stamped Armitage Shanks.

Plastic bags were being opened in the lounge. Out of them came the day’s supplies: sandwiches of beef, chicken breast,

shiny squares of gammon, salmon paste and cheese spreads. And then the treats to follow: Paris buns, Blue Riband biscuits, Tunnock’s Teacakes, Bourbon creams. Some of the women dropped sweeteners into their tea and stirred melodically for a long time after.

Others placed ginger snaps at the edge of their saucers or unwrapped tight wads of shortbread, ready for distribution. Neat stacks of white bread and sweet acres of treats stretched on the tables in front of every passenger. All the mouths were going – shredding meat and sloshing tea – like washing machines on a full load. This was not lunch for the Holy Redeemers; merely elevenses.

SLUDGE, in the particular sense of our sludge boat’s cargo, comes about like this: The sewage pumped into Glasgow’s three sewage works is twice screened. The first screening takes out large objects – lumps of wood, rags, metal – that somehow find their way into the sewers. The second screening extracts smaller, abrasive materials such as glass and sand. Then comes the first separation process, designed to make the organic component of the sewage sink to the bottom of the tank (just as sediment will settle in a bottle of wine). They call this the stage of primary settlement. The heavy stuff at the bottom is called raw sludge; the clearer liquid above is settled sewage.

The raw sludge is not ready to dispose of; it needs further modification and is subject to biochemical breakdown. Some of it goes through a process called digestion. Bacteria are allowed into the holding chambers, where they feed energetically on the proteins and carbohydrates, diminishing the organic matter until the sludge is fit to be spread on farmland or made ready for dumping at sea. Then, at the works near the wharf at Shieldhall, the sludge is “settled” one last time, to

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increase the content of sinkable solids in the watery mix.

The stuff in the hold has passed through many systems – biological and mechanical – and it will have no final rest from the biological, even at the bottom of the sea. It degrades there to feed marine life (the fishing near the dumping ground is said to be fairly good) and continue its journey through the ecosystem.

There has, however, been an awful lot of it dumped, and all in the same place. In the first year of the sludge boats, 213,867 tons were carried down the Clyde. In 1995, the figure was 1.8 million tons. The total for this century is 82.6 million tons. The seabed at the dump's centre is said to be damaged, its organisms contaminated. The EU has delivered its verdict. Glasgow needs a new venue for the sludge, and old ideas are being re-examined – fertilizer, for example.

Sludge is rich in nitrates (four per cent), phosphate (three per cent) and potassium (one per cent), and full of nutrients – it could do a good job on the land, and farmers seem willing to try it for free. It is also well suited to grass-growing and is already being spread on derelict industrial sites to prepare them for reclamation. A new product range – sludge cakes, sludge pellets – will be tried on the waste ground that was once the Ravenscraig steelworks, the largest and last of Scotland's steel plants, where the soil has been poisoned by decades of metal wastes. Sludge used there could make a meadow grow.

WE passed Greenock, which used to make ships and sugar, and then veered left into the Firth proper. The Garroch Head was going at a fair pelt now, and most of the passengers had their eyes down, playing a restive round or two of bingo. Some were nibbling still at the corners of buns and sandwiches. From the saloon porthole the water looked silver,

as if some giant shoal of mackerel swam just beneath the surface. The islands of Great and Little Cumbrae stood out, like two large boulders only recently dropped into the sea.

We passed them. Up on the bridge, they were slowing the vessel down, ready to discharge their load. We had reached the dumping ground, and as soon as the position was right, a crewman on the bridge flicked a switch, and I heard a little rumble. The valves were opening. I thought I could feel the cargo starting to be pulled by gravity from its tanks.

I went down from the bridge to the deck nearest the water and saw the first of the billowing columns. Fierce puffs, great Turner clouds of wayward brown matter, rose up and spread in an instant over the surface. The waters of the Firth were all at once rusty and thick, and the boat was an island in a sea of sludge. This was all in the first few minutes.

We moved off, leaning to port, aiming to complete a full circle as the sludge descended. A group of pensioners stood in a row looking out, covering their mouths and noses with white hankies. All the worst odour of a modern city, until now stored and battened down, was released in this time-stopping, comical stench. I looked up at the coast and wondered for a second where it had all begun, because this was an ending, and the sense of an ending was as palpable and strong as the brew in the sea before us.

The ship turned about and headed home. Its emptying had taken 10 minutes. Back in the saloon, the pensioners were dancing to a song called Campbelltown Lock, I Wish Ye Were Whisky. My tea sat just where I'd left it, and I was happy to notice it was still quite warm. **CT**

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Andrew O'Hagan's novel The Illuminations was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and is published in Canada by McLelland and Stuart.

PIT PROPS

Music, International Solidarity
and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike



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PIT PROPS marks the end of an era in coal mining in the UK and highlights how the incredible year-long struggle by the miners in defence of jobs and communities still resonates today. One section focuses on the vital creative links between music, politics and protest which grew up during the strike. Another tells the amazing story of the flood of international support – money, food, toys, clothes, toiletries as well as holidays abroad – which sustained the miners and their families during that year of struggle.

The book also deals with unfinished business from the strike. The Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign is resolute in its pursuit of a full public inquiry into the role of the police on 18 June 1984, when vicious para-military tactics were deployed against miners at Orgreave, South Yorkshire. The former coal field communities, devastated by the relentless pit closure programme which began after the strike, still struggle today.

The book concludes with an analysis of the privatisation of the electricity supply

industry and how the failure to pursue a coherent energy policy has led to swathes of the industry being controlled by foreign, often state-owned, companies. The absurd consequences of this, now and in the future, are a matter of urgent public concern.

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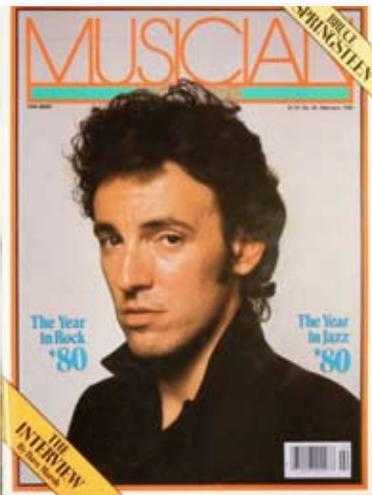
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Bruce Springsteen

"This interview, originally published in *Musician* magazine, in February 1981, is probably the best I ever did, and one of the very few I published in a Q/A format," writes **Dave Marsh**. It's been quoted in pieces in a lot of places, but has not been seen much until now. This is a propitious moment to reclaim the interview, intro and all, especially because *The Ties That Bind*, the recently released box set based on *The River*, includes a lot of film footage from the Tempe, Arizona, show at which the interview was conducted



From *Musician* Magazine (February, 1981)

'I'm a thinking fool; that's a big part of me'

A YEAR AGO, taking a respite from recording to play two nights of the MUSE [Musicians United for Safe Energy] anti-nuke concerts, Bruce Springsteen pared his normal three-hour show down to a more everyday 90-minutes. The result was pandemonium just this side of Beatlemania.

Following the biggest stars in American soft rock to the Madison Square Garden stage, Springsteen and the E Street Band upstaged everyone, including the issue itself. The air in the hall that night was one of fanaticism and conversion as though Springsteen were a rock 'n' roll evangelist and the Garden his tabernacle.

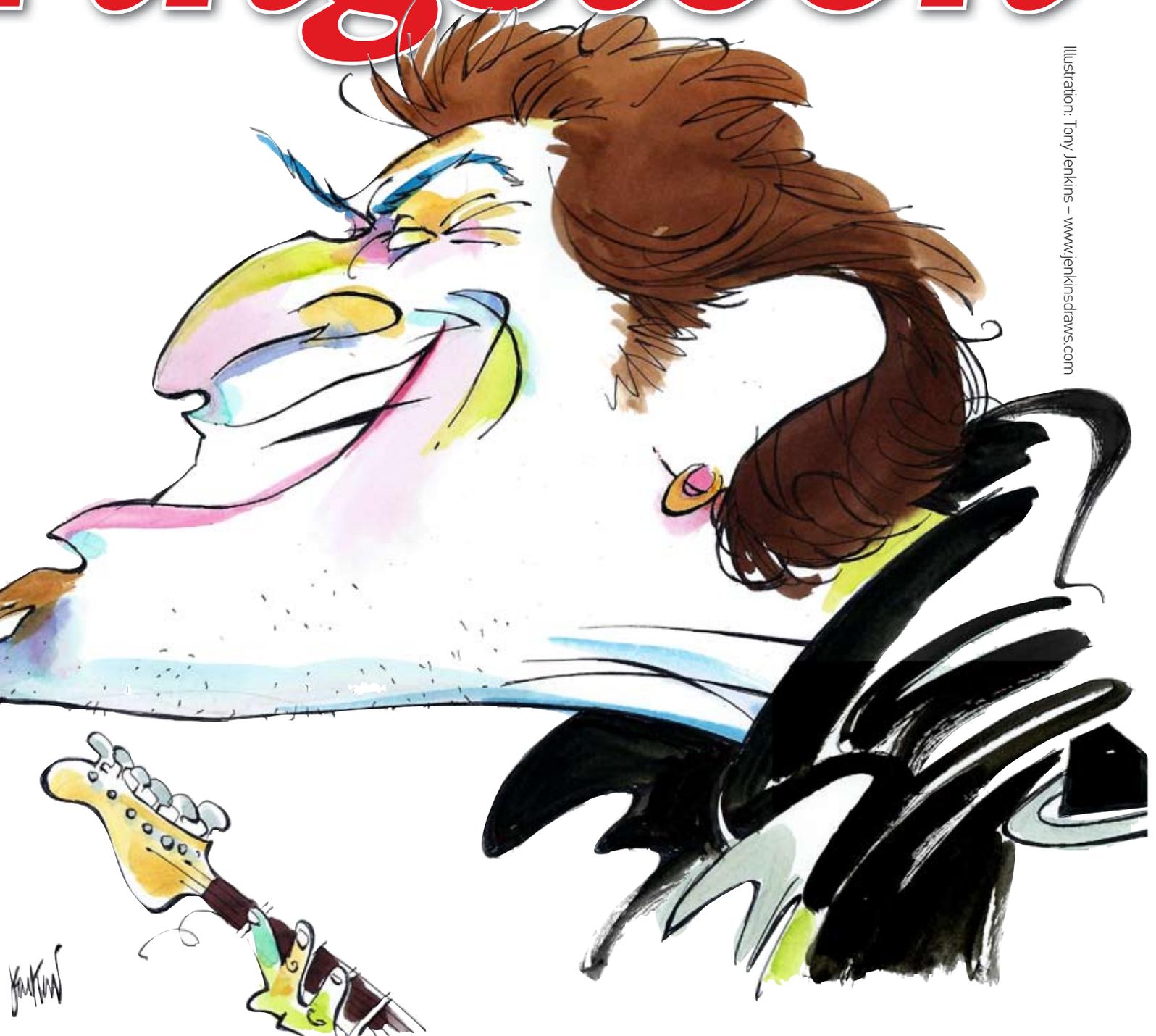
It's easy to imagine that Springsteen was just a pro rising to an occasion which includ-

ed a camera crew and a recording truck, not to mention a backstage full of peers. What's harder to explain, unless you've seen him on stage before a crowd that might not include so much as a weekly newspaper reviewer, is that the MUSE shows were just a fragment of what he usually does. "After those shows went over so great, I just figured that that's what we'd be doing on this tour," remembers E Street guitarist Steve Van Zandt. "Just 90 minutes, a couple of ballads, and make people as crazy as you can like the old days. We can do that. But not Bruce. What we ended up doing was just adding that 90-minutes to the show we always did."

By late October, when the E Streeters hit LA for four shows at the 15,000-seat Sports Arena, they were playing four-and-one-half-hour shows, five nights a week. Going on at 8.30, they'd break at 10 and return a half hour later to play until 12:45 – or 1:00 or 1:15.

ringsteen

Illustration: Tony Jenkins - www.jenkinsdraws.com



One of the most miserable summers of my existence was spent watching 15 Rolling Stones shows in 1975.

By the fifth, I was fighting to stay awake; by the 10th I'd stopped fighting

And they weren't playing the ebb-and-flow show offered by most bands who play so long. We're talking about four-hours of ensemble rock and roll here in which even the ballads are attacked more strenuously than most modal jams. Jon Landau, his manager, said one night, "I think Bruce might actually play longer, except that the band just gets worn out." True enough, drummer Max Weinberg often spends intermission taping bleeding fingers, and the others are spared such medicaments only because their instruments are less physically demanding.

Generally, Springsteen did 32 or 33 songs, including 17 or 18 from *The River*, a half dozen from *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, five from *Born to Run*, the perennial set closer *Rosalita* from *The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle* album, plus *Fire and Because the Night* from his seemingly bottomless supply of unrecorded hits. And, of course, the Mitch Ryder medley which was the highlight of the *No Nukes* LP.

But the show has that shape only on nights when Springsteen hasn't declared a special occasion, which is a rare night in itself. On Halloween, the second night in LA, he cooked up a version of *Haunted House*, the old *Jumpin' Gene* Simmons hit, at sound-check, and opened the set with it - after appearing from a coffin, and being chased around the stage by ghoul-robed roadies during the guitar break.

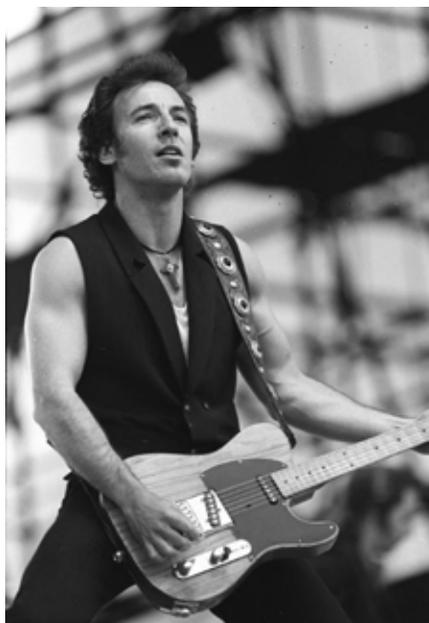
On Saturday, Bruce added an acoustic guitar and accordion version of *The Price You Pay*, and debuted *Fade Away*, the one song from *The River* he'd avoided. On Monday night, with Bob Dylan in the house for a second night (he'd come with Jim Keltner on Thursday, and been impressed), Springsteen put *The Price*

You Pay back in and dedicated it to his "inspiration." Plus a lengthy version of *Growing Up*, from his first album. On both nights, he ended the encores with Jackson Browne, dueling on *Sweet Little Sixteen*. On neither night did the inclusion of the additional songs mean the removal of any of the others.

"Yeah, but you really missed it in St Paul," said Van Zandt. "He turned around and called *Midnight Hour*, and we all just about fainted. Funky (bassist Garry Tallent) didn't even believe we were doing it until about the second chorus." The band had not rehearsed the song, and it's unlikely that the E Street Band's present lineup had ever played it before in its five years together. But even the musicians thought that it sounded great.

THE expansiveness and elasticity of Springsteen's show is a conundrum, because arena rock is in all other hands the surest route to formula. One of the most miserable summers of my existence was spent watching 15 Rolling Stones shows in 1975. By the fifth, I was fighting to stay awake; by the 10th I'd stopped fighting, a circumstance I ascribed to the band's senility until it occurred to me that no one was meant to look at more than one or maybe two of their damn fiestas.

That's rock and roll for tourists. Springsteen plays for the natives. Although he would probably put it more idealistically, he's really just never lost the consciousness of a bar band musician, who knows that a good part of the house may be seeing all three sets. And like a bar band veteran, he refuses to resort to gimmicks. Mark Brickman's lighting is the best in rock, but it's based on relatively simple theatrical gels and an authoritative sense of timing with follow spots; any funk band in the Midwest might have a more elaborate concept, but nobody with lasers achieves such an effective result. (Brickman has a computer along on this tour, but only, he told me, because



Showman: Appeared from a coffin.

“if you can figure out a way to program Bruce’s show, you can figure a way to make it work for anything.” Most nights, Brickman and soundman Bruce Jackson might as well throw their set lists away.)

But what reveals Springsteen’s bar band roots more than anything is his sense of intimacy with the crowd. One night during this tour, someone told me, he actually announced from the stage, “If the guy I met at the airport yesterday is here, please come to the stage at the break. I’ve got something for you,” which is about as close to sock hop mentality as you could ask.

At his show in Phoenix, during *Rosalita*, Bruce made one of his patented leaps to the speakers at the side of the stage. But this time he missed. The crowd just kept on cheering, but back at the sound-board where Jackson and I were sitting, the tension was thick. Bruce might do anything, but this was weird; the band was holding the chord, and the chords of *Rosalita* are not meant to be held for five seconds, much less fifteen.

It’s a good long drop from the speakers, two feet high, to the floor, a good eight or nine feet away. All there was between Bruce and the hard concrete floor was the band’s monitor mixing board, but as he tumbled down, roadie Bob Werner reached out and broke the fall. (He sprained his wrist in the process.)

Neither the band nor the crowd could see any of this. The next thing any of us knew, the guitar appeared, tossed atop the speakers. Then a pair of hands, and at last, Springsteen’s head, with his silly-faced-little-boy grin. He shook his head, pulled himself the rest of the way up, strapped on his guitar, and went back into action as if nothing had occurred.

This moment is presumably on film – there was a crew shooting a commercial that night – though from what angle I cannot say. But what that incident proclaims, more than anything, even Bruce’s sense of spontaneity, is his sense of event. The cardinal rule of his shows is that something always happens. It’s

not only, as he says in the interview below, that he’s prepared for whatever happens. Somehow, he always makes sure that something does occur. I’ve seen at least 100 shows in the past six or seven years. The worst of them was fascinating, but maybe the most awesome have been the times when, after four or five nights of hell raising action, he manages to make it different again. This guy does not know the meaning of anticlimax.

BUT there’s the bright side. There are darker ones. In Los Angeles, where ticket scalping is legal, front row seats for this extravaganza were going for \$180, \$200, \$250. And fans wrote Bruce to complain, not just that tickets were being scalped, but that the best ones were. It’s an old story, and most bands would let it slide, but Bruce took a stand. Each night in LA, he gave the crowd the name of a state legislator, and a radio station, who’d agreed to campaign to change the scalping law in California. This might qualify as a gesture – although the night after Landau got a pre-show phone call from a “ticket agent” suggesting that Bruce “do what he does, and I’ll do what I do, so why don’t he just lay off,” he made the announcement three times – but he’s also hired investigators to get to the bottom of the mess, with intentions of turning the information over to the proper authorities, if any hard evidence can be turned up.

And this reflects the spirit in which Springsteen played *MUSE*. Although he was one of only two musicians at the benefit who did not make a political statement in the concert program (the other was Tom Petty), Springsteen upstaged the issue only accidentally. He felt that particular problem to his marrow; *Roulette*, the song he wrote right after *Three Mile Island*, is the scariest piece of music he’s ever done, for my money more frightening than even the last lines of *Stolen Car*, and unmistakably based on the event. (Not to mention Del Shannon’s paranoiac *Stranger in Town*.) There is more to come.

At his show in Phoenix, during *Rosalita*, Bruce made one of his patented leaps to the speakers at the side of the stage. But this time he missed . . . All there was between Bruce and the hard concrete floor was the band’s monitor mixing board, but as he tumbled down, roadie Bob Werner reached out and broke the fall

Springsteen's career is all about naive faith. Who else could have survived The New Dylan, The Future of Rock and Roll, The Hype, The Boss? And emerged not only successful, but respected

The River itself feels like a farewell to innocence. As Springsteen notes in the interview below, the innocent characters on this album are anachronisms. Their time is gone. That guy lying by the side of the road in Wreck on the Highway is not only the guy in Cadillac Ranch and Ramrod, he is also Spanish Johnny, the original man-child hero of The Wild, the Innocent and The E Street Shuffle.

The River is, I think, Bruce Springsteen's best album for this very reason. It sums up seven years of work, and it does not shy away from the errors of his career thus far, nor does it disown them. He remains a romantic and a bit of a juvenile, after all this, for who but a romantic juvenile could conceive of a purposeless car thief as a genuine figure of tragedy? But he is also capable now of tying together his hopes and fears – the most joyous of songs are awash with brutal undercurrents.

The River wasn't the record anyone would have predicted Bruce Springsteen would make. Epics aren't anticipated (although they might be the subject of certain fervent hopes.) But if The River was unpredictable, the album that will follow it is almost unimaginable. And not only because the society that shaped Springsteen's most beloved characters and the musical tradition he cherishes is now crumbling.

Among other things, The River is a Number 1 record. Hungry Heart looks likely to be his first Top 10 single. Things change when that happens, and we have not yet seen the rock and roller who is strong enough to withstand those changes. It would be naive to expect Bruce Springsteen to be any different.

But Bruce Springsteen's career is all about naive faith. Who else could have survived The New Dylan, The Future of Rock and Roll, The Hype, The Boss? and emerged not only successful, but respected. It's easy to play cynical rock journalist and suppose the worst – no one else has exactly cruised through success – but the fact is, Bruce

Springsteen is the only human I have ever met who cannot sell out. He doesn't have a price, because the things he wants are quite literally beyond price. You don't have to believe me. Just wait and see. As Miami Steve says, "For the first time, I can really imagine rock and roll at 40."

THE interview below took place at the Fiesta Motel in Tempe, Arizona, on November 6, from about 3:30 a.m. until dawn. (The time frame is typical.) Bruce had just completed a show at Arizona State University, and in a strange way, what I'll remember about that night isn't talking with him or even the fall off the speakers, but the lines he sang just after the fall, that climactic verse of Rosalita:

*Tell your daddy this is his last chance
If he wants his daughter to have some fun
Because my brand new record, Rosie
Just came in at Number one
He won't forget, either.*

– Dave Marsh, Musician, February 1981

MARSH: Here you are, The River is a Number 1 album, the single is a hit, you're playing great shows in the biggest halls, and selling them out. In a sense, a lot of goals you must have had are now achieved. What goals are left?

SPRINGSTEEN: Doing it is the goal. It's not to play some big place, or for a record to be Number 1. Doing it is the end – not the means. That's the point. So the point is: What's next? Some more of this.

But bigness – that is no end. That, as an end, is meaningless, essentially. It's good, 'cause you can reach a lotta people, and that's the idea. The idea was just to go out and to reach people. And after tonight, you go out and you reach more people, and then the night after that, you do that again.

MARSH: One of the things that The River and also the show, its length and certain of the things you say between songs, are about is seeing more possibilities, more opportunities for things to do.



Ready for another four hours of hard rocking: Bruce Springsteen with the original E Street Band.

“There’s been a lot of instability in everybody’s life. The band’s and mine. It dates back to the very beginning, from the bars on up to even after we were successful. Then there was the lawsuit . . .”

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah. There’s an immense amount, and I’m just starting to get some idea about what I want to do. We’ve been in a situation, always, until recently, there’s been a lot of instability in everybody’s life. The band’s and mine. It dates back to the very beginning, from the bars on up to even after we were successful. Then there was the lawsuit.

And then there’s the way we work, which is: We’re slow. And in the studio, I’m slow. I take a long time. That means you spend a lotta money in the studio. Not only do you spend a lotta money, you don’t make any money, because you’re out of the stream of things. It’s like you can never get ahead, because as soon as you get ahead, you stop for two years, and you go back to where you were.

MARSH: Is that slowness as frustrating for you as it is for everybody else?

SPRINGSTEEN: I’m lucky, because I’m in there, I’m seeing it every step of the way. I would assume that if you didn’t know what was going on, and you cared about it, it would be frustrating. With me, it was not frustrating.

You know, we started to work [on the album] and I had a certain idea at the begin-

ning. And at the end, that was the idea that came out on the record. It took a very long time, all the colouring and stuff, there were a lot of decisions and songs to be written right up until the very last two weeks, when I rewrote the last two verses to Point Blank. Drive All Night was done just the week before that. Those songs didn’t exist, in the form that they’re on the record, until the last few weeks we were in the studio. So there’s stuff happening all the time. But we get into that little bit of a cycle, which hopefully we’ll be able to break – maybe, I don’t know.

MARSH: In a lot of ways, The River feels like the end of a cycle. Certain ideas that began with the second and third albums have matured, and a lot of the contrasts and contradictions have been – not resolved – but they’ve been heightened.

SPRINGSTEEN: On this album, I just said, “I don’t understand all these things. I don’t see where all these things fit. I don’t see how all these things can work together.” It was because I was always focusing in on some small thing; when I stepped back, they made a sense of their own. It was just a situation of living with all those contradictions. And that’s what happens. There’s never any resolution. You have moments of clarity, things

"Hank Williams' stuff always has that conflict, he always has that real religious side, and the honky tonkin', all that side"



Bandmates: Springsteen is flanked by his two key sidemen, Clarence Clemens and Little Steven Van Zandt.

become clear to you that you didn't understand before. But there's never any making-ends-meet or finding any time of longstanding peace-of-mind about something.

MARSH: That's like *Wreck on the Highway*, where, for the first time in your songs, you've got the nightmare and the dream in a package.

SPRINGSTEEN: That was a funny song. I wrote that song real fast, in one night. We came in and played a few takes of it, and that's pretty much what's on the album, I think. That's an automatic song, a song that you don't really think about, or work on. You just look back and it sorta surprises you.

MARSH: On this record, it also feels like you're relying a lot more on your instincts, the sort of things that happen on stage.

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, that's what happens the most to make the record different. A lot of it is real instinctive. *Hungry Heart* I wrote in a half hour, or 10 minutes, real fast. All the rockers – *Crush On You*, *You Can Look*, *Ramrod* – were all written very quickly, from what I can remember. *Wreck on the Highway* was; *Stolen Car* was. Most of the songs were, sit down and write 'em. There weren't

any songs where I worked – *Point Blank* I did, but actually those last two verses I wrote pretty quickly. *The River* took a while. I had the verses, I never had any chorus, and I didn't have a title for a long time.

MARSH: But you always had the basic arrangement?

SPRINGSTEEN: No, on that song, I had these verses, and I was fooling around with the music. What gave me the idea for the title was a Hank Williams song, I think it's *My Bucket's Got a Hole In It*, where he goes down to the river to jump in and kill himself, and he can't because it dried up. So I was just sitting there one night, thinking, and I just thought about this song, *My Bucket's Got a Hole In It*, and that's where I got the chorus. [Actually, he's referring to *Long Gone*, *Lonesome Blues* – DM]

I love that old country music. All during the last tour that's what I listened to a whole lot – I listened to Hank Williams. I went back and dug up all his first sessions, the gospel kind of stuff that he did. That and the first real Johnny Cash record with *Give My Love to Rose*, *I Walk the Line*, *Hey Porter*, *Six Foot High and Risin*, *I Don't Like It But I Guess Things Happen That Way*. That and the rockabilly.

There was a certain something in all that stuff that just seemed to fit in with things that I was thinking about, or worrying about. Especially the Hank Williams stuff. He always has all that conflict, he always has that real religious side, and the honky tonkin', all that side. There's a great song, *Settin' the Woods on Fire*. That thing is outrageous. That's *Ramrod*, that had some of that in it. And *Cadillac Ranch*.

MARSH: Earlier, you said that *Ramrod* was one of the saddest things you'd written. Why?

SPRINGSTEEN: (Laughs) Well, it's so anachronistic, you know? The character – it's impossible, what he wants to do. One of the ideas of it, when I wrote it, it was sort of like a partner to *Cadillac Ranch* and a few

things, it's got that old big engine sound. That song is a goddam gas guzzler (laughing). And that was the sound I wanted, that big, rumbling, big engine sound. And this guy, he's there, but he's really not there no more. He's the guy in Wreck on the Highway – either guy, actually. But he's also the guy, in the end, who says, "I'll give you the word, now, Sugar, we'll go ramroddin' forevermore." I don't know; that's a real sad line to me, sometimes.

MARSH: If you believe it, you mean.

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, but it's a funny kinda thing. I love it when we play that song on stage. It's just a happy song, a celebration of all that stuff that's gonna be gone – is gone already, almost.

I threw that song 10 million times off the record. Ten million times. I threw it off Darkness and I threw it off this one, too. Because I thought it was wrong.

MARSH: You mentioned something similar about *Out in the Street*, that it was too much of a fantasy to possibly believe it.

SPRINGSTEEN: I was just wary of it at that time, I guess for some of the same reasons. It always seemed anachronistic, and at the time, I was demanding of all the songs that they be able to translate. All the characters, they're part of the past, they're part of the future, and they're part of the present. And I guess there was a certain frightening aspect to seeing one that wasn't part of the future. He was part of the past.

To me, that was the conflict of that particular song. I loved it, we used to play it all the time. And there was that confusion, too. Well, if I love playing the damn thing so much, why the hell don't I want to put it on the record?

I guess I always made sure that the characters always had that foot planted up ahead somewhere. Not just the one back there. That's what makes 'em viable, or real, today. But I also knew a lotta people who were exactly like this. So I said, well, that's OK. There

was just a point where I said, that's OK, to a lot of things where I previously would not have said so.

I gained a certain freedom, in making the two-record set, because I could let all those people out, that usually I'd put away. Most of the time, they'd end up being my favourite songs, and probably some of my best songs, you know?

MARSH: You mean the kind of songs that would show up on stage, but not on record? [*Fire, Because the Night, Sherry Darling*]

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah. I'm the kind of person, I think a lot about everything. Nothin' I can do about it. It's like, I'm a thinkin' fool. That's a big part of me. Now, the other part is, I can get on stage and cut that off and be superinstinctive. To be a good live performer, you have to be instinctive. It's like, to walk in the jungle, or to do anything where there's a certain tight-rope wire aspect you need to be instinctive. And you have to be comfortable at it also.

Like tonight, I was falling on my head. I wasn't worryin' about it. I just went: it just happened. (Laughs.) You just think, what happens next? When I was gonna jump on that speaker, I couldn't worry about whether I was gonna make it or not. You can't. You just gotta do it. And if you do, you do, and if you don't, you don't, and then something else happens. That's the point of the live performance.

Now, when I get into the studio, both things operate. When we perform on this record, I feel that we have that thing going that we've got live. To me, we're not rockin' that stuff better live than a lot of it is on the record. I can still listen to it. Usually, two weeks after we're out on the road, I cannot listen to my record any more. 'Cause as soon as I hear some crappy tape off the board, it sounds 10 times better than what we spent all that time doing in the studio. This is the very first album that I've been able to go back and put on to play, and it sounds good to me.

But in the studio, I'm conceptual. I have

"When I was gonna jump on that speaker, I couldn't worry about whether I was gonna make it or not. You can't. You just gotta do it. And if you do, you do, and if you don't, you don't, and then something else happens. That's the point of the live performance"

"Where is Hank Mizell? What happened to him? What a mysterious person; what a ghost: And you put that thing on, and you can see him. You can see him standing in some little studio, way back when, and just singing that song. No reason. Nothing gonna come out of it. Didn't sell. That wasn't a No. 1 record, and he wasn't playin' a big arena after it, either"

a self-consciousness. And there's a point where I often would try to stop that. "No, that's bad. Look at all these great records, and I betcha they didn't think about it like this, or think about it this long." You realize that it doesn't matter. That's unimportant; it's ridiculous. I got into a situation where I just said, "Hey, this is what I do, and these are my assets, and these are my burdens." I got comfortable with myself being that kind of person.

MARSH: But only after going to extremes. Darkness is the least spontaneous of your records.

SPRINGSTEEN: That's right. And it's funny because Darkness on the Edge of Town, that cut is live in the studio. Streets of Fire is live in the studio, essentially. Factory is live. It's not a question of how you actually do it. The idea is to sound spontaneous, not be spontaneous.

So at this point, I just got settled into accepting certain things that I've always been uncomfortable with. I stopped setting limits and definitions – which I always threw out anyway, but which I'd always feel guilty about. Spending a long time in the studio, I stopped feeling bad about that. I said, that's me, that's what I do. I work slow, and I work slow for a reason: To get the results that I want.

When you try to define what makes a good rock-and-roll record, or what is rock and roll, everyone has their own personal definition. But when you put limits on it, you're just throwing stuff away.

MARSH: Isn't one of your definitions that it's limitless?

SPRINGSTEEN: I think it is. That's my definition, I guess. Hey, you can go out in the street and do the twist, and that's rock-and-roll. It's the moment, it's all things. (Laughs.) It's funny, to me, it just is.

You know, my music utilizes things from the past, because that's what the past is for. It's to learn from. It's not to limit you, you shouldn't be limited by it, which I guess was

one of my fears on Ramrod. I don't want to make a record like they made in the '50s or the '60s or the '70s. I want to make a record like today, that's right now.

To do that, I go back, back further all the time. Back into Hank Williams, back into Jimmy Rodgers. Because the human thing in those records, that should be at least the heart of it. The human thing that's in those records is just beautiful and awesome. I put on that Hank Williams and Jimmy Rodgers stuff, and wow! What inspiration! It's got that beauty and the purity. The same thing with a lot of the great '50s records, and the early rockabilly. I went back and dug up all the early rockabilly stuff because . . . what mysterious people they were.

There's this song, Jungle Rock by Hank Mizell. Where is Hank Mizell? What happened to him? What a mysterious person; what a ghost. And you put that thing on and you can see him. You can see him standing in some little studio, way back when, and just singing that song. No reason. (Laughs) Nothing gonna come out of it. Didn't sell. That wasn't a No. 1 record, and he wasn't playin' a big arena after it, either.

But what a moment, what a mythic moment, what a mystery. Those records are filled with mystery; they're shrouded with mystery. Like these wild men came out from somewhere, and man, they were so alive. The joy and the abandon. Inspirational, inspirational records, those records.

MARSH: You mentioned earlier that when you went into the arenas that you were worried about losing certain things.

SPRINGSTEEN: I was afraid maybe it would screw up the range of artistic expression that the band had. Because of the lack of silence. A couple things happened. Number 1, it's a rock-and-roll show. People are gonna scream their heads off whenever they feel like it. That's fine – happens in theatres, happens in clubs. (Laughs.) Doesn't matter where the hell it is, happens every place, and that's part of it, you know.

On this tour, it's been really amazing, because we've been doing all those real quiet songs. And we've been able to do 'em. And then we've been able to rock real hard and get that thing happening from the audience. I think part of the difference is that the demands that are made on the audience now are much heavier, much heavier on the audience that sees us now than on the last tour.

But the moment you begin to depend on audience reaction, you're doing the wrong thing. You're doin' it wrong; it's a mistake; it's not right. You can't allow yourself, no matter what, to depend on them. I put that mike out to the crowd, you have a certain faith that somebody's gonna yell somethin' back. Some nights it's louder than other nights, and some nights they do, and on some songs they don't. But that's the idea. I think when you begin to expect a reaction, it's a mistake. You gotta have your thing completely together – boom! Right there with you. That's what makes nights special and what makes nights different from other nights.

MARSH: On the other hand, the only way to do a really perfect show is to involve that audience. Maybe an audience only gets lazy if the performer doesn't somehow keep it on its toes.

SPRINGSTEEN: I'm out there for a good time and to be inspired at night, and to play with my band and to rock those songs as hard as we can rock 'em. I think that you can have some of the best nights under the very roughest conditions. A lotta times, at Max's or some of the clubs down in Jersey, they'd be sittin' on their hands or nobody wants to dance, and the adversity is a positive motivation.

The only concern is that what's being done is being done the way it should be done. The rest you don't have control over. But I think that our audience is the best audience in the world. The amount of freedom that I get from the crowd is really a lot.

MARSH: The way the stage show is organized



First album: Springsteen checks out *Greetings from Asbury Park, NJ*.

is that the first half is about work and struggling; the second half is about joy, release, transcending a lot of those things in the first half. Is that conscious?

SPRINGSTEEN: I knew that I wanted a certain feeling for the first set. That's sorta the way it stacks up.

MARSH: What you rarely get a sense of around rock bands is work, especially rock and roll as a job of work. Yet around this band, you can't miss it.

SPRINGSTEEN: That's at the heart of the whole thing. There's a beauty in work, and I love it, all different kinds of work. That's what I consider it. This is my job, and that's my work. And I work my ass off, you know.

MARSH: In Los Angeles one night, when you introduced *Factory*, you made a distinction between two different kinds of work. Do you remember what it was?

SPRINGSTEEN: There's people that get a chance to do the kind of work that changes the world, and makes things different. Then there's the kind that just keeps the world from falling apart. And that was the kind that my dad always did. Cause we were always together as a family, and we grew up in a . . . good situation, where we had what we needed. And there was a lot of sacrifice on his part and my mother's part for that to happen . . .

MARSH: The River has a lot of those sorts of

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"How many times in the Watergate thing did people say about Nixon, 'Well, he just wasn't smart enough to get away with it.' Like his only mistake was that he didn't get away with it. And there's a certain point where people have become cynical – where the hustle, that's the American way"

workers – the people in Jackson Cage, the guy in The River itself.

SPRINGSTEEN: I never knew anybody who was unhappy with their job and was happy with their life. It's your sense of purpose. Now, some people can find it elsewhere. Some people can work a job and find it some place else.

MARSH: Like the character in Racing in the Street?

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah. But I don't know if that's lasting. But people do, they find ways.

MARSH: Or else . . . ?

SPRINGSTEEN: (Long pause) Or else they join the Ku Klux Klan or something. That's where it can take you, you know. It can take you a lot of strange places.

MARSH: Introducing Factory on a different night, you spoke about your father having been real angry, and then, after a while, not being angry anymore. "He was just silent." Are you still angry?

SPRINGSTEEN: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if I know myself that well. I think I know myself a lot but I'm not sure. (Laughs.) It's impossible not to be [angry] when you see the state of things and look around. You have to be, somewhat.

MARSH: Tonight, you were saying on stage that you found the election terrifying. That seems to go hand in hand with playing the MUSE benefits, and striking back at ticket scalpers in LA. You wouldn't have done those things two years ago, I don't think. Are you finding social outlets for that anger now?

SPRINGSTEEN: That's true. It's just a whole values thing. Take the ticket thing. It's a hustle. And a hustle has become . . . respected. In a lot of quarters – on a street level, dope pushers – it's a respectable thing, to hustle somebody. I mean, how many times in the Watergate thing did people say about Nixon, "Well, he just wasn't smart enough to get away with it." Like his only mistake was that he didn't get away with it. And there's a certain point where people have become cyni-

cal - where the hustle, that's the American way. I think it's just turned upside down in a real bad way. I think it should lose its respect.

MARSH: Do you feel that way about nuclear energy?

SPRINGSTEEN: It's just the whole thing, it's the whole thing. It's terrible, it's horrible. Somewhere along the way, the idea, which I think was initially to get some fair transaction between people, went out the window. And what came in was, the most you can get. (Laughs.) The most you can get and the least you can give. That's why cars are the way they are today. It's just an erosion of all the things that were true and right about the original idea.

MARSH: But that isn't something that was on your mind much until the Darkness album?

SPRINGSTEEN: Up to then, I didn't think about too many things. In Greetings from Asbury Park, I did. And then I went off a little bit, and sort of roundabout came back to it.

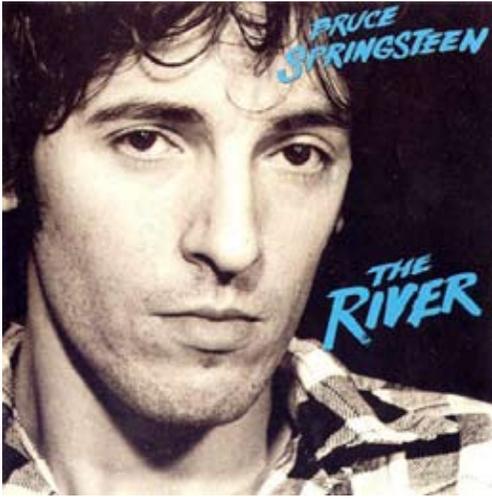
I guess it just started after Born to Run somehow. I had all that time off, and I spent a lotta time home. We were off for three years, and home for a long time. It came out of a local kind of thing – what my old friends were doing, what my relatives were doing. How things were affecting them, and what their lives were like. And what my life was like.

MARSH: Did you have a sense that no one else was telling that story?

SPRINGSTEEN: I didn't see it too much, except in the English stuff. Things were being addressed that way in that stuff.

MARSH: You mean, for instance, the Clash?

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, all that kinda stuff. I liked it, I always liked that stuff. But there wasn't too much stuff in America happening. It just seemed to me that's the story. But there was a crucial level of things missing,



Revived: The 2016 tour is based on songs from *The River* album.

and it is today still. Maybe it's just me getting older and seeing things more as they are.

MARSH: On *Darkness*, the character's response is to isolate himself from any community, and try to beat the system on his own. The various characters on *The River* are much more living in the mainstream of society.

SPRINGSTEEN: That guy at the end of *Darkness* has reached a point where you just have to strip yourself of everything, to get yourself together. For a minute, sometimes, you just have to get rid of everything, just to get yourself together inside, be able to push everything away. And I think that's what happened at the end of the record. And then there was the thing where the guy comes back.

MARSH: And *The River* is what he sees?

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, these are his feelings, it's pretty much there, and in the shows, it's there now, too, I guess. I hate to get too literal about it, because I can never explain it as well as when I wrote about it. I hate to limit it. I look back at *Darkness* or the other records, and there were other things going on that I never knew were going on.

MARSH: Do you like *Born to Run* and *Darkness* better now?

SPRINGSTEEN: Not particularly. On *Darkness*, I like the ideas, I'm not crazy about the performances. We play all those songs 10 times better live. But I like the idea. *Born to Run*, I like the performances and the sound. Sometimes, it sounds funny.

MARSH: Young and innocent?

SPRINGSTEEN: Yeah, yeah. Same thing with *The Wild* and the *Innocent*. I have a hard time listening to any of those records. Certain things on each record I can listen to: *Racing in the Street*, *Backstreets*, *Prove It All Night*, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*. But not a lot, because either the performance doesn't sound right to me, or the ideas sound like a long time ago.

MARSH: Do you remember when you threw the birthday cake into the crowd, at the second *MUSE* concert?

SPRINGSTEEN: (Laughs.) Oh yeah. That was a wild night.

MARSH: You'd just turned 30 that night, and didn't seem to be overjoyed by it. But a couple of weeks ago in Cleveland, I was kidding Danny about turning 30, and said, "Oh yeah, we're 30 now, can't do what we used to do." You said, real quick, "That's not true." What happened in that year? Was that significant, turning 30?

SPRINGSTEEN: I don't remember. It just made me wanna do more things. I think, as a matter of fact, when we were in the studio, that was the thing that was big. I didn't feel we were going too slow for what we were doing. But I felt that I wanted to be quicker just to have more time. I wanted to be touring, for one thing. I wanted to be touring right now.

MARSH: But by the time you finish this tour, you'll be crowding 32. Then, if you're right and it's just gonna take a year or so to make a record, you'll be 33 or 34 by the time you get out again. Can you still have the stamina to do the kind of show you feel the need to do?

SPRINGSTEEN: Who knows? I'm sure it'll be

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"In Denver, I went to the movies by myself. This guy comes up to me, real nice guy. He says, 'Listen, you want to sit with me and my sister?' I said, 'All right'

a different type of show. It's impossible to tell and a waste of time guessin'. When I was in the studio and wanted to play, it wasn't the way I felt in a physical kind of way, it was what I felt mentally. I was excited about the record, and I wanted to play those songs live. I wanted to get out there and travel around the world with people who were my friends. And see every place and play just as hard as we could play, every place in the world. Just get into things, see things, see what happens.

MARSH: Like in Badlands?

SPRINGSTEEN: That's it. That's the idea. I want to see what happens, what's next. All I knew when I was in the studio, sometimes, was that I felt great that day. And I was wishing I was somewhere strange, playing. I guess that's the thing I love doing the most. And it's the thing that makes me feel most alert and alive.

MARSH: You look awful before a show, and then those hours up there, which exhaust everyone else, refresh you.

SPRINGSTEEN: I always look terrible before the show. That's when I feel worst. And after the show it's like a million bucks. Simple as that. You feel a little tired but you never feel better. Nothing makes me feel as good as those hours between when you walk off-stage, until I go to bed. Those are the hours that I live for. As feelings go, that's 10 on a scale of 10n. I just feel like talking to people, going out back and meeting those kids, doing any damn thing. Most times I just come back and eat and lay down and feel good. Most people, I don't think, get to feel that good, doing whatever they do.

MARSH: You can't get that in the studio?

SPRINGSTEEN: Sometimes, but it's different. You get wired for two or three days or a week or so and then sometimes, you feel real low. I never feel as low, playing, as I do in the studio.

You know, I just knew that's what I want-

ed to do - go all over and play. See people and go all over the world. I want to see what all those people are like. I want to meet people from all different countries and stuff.

MARSH: You've always liked to have a certain mobility, a certain freedom of movement. Can you still walk down the street?

SPRINGSTEEN: Oh sure, sure. It depends where you go. Usually . . . you can do anything you want to do. The idea that you can't walk down the street is in people's minds. You can walk down any street, any time. What are you gonna be afraid of, someone coming up to you? In general, it's not that different than it ever was, except you meet people you ordinarily might not meet - you meet some strangers, and you talk to 'em for a little while.

The other night I went out, I went driving, we were in Denver. Got a car and went out, drove all around. Went to the movies by myself, walked in, got my popcorn. This guy comes up to me, real nice guy. He says, "Listen, you want to sit with me and my sister?" I said, "All right." So we watch the movie. (Laughs.) It was great, too, because it was that Woody Allen movie - [Stardust Memories], the guy's slammin' to his fans. And I'm sittin' there and this poor kid says, "Jesus, I don't know what to say to ya. Is this the way it is? Is that how you feel?" I said, "No, I don't feel like that so much." And he had the amazing courage to come up to me at the end of the movie, and ask if I'd go home and meet his mother and father. I said, "What time is it?" It was 11 o'clock, so I said, "Well OK."

So I go home with him; he lives out in some suburb. So we get over to the house and here's his mother and father, laying out on the couch, watching TV and reading the paper. He brings me in and he says, "Hey I got Bruce Springsteen here." And they don't believe him. So he pulls me over, and he says, "This is Bruce Springsteen." "Aw, g'wan," they say. So he runs in his room and brings out an album, and he holds it up to

my face. And his mother says (breathlessly) “Ohhh yeah!” She starts yelling “Yeah,” she starts screaming.

And for two hours I was in this kid’s house, talking with these people, they were really nice, they cooked me up all this food, and the guy gave me a ride home a few hours later.

I felt so good that night. Because here are these strange people I didn’t know, they take you in their house, treat you fantastic, and this kid was real nice, they were real nice. That is something that can happen to me that can’t happen to most people And when it does happen, it’s fantastic. You get somebody’s whole life in three hours. You get their parents; you get their sister; you get their family life, in three hours. And I went back to that hotel and felt really good because I thought, “Wow (almost whispering), what a thing to be able to do. What an experience to be able to have, to be able to step into some stranger’s life.”

And that’s what I thought about in the studio. I thought about going out and meeting people I don’t know. Going to France and Germany and Japan, and meeting Japanese people and French people and German people. Meeting them and seeing what they think, and being able to go over there with something. To go over there with a pocketful of ideas or to go over there with just something, to be able to take something over. And boom! To do it. But you can’t do one without the other. I couldn’t do it if I hadn’t spent time in the studio, knowing what I saw and what I felt right now.

MARSH: Because then you wouldn’t have that pocketful of ideas?

SPRINGSTEEN: Then, if you don’t have that, stay home or something. If you have some ideas to exchange, that’s what it’s about. That’s at the heart of it. I just wouldn’t go out and tour unless I had that. There wouldn’t be a reason.

The reason is you have some idea you wanna say. You have an idea about things,

an opinion, a feeling about the way things are or the way things could be. You wanna go out and tell people about it. You wanna tell people, well, if everybody did this or if people thought this, maybe it would be better.

When we play the long show, that’s because it gives the whole picture. And if you aren’t given the whole picture, you’re not gonna get the whole picture. We play the first part . . . that first part is about those things that you said it was about. That’s the foundation; without that the rest couldn’t happen. Wouldn’t be no second half without the first half; couldn’t be all them other things, without those things. Without that foundation of the hard things, and the struggling things, the work things. That’s the heart; that’s what it comes down to.

And then on top of that, there’s the living, the things that surround that. That’s why the show’s so long. “You wanna leave out Stolen Car? No, that’s a little part of the puzzle. “You wanna leave this out?” No that’s a little part of the puzzle. And at the end, if you want, you can look back and see . . . just a point of view really. You see somebody’s idea, the way somebody sees things. And you know somebody.

People go to that show, they know me. They know a lotta me, as much as I know that part of myself. That’s why, when I meet ’em on the street, they know you already. And you know them, too. Because of their response.

MARSH: Even these days, it’s still not very far from the dressing room to the stage for you, is it?

SPRINGSTEEN: I don’t know if it is. I don’t know if it should be. I don’t know for sure how different the thing is or how it’s perceived. Except a lot of the music is real idealistic, and I guess like anybody else, you don’t live up to it all the time. You just don’t. That’s the challenge. You got to walk it like you talk it. That’s the idea. That’s the line. I guess that’s pretty much what it’s about. **CT**

“When we play the long show, that’s because it gives the whole picture. And if you aren’t given the whole picture, you’re not gonna get the whole picture”

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Dave Marsh is the author of many books on music, including the classic, *Born To Run, The Bruce Springsteen Story*. He blogs at www.rockrap.com

The long road to Thatcher's funeral . . .



Déjà vu: Police line the London streets waiting for violent protesters at Margaret Thatcher's funeral in 2013.

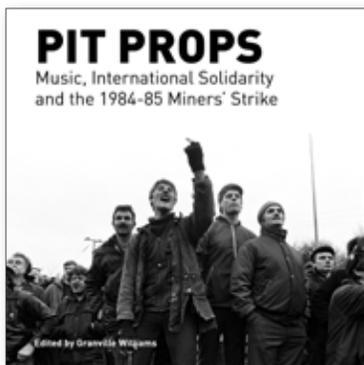
In this edited excerpt from the book, *Pit Props: Music, International Solidarity and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike*, **Peter Dunwell** tells how his life was affected by the rule of Margaret Thatcher, why he travelled to London to photograph her funeral in 2013, and why he hates her home town, Grantham



Waste of cash: Policewoman has a quiet word as demonstrators lining the route of Thatcher's funeral protest the huge cost of her state funeral.



Last respects? Police face protestors lined up awaiting Margaret Thatcher's funeral cortège.



From *Pit Props: Music, International Solidarity and the 1984-85 Miners' Strike*

WAS the youngest of seven children, raised in a village close to the once-mighty fishing port of Grimsby, in North East Lincolnshire, in England. Our village was dominated by the A18, one of only two roads out of the county: the A46 headed south to Lincoln, while the A18 went west past the steelworks of Scunthorpe on to the South Yorkshire coalfields around Doncaster.

On May 3, 1979, as my school-leaving exams were drawing to a close, I heard that the Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher, another Lincolnshire native, born in Grantham, had ousted James Callaghan's Labour Party in a narrow general election victory. The result didn't register until I received a letter from college saying that, due to funding cuts introduced by the new government, I would be unable to attend the apprentice course for which I had been selected. A second letter, from the electrical company for which I was about to start work, told me they could no longer offer me an apprenticeship as their funding had also been slashed.

I spent the next three years on youth training schemes, mostly sweeping floors and making tea for my workmates, as Thatcher's gang



Police state: Armed police, guns at the ready, get ready for any disturbance at the Iron Lady's funeral.



wreaked havoc on the country's working class.

By the time I was 18, I had been thoroughly politicized, angry at the callous way workers were being treated by a prime minister who had claimed in an interview in 1987, that, "There's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours."

She meant it, too. One of her first actions as prime minister was to sell off council houses, which prevented many young couples from starting married life, as their parents had done, in subsidized rented

One of Thatcher's first actions as prime minister was to sell off council houses, which prevented many young couples from starting married life, as their parents had done, in subsidized rented accommodation in their own communities



Putting the boot in: A not-so-gentle reminder of the harsh treatment that striking miners received.

I wanted my photographs from her funeral to recreate the feeling of the strike, with its overwhelming and intimidating police presence. I wanted to capture the spirit of the images I didn't get in the 1980s

accommodation in their own communities.

ALWAYS a keen photographer, I regretted missing the opportunity to take my camera to the South Yorkshire coalfields when the 1984 miners' strike began. I didn't even photograph the masses of police housed at the Beachcomber Holiday Park in the seaside resort of Cleethorpes that adjoined Grimsby, waiting to be shipped out to face the strikers.

So, more than 30 years later, I decided to attend the state funeral of the 87-year-old Baroness Thatcher, at St Paul's Cathedral on April 17, 2013. I wasn't angry any more, but I wanted to join other protesters who were going to turn their backs on the politician

who had turned her back on British society so many times in the past.

I also wanted my photographs from her funeral to recreate the feeling of the strike, with its overwhelming and intimidating police presence. I wanted to capture the spirit of the images I didn't get in the 1980s.

WHENEVER I travel to London, my train passes through Grantham, Thatcher's birthplace. I always take a photo of the tall tower of the town's St Waltham's Church from the train window to remind me of her, and the sins of her government. This is my peaceful protest. I know I should visit the church and exorcise her ghost . . . but I'm not yet ready



Trappings of power: This is what £10-million buys – lots of men in uniforms, big horses and powerful guns.



Because of her actions so many years ago, I despise Thatcher's home town of Grantham, and the tall tower of St Waltham's Church that failed to reach out and teach her honesty and compassion

Home and away:
The uniforms march dutifully to St Paul's Cathedral, where the hearse carrying the Iron Lady will end its tour of the London streets. Below is the Ritz Hotel, where the 87-year-old Thatcher lived in the years before she died



Now you can visit Grantham's museum and admire Thatcher's old bed and her schoolgirl hockey stick

to do that. Nor am I ready to visit the town's museum – re-opened after being closed a few years ago because of another Tory government's funding cuts – which has many exhibits relating to the former prime minister, including her old bed, handbag, blue suit and schoolgirl hockey stick.

Hockey stick? My mind boggles. **CT**

Peter Dunwell is a photographer who specialises in the music industry. His web site is www.peterdunwell.co.uk





I was shot down by Frank Sinatra

Remember when newspapers were fun to read? If you're under 50, the answer is almost certainly, "No." One reason why papers were once so much better is this: Guys like Baltimore freelance writer **Tom Nugent**, who tells of the day he asked a singing legend some interesting questions



From
NineOnTen
Issue 4
2003

WE WERE strolling along a ramp at the Long Island Coliseum – Frank Sinatra and I – when all at once the famous crooner began to bellow angrily, “Hey! Hey! Who is this guy? Who is this guy?”

As if by magic, three huge men suddenly appeared at my elbow. Their coats bulged with obvious guns, and they did not look happy to see me.

I did my best to ignore them.

“Mr Sinatra,” I said, pressing ahead with my newspaper interview, “you’ve always been a strong supporter of Ronald Reagan . . .”

“Who is this guy?”

“In the wake of the Grenada invasion,” I said, “I wonder if you could tell us . . .”

But now the gunmen were upon me.

It was pretty clear that they didn’t want me to interview Mr Sinatra anymore.

“Right this way, sir . . .”

They began to bump me with their large, padded shoulders.

A doorway opened on the right side of the ramp – more magic . . . and within a few seconds, the gunmen were “bumping” me through it.

Sinatra glared back at me for a moment.

“I didn’t come here,” barked Ol’ Blue Eyes, “to talk politics with you!”

A moment later, the door slammed shut. Now I stood in a patch of dripping weeds. Rain fell on my face.

I had just been booted out of the Long Island Coliseum.

End of interview.

Everybody knew that you couldn’t interview Frank Sinatra. He hated reporters, because they kept trying to ask him questions about his alleged “underworld connections,” and about his interesting relationships with such unsavoury figures as former Maryland governor and US vice president Spiro T. Agnew, a convicted criminal.

But I tried. I did.

It happened back in the spring of 1984. I was working as a feature writer at the Washington Times – having recently resigned from a similar post at the “Whore of Babylon” (the Baltimore Sun), where the daily, cringing censorship of any news that didn’t protect the “Baltimore Establishment” had become unbearable.

Anyway, Sinatra was coming to Washington to receive some sort of grotesque “national citizenship award” at the Kennedy Center.



Everybody knew that you couldn't interview Frank Sinatra. He hated reporters, because they keep trying to ask him questions about his alleged "underworld connections," and about his interesting relationships with such unsavoury figures as former Maryland governor and US vice president Spiro T. Agnew, a convicted criminal

Illustration: Rui Ramalheiro

The editors at the Times wanted to "profile" the fabled crooner, and then run the piece on the day of the award.

"You'll have to write the profile from clips," the feature editor told me, "since Sinatra doesn't give interviews."

"Let me try," I said.

"You'll only get shot down."

"Let me try!"

The editor frowned, blinked, and scratched his head.

"Go for it," he said.

Is there any joy like the joy of getting "shot down" on an interview, and then get-

ting booted out into a rainstorm?

After 20 years of writing features for newspapers and magazines all across America, I've become addicted to the "adrenalin rush" that takes place whenever you try for an impossible interview.

I also love the "rush" that begins the moment you ask a real question (as opposed to a horseshit "PR question") of a major celebrity.

I can't forget the immense joy, for example, of asking Henry Kissinger (back in the late 1970's) why he secretly bombed Cambodia for 18 months, at the height of the Viet-

Most of the men in the room were bald, with pencil-thin moustaches – they looked like they all ran major car-crushing operations in Bayonne . . . There were also at least a dozen beautiful blonde women milling around Sinatra, and every one of those beauties was at least six inches taller than I was

nam War. (His answer: “Dere . . . dere vass no secret bombink of Cambodia – and your kahvestion shows disrespect!”)

I can’t forget the joy of asking former president Gerald Ford, back in early 1980, if Ronald Reagan, given his “apparent intellectual limitations,” was “smart enough to be president.”

(His answer: “Well, he’s no Phi Beta Kappa . . . but I think he’s smart enough to get the job done.”)

And I can’t forget the huge thrill of asking that famed and magnificently moustachioed Watergate burglar, G. Gordon Liddy, why he had broken the law for Richard Nixon.

(His answer, after insisting that he’d done the deed for “national security,” and warning that the Soviets were intent on takeover: “It’s not Charlie the Tuna out there in that water, pal – it’s Jaws!”)

THE first thing I did, after deciding to interview Sinatra, was to call the PR guy at the Long Island Coliseum. (Ol’ Blue Eyes, as it turned out, would be performing at the Coliseum that very evening, and the joint was sold out.)

The PR guy sounded a little uptight on the phone. Surprisingly, however, he told me that if I showed up, he’d try to help me get an interview with Ol’ Blue Eyes.

“If he’s in a good mood, I might be able to get you 10 minutes, right before the show.”

Ten minutes with Ol’ Blue Eyes?

That was all I needed to hear.

I grabbed a tape recorder and notebook and ran for Penn Station.

Arriving in New York City, I took a commuter train to Long Island, and then had to catch two different buses to reach the Coliseum.

It was raining like hell. Soaked, I fought my way across swamped Long Island potato fields to the giant steel doughnut – the Coliseum – which serves as headquarters for the Islanders pro hockey team. The arena was already packed; 20,000 matrons from New

Jersey were already screaming and wetting themselves in their \$25 seats.

Head down, teeth bared, I fought my way to the PR office, and picked up a “pass” that would admit me into the bowels of the arena.

But when I reached the PR guy’s office, I found him cowering behind his desk.

“Sorry!” he snapped, the moment I introduced myself. “But you can’t interview him – he’s cranky!”

My face fell. “I just came all the way from Baltimore . . .”

“Nothing I can do,” he cut me off, with gathering panic visible in his eyes. “Don’t you understand, he’s cranky?”

“Where is he now?”

The PR guy rose to his feet.

“He’s right down the hall, at a champagne reception. But you can’t go in there . . . I tell you, he’s cranky!”

“I’m going to give it a try,” I said. Then I turned away and headed for the reception.

“No!” The PR guy ran out from behind the desk. His face was white as chalk. His eyes swam with terror. “You can’t! Forget it! Cranky!”

I was already walking down the hallway . . . past the pro hockey locker room . . . all the way to a banquet room marked: SINA-TRA RECEPTION.

The door was open. I could see Ol’ Blue Eyes standing at the head of a champagne-laden table, greeting a line of important people who moved slowly past him. Most of the men in the room were bald, with pencil-thin moustaches – they looked like they all ran major car-crushing operations in Bayonne.

There were also at least a dozen beautiful blonde women milling around Sinatra . . . and every one of those beauties was at least six inches taller than I was.

I gulped with fear. Adrenalin!

I had reached the secret heart of the American Dream – the place where they kept the money, and the guns, and the good Scotch whisky, and the taller women.

The reception was breaking up!

My guts roiled with stark, animal fear.

Then a thunderous drum roll, somewhere far above my head, announced that they were beginning to introduce Frankie.

Hovering at my elbow, the PR guy moaned with terror. His job was on the line, and he knew it. “You can’t do this! I can’t let you do this! Don’t you realize . . .”

But it was too late.

The Sinatra entourage was upon us.

Without hesitating, I fell into step beside him. “Mr Sinatra,” I said brightly, “I want to be the first to welcome you to Washington, next week, for your award at the Kennedy Center!”

He glared at me suspiciously, but shook my hand. Together, we began walking down the hallway toward the ramp that would take him out to the arena, where the 20,000 New Jersey matrons were at that moment going insane.

I began to ask him my question about President Reagan. Sinatra, after all, was a lifelong pal of the president, and the two of them had often been seen together. Only a few years before, in fact, they had been photographed at a posh wedding . . . along with a man described by the newspapers as a “major organized crime figure” from California.

So, quite naturally, I wanted to ask Sinatra all about the president, and all about Grenada, and all about the alleged mobster, and all about the frequent rumours that the US White House and the US Congress and most

of the US government were, in fact, controlled by ruthless gangsters . . .

But then Ol’ Blue Eyes began to bellow. “Who is this guy?”

We were on the ramp now – Sinatra and I – headed toward the giant, weaving spotlights up ahead.

The Coliseum shook with thunder, as the 20,000 New Jersey matrons reached showbiz orgasm, and then the announcer roared:

AND NOW . . . THE MAN YOU’VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR . . . OL’ BLUE EYES!

But at that moment the gunmen arrived, the door slammed open, and I was suddenly standing in a patch of weeds, with rain falling in my face . . .

It took me three hours – and two more buses – to fight my way back to New York City. Soaked to the skin again, I finally managed to rent a hotel room, where I could sit down and “transcribe” my notes.

Those notes, I soon discovered, consisted of two sentences.

“Who is this guy?”

“I didn’t come here to talk politics with you!”

But I felt terrific!

It was brief . . . there was no denying that. But the fact remained: I had gotten an interview! I had Frank Sinatra on tape!

Was there any joy like it? **CT**

.....
Tom Nugent publishes the *Inside Baltimore* blog at www.insidebaltimore.org

The Coliseum shook with thunder, as the 20,000 New Jersey matrons reached showbiz orgasm . . . At that moment the gunmen arrived, the door slammed open, and I was suddenly standing in a patch of weeds, with rain falling in my face

Read back copies of NineOnTen

Writing Worth Reading about Journalists and Journalism . . . Read all back copies at

<http://coldtype.net/Section4a.html>



Dicing with death on the New River

There are things normal people just don't do. Charging down a flooded river on a home-made raft – into giant whirlpools and fearsome rapids is one of them. Especially with your wife-to-be and your sister on board. That's what **Barry Tuscano** did.



From ColdType (tabloid version) Issue 4 (1996)

I HAVE told this story many times before, but it still makes a great party tale. But I do have a little bit of a problem relaying it. The big challenge lies in telling it without looking stupid. Knowing what I now know, or even what the most basic whitewater novice knows today, it's incredible that "it" happened. But you gotta understand that "this" was way back in the old days.

I began my whitewater career in 1971 on the Youghiogheny River in Pennsylvania. Riding the rapids in a little raft was an instant hit with me. Riding them outside the raft was even better.

My friends and I never attempted to learn anything about moving water. We thought the only way to approach a rapid was full speed ahead, right down the middle.

Our raft trips involved more swimming than paddling, and we didn't have the foggiest notion what a hole or an eddy was. If the raft flipped, that was fun, and it made the day more memorable. You have to remember that there was no one else on the river to learn from, not that anyone could have taught us anything.

In 1973 I was introduced to the Pittsburgh Explorers Club. This was, in those days, a social organization that regularly scheduled outdoor activities such as rock climbing, parachuting and whitewater rafting.



The activities offered an excuse for going to exotic locations to drink. The activities were always strenuous, but the parties afterward were real killers.

Explorers Club members were undertaking some monumental expeditions and always had great stories to tell. In reality, most were in way over their heads. I fitted right in with their rafting program, which ran trips to the New and Gauley rivers.

That first run on the Gauley still lives in club lore. Some of us had shown up late and had to take our little Sears raft. The older members had all secured spots in the club's big rafts. The club has a slide of us upside down and airborne at Pillow Rock that is still shown at Christmas parties. We swam every rapid on the Gauley that day.

For the next couple of years we made trips to the New River two or three times per summer. We owned two Sears specials – \$99 on sale – horse collar life jackets and wooden canoe paddles. We camped at Fayette Station, where our night-time activities became legendary.

Once, our party was bigger than we could fit into the rafts, so we got a truck inner tube and took turns riding the rapids in the tube. Pretty soon we were fighting over who got to ride in the tube.

The New was perfect for tubing – deep, with few rocks. We rode inside the tube with our feet

hanging down and our arms over the sides. It was amazing how the tube caught the deepest currents, and skirted the holes. Not that we knew what a hole was. We'd learned that there were rapids called the Keeneys and Greyhound. These were places where we could count on having fun, usually outside the raft. Occasionally, we would encounter a commercial raft trip – the industry was in its infancy then – and the guide would get a real concerned look and ask us if we knew what was coming up.

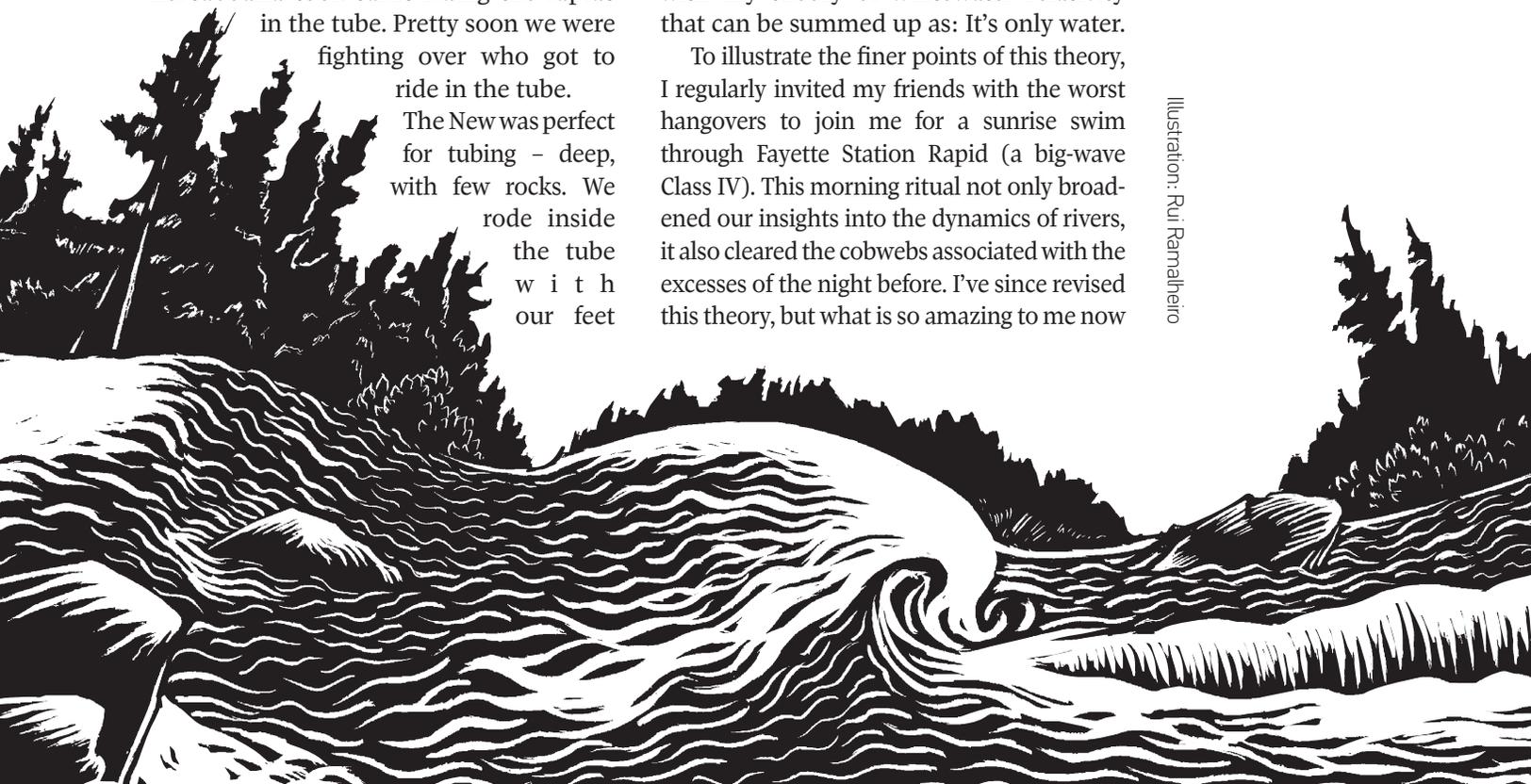
What a sight: Two little yellow rafts with four people in each, straddling the tubes, riding the raft like bronco busters. We had lost so many paddles that we began tying ropes from the handles to the raft. Sometimes my dog rode in the front of the raft. The inner tube would tag along behind. Those guides had every reason to be concerned. But, there's no doubt in my mind that we had more fun than their customers.

It was about this time, probably around the campfire and the keg, that I came up with my theory of whitewater relativity that can be summed up as: It's only water.

To illustrate the finer points of this theory, I regularly invited my friends with the worst hangovers to join me for a sunrise swim through Fayette Station Rapid (a big-wave Class IV). This morning ritual not only broadened our insights into the dynamics of rivers, it also cleared the cobwebs associated with the excesses of the night before. I've since revised this theory, but what is so amazing to me now

What a sight: Two little yellow rafts with four people in each, straddling the tubes, riding the raft like bronco busters. We had lost so many paddles that we began tying ropes from the handles to the raft. Sometimes my dog rode in the front of the raft

Illustration: Rui Ramalheiro



Halfway up the Gorge Road we're turned back by a mud slide. I have since made this a rule to live by: "When shuttle roads are washed out, the river gods are trying to give you one last warning"

is that we got so far into the sport without knowing anything at all about the technical aspects of it – and survived.

WELL, it's time to get to the good part of this story – the part that makes me look stupid. If you thought I already covered that, you're wrong.

It was the first weekend in October 1976. I know this because it was a month before my wedding. I was 25. I was madly in love. I was irrational. Must have been the hormones. We were at Summersville Dam. My bride-to-be and I were having a tough time with my theory of whitewater relativity. It was only water, but it was six inches deep and it was inside my tent. We spent the early morning hours cramped in our VW Bug in wet sleeping bags. It was raining as hard as I've ever seen it rain, and the water was everywhere. Shortly after daybreak, I downed a couple of cold beers and went looking for the other explorers. I found them at the base of the dam, hypnotized by the sight of the water blowing out of the dam. It had rained four inches overnight, and the lake was overflowing. The water was lapping at the railing above the put-in. I can't imagine what thoughts were going through the minds of the others who had come to take on the mighty Gauley. Something akin to respectful awe.

I can't imagine now what I was thinking.

"Where's the rafts? Come on, let's get going."

I was greeted with blank stares and stern admonitions. Not a single person was even contemplating getting on the river. I had never considered that we wouldn't.

So what's wrong with this picture? Later that day I formulated a new rule to live by: "Never make a life-and-death decision on a morning that your breakfast came from a brewery."

This has served me well over the years. And, no, I didn't put on the Gauley by my-

self at 15,000 cubic feet per second. You think I'm stupid, or what? Instead, I talked some of the Explorers into driving down to look at the New.

At the Fayette Station bridge, 20 miles south, it was still raining. Our group stood and stared at the New River. The campsite above Fayette Station Rapid was under water. Fayette Station Rapid was gone. The water was rushing by at 50 miles per hour, about 10 feet below the bridge deck. The painted gauge on the bridge pier was underwater.

There was some discussion by the explorers as to what it would be like to put on the New at this level. I'm looking at where the takeout rapid, Fayette Station, used to be and arguing that it will all be washed out. Several of the more experienced explorers kept mentioning "Big Holes." I think I quoted the Theory of Whitewater Relativity.

Final result: Four of us decide to take a Sears special and an inner tube and give it a whirl. Where, you ask, did I find three other crazies to risk this with me?

#1. That's Kitty, my wife. She loves me and has no choice.

#2. That's Joady, my sister. She trusts me and has a touch of my love of adventure.

#3. That's Ron, Joady's husband. He loves Joady and has no choice.

Now we're rolling. Load the gear and head up the road to Fayetteville. Remember these are pre-bridge days. Halfway up the Gorge Road we're turned back by a mud slide. I have since made this a rule to live by: "When shuttle roads are washed out, the river gods are trying to give you one last warning."

The detour was 30 miles back through Gauley Bridge to Fayetteville. We stopped at a gas station to blow up the raft, then proceeded to Cunard, the put-in.

We donned our heavy two-piece hooded diving suits and primitive life jackets. Ever safety conscious, we also wore cheap plastic helmets. Our paddles were dutiful-

ly lashed to the raft. Kitty and I were using homemade paddles.

I had used a wood canoe paddle for a pattern, lengthened the shaft and enlarged the blade. For strength I used solid red oak. They were heavy, but unbreakable. Each paddle had a hole drilled in the grip and we knotted a piece of parachute cord long enough for freedom of movement. No one ever considered that the cord was long enough to strangle someone.

I DON'T remember any talk about what to expect once we were on the river, although we did discuss the possibility that the power lines below Railroad Rapid might be in the water. We hoisted that raft and began the long descent to the gorge. Our trusty inner tube was in the raft, and the raft was on our heads.

If anyone had any reservations about the river, surely we would have turned back when we got to the part of the hill where a huge mudslide had obliterated the road. We were knee-deep in very unstable mud and rock there and could easily have triggered another major avalanche. But I guess the gods were saving us for the river. The water was so high that the put-in was on the lower road. The river here looked like the ocean. It was so wide, with huge, smooth waves rushing by. For 50 yards along each bank there were trees sprouting up through the current. I realized that whatever happened, it was going to be fast.

I have since paddled many high water runs. I was on the Lower Yough the day of the '85 flood. I paddled the Grand Canyon, the Cheat at 10 feet, the Tygart at 13 feet, the Ottawa in the spring. But this was the fastest sustained current I can ever remember seeing. In the time it takes to describe this debacle, we were at the takeout. Maybe 15 minutes.

We jumped on the raft, straddled the tubes, got a good knee grip and paddled like hell to get out through the trees. Once

into the current, everything was smooth sailing. The swells were 15 feet high and a quarter of a mile long. No need to paddle; we were traveling too fast already. Down past the railroad bridge in three swells – about two minutes.

Luckily, we ducked under the power line, short of the crest of the wave. A few feet higher and we would have been “wired!”

Having negotiated what I thought would be the only threat on the river, I began a short discourse on how easy this was going to be. Probably even boring. Meanwhile, as we roared around the next bend, there appeared a new feature in the distance, one that none of us had ever seen before. The same smooth swells were visible to the horizon, but then the horizon was fairly abrupt. In the centre of the river a spout of water was shooting 30 feet into the air.

It took a few seconds for this to register. Then Joady piped up with the first rational idea of the day.

“Hey, that looks pretty big. Maybe we better try to get over to the side.”

My reaction was less rational. “Just paddle hard. It’s only water.”

At any rate, we could never have gotten over in the seconds that were left before we crested the lip of that huge caldron of exploding white froth. That instant will be forever etched in four memories, perhaps more in mine, since I was the one responsible for the folly. Looking down 30 or 40 feet into the bottom of the hydraulic, which stretched from treeline to treeline, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that we were about to die.

I remember thinking, “Now I know what a hole is.”

That raft never even slowed down on impact. I think we rode it all the way to the bottom of the river. Then, I was being tumbled and cartwheeled through a chaotic mass of foaming and wrenching water. The force was indescribable.

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I finally surfaced, spitting up water and sucking in air. Miraculously the tube was right beside me, and I latched on to it. A short distance away I could see the deflated remnants of the raft floating downstream. I had no desire to retrieve it

Any resistance was out of the question. This river was going to do what it would do to me, and all I could do was submit. I tried to curl into a ball, but centrifugal force kept my limbs splayed.

Suddenly, I was clobbered by a huge flume of water and was carried with it. I tucked into a ball again, and the noise faded. The water became black, and I was sure that I was on the verge of eternity. I closed my eyes and waited. I was being swept away with such force, and I felt like a tiny insect. Finally, my lungs forced me to attempt something. I opened my eyes and for the first time could see light in one direction. "That must be up."

I broke into a strong breaststroke and seconds later surfaced. Simultaneously, I began sucking in air and surveying the surface for other survivors. The first thing I saw was the raft. It was floating upright about 10 feet downstream. A couple of strokes brought me to it, and I flopped over the side in seconds.

Upstream and off to the right, I spotted the inner tube, and I almost collapsed with relief when I realized that Ron and Kitty were clinging to it. I thought I could see Joady's yellow helmet and orange life vest farther downriver, toward the right shore.

My first job was to get to Kitty and Ron and haul them back into the raft. I grabbed my paddle rope and pulled in a splintered oak shaft. Another rope had nothing at all. All of the paddles were broken or gone. Suddenly, being in the raft seemed less than secure. I began hand paddling towards the tube, making very little progress.

Kitty and Ron were about 20 feet away from me when I came to the second hole. This time I recognized what was coming from the signs – another abrupt horizon line, with a spout of water shooting high into the air.

I glanced toward the tube for a second, and then, terrified, I threw myself spread-eagle across the raft and grabbed the oar locks with both hands. I don't know what

I thought the raft was going to do, but I was determined not to relinquish those oar locks. From this position in the raft I wasn't really able to see much, but after my experience in the first hole, that suited me fine. I closed my eyes.

I never did let go of those oar locks. But at some point, not far into my second hole ride, the raft was torn free. The oar locks were my only connection to reality, and I held them as if my life depended on it.

I finally surfaced, spitting up water and sucking in air. Miraculously the tube was right beside me, and I latched on to it. A short distance away I could see the deflated remnants of the raft floating downstream. I had no desire to retrieve it.

FEELINGS of security are by all means relative. Floating a 70,000 cubic-foot-per-second river with two other half-drowned people on an inner tube suddenly felt great. I started yelling for everyone to stroke for shore. We were exhausted and scared. One more hole would certainly kill us. Letting go of the tube and swimming would have been easier, but none of us were about to relinquish that tube. We made very slow progress to the right shore, but, thankfully, the river had no more terrible surprises for us.

As we crawled up the bank, my first reaction was to collapse. But I was so worried about Joady that I scrambled up to the railroad tracks and started running, scanning the river and calling. I did this for almost a mile and was despairing of ever seeing my sister again when I rounded a bend and spotted her casually strolling down the tracks.

I couldn't believe it. We had all survived. I should have been overjoyed, but I was overcome with exhaustion. I collapsed right there and began retching. Joady had to help me walk back to Kitty and Ron. She explained that she had surfaced from the hole near the right shore, grabbed a tree, then made it to shore.

I hadn't realized it, but I was the only one to hit the second hole. You might say I got what I deserved. Kitty and Ron neatly skirted it, close enough to see my terrified face as I plunged in.

We landed less than a half mile from Fayette Station. It had taken us 15 minutes to get there, most of it spent swimming or hanging on to the inner tube. I have since paddled the New at 15 feet and had a close look at each of these holes as I drifted by. At 15 feet those features look very impressive, but there is no comparison to the way they look that fateful day from the brink – at more than 30 feet – with more than twice the flow.

SO, you ask, what effect did this amazing experience have on us? Well, for a time I had a hard time finding folks to take rafting. Everybody knew that some, or all or us, should have died that day.

Did whitewater lose its charm? Well, figure this out: I got a kayak the next summer, which opened up a new chapter in my notorious career of aquatic misadven-

tures. Kitty did indeed marry me the next month and has also mastered the kayak. We now have a 15-year-old son who has mastered the Upper Yough.

Joady and Ron never got in another raft and try not to think about whitewater. They got their fill of river running all in one big helping. Shortly after our debacle, they found the Lord and dedicated their lives to Jesus.

I would argue that stupid is someone who doesn't learn from his experiences. So, just because someone or something hammers you over the head doesn't mean you shouldn't consider it educational. I do have a very thick skull, but I can learn. I may be crazy, but I'm not stupid.

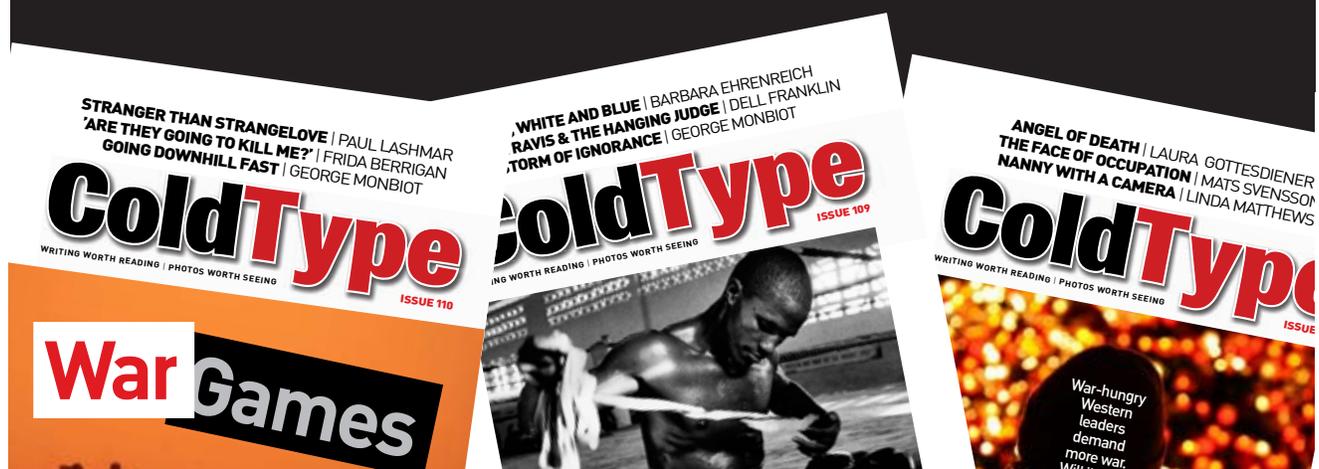
These days I have a deeply ingrained respect for rivers. Over the years I've been taught many a valuable lesson by these powerful teachers, but that first one remains the most memorable of all. **CT**

This article is an excerpt from River's End: A Collection of Bedtime Stories for Paddlers, edited by Bill Sedivy, available from www.amazon.com

Shortly after our debacle, Joady and Ron found the Lord and dedicated their lives to Jesus

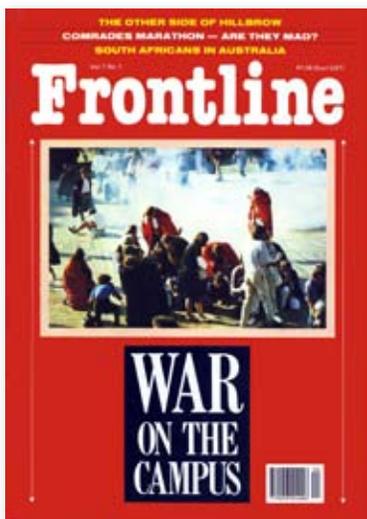
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Wits Blitz: Fleeing the campus tear gas

Frontline magazine's offices in Johannesburg were two blocks from the brightest and best university in the country, the University of the Witwatersrand, aka "Wits." We knew it was the best, not only because it had the most Nobel prizes, but also because it most regularly got its students' heads whacked in the anti-apartheid cause. Its editor, **Denis Beckett**, was there on the day Winnie Mandela was due to make a speech



From
Frontline
Magazine
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MONDAY, May 4, 1987. Winnie Mandela is meant to be speaking at Wits. There are rumours that the meeting has been banned, others that it hasn't been banned but is illegal anyway. With all the veerings in the State of Emergency regulations no-one seems to know. At about 12.45 I go to take a look. A few hundred people are gathered round a loudspeaker on the library lawn. I listen idly to some routine Nusas and Black Students Society rhetoric, go to sample the (much improved) student canteen, and then stroll back past the lawn.

The crowd has increased to perhaps 1,000, about half of whom are milling around the perimeter. Most of these are listening with half an ear. One group is talking about sailing. Another, multi-complexioned, seems to be focussing on transport logistics for some weekend plan.

The loudspeaker is droning forth. "Please have patience - please keep seated - Mrs Mandela is still here, and we are almost cer-

tain this problem will soon be sorted out." It is only partly audible above the buzz of chatter. Occasional catcalls are ringing out from around the crowd - Pipe Down, Hurry Up, etc. The scene is as drama-laden as a church picnic. Feeling no need for a dose of Aman-dlas and Vivas and assurances of the imminent demise of minority rule, I turn homeward. Reaching the piazza level above the lawn, I stop in sudden shock. I am directly in the path of an oncoming platoon. They are semi-marching, semi-walking in formation, about 10 abreast, with helmets and visors, tear gas guns in the port-arms position and sjamboks [raw-hide whips]. A girl is sitting on the ground eating lunch. With the noise from below she has not heard them. They are almost upon her when she scurries off like a startled rabbit.

The police halt at the edge of the piazza. There is sudden tension down below, where most of the students are about 100 yards away. Figures break away from the crowd. The amplifiers break into a loud insistence: "Please stay calm' please stay calm. Do not run away. Please remain seated."

Standing people sit again. The buzz, having momentarily ceased, rises to a pitch.



The police descend to the lawn, walking. By the time they get to the site of the meeting it is nearly empty. A few of the police, including some in plain clothes who look like students, rip down a huge poster proclaiming "One Person One Vote One Unitary State." A few others accost TV crews. Most stand about looking spare

There are boos and hisses. An authoritative voice comes on. It is Alan Mabin, chairman of the Academic Staff Association. He pleads for calm. Other voices follow. One, distinctively black, invites the "people in blue, if they want to address this meeting, to follow the proper procedure." Cheers and laughter.

Meanwhile a policeman has raised a hand megaphone. "Aandag, aandag," he begins. The main loudspeaker drowns him out. I, alongside, can barely hear him. He reads a statement, first in Afrikaans then in English. Act Number mumble-mumble of 19 mumble-mumble . . . Proclamation by acting chief magistrate . . . two minutes to disperse.

Confusion down on the lawn. The message is evident. Hesitancy over the loudspeaker. Suddenly a clear call: Gather in the sports hall. The students move off north west to the sports hall, away from the police. They are already moving when the commander shouts: "Twee minute is op. Beweeg in."

The police descend to the lawn, walking. By the time they get to the site of the meeting it is nearly empty. A few of the police, including some in plain clothes who look like students, rip down a huge poster proclaiming "One Person One Vote One Unitary State." A few others accost TV crews. . After a

while, they move on to the sports hall, which a second contingent is now approaching in a long file up the narrow steps from below, perspex shields held high.

There is a vantage point overlooking the sports hall. It is heavily crowded. The plant-life dies a sudden death under hundreds of feet. People start to yell furious abuse as the police enter the hall. A mature male voice rings out in measured tones above the din: "Please do not provoke them. We do not wish students to be injured." He says it over and over again. The hubbub subsides.

THE police form a cordon, surrounding the hall door. The abuse rises again. One policeman is walking behind the cordon, slamming down visors that have been left open. A young black policeman leaps in agony, rubbing his face. He has been pinched somehow as his visor snapped shut from behind him.

Students emerge from the hall under escort and are led away towards the road. I am towards the rear of the crowd above, suffering from some atavistic sensitivity about trampling the plants. This means I would have been likely to see any missiles flung from that quarter. I do see one. It

There is a sudden wild rush. Students scatter. The crowd around Shear shrinks to a small cluster. Then a police column appears. They cross from north to south-east, like a victorious army trudging homewards at the end of a battle

comes from behind me – a stone or pebble no bigger than a matchbox.

A policeman points his gas-gun towards us and fires. The crowd flees. A moment later – the interim is blurred – I am standing alone in a flower-bed at the other end of the architecture block, respect for the plants forgotten. Fleeing students and pursuing police are hurtling by. One policeman, sjambok flashing, corners his prey. A second student jumps at the policeman. In a trice more students are in the fray. The policeman is brought down. There is a flailing heap on the ground. The students don't seem to know what to do now. All but one split off. That one is left grappling. He's on top of the fight, but with limited strategic options.

A noise behind me. I swing round. A policeman is coming. Then he sees the fight. He calls – “Botha's innie kak” – and rushes past. Blue figures flash by. I see blows rain down on the wrestling student. Then the tear gas hits. My options are to run west, past the fight, or south, back to the lawn. South has it. Hacking and choking on the library lawn, I recall the Minister of Police explaining on TV that the police are short of men for crime-prevention functions. I am trying to reconcile the feelings I have for policemen I have known or interviewed with the attitude I am currently experiencing towards the SAP as an institution.

Is the admirable lawman who psychologized my former neighbour out of homicidal intent towards his wife here now? Is the earnest constable I met on a bus bench, desperate with weariness after three months' continuous overtime? I look up and see the acting ambassador of Germany walk past with stern dignity, red and puffy eyes protruding like goggles.

Gradually, the library lawn comes to life. Soon it is nearly as full as before. There is much discussion. What to do now? A professorial figure with grey hair and a grey suit strides purposefully forward. This turns out to be Mervyn Shear, deputy vice-chancellor. A student gives Shear the megaphone. He is saying: “. . . many students have already

been arrested and I can assure you that . . .”

On the “that,” there is a sudden wild rush. Students scatter. The crowd around Shear shrinks to a small cluster. Then a police column appears. It crosses from north to south-east, like a victorious army trudging homewards at the end of a battle. Silence persists until the police are nearly gone. Then a smattering of boos and hisses breaks out. A black man, riskily conspicuous, yells loudly: “Go back to the farm.” The lawn rings with laughter. The police keep moving off.

THE people re-congregate. After much discussion, the venue is shifted to the canteen. People dawdle off, stopping, talking, swapping notes en route. The anger, which was tangible earlier, is becoming hard to see. People are laughing and animated. Gesticulating groups are describing who did what to whom. A lone policeman walks through the throng, back to the architecture block. No comments are heard. He has evidently lost his sjambok. He is unlikely to find it. A TV crewman fished one out of a pond, to the cheers of the staff members at the windows, but overshot when he threw it to them. It landed on the roof.

A group of students crosses the lawn carrying survey instruments and measuring-rods. Someone says: “Don't you know the campus is at war?” One of the surveying students raises his rod like a spear and lets out a mock-gladiatorial shout,

The shady benches outside the canteen are occupied by a normal complement of students – chatting or studying and apparently oblivious to the, drama.

In the canteen people are slowly gathering around a central table. Eventually someone stands on it and starts talking. The central position is tactically unwise, because whichever way he faces three-quarters of the assembly can't hear. There are snatches of the usual – comrades, oppression, racist regime. Someone draws cheers with an impassioned speech about how the white stu-

dents are not the baases of yesterday, they are just as sick and tired of apartheid as any black. Then someone else is predicting the lies to be expected from the Bureau for Information. He's hard to hear and there are cries of "Speak up."

My attention wanders. I am gauging the prospects of elbowing my way to the cool-drink counter. Suddenly, I am practically bowled over. I'm on the doorward side of the crowd, and a torrential mass of humanity is stampeding for the exit.

Loud voices yell: "Lock the doors Lock the doors." Whether the objective is to lock the police out or lock the students in, I do not discover. Students divert anyway, rushing through the serving area. Others run to the far end of the canteen. A few people slam the doors and feverishly pile tables and chairs behind them. Someone rolls out the canteen's fire hose

In the serving area, a black woman in canteen uniform is imprecating violently, waving her arms in protest at the disorder in her domain. Near the door there is a dog-leg in the canteen. This part has been out of the scene of action. It is from here that the tables are brought for the barricade. Some students remain sitting there, reading, eating, talking. A woman is absorbed in a book, hands over her ears in the way one blocks out the noise of a vacuum cleaner.

I follow the serving-area route. A group of sweating kitchen staff are lugging milk cans out of a lift. Stairs lead either downwards and out the back way or upwards to another canteen and a bird's eye view. I take the latter. The upstairs canteen is nearly empty. Emigrants from below have passed through it to the balcony outside. A canteen supervisor is chivvying a late luncher, a black man in workman's clothes: "I don't care how long it is since you ate and neither will they. Just let me lock up." The eater eats on. A student shouts at the supervisor: "You have a duty. I'll report you. I'll report you to the very top". She shouts back; the eater keeps eating.

The balcony crowd is watching police in discussion below, speculating on their in-

tentions and ancestry. Then a knot of policemen break clean and run, hell-for-leather, for an unseen target. There is another outbreak of flight. Shortly afterwards the police return, with a clutch of protesting cameramen in tow. The cameramen are led away. Then follows an odd pantomime. The main body of police slowly returns southwards. As they recede, hisses and slow claps break out. They stop and turn round, and there is another burst of wild fleeing. After standing still for a couple of minutes, silence on both sides, the police turn their backs and proceed. More hisses; more claps. They stop and turn again. More fleeing.

Eventually the police are out of sight. Word goes round that the academics are assembling on the piazza, in solidarity. Students, now down to perhaps 500, make their way there. The scene is carnivalian. On the piazza students are dancing in large groups, arms around shoulders. A nucleus, mainly black, is singing a song of which the central feature is the word "sojer." A girl student tells me brightly that she's made more friends today than in two and a quarter years at 'varsity. The academics are seated on the steps, wearing their gowns. Masters' black and doctors' crimson give a mediaeval feel to the affair, and clash incongruously with shirtsleeves and plimsoles.

ABRUPTLY, a rain of smoking projectiles falls upon the crowd. Police have re-appeared around a corner, gas masks complementing their Empire Strikes Back image. And they are firing tear gas. The eerie sound of whooshing canisters is everywhere. Only one door to the central block is open, and people are storming it. A woman falls, a man trips over her. He's up instantly and into the building. She takes longer, hobbling on a hurt leg.

The piazza is almost empty. A few students are stamping on canisters. One picks one up and flings it back at the police. A grey-headed man in a suit stands still and erect as the Rock of Ages, staring defiance. Crimson

A knot of policemen break clean and run hell-for-leather for an unseen target. There is another outbreak of flight. Shortly afterwards the police return, with a clutch of protesting cameramen in tow

Whispers of gas start to permeate the foyer. People retreat down the corridors. A student has considerably taken the top off a big standalone ashtray so he can puke into it. An elderly lecturer has become befuddled, and thinks the people offering him a torch are new aggressors

gown flailing, a professor of nuclear physics is kicking canisters away like a boy playing with pinecones. I take cover behind a pillar, mindful of Azapo's one-eyed president, who was two-eyed until a recent altercation with a tear gas canister. The firing stops, and I'm still breathing oxygen. At this point I think the gas is where the smoke is – I'm soon to learn better – and although there are several clouds of smoke, none are coming at me. I emerge and watch the police survey their handiwork.

Next to me a voice rings out: "Fuck off, you cunts." I see a gun quickly raised, pointed at the source. I duck back behind the pillar and simultaneously feel my first full-blooded wave of gas. There are several whooshes, close by. Scared to cross the few feet to the door, I breathe more of the gas than I am happy about. Then the whooshes stop and I scuttle into the central block foyer.

Inside, people are shouting "Don't use water, don't use water." Several people are holding up torches of newspaper. Two young blacks grab me and shove my head over a torch. The smoke is a relief to breathe. Soon after, whispers of gas start to permeate the foyer. People retreat down the corridors. A student has considerably taken the top off a big standalone ashtray so he can puke into it. An elderly lecturer has become befuddled, and thinks the people offering him a torch are new aggressors. A boy in shorts is explaining technique to an eminent scientist – something about how it's okay to breathe through wet cloth but bad news to rinse your eyes.

THE tear gas came at 3:05. Until perhaps 3:10, the front of the building feels like the aftermath of a train crash. Red-eyed and weepy people are drifting around aimlessly, coughing and sniffing and looking mournful. Then it starts to get back to normal. People are talking, cracking jokes, bumping into old acquaintances and making new ones, comparing the state of their eyes. Someone wants to know if he can package the gas in small quantities as a cold cure. Someone else

calls out: "All I can say is that this is enough to make a fellow weep." Everybody laughs.

By 3:15, the piazza is full again. The dancing re-starts. Everything is as it was, except for an acrid smell in the air and a lot of ash and half-burnt newspapers flapping gently across the ground. And the red eyes. The police are nowhere to be seen.

3:22: Another flurry. Police are taking up a position on a landing in the Wartenweiler Library. Another sudden scattering, this time smaller and briefer than before.

3:25: The academics form a black-and-crimson line, about a hundred across, on the police side of the students.

3:27: The police at the library silently move off, guns at rest like hunters leaving an unsatisfactory vantage point.

3:37: Mervyn Shear reappears with Alan Mabin and student council members. There is quiet while a loudhailer is sought. Shear begins: "I want you all to know that the university feels very deeply . . ." The upshot is that there is going to be a Senate meeting at four o'clock.

Shear hands the loudhailer to a black student. There is a chorus of Amandlas. For the first time I realize how effective the Amandling is. It gives people a sense of participation, like the singing. Apart from which, nobody ever dozes off at a liberation meeting. Every ten minutes you're up on your feet and raising the roof. "My fellow South Africans," says the black man, "my fellow students, my fellow academics . . ." The crowd laughs. The speaker with them. He says the students want the university to be closed for two days. Loud cheers. He attacks PW. Botha for failing to ban himself from holding meetings where he can seek a mandate to continue oppression.

Alan Mabin warns that Senate does not have the power to close the university. However, he and others will seek to persuade Senate to put the case to Council, which does. A lady from the white student council announces her joy that today has broken the racial mould at Wits, perhaps forever. Black and white students have fully and jointly

participated in a common cause; history has been made.

3:53: Another scare. The police reappear and advance towards the centre of the piazza. The crowd disperses, some fleeing, some just backing off.

3:58: There is first one, then several, shouts of “fuck off” and the like. Police fire tear gas. The process of an hour earlier is repeated, with some variations. People learn fast, it appears. This time they treat the tear gas with less awe than before. The torches are everywhere.

I am less nervous, except about a direct hit from a canister. As familiarity grows, the masks and helmets are losing their intimidatory effect, and I’m coming to look on the gas as something nauseating but temporary – no worse than sea-sickness. I’m beginning to think that the tales I’ve heard about township kids’ amazing courage in the face of the gas is no big deal after all. I’m also losing my anger. This thing is assuming the dimensions of farce. If I’m angry now it’s not so much as a citizen aggrieved at oppression and suppression but as a taxpayer aggrieved at the hamhandedness of the people whose wages I am paying. If they’ve got to be here at all, instead of catching muggers and car thieves like they’re meant to be doing, let them at least use some sense.

I’m crouching now in yet another bed of formerly decorative greenery, vaguely conscious of the apoplexies that await various gardeners tomorrow. There is the same sort of camaraderie as earlier in the foyer. People are loudly mocking a guy who is having a hard time – he’s shaking a lot – lighting a sheaf of paper with matches. We’re all waiting for it, but no one is desperate. Someone steps in with a lighter, and in the meantime the smokers are passing their packs around. Nearly everyone lights up, and people blow their smoke into the faces of others, who breathe it in like junkies.

By 4:05 the police have withdrawn. By 4:07 the piazza is abuzz as per normal. At 4:15 someone from the Black Students So-

ciety is holding up for claim a collection of shoes lost in the various rushes. He announces that proceedings will resume in the Senate House concourse – the sixth venue of the day, if we count the library lawn twice – and that the academics have offered to man the doors. They’ll stand there all dignified in their gowns and try to keep the police from barging in. Loud cheers.

5:25: The faithful have dwindled. About 200 people are in or around the concourse. Some are dancing and singing on the floor, the few whites among them keeping up well, at least in respect of the dancing. More are clustered around the stairs and the atrium-type balconies, watching and chatting.

ON the stairs there’s a debate going on between a black woman and a white man. She’s saying she doesn’t want to send her kids to Wits any longer, not until the blacks stop needing to assert themselves. He’s a little scandalized. She wants to know whether he would send his kids to a university where they spend half their time dodging tear gas or observing stayaways. A laden photographer asks someone to come outside with him and case the street. Police are still there confiscating cameras, he’s heard.

Then there’s a white man with a beard standing at the crown of the stairs in Hear This pose. For the last time in the day, there’s instant panic. In about two seconds the floor is empty. In about another 10 seconds it is realized that this is Alan Mabin, minus crimson, and the refugees sheepishly return.

Mabin announces that the university will close on Wednesday, election day. Cheers, rapidly returning to cries of “No, no.” A student leader quickly joins him and says, “No Problem.” The university will officially close on Wednesday, but the students will consider Tuesday a closed day anyway. Cheers.

Within 10 minutes the place is empty but for a foreign television team frantically seeking interviews with anyone in sight. **CT**

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Denis Beckett
edited and published Frontline magazine from 1989 until its death 11 years later. Read more of the magazine’s best journalism at www.coldtype.net/frontline.html

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