



## ROUGHING ALONE

*roughing alone what can you do?  
oh roughing alone what can you do?  
but give me a ride like I would you  
nothing in my pockets and my home on my back  
forever passing you by  
see me out of your window and you wonder where I'm bound  
all I gotta say to you is hi*

I avoided Arthur for a few days. Not only was I busy at work but wanted time to check up on a few things - primarily investigate any feedback from Jack. Frankly, I was expecting a dead end. I did call Arthur once or twice but couldn't catch him at the Malmaison and got nowhere on his mobile, though I did eventually speak with Kate who suggested I meet him for coffee on Saturday. The Sage Gateshead, a spacious new music venue on the south bank of the river near the Tyne Bridge, was suggested as a neutral rendezvous and I readily agreed. She said she'd pass the message on and would, 'make sure the old rascal got there,' which sounded rather worrying.

On Friday I received an email from Jack who, after opening with the usual insults and in-jokes, changed his tune when commenting on the list of names. Or should I say, one name in particular, the illusive wanderer himself. Though he had barely known Arthur, Jack's wife Jenny had been very friendly with the 'old rascal's' ex-wife, Susan. Though Jenny had known Susan, or Sue as she was usually called, by her married name - something Welsh sounding like Gwyndle or Gwyneth - rather than McGargle. Anyway, Arthur had been a total rat apparently - not only disappearing for days or even weeks at a time, and up to all kinds of mysterious mischief, but had even defrauded Sue out of her savings. Arthur also, according to Jenny, had a very murky past that included detention for a litany of crimes, from drug offences to living off immoral earnings - the only saving grace being that none were for violence, though only due to his inherent cowardice. If all this were true it would certainly explain Arthur's frequent absences.

Other names, as I'd guessed, were acquaintances from the Sixties, and almost all one-time regulars of the Dog and Duck. Every one had at some time also joined the annual summer migration to Swanage, a little resort nestling between picturesque cliffs on the south coast, mainly to work as waiters, chambermaids, cooks and assorted bottle washers. Sue, unlike most others, had decided to stay there permanently and subsequently bought a little B&B. In time she'd expanded her property portfolio, becoming quite successful and one of the small town's leading players. Not long before moving to New Zealand in the early Seventies, Jack and Jenny had spent a winter at Sue's place and they'd stayed in touch ever since. Unfortunately, most of the information passed on to me was hearsay as Jack didn't seem to have any firm evidence against Arthur. As usual, my man's chameleon-like nature made him hard to pin down. Another thing, according to Jenny, whereas most people would be appalled to hear slanderous stories about themselves, Grimsby just found it amusing, if not hilarious, and seemed to revel in notoriety. Eliciting the truth out of him, as I knew to my cost, was never simple and Susan seemed to have done no better. Unfortunately, this message left me with even more loose ends than before.

I sat with my latte and carrot cake in the boulevard café, marvelling at the colossal silver slug, its steel frame soaring up like a surrealistic cathedral or wonky upturned ship's hull. Clad in mirrored glass that gleamed impossibly against the dreary urban backdrop, with

stunning panoramic river views and state-of-the-art concert halls, restaurants, bars, rehearsal suites and sound library, the Sage was a most civilised place; somewhere I enjoyed visiting, to wander around, attend performances or, as now, just hang out with a healthy snack. So I wasn't bothered that Arthur was late; in fact, when a choir set up in the foyer for a free concert I was more than happy to relax amid the gentle harmonies and polite lunchtime hubbub. Not really a big fan of choral music but, open to most genres if in the right mood, this seemed to hit all the right easy-listening notes. Of course, it may have been I was just glad of a few sane minutes before the uneasy confrontation I guessed must come.

- But, knowing the kind of dirt I'd uncover, why did he ask me to investigate?
- Was he really a crook or was it just another urban myth, elaborated over several decades?
- Dodgy dealer or not, why had he returned? To make amends?
- Or was he back, like an aging tom cat, to scrape the last dregs of cream from the pot?
- And married? Really? To someone in the old crowd?
- And with a kid in the frame?

Aside from the Marquee Club riot (which, in fairness, was not entirely his fault), and also the Geronimo fiasco (of which more later but, as you will see, he was definitely to blame for) most of my dealings with Arthur had been amicable. He had never tried to rip me off as far as I knew and, his outlandish stories apart, hadn't ever lied to me – not much anyway. What's more, he'd once taken an almost fatherly interest in my affairs, even if his efforts turned out to be mostly misguided. Indeed, when Andy and I returned from our travels in '62 he couldn't have been more amused and interested. We'd been sitting on the church wall opposite the Kenco, amongst a bunch of other teenagers, and he'd turned up after an absence of over a year like a prophet; long flowing locks, skin weather beaten and tanned, his ex-RAF greatcoat draped in true shamanic fashion. Yet, after amiable greetings and the sharing of peace pipes (well, straight roll ups, we'd yet to experience the wacky backy) he came up and was keen to hear our first real experience 'on the road'.



I told him of discovering the Beats on Brighton beach, sprawled out flamboyantly with studied shabbiness like exhibits in a zoo and gawped down on by bemused holiday makers strolling along the Prom. How we'd rather self-consciously joined them, and then regretted it when some over-inquisitive little weasel had sidled up asking lots of questions about our financial state, where we were staying and so on. Of course, we didn't let on we had regular jobs and nice homes in the suburbs but gave the story we were teenage runaways. At first we thought he was just a bit weird with his over-insistent questioning till he pressed us on whether we wanted to sell our rings. Andy wasn't wearing a ring and mine, a CND embossed affair which turned my finger green and I only

wore to wind up the guys in the office, wasn't worth a light. The greasy little guy just grinned at our blank faces, until the penny dropped and he scuttled off before we could lay one on him.

After an hour or so we'd had enough of posing on the pebbles and wandered off towards the pier to meet up with Phil who was coming down by train. We had souvenir snaps taken in a booth, our hair blown wild by the sea breeze, and I put mine in an envelope to post back to the lads at Kenton & Wood. I was proud of my outfit; a Millet's combat jacket, customised by cutting off the collar and trimmed with leather (don't ask me where I got the idea, but a year or two later the Beatles all sported similar tailored versions), a black polo necked jumper and tight slacks bought in then unknown Carnaby Street (from one of a few small avant-garde tailors before it all became a tacky bazaar), all finished off with a black imitation silk scarf tied gypsy style around my throat. Andy was in similarly faux-beatnik attire, and the more Joe Public acknowledged us with scathing glances the happier we were (most young teenage girls sniggered bashfully, something which made us even happier).

When, after another hour, Phil still hadn't turned up we strolled along to join a small crowd heckling a posse of Christian evangelists. I should say Andy heckled because I still couldn't get my head around any religious stuff and anyway found such behaviour embarrassing. They fascinated me nevertheless, not by what they said but how they had the gall (or stupidity) to rail so passionately against an indifferent gaggle of strangers, especially here amongst the popcorn and candyfloss booths, the amusement arcades and flashing neon where the only response was half-baked sarcasm from smirking youths like us. I'd rather have moved on, especially when, as the meeting ended, they invited us to join them in a short prayer of thanksgiving. Thank who? Something or someone I didn't know existed? For what? My life had hardly been a bed of roses and prospects weren't much better? What a sad joke, I thought. They kept pleading with us to join them in prayer, which I resolutely refused even though they offered hot soup and bread rolls back at their caravan.

But maybe they were just trying their best - seeing us as poor misguided youth, ripe for street conversion - and needing to be set on the right road. Little did they know, we had our own religion - call it the new romanticism, bohemianism, existentialism, or just rock and roll - whatever its label we felt part of a rising new tide. In fact, we had no beliefs you could put a finger on and that, of itself, was actually the point. The old certainties, the Bible-based laws and traditions, had been the root cause of so much conflict and we wanted to break free from all that and, though we only had doubts to fill the void, didn't feel this a cause for concern - it was liberating.

I recall, for example, a couple of years later, hitching through Tunisia and getting in with some local students when, in a generally light hearted conversation, they asked us what faith we belonged to. To them this was not an opportunity for debate, just idle curiosity similar to asking about one's family or home town. We told them we had none but they refused to accept this. 'Don't you believe in God?' they asked, genuinely astonished. As they wouldn't accept no for an answer, we said we believed God was everywhere and waved our arms around as if to indicate all and nothing. What we meant was, 'Who knows if God exists but, if he does, he could be anywhere.' In a strict Muslim country, as Tunisia was then, God - and certainly the name of Allah - was on everyone's lips constantly, and not in a blasphemous way. Maybe this was how it had been in England and most of Europe for many past centuries, but we felt no connection to our spiritual roots. Even the language of Christianity was anathema to us, carrying connotations of 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' - a warning of things to come which didn't seem so fictional back then - all that we were trying to get away from in fact.

Actually, it wasn't the ex-con, converted Satanist, covered in crude self-inflicted tattoos and knife scars, and with an ugly broken nose who bothered me most, but an unctuous

youth of about fifteen who echoed every 'Hallelujah!' and 'Praise Be!' several times over. How could anyone of our generation get caught up in this charade? Had he been brain washed by the Bible bashers, or some intoxicant slipped into his mulligatawny? What really got me was the sheep-like acceptance - a number one sin in my book. As Dylan sang, 'Don't follow leaders, watch the parkin' metres,' in his mock advice to youth from 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'. Though that was later, in 1965, we were way ahead of him, especially the bit where he says, 'Look out kid, they keep it all hid.' We were proud of our qualms and suspicions, the cynical questioning of anything and everything, especially if emanating from our 'elders and betters'. Hadn't they recently been responsible for two World Wars (and many other conflicts almost as destructive?), nearly flattening all Europe and then, obviously not content with narrowly avoiding total destruction, got into a nuclear arms race where there could be no winners only obliteration of the planet several times over? All around was plain evidence of further dumb devastation and contamination, either of the environment or people's minds. Religion was one of the worst perpetrators of this latter crime, I thought, and anyway, if the Jesus freaks hadn't succeeded in their dream of world domination after two thousand years, why now?

'And did you partake of their soup?' asked Arthur.

'Of course,' I said. 'And, funnily enough, once we got back to their caravan they dropped the front and became almost human.'

'And you didn't have to drop yours,' he quipped.

'Nah!' I laughed. 'But you know what they say about things coming in threes? It was the third time we were propositioned that day. Strange, eh?'

'Well, Allie-boy,' said Arthur, 'No one ever said the road was safe. You never know what's round the corner - therein lies its fatal attraction. Maybe you learned a few lessons back there?'

'I guess so, but that was just the start. We slept under the pier the next couple of nights, woken by fuzz every time we managed to nod off. Why'd they do that?'

'No good for business man. It's a holiday town don't y'know? For straights. Why would they want scumbags like us despoiling their pretty esplanade?'

'I suppose so,' I smiled, uncertain if being included as a fellow scumbag was compliment or not. 'Anyway, they succeeded - we moved on.'

Phil's company, when he finally arrived, was greatly appreciated, he being easy meat to wind up, and all gangs need someone to pick on. But he was an amiable companion who took our ridicule of the many home comforts pressed on him by his mother in good heart. She was unaware of our mode of travel or alfresco sleeping arrangements and, though we kept up the scorn for two weeks, did help him invent plausibly reassuring tales to phone his parents with. What's more, despite even slower progress now there were three idiots lolling by the kerbside, our holiday seemed to fly by - especially, for me, after I spent my last few pounds on a cheap box and began strumming again. Bobby Darin had worked his magic giving me the impetus to re-learn the old chords and, with 'Jailor', the bones of a new desperado image. It was topped off when I walked back into work, now regretfully bathed and trimmed, to discover my photo up on the staff notice board above the title, 'Office Slapper!' Those cheery wags in the Art Department had carefully rouged my lips and added some pearl earrings - the wind strewn hair required no girly touch-up.

Though the escapade was fun and had, as Arthur suggested, taught me valuable lessons, I knew it was but a trial run - a mere walk in the park compared to the grand exploits yet to come. Furthermore, it wasn't going to be financed by continuing to work in advertising. My pay was just four pounds and ten shillings a week - £4.50 in today's money, though its value would be around £65 currently <sup>(1)</sup>. I spent over half this on travelling and lunches etc, and gave £1 to my mother for keep, which left about a quid to pay for clothes,

entertainment and cigarettes (I'd picked up the habit somewhere along the Brighton Road). It obviously wasn't enough to finance a world tour, even given my seventeen year old optimism. Yet travelling the globe in search of adventure had always been my ambition – what was I to do?

To Arthur, when I explained my problem, the solution was obvious. It was my life, he said, not some square corporation's. I should wake up and do my own thing man, not go sleep-walking into oblivion like all the other zombies. That was all very fine, I thought, but what about the bread? (Note the newly adopted jive talk creeping in.) How would I pay to put this noble philosophy into action? As usual, Arthur was dismissive of practicalities and, despite the revolutionary talk – pre-empting the hippy slogan, 'tune in, turn on and drop out' – just smiled at my boringly reasonable questions as if to indicate that, what he had done, anyone could do, with a modicum of bottle. Only they couldn't. I needed more than radical poetry, hip jargon and outlaw songs to survive on the road, that's one lesson I'd already learned the hard way. Luckily, at that time, there was a ready abundance of manual work and not badly paid either compared with the pittance I, and many other office staff, got then in return for our air-conditioned sense of superiority <sup>(2)</sup>.

So I jacked in a perfectly good job with excellent prospects, according to my family and everyone who knew me, and found a position as a dog's body on a construction site within walking distance of home. The foreman, a wily Cockney called Willy, had me down as an intellectual (he'd have thought differently had he glimpsed any of my school reports) because I preferred reading a book to the Mirror during tea breaks. But he was a canny lad, as they say in the North East, and so long as I pulled my weight didn't send me on too many fool's errands. We sat around a makeshift brazier, dragging breaks out as the coldest winter for many years crept upon us and seized the nation's balls with an icy claw <sup>(3)</sup>. As the site was still open to the elements, had no services as yet and heavy labour the only other way to get warm, it's not surprising I wasn't laughing any more. Not only had I split my safe and snug office, along with the increasingly lively London scene, but even Molly, who lived way out in Romford on the opposite side of London, had to go too. Not for the first or last time, I wasn't the only one questioning my sanity.

But, the discomfort did pay off. With an increased income, plus savings from zero travel expenses, I was able not only to equip myself with a small tent, primus stove, decent sleeping bag and rucksack, but also purchase a one-way ticket to Calais (a return ticket would have been tantamount to admitting defeat before even leaving) and save about thirty pounds in cash by Christmas. I also had the foresight to join the YHA and buy a decent map. The country was, by now, looking like the North Pole and would remain iced over for nearly three months more, but I was heading south and, as soon as festivities were over, would be on the overnight ferry to begin my world tour.

It's perhaps worth mentioning that around this time my mother re-married and, though I had no problem with that as such – she deserved some adult love and support after many years bringing up four kids on her own - it left me feeling somewhat put out. I knew this was immature of me, especially as Logan was a decent man who treated us and Mum very well, but that's just how it was. The main problem, which no doubt hid deeper issues, was that he'd not only been one of my teachers but also Scoutmaster. In fact, it was indirectly due to me and my brothers attending the Donuts that he and Mum got together.

When other kids found out about the relationship I was not just embarrassed but deeply pissed off, having to fend off the inevitable ribbing, never mind deal with big shifts in the family dynamic and my attitude towards him. Teachers were the enemy after all, and Logan was a very strict one. (He once recalled, rather too cheerfully I thought, how he'd subdued an unruly class in a new school by knocking the teenage ringleader across the room – 'No bother from that lot again', he concluded, giving him an instant reputation as a hard

bastard.) It had been bad enough coming from a low-income single-parent family (with us kids on free school meals) in days when such things were relatively rare in our neck of the middle-class Surrey woods, but to have a member of staff move into your home was almost too much. Though I'd always been very independent and not demonstrative when it came to familial affection, I was really quite hurt by the newcomer's arrival. But, rather than show any emotion, which would have been a loser's reaction, it was better to get out. All things considered, as with my father's death, the changed situation gave me further incentive to get off my arse and go my own way.

We landed in Calais around four in the morning and were filed off into a vast customs shed to wait processing. Why we were kept hanging around so long in that icy dump I don't know (bloody-minded French officialdom or maybe they were just determined to complete their breakfasts of buttered croissants and oeufs-en-cocotte?) but after what seemed like hours standing there I suddenly found myself inexplicably spread-eagled on the ground.

Helping arms soon heaved me up and I was eased onto a chair. Resting my head in my hands and wondering what the hell had happened, I felt my chin which, I gradually realised, was slippery and warm – then looking down I saw blood. I'd passed out, from lack of sleep and the cold, then fallen face down, smashing my face on the concrete floor. Eventually we got through this frozen limbo and I wandered out, daubing my face with a hanky, and bought my first real French coffee and baguette sandwich in a little dockside café. From what I could see so far, France was a dim and desolate place, far from the romantic image portrayed in films. Subsequent slow progress to Paris along endlessly flat straight roads didn't change that initial impression. Small towns, which I was often forced to trudge through on foot as lifts were few a far between, relieved the monotony - though after a while they all began to look the same too.

Arriving on the outskirts of the capital late in the evening, I found a Metro station and headed for the centre - nothing revealing the contrast between London and Paris more starkly than the heady cocktail of Gauloises, garlic and Gallic BO. Alighting at Place Pigalle after a jarring ride, I was somewhat taken aback by the bustling crowds, brightly lit shops, night clubs, bars, restaurants and, along the middle of the street, fairground rides in full swing. It was just two days before New Years Eve and, as I was soon to discover, a time of riotous public bonhomie on a scale unrivalled by us less ostentatious English. Something of that feeling of good will was already in the air, though there were still some grumbles as I bundled my rucksack and guitar through the crowds, map in hand, searching for street names and with a mumbled 'pardonnez-moi' on my lips. Luckily the Youth Hostel was only a few hundred yards - and I was never more relieved to reach a destination, however humble it may have been.

Despite the time of year, or maybe because of it, the place was packed. I wasn't there to celebrate, just impatient to be off south, but knew I had to wait till after the holiday. In fact, had I been more sensible, I'd have waited till spring rather than set out during the worst winter in living memory, when I would also have been better prepared and financed. Nevertheless, like everyone else, I went out drinking on New Years Eve and found myself screaming 'Bonne Annee!' down the Champs-Elysees along with thousands of Parisians until early next morning. In fact, my few days in the city gave me some breathing space, not only to do a little sight-seeing and get acclimatised, but also listen to the travel tales of the very diverse bunch at the hostel, many of whom had hitched all over Europe and far beyond, making my adventures to date seem tame. One place recommended, by a tall geeky looking American guy named Herbert - an Ivy League science graduate who insisted on being called Herby - was the island of Ibiza. It was cheap, almost always warm, but had few hotels and even fewer tourists, he said. It was also very hip, a hangout for writers, artists, musicians and other bohemian types. 'Your kinda place,' he said, noting my guitar and unkempt hair.

The journey through France was painfully slow, lonely and cold. Lifts were few and far between and I was often forced to walk for miles, though sometimes did so out of choice to get the circulation going again. I stayed in hostels and occasionally, as temperatures rose a little towards the South, found sheltered places to camp. My route went via Tours, Poitiers and Bordeaux, then across the Spanish border near San Sebastian where I was struck by the big difference in culture and prosperity compared with France and the UK. At the time Spain was still ruled by the autocratic General Franco who, though instigating some economic reforms seemed more concerned with maintaining control than enabling the kind of democratic freedoms we were used to. As evidence of this there was no end of uniformed personnel on the streets which could be a little unnerving as I had no idea who were police, military, traffic wardens or bus conductors.

Travelling by thumb you discover a lot more of how ordinary folk live, either by meeting them in their many assorted vehicles or along the roadside. You frequently have little choice of eating or sleeping establishments either and can find yourself stuck in many unexpected places - from impoverished dump to luxurious palace - but have to make the best of it whatever comes. The Spanish, I found then, were more hospitable and generous than their wealthier neighbours – as I later discovered in other much poorer countries in subsequent years – though drivers (rarely female wherever I went) were generally more reckless. One guy deliberately drove on the left hand side of a major road for nearly a mile (little traffic then) as a joke because I was English – in such cases you're not sure whether to grin and bear it or protest, the fear being that to object might cause offense and make him act even dafter.

When I arrived in Barcelona Herby was already there, evading my questions about his mode of transport though he seemed suspiciously neat and clean for a genuine traveller. At the time most British youth hostels were deliberately primitive affairs where you all mucked in with chores and they frowned on anyone not making a rough-and-tough effort like hiking, cycling, mountaineering, or even motorbike riding - but continental ones were a lot more relaxed and often nothing but cheap hotels. I was by now a fully paid up member of the Spartan brigade with blisters, windburn and unwashed underwear to prove it so, despite Herbert's intellectual advantage, I was able to take the moral high ground. Not that I wanted to take any ground, but he insisted on being my buddy, showing a special interest in the old guitar. He was one of those annoying people who knew all the theory but none of the practice. But I'll give him this, the arrogant bugger tried. He knew hundreds of chords and could baffle anyone with technical know-how, but had zero musical feel. It was painful to hear, but he would keep 'borrowing' my instrument and could empty the hostel in minutes – thank God he never tried to sing.

Luckily he wasn't the only musician there. A Spanish guy named Carlos approached me one day and showed great interest, not in my playing as he was streets ahead, but in the guitar itself. Apparently, he said, steel strung guitars were expensive and difficult to obtain there. The local gut stringed instruments on the other hand were common and, though his was better quality than mine, he was happy to swap. I readily agreed as his was a lovely flamenco-style job with a really nice tone, though quite well used. Though this particular instrument fell to pieces one rainy night about a year later when I stupidly camped too near a river during a storm, I've subsequently owned several similar ones and, if I could only keep one guitar, it would always be a Spanish. My tip, by the way, is buy second-hand when possible. Guitars mellow and change with age, like people, so first impressions can be misguided – especially judging by appearances. Also, older instruments have character and, believe it or not, develop a soul. Pooh-pooh this if you like, but any decent muso will tell you the same. (See Rory Gallagher's battered Stratocaster, bought second-hand in Cork, 1961, for just shy of £100 and played constantly throughout his career. Or Willy Nelson's nylon string

Martin acoustic which has a gaping hole scratched out from years of playing with a plectrum. Also, Seasick Steve's three string Fender held together with duck tape and which, he says, '...is the biggest piece of shit in the world'. Don't tell me these instruments ain't got no musical heart and soul – if so, neither have their owners.)

While I was in Barcelona, mostly just hanging out, I also swapped songs with Carlos and his mates. One of the artists who came up was Bob Dylan whose first album I'd recently bought. It was largely his versions of traditional songs, the arrangements for which he mostly took credit for on the sleeve, though he mentions Eric Von Schmidt as the arranger of 'Baby Let Me Follow You Down'. He doesn't, however, give Dave Von Ronk credit for 'House of the Rising Sun'. That last omission was a shame, not only as it apparently caused bad blood between them (since denied), but it was the track to get covered most by other artists, notably Eric Burdon and The Animals who made it a big hit – though Burden later claimed he learned the song back in Newcastle from a folk singer<sup>(4)</sup>. As it happens that was the only song off the album I, or most singers, attempted to play. Though, to be honest, I never was much good at it. The song has, in fact, a long and complex history, possibly starting out as an English folk song in the Sixteenth Century and recorded by numerous artists from 1933 on. Incidentally, for something completely different and how to ruin a perfectly good song check out John Otway's version.

At the time, Dylan was a breath of fresh air – the leading light of a new breed of singer-songwriters such as Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell and so on. Though Dylan began playing traditional stuff (and to this day still borrows heavily from it) not unlike many other popular American singers such as Pete Seeger, The Kingston Trio, Burl Ives, Peter Paul and Mary, etc, as well as less well known blues and country artists, there was something iconoclastic about him. His guitar playing wasn't anything to write home about but, like Skiffle before and Punk after (or today's electronic sounds which only require a few mouse clicks), he made you feel you could do it too. Of course that impression was deceptive, as the hundreds of highly original songs he subsequently wrote testify. Though many have derided his croaky voice and often contemptuous attitude towards live audiences, yet have to admit he's written some great material - better sung by others, they say, but I disagree. I'd generally rather hear any writer perform their own material in favour of a more technically proficient cover version – you get more of the original sentiment that way – but there are many notable exceptions.

We sailed on a rusty old hulk overnight to Ibiza and, not for the last time, I discovered how stormy the Med can be. Herby insisted, bizarrely, on carrying my guitar – not, I guessed, in the role of porter but in the hope people would assume he was the musician. Exhausted on arrival, we didn't stray far from the dockside and took almost the first rooms offered in a box-like whitewashed building with few amenities. Our main priority was cost, mine of necessity and Herby because he was tight – or maybe he just wanted to experience Ibiza's unspoiled charm

Irma Kurtz, in the Daily Mail recently, wrote of her experiences then: 'Life on the island was phenomenally cheap. A meal at the best restaurant on Ibiza Town's front, Juanita's, cost the equivalent of 50p today, including a glass or two of potent red wine.' She had hung out with other writers, artists and 'moody layabouts' there in the early Sixties, remarking on how quiet and simple life had been compared to a recent visit where she discovered, '...a mass of high rise hotels, thumping noisy bars and shops.' She concluded that, 'As a result of the overwhelming culture of drug-taking, gargantuan nightclubs and vomiting tourists, my paradise island is no more.'<sup>(5)</sup>

I've no doubt some of Ibiza's original charm does still exist away from the holiday centres and also, I suppose, if people want to

let their hair down they might as well do it there as anywhere. Clubbing - techno, house, trance, drum and bass or whatever - is just leaping about and having a good time. When has that ever changed? Hand on heart; I can't say I'd do any different if I was younger myself. Though, if I did go there now, I'd probably agree with Irma.

As it was we sought out the bohemian life style, mostly lounging around the bars near the harbour, but didn't really join in. I was just seventeen and they weren't my generation or, I felt, people I could relate to. Maybe, had I visited Ibiza a few years later when many musicians discovered the place, things might have been different <sup>(6)</sup>. As it was we bought cheap booze and ropy cigarettes and lazed about, mainly on the beach. Herbert's professed knowledge of organic chemistry came into its own when, on discovering the local bread to be little better than overblown cardboard, we threw a load of citrus fruit and sugar into a pot and conducted a marmalade-making experiment. Amazingly, the stuff set, didn't burn, and almost made the bread edible.

But such excitement couldn't last. There was the pressing, actually desperate, matter of finances - or lack of them - to face. Unless I was prepared to sell my ring at last, given that I was nowhere near confident enough to busk, I had to do something fast or end up permanently on the beach. The first thing was to get off the island. And so, after shaking Herby's hand with some regret, his impromptu dissertations on quantum theory almost having begun to grow on me, I boarded the next boat for the mainland, alone again.

*I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger  
travelling through this world of woe  
there is no sickness toil nor danger  
in that bright land to which I go*

I was roused from my thoughts by these apposite words, intoned plaintively in bitter sweet harmony by the Sage choir. For a moment I was back on The Folk Barge, a club venue moored on the Thames at Kingston where John Martyn and others used to perform, hearing a big bearded fellow called Theo Johnson (the man who got Martyn's first recording deal) sing this song in a deep melancholy baritone. No one really knows who wrote it, though there are as many varied versions as opinions of origin <sup>(7)</sup>. Some say it's an Appalachian folk song, with maybe Irish roots. Others say it comes from a Negro spiritual. Whatever the truth, it has been recorded by numerous artists including the Morman Tabernacle Choir, the source it seemed of this present rendition.

For a while I listened as the group of around twenty singers in flowing lilac tabards gave it the full mournful treatment, till my eyes strayed to a discordant figure weaving erratically along the concourse. The man, flailing about in a wheelchair, was being pushed towards us with obvious reluctance. Though he was desperately attempting to sabotage progress, the pusher was determined not to be put off by any antics including drunken abuse. As soon as I realised the crazy old passenger was Arthur, I reeled around desperately seeking an escape route. There was a toilet nearby, I recalled, but where was it? Or maybe I could exit into a lift or scoot upstairs? I stood to go but immediately realised my mistake.

Lester the chauffeur, eyeing me, gunned his charge in my direction, prompting even greater protests. Would he, I wondered, pile right through the crowded tables, scattering all before him like a battle tank? Despite his age and infirmity, I was already considering possible weapons. Would one of the chic but slender floral table decorations do the trick if emptied over his head? Or maybe a latte or two? But, just as they spun around to avoid the choir, something miraculous occurred; Arthur suddenly stopped wavering and, jamming his feet on the deck and his hands on the brakes, brought their erratic advance to a juddering halt.

*I'm going there to meet my father  
I'm going there no more to roam  
I'm only going over Jordan  
only going over home*

Suddenly mesmerised, Arthur sat like a baby while Lester signalled 'hopeless and helpless' to me - at least his charge was temporarily behaving. What had stopped him? A minute or two later, I saw him reach into an inside pocket and retrieve a shiny object, slowly bring it to his mouth and, in cupped hands, begin to play. The sound at first was barely audible, just long low harmonising notes, mingling with the choir and almost indistinguishable. After a bit, as he became more confident, the harmonica part sailed higher, encircling the human voices, a kind of ethereal echo that reached up into every steely crevice of the vaulted roof. At last, as the final words left the choir's lips, Arthur played on for another few bars, throwing in some subtle improvisations for good measure and ending on an impossibly convoluted minor note. The lunchtime audience, who normally gave these free concerts little more than polite recognition, stood up en-masse and applauded enthusiastically. The maestro stood slowly, making the most of his infirmity, and nodded with a shy smile.

Well, I thought, as everyone sat down, there's no escape now. Go and congratulate your old buddy – so I did.

## **FOOTNOTES - Chapter 9**

(1) 'One Pound GBP in 1962 had the purchasing power of about £14.30 today.' This figure is only an approximation, as the site admits, since many calculations are required. According to [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)

(2) As an aside, some years later as a student, I worked during vacations for a demolition firm called Gorilla (which deserves a chapter if not a whole book to itself) when a gang of us had to rip out fixtures and fittings in a city office block prior to refurbishment. As we made our way up and down the service lift with bags of rubble, timber, carpets and old furniture, staff on other floors began firstly to 'shush' us, then to complain vociferously about the noise. We, of course, couldn't help it but answered their pleas by turning up the radio and banging around even more. We viewed our white collared cousins as pathetic and unsympathetic wimps. Didn't they know what shit we had to deal with? And from the chilly dawn, often without breakfast, not a leisurely nine-thirty start in peaceful, coffee powered, luxury? We didn't envy them, but did despise these somewhat effete softies tied to keyboards and phones, especially as we often earned a lot more than they did.

(3) According to the Met Office, 'The winter of 1962/63 was tobogganing heaven for the nation's children but the cold and snow would offer a challenge of a different kind for just about everyone else.' The first falls of snow brought transport to a standstill and closed schools, but more snow was on the way. 'On 29 and 30 December a blizzard across south-west England and Wales left drifts six metres deep which blocked roads and rail routes, villages cut off and brought down power lines. Thanks to further falls and almost continual near-freezing temperatures, snow was still deep on the ground across much of the country three months later. In the intervals when snow was not falling, the country simply appeared to freeze solid. January was the month when even the sea froze (out to half a mile from the shore at Herne Bay), the Thames froze right across in places, and ice floes appeared on the

river at Tower Bridge. Everywhere birds literally dropped off their perches – killed by the cold and lack of natural food. February was marked by more snow arriving on south-easterly winds during the first week, with a 36-hour blizzard hitting western parts of the country. Drifts 20 feet deep formed in gale-force winds (gusts in excess of 70 knots were common, and a gust of 103 knots was recorded on the Isle of Man). Throughout the winter thousands of sheep, cattle and ponies starved because it was impossible to get enough fodder to them. A slight lull in the winter proceedings happened around mid-month, but in the third week of February it was the turn of the north-west to suffer – in Cumberland the snowfall was reckoned to be the worst in living memory. By the end of the month the weather over the country had reverted to “normal” – cold but clear and sunny days with severe night frosts and freezing fog. A gradual thaw then set in – the morning of 6 March 1963 was the first day in the year that the country was entirely frost free. The report concludes by saying, ‘Monster snowmen and snowballs – now adrift and melting in the green “seas” of gardens and playing fields – were soon all that was left of the winter that was probably the coldest since 1795.’ The Met Office, ‘Great Weather Events’. From their website: [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

(4) In a BBC Radio 4 interview, 18 Jan. 2008, Eric Burdon revealed that he first heard the song in a club in Newcastle, England, where it was sung by a Northumbrian folk singer called Johnny Handle. The Animals were on tour with Chuck Berry and chose it because they wanted something distinctive to sing. This interview denies assertions that the inspiration for their arrangement came from Dylan. The band enjoyed a huge hit with the song, much to Dylan's chagrin when his version was referred to as a cover—the irony of which was not lost on Van Ronk, who went on record as saying that the whole issue was a "tempest in a teapot," and that Dylan stopped playing the song after The Animals' hit because fans accused Dylan of plagiarism. Dylan has said he first heard The Animals' version on his car radio and "jumped out of his car seat" because he liked it so much.

(5) ‘In the early Sixties, visitors to Ibiza were the last of the true bohemians, fleeing from conventional life and trying to make destinies of their own as writers, artists or simply as moody layabouts. We spent our days tap-tapping on typewriters at short stories or daubing colours onto canvas, swimming, sailing, laughing and talking with friends, and wondering at the sunsets and the stars at night. Not only was Ibiza blessed with beautiful beaches and a sweet climate, and not only were the locals welcoming and honest, but equally important to an arty crowd like ours, life on the island was phenomenally cheap. A meal at the best restaurant on Ibiza Town's front, Juanita's, cost the equivalent of 50p today, including a glass or two of potent red wine. Recently I returned to Ibiza to see how the island has changed in the past 40 years. I could not have been more horrified and bitterly disappointed.’ She notes, for example, visiting Figueretes: ‘Once just a few pretty houses on an enticing shore where the ladies used to hang out washing and watch for fishing boats, Figueretes is now a mass of high rise hotels, thumping noisy bars and shops.’ Also that: ‘As a result of the overwhelming culture of drug-taking, gargantuan nightclubs and vomiting tourists, my paradise island is no more.’

Irma Kurtz, Daily Mail, 10 August, 2006.

(6) People living on Ibiza in the early Sixties included: Elmyr do Hory (famous forger), Clifford Irving (hoaxed the Howard Hughes biography), Romy Schneider, Nina and Frederick Van Pallandt (sang ‘Little Donkey’) Irma Kurtz, Norman Mailor, Terry Thomas, Terence Stamp, Charlotte Rampling and John Anthony West, the writer. Towards the end of the Sixties and early Seventies arrived musicians such as Nico, of The Velvet Underground,

Bob Marley, Davy Graham, Joannie Mitchel, Bob Dylan, Frank Zappa, Eric Clapton, Mike Oldfield, and members of Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Yes, The Stones and Beatles.

From various websites including: [www.ibizaa-z.com](http://www.ibizaa-z.com) [www.hippy.com](http://www.hippy.com)

<http://stewarthomasociety.org>

(7) Artists who have recorded 'Poor Wayfaring Stranger' include: Bill Monroe, Burl Ives, Dolly Parton, Duane Eddy, Dusty Springfield, Emmylou Harris, Esther Ofarim, Eva Cassidy, Frankie Laine, Isaac Guillory, Jack White, Jerry Garcia, Jerry Reed, Jo Stafford, Joan Baez, Johnny Cash, Kristin Hersh Leland Martin, Michael Franti, Mormon Tabernacle Choir, Natalie Merchant, Neko Case, Papa M, Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary, Richard Shindell, Roger McGuinn, Ronnie Hawkins, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Tim Buckley, Tony Rice, Tom Fox, Trace Adkins, and many more.