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The Prez of Louisville

The first black man I ever knew was named Charlie Dorsey. He worked in a paper mill and wrote poetry, free verse that he published at his own expense in slim little volumes he gave to his friends. I remember holding one of these books, words in black ink on white paper and encased in a red paper cover, with a sort of sense of caressing a treasure. I had never known an author of words that were actually in print, and I was in awe of books. It mattered little that he had paid for this book himself; what mattered was that he gave it to me.

I held Charlie Dorsey in a kind of reverence, and that was even before he saved my life. But then I thought all black people were gods. This was because most of my idols were black: men named Benny Carter, Nat Cole, Duke Ellington, Jimmie Lunceford, Joe Thomas, Ray Nance, Count Basie, Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Teddy Wilson, Arnett Cobb. Dozens of them. There were a few white heroes, too: Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Cappy Lewis, Mel Powell, Bunny Berigan, Artie Shaw. I even had a few heroes who weren't musicians, John Steinbeck, Thomas Wolfe, William Saroyan, and William Faulkner among them. Years later, in New York, I walked into the office of the noted literary critic Seymour Krim, who was then editor of a magazine I wrote for. A man of middle years was sitting there, chatting with Sy. Sy waved me to a chair and went on with some point in the conversation with that older man and then after about a minute said, "Excuse me, I'm being rude. Gene, I'd like to meet Bill Saroyan." I nearly fainted.

One thing all -- or almost all -- my heroes had in common, black or white, musicians or otherwise: they were Americans. And I wasn't. Of the musicians, I'd say that approximately 60 percent of these unreachable deities were black. One young friend of mine, Doug Bush, who played trumpet and shared my awe of them, said once that whenever he saw someone Negro (the requisite polite term in those days), he wanted to get his autograph, even if the man was a railway porter. Such indeed was our conditioning.

I have never understood those who pull back from difference, or more, hate it, some of them with a lethal dedication. I loved it and in time fled into it, any kind of difference I could find: French, Jewish, Italian, Latin American (curious, but I have never had any great interest in Iberia itself), and black.

My parents had a lot to do with my attitudes. My father went to work in a Lancashire cotton mill when he was twelve and in a coal mine at fourteen. He practiced violin fingerings on the handle of a shovel and eventually became a musician. I do not remember either of my parents ever saying they loved me, and neither do my brother and two sisters. My parents had many faults, but they had two virtues: though neither of them had much formal education, they were highly literate people; and they were devoid of any kind of ethnic prejudice. My mother, however, was afflicted with that peculiarly English sense of class. She was born in London -- indeed, she was technically a Cockney, although she had been in Canada from the time she was three and had no trace of English accent -- and she despised my father's Lancashire relatives. I was made very conscious of their accent; indeed, I can slip into it instantly. I was made to feel they were her social inferiors. I do not know how much damage she did with this: if they were such trash, what did this make me? And yet I loved their culture, the songs of George Formby and Gracie Fields, *Mr. Woo's a Window Cleaner Now* and *The Biggest Aspidistra in the World*, that entire English music-hall tradition, much of which became part of me by osmosis when my father would take me with him in the car and sing songs. As I got to know them I would sing them too. I learned an enormous amount of Gilbert and Sullivan from him. And I never hear Kern's *They Didn't Believe Me* and *I've Told Every Little Star* without thinking of him; I learned both songs from him in the car. He loathed *Rhapsody in Blue*, he was intensely anti-American, and never wavered in this hostility until he died about seven years ago. I must refine that: he liked Americans and hated the United States for such things as the Haymarket Strike, the Scottsboro trial, the shooting of automobile workers in Detroit, the depredations of J. Edgar Hoover, McCarthyism, the House Un-American Activities Committee, the execution of the Rosenbergs, and the Cold War, which he insisted was primarily the creation and fault of the U.S. Yet he greatly admired certain specific Americans, and I was named after one of them: Eugene Debs. My mother was a Lincoln buff.

I went to work as a bag boy in a supermarket when I was twelve and in a paper mill when I was fourteen. I worked in one mill or another from then until I was eighteen. I worked in them weekends and summers all through my high school years. I liked the paper mills. I liked the sense of camaraderie with the men. And I liked having my own money, and decent clothes. My mother never cared much what her kids wore, and I was usually rather shabbily dressed. I blame this on Communism. Her father, my grandfather, was a Communist, a friend incidentally of both Jack London, who made his way as far as Buffalo during the famous march on Washington, and Horace Traubel, Walt Whitman's biographer. My grandfather too was highly literate, though most of his reading was pertinent to The Cause. My mother had absorbed his attitudes, and there is one thing you must know about orthodox Communists: they have no real sense of pleasure. They are austere people, and they see art only as purposive. It is supposed to be "doing" something, "improving" society. If it doesn't do that, it is worthless. Such people measure all art according to a tenet of social utility. Therefore my grandfather's authors of preference were the likes of Upton Sinclair, Jack London, and Charles Dickens. His devotion to the latter left me with a distaste for Dickens that persists to this day. He used to say that all art is propaganda. I never knew whether he meant it was or was supposed to be, nor whether the phrase was original with him. I read it years later in an interview with Abbey Lincoln, who shared the sentiment. Certainly it is the viewpoint behind all that proletarian art of the Stalinist period in Russia and Italian heroic public architec-

ture under Mussolini.

I know of only one jazz critic who has the same fix on this reflexive imposition of the political viewpoint on esthetic interpretation that I do, James Lincoln Collier, and he has been crucified by other critics for it. Collier, like me, has good leftist family credentials, and he can read and see right through the interpretive pre-supposition this philosophy produces. Collier is absolutely correct in his view that writers of the left have falsified jazz history.

How anyone can think the art of Louis Armstrong -- or Benny Carter or Count Basie or Coleman Hawkins or John Coltrane -- is the cry of pain of a downtrodden people is beyond me, for jazz is the most sensual and joyous music I know. Of course there is pain it; it would be shallow, and false to the human experience, like the poems of Edgar Guest and the piano of Eddy Duchin, if there were not. But there is joy, exuberant and luxuriant, in it as well. Coltrane said to me once, "Why do they say my playing is angry? I'm not angry." And he wasn't, either: he was a very gentle man. It is precisely the range of its expressivity that makes jazz the magnificent art that it is, and according to my lights the most significant music in the world from approximately 1920 to the present. And I was listening to it from a time before I can remember, certainly before I knew what to call it. My mother's brother, my Uncle Harry, who was a trombone player, probably turned me onto it first. He was everything my mother wasn't, a meticulous and dapper dresser and a lover of pleasure. He hated my grandfather and hated Communism. He hipped me to Basie. He played in and wrote charts for a band led by someone named Len Allen, and I would listen to their radio broadcasts. Every once in a while they would dedicate a song to me. That was my true introduction to dance bands. I could recognize the sound of any instrument by the time I was three.

And so I grew up in a town called St. Catharines, Ontario, a narrow and bigoted little city not far from Niagara Falls and Buffalo. I collected my jazz records and made friends with the young local musicians, several of whom -- including a drummer named Rodney North and a trumpet player named Kenny Wheeler -- are still friends of mine. And I worked in paper mills, to get money for my clothes and my records and, eventually, a small black portable Remington typewriter. I taught myself to touch type.

There was always work for school kids in the mills in summer, for that was when the logs came in on the boats. One of the mills was that of the Ontario Paper Company, on the east bank of the Welland Canal. The company was a subsidiary of the Chicago *Tribune*, and once when I was working on a paper machine the *Tribune*'s owner, Colonel McCormick, came through on a tour of inspection. I remember him tall and white haired, wearing, I think, a white suit, another regal American. My father hated him because of the *Tribune*'s isolationist stand during the war years, when my dad's country was getting bombed. The young men in the graduating class the year I entered high school were gone, almost all of them dead in the Battle of Britain.

But McCormick in fact treated his Canadian employees extremely well. He was one of the pioneers of reforestation. The money in the mill was good, and I liked the Ontario.

I grew up along the Welland Canal, and I am creature of the Great Lakes. The ships would tie up at the Ontario dock and a great crane would drop its claw, at the end of a cable, into the holds. The fingers would close and the crane would lift the claw, pulp logs protruding from its grasp, and drop them on a conveyor. The job of the yard workers, including me, was to see that they didn't jam. The chain that moved them ran along the bottom of a v-shaped wooden track, dragging the logs to a second conveyor, this one rising at about a thirty degree angle. The logs would drop off the end of it, gradually accruing into a great conical mountain of wood, which later would be fed into the mill, reduced by sulfuric acid into the long white fibers called sulphite or ground into porridge called groundwood. These are combined in huge roaring machines to make newsprint. The sulphite holds the paper together; the groundwood forms its surface.

Yard work at the Ontario was hard, but handling pulp logs made me strong, and I liked the place. I remember an old (he was probably forty) Polish paper-maker (a skilled craft) who was protective of me. He spoke only a few words of English. And he inspired in me the amazing revelation that ignorant is not stupid. Some very bright and brainy people lack education.

I liked to work nights -- it left the days free for going to the beach with the first girl I ever loved -- and I remember standing on that top conveyor, a pike pole in hand to break up any log jams that might occur, as the sky turned gradually green and then the trees and the mountains of pulpwood stood in blackest silhouette against a red sunup occurring a few miles over there in New York State. The rows of lights in the yard would grow weak and then would be extinguished for the day.

But my favorite hour was midnight. We took our lunch break then. All the young guys would scarf down sandwiches brought in brown paper bags or lunch pails. And then we go swimming in the canal. Great floodlights illumined the ship and the waters around it. We'd climb way the hell up on the ship, the bridge or higher, and then dive screaming into the warm water. After so long a plunge, you'd go deep, and the water was gorgeously green in the flickering shafts of descending lamplight, and you'd rise to the surface by the side of the ship, climb up on the dock and then up on the ship and do it all over again. Sometimes a big rust-red laker would plow slowly along the canal, going up to Chicago or Milwaukee or Cleveland or down to the St. Lawrence River and Montreal and ports on the far side the world. I yearned to go with them. Kenny Wheeler's brother became a captain of one of those long lakers. These ships were awesome when viewed from water level with your head sticking above the surface. You made sure to stay well out of the wash, of course. The Great Lakes were not yet polluted and the water was very clean.

I suppose what we did, swimming and diving in that night-time canal traffic, was dangerous. But it sure was fun.

It occurred to me once that I must be one of the few writers who has been in on the process from unloading the logs to making the paper to writing the words that go on it. I know of another: Charlie Dorsey.

There was little visible prejudice against blacks in that part of Canada. That was because there were few blacks. I don't remember that there was even one in my high school. There were a few in the area, a very few, including several young musicians who were friends of Kenny Wheeler's. Kenny was terribly shy, and so was I. In that he has never changed. Kenny turned me onto Sauter-Finegan, Sarah Vaughan, and Miles Davis. He was the first person I knew to appreciate Miles.

I suppose Charlie Dorsey was around forty, and I surmise that he must have been one of the first persons with whom I ever discussed writing. Somewhere in the shadows that lie just beyond the edge of consciousness, I have an idea that he encouraged me to take it up.

The Alliance paper mill was not on the bank of the Welland Canal. It got its pulpwood by railway. Charlie and I would work together, relieving these box cars of their logs, cut uniformly to a length of four feet. You had a big hook in your right hand, what they call a baling hook on the New York waterfront. You'd dig it into one end of a log, raise the end, pick up the log with your free hand, and toss it out the door onto a conveyor belt. One became very skilled with one of those hooks. We held informal contests to see who could throw a log the farthest. I could pitch a pulp log a good twenty feet, maybe more. I loved being with Charlie. He was wise and warm and funny, and teased me a lot.

As at the Ontario, the yard at the Alliance contained those conical mountains of logs, so characteristic of paper mills, together with smaller cones of brilliantly yellow sulphur, used to make the sulfuric acid that breaks down the fibers of the wood. One of our jobs was to move the wood from this huge pile onto other conveyors that carried them into the plant. When you had worked on the cone for a while, it would become undercut. The wood at times was hanging over your head. When it reached the danger point, you'd use a long pike pole to pull on the overhang until it collapsed.

I was working beneath that overhang one day when it began to give way. Charlie Dorsey was behind me. He saw what was happening. His action was reflexive, instant, and perfect. He reached out with that wood hook, stabbed it into me, and yanked me back just as the logs came crashing down. I didn't feel the pain at first; I suppose I was too elated to be alive.

I couldn't sit for a week or so; the hook had left quite a wound. But I wasn't dead.

I left that town as soon as I could get out of it and never saw Charlie Dorsey again. Later I made enquiries, but nobody could tell me anything about him. I suppose he's dead by now.

The second and third black men I ever knew personally were Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown, whom I met when I was a young reporter in the city where I was born, Hamilton, Ontario. A barber refused to cut Oscar's hair and I was assigned to the story. I interviewed, but we did not become close friends until years later, in Chicago.

At that time, whereas one American in four was black, only one Canadian in 740 was black. And so I didn't get to know anyone else black for two or three more years. In Montreal -- I had gone there because it was French-speaking, and I was already well along on my journey into difference -- I became friends with a young pianist, singer, and songwriter named Cedric Phillips, who was from Barbados. We became very close and Cedric gave me my first real insight, aside from the music I already loved, into black culture.

Cedric worked in cocktail lounges, and when he was off, we'd go to the rooms where jazz was played. And there were a lot of them. Montreal was a swinging city in those days. It's a rather dead city now, due to the linguistic racism that has been written into law. English is virtually a forbidden language there, and the city is slowly atrophying of its own insularity and bigotry, the vain attempt to save a language that cannot be preserved. It will fade as surely as Irish has faded. French isn't going to be preserved even in France. English is the language of all the airlines of the world, and the Chinese -- and Russians and others -- are learning it with all possible despatch. More than half the books sold in Holland are in English. And our present English will probably be hard to read in a hundred years. You can see how fast the language is mutating by reading a 1945 copy of the New York *Times*; the English in newspapers and magazines of the 1920s seems even more remote. English expands its vocabulary with a good-natured amorality. French officialdom frowns (somewhat ineffectually, to be sure) on importations, and the Academie Francaise has not been able to expunge such terms as *pipeline* (pronounced peepleen) and *building de haute standing*, which you see on billboards in front of rising condominiums in Paris. In 1962, when I was in Latin America with the Paul Winter sextet, a peculiarly Spanish term in common use had to be explained to us. The term was *macho*; thirty years later it is part of the English language, and an irreplaceable part at that. One wonders how they are coping with it in Quebec. It developed in Spanish from the Latin *masculus* from which we (and the French) get *masculine*.

We long ago abandoned gender in English, and we continue to simplify our grammar through the abandonment of declension and conjugation endings, a process that is almost completed. Pronunciation and usage evolve through error. Though doesn't rhyme with through, cough, or tough. Wind no longer rhymes with mind, water doesn't rhyme with later, and great doesn't rhyme with seat, which rhymes with greet. John F. Kennedy saddled us with that ghastly misuse of the adverb *hopefully*. And if there is an after-life, I hope a special torment can be devised there for the Unknown Solderer who affixed a preposition to a noun to give us that clumsy (and ubiqitous) new adjective *in-depth*, as in "an in-depth interview." Alas, you'll get used to it, and English will go on expanding, spreading around the world like kudzu.

My son, who is French, a pianist and composer and currently

music director of a French TV soap called *Riviera*, called me from Paris a few weeks ago to ask me to write lyrics for two of his tunes to be used in the show. Half-way through the job I said, "Phil, I don't get it. Why are we writing lyrics in English for a French TV series?"

He said, "Because this show is seen in eight countries, and the language of Europe is English."

I was startled further not long after that to learn that the show is actually shot in English and then dubbed into French! The Pasteur Institute in Paris, which has always published its papers in French and English, recently announced that it was ceasing to publish in French. Henceforth all its papers would be in English. This caused shock waves in Quebec.

What has been done to Quebec is tragic. But Montreal was a wonderful place when I lived there, with jazz -- not to mention a whole cabaret world in French -- to be found everywhere. The city was wildly bilingual in those days. And whereas I had always absorbed the lyrics sung by Frank Sinatra, Peggy Lee, Jo Stafford, and other American idols, I was now absorbing those I heard on the records of Edith Piaf, Maurice Chevalier, Yves Montand, and Gilbert Becaud. Becaud came to Montreal to do a concert, and I interviewed him. I admired his songs, and still do.

I was a reporter in those days for the Montreal *Star*, a newspaper that had a good reputation it didn't deserve. Quebec was corrupt, Montreal was corrupt, and the city's newspapers were corrupt, none more so than the *Star*. It had your standard hard-drinking Irish city editor, a man named Ted Murphy who was -- everybody on the paper knew it -- balling the editor of the women's page, a rather prissy maiden lady who, as I recall, wore hats with large floppy brims. One would have thought her devoid of the baser instincts, but one of our guys, working late, caught her and Ted having at it in the men's room, of all places. Like all the older reporters, Ted was on the take. Once when I came back from covering some government story, Ted asked for his cut. I didn't know what he was talking about. He said there was always a payoff from that source, and he wanted his share. I recall his incredulity when I said I hadn't been given anything. At last he took my word for it, and he shook his head with pitying amazement at such naivete.

We had a photographer on that paper who was dogged by bad luck. Once he climbed a hydroelectric tower to get a better shot of something. He leaned out, holding his camera in one hand and grasping a metal bolt with the other. The bolt came loose and he ended up in the hospital. Another time he was assigned to cover the favorite charity of the paper's owner. He got down on one knee for the shot. The owner's wife was seated front and center with her legs a little parted, her skirt just covering her knees. The flash of course illuminated everything, and when the darkroom guys printed the picture, they discovered that she was wearing no pants. The art department airbrushed an additional length of skirt.

This photographer, whose name I forget, went out one February morning on a bad fire in a downtown apartment building. Montreal winters are the coldest of any city I've ever lived in, Chicago not excepted, and the temperature was well below zero that day. The photographer walked in front of a fireman's hose.

The noon deadline came and went, with no sign of him. Ted Murphy was annoyed, to say the least. At last the photographer turned up, his clothes hardened with ice. He even had ice in his hair. Ted took one look at him and said, "What'd you do, piss yourself with excitement?"

The executive editor was a man named A.J. West. He was a dapper, Adolph Menjou kind of man, and he was a jerk. Once one of the photographers brought back a photo of a gorilla, taken God knows where. Ted said brusquely, "What's this?"

"It's a gorilla," the photographer said.

"Nonsense," Ted said. "It's A.J. West."

Ted eventually drank himself to death. He was an amor[illegible] man, but he was fun, and I liked him.

It was at the Montreal *Star* that Alain Braun, my best friend on the paper, with my connivance, invented Ignace Knupf, the demon reporter who didn't exist.

Al Braun, whose parents died at Auschwitz, had survived a terrifying odyssey all over France in his childhood, hiding from the Germans. He had a peculiar lingering effect of those years: he had missed the year of school when you learn the order of the alphabet, and thus, not knowing the sequence of the letters, had trouble using a telephone directory.

This did not impair his extraordinary gift of words. With the end of the war, when he was 17, he got a visa to Canada, and spent the next six months sitting all day, day after day, in movie houses, learning English. Within six months he wrote it so well that he got a job on a small newspaper, then moved to the Star when he was only 18. Alain Braun was one of the most brilliant men I ever knew. He was rather small, with an aquiline nose, very tough, and skilled at judo.

The *Star* building was on St. James Street, now renamed Rue St. Jacques, in the financial district. All the major banks had big buildings there. A peculiar thing happened one day at o[illegible] of them. An elderly teller, frustrated and bitter apparently over his failure to be promoted in all those years, took an original kind of revenge on his bank. At high noon, when the bank was crowded with customers, he put a revolver to his head and adorned the cage with its contents.

It is policy on many newspapers not to cover suicides, except when they occur in public places. In this case, the upper brass of the bank promptly got in touch with the owners of all the newspapers and got the story suppressed. But a day or two later, A.J. West developed a morbid curiosity about the incident and told Al Braun, who was covering the morgue, to write him a private memo about it. Well, by then the fix was in. The coroner's report was nowhere to be found. And to punish Al for his inability to get the information, West spitefully put him on the night police shift. This meant he sat in the office alone all night, monitoring the police radio and checking out stories. No good assignments, just long tedious hours of night.

One day, listening to a local radio station, he noted that it

offered a prize of several dollars for news tips, with a bonus for the best tip of the week. Al realized that the news staff apparently didn't have the smarts to listen to the police radio, so he started phoning them stories he picked up in the course of the night. When they asked his name, he instantly devised a pseudonym: Ignace Knupf. It was odd, crazy, and inspired. He phoned stories to the station so regularly that the personnel there began calling him Iggie.

Then Al had another inspiration. I was working day shift. All our copy was written on what they called "books" -- sheets of paper with five or six carbons behind them. The carbons were deposited in bins on a table in the city room. Some went to the wire service, Canadian Press. Some were supposed to go to A.J. West. I never did divine what the others were for. Al at this point told me what he was doing. He proposed that just before the noon deadline each day, I grab a set of those carbons and phone the stories to him, after which he would phone them to the radio station. At first I was reluctant. But the paper was hopelessly corrupt, and I thought, What the hell, why not?

And so we proceeded. Iggie had been phoning that station all night long, and now he was phoning them at noon, an hour or two before the *Star* hit the streets. Then Al got still another idea. He realized that the French-language stations did not listen to the English-language stations, nor read the English newspapers. He proposed to the largest of them an arrangement like that he had with the English-language station. We began servicing both stations. And then he got still another idea. Every morning, when he left the *Star* office, he picked up the morning papers and brought them to my apartment. We would scalp them (a newspaper term meaning to lift stories from other papers) in both languages. We phoned the stories to both stations, the French stories to the English-language station, the English to the French-language stations. Soon Iggie was making more money than Al and I together were making from our jobs.

Ignace Knupf, the Reporter Who Never Sleeps. He phones you all night, he phones you at dawn, he phones you at noon. In two languages. The hottest reporter in town didn't even exist. And Ted Murphy was going nuts, trying to figure out how these two stations were scooping not only the *Star* but every paper in town -- and there were about ten of them, three in English and the rest in French. Iggie had his own checking account and Al and I were laughing, well, all the way to the bank.

Iggie's days were numbered, however. Eventually the English-language station started pressing Iggie to come in for a face-to-face meeting. Al finally admitted Iggie's identity, left the paper, and started writing for radio and later television.

I covered strikes and plane crashes and fires and murders. I shake my head when the movie special effects people contrive to show an instant gush of blood from a bullet's entry wound. It may be dramatic but it isn't the way it is. A bullet going in makes a nice neat hole; the mess is made at the back when it emerges. I once covered a murder-suicide in which a man shot his naked boyfriend in the heart with a Lee Enfield army rifle, then blew -- and I mean blew -- his own brains all over the ceiling. The boyfriend just had a neat blue hole smack in the center of the chest.

I got sick, and sickened, of seeing such things.

I was sent to Europe on assignment. I worked out of the *Herald-Tribune* office, writing stories on the Royal Canadian Air Force, among other things. I met a beautiful girl named Micheline in the bank where I went to pick up my expenses and conned her into going to a Beethoven concert with me. We fell in love by moonlight in a restaurant on a barge on the Seine, with the Eiffel Tower reflected in the water. I thought it was too unreal to last, which intuition proved correct.

I flew home again with the air force. Planes didn't simply jump the Atlantic in those days. The usual procedure for the air force was to refuel in Iceland. It was the time of the midnight sun, and all night I watched the red sun crawl along the horizon.

One of the reasons I left Canada, I can see in retrospect, is that it simply was too small -- not in terms of area, of course, but in terms of population. If you wanted to practice any of the arts that require a reasonably large audience, it was almost impossible to stay there. That is why so much of its talent went to England, as in the cases of Robert Farnon and Kenny Wheeler, and even more to the United States, which is closer and in whose culture we were steeped due to its sheer size and proximity. We memorized its songs, listened to Edgar Bergen and Jack Benny and Bob Hope on the radio, devoured its movies and bought its cars. Canada was and is the major trading partner of the United States, consuming a tenth of the U.S. gross national product. When Canada can't buy American goods, the U.S. is in trouble. Growing up on American art yet never really feeling part of it, we were like kids with our noses to the candy-store window.

I was hired to become classical music critic of the Louisville *Times*. And there I experienced a series of culture shocks.

I was issued my residence visa in April 1955, and the following month left Montreal. I took a train to Windsor, Ontario, and crossed by bus to Detroit, where I turned in my residence papers to U.S. Immigration. I was told that my green card would be issued by mail shortly. I remember buying a pair of shoes while I waited for my train to Louisville. The clerk asked my name. I told him. And he instantly addressed me not as Mr. Lees but as Gene. They didn't do that in Canada, though this casual American intimacy has since become customary there too.

I had visited the United States often, of course, and during the war I bought most of my records in Niagara Falls, New York, and smuggled them across the border. That's how I got the early Nat Cole, Bobby Sherwood, and Stan Kenton records on Capitol. But this was different: now I was going to live here. Now I had to become a part of it, and my antennae were open.

I was somewhat affronted by the presumption of that shoe clerk. But in time I came to realize that Americans were far friendlier than Canadians. Warmer. Or they were then, much

more so than they are now. Forty-five years of post-war avarice and vicious competition have made them colder.

The train trundled through the night. In the morning I was in Louisville. I descended from the train in the Louisville and Nashville station. And I felt an almost physical shock when my eye caught sight of the station's lavatories. They had signs on the doors. Colored. White. I had never seen such a thing. I cannot say there was no racial prejudice in Canada. Ask Oscar Peterson (now the chancellor of York University) or Ed Thigpen (who lived in Toronto for a while) or Sonny Greenwich or Oliver Jones. But, as Oscar told Ray Brown when Ray chided him about the haircut incident, "At least in my country, the law was on my side." And it was. What I was looking at in Louisville was official, sanctioned, accepted, enforced segregation.

I took a room at the YMCA until such time as I could find an apartment. And I checked in at the paper. It was a few days before the Kentucky Derby. I was pressed into duty to write color stories about it. And then I was sent to the Derby itself, to write more color material. I found myself in the press box sitting beside a small, handsome man with a mustache and a stained tie. His suit was rumpled. But I'd have known that face anywhere. He was on assignment, I learned later, to cover the Derby for a New York magazine. One of the older reporters said to me, "Gene, this is Bill Faulkner." Another of my gods. And since there was nothing much for us to do until post time except sip mint juleps (a drink for which I acquired an instant dislike) and sit there, I had the incredible experience of talking to Faulkner about writing. I wish we'd had cassette recorders then.

But my greatest Louisville shocks lay ahead.

Needless to say, I was soon immersed in the jazz world of the city. I pressed the paper's editor to let me write about it as well as classical music, believing it to be just as important as the modern "classical" music being commissioned and performed by the Louisville Orchestra. This music was issued in boxed collections. I had the entire set. I lent it to Miles Davis in New York and never got it back. I wonder if he still had those records when he died.

Louisville was a comparatively progressive city, certainly when compared with others of the South. The famous Supreme Court ruling banning segregated schooling had just come down. Louisville was ready for it, and implemented school desegregation within months. But private business was not covered by a ruling, and you simply did not see anyone black in any of the restaurants there. A concert package came through, presenting Nat Cole and Count Basie. I met them both. Nat asked me to have lunch with him. I remember that he sent for room service and we ate in his hotel room. The significance of that didn't strike me until many years later.

Almost from the moment I hit Louisville, I began doing something that just wasn't done in the South: going to black nightclubs to listen to music. And going to black homes.

There was a prosperous black middle-class in Louisville, with its own separate culture. One of the social groups presented Leontyne Price in recital. I met her then and was invited to a reception for her at one of the black homes, and from that point on I was often in educated black middle-class society. I found some of those people quite charming, but on the subject of jazz, quite square. Indeed, some of them spoke of it, if they spoke of it at all, with ill-concealed condescension. As I learned long afterwards from Benny Golson, that attitude was entrenched even at Howard University. Jazz was the cry of protest of the black American? Not to a lot of those I met in Louisville: they didn't even like the stuff.

I do not wish to suggest that I was the only "liberal" on the paper. A passionate opposition to segregation was endemic on the reporting staff. Even the Southerners among the reporters were militant about it. One of them, Bill Peeples, a reporter from Georgia, almost started a strike when he found out that black employees (all of them in lower-echelon jobs) were not allowed to eat in the paper's cafeteria.

I liked Barry Bingham, the handsome owner of the Louisville *Times* and its sister paper the *Courier-Journal*. And I liked his cool and aristocratic wife Mary. Bingham was a Democrat, and a friend of Adlai Stevenson's. The official editorial stance of both papers was staunchly liberal and pro-integration.

A joke went around on the paper. Barry is sitting in his garden and swats at an itch, muttering, "These damn chiggers."

"Please, Barry," Mary says. "You have to say Chegroes."

There was more truth to that joke than I knew. Two books have been written about the Binghams of Louisville. One of them contains a chilling revelation. A black gardener was working at their home. The Bingham children were swimming in the pool. The gardener's young son was with him. The Bingham kids invited him to come in for a swim.

When Mary Bingham saw him there, she was horrified and ordered the boy out.

And she completely drained the pool.

One of my reporter colleagues of that time, Tom Tomizawa, a nisei from San Francisco and later a producer at NBC News in New York, remarked to me a few years ago, "Don't you remember? The liberalism was all in the pages of the paper. It didn't apply at home, and it didn't apply to us."

It struck me as peculiarly American that I could be on friendly terms with the owner of the newspaper and with one of the black janitors who cleaned the building at night. His name was John Woods. And the reason I became friends with him was that he was a very good guitarist. He couldn't get enough work in music to live on, but he could play. And he and I would sometimes go up to my little efficiency apartment to listen to records. I would have to enter with my key through the front door, go to the back of the building, let him in a rear door and go with him up the fire escape stairs.

I learned something from John, something about the inherent poeticism of the South, which I have concluded is the consequence of the marvelous and mad love of language of the Irish, and a decorative, allusive indirection of expression that is a heritage of Africa. John, who had a solid Southern accent, was talking about a girl he'd been in love with. He told me she was very passionate. He said that when he was making love to her, "she like to clawed de paper off de wall."

My God, I thought, that's poetry. And then he topped it. He said, "An' when I pulled it out, she groaned like I took a knife out of a wound." From then on I used to hang out with John not just to hear him play guitar but to hear him talk as well. Wow. Did he have a flair for language.

Not that it did him any good. In that society, he was just a janitor. What would he have become had he ever had access to the implements of education? Old Mike in the paper mill. Ignorant is not stupid.

I hadn't had much "formal" education either. But at least I hadn't been debarred from the public library. And I was devouring it, reading history incessantly. And at least I had the company of my friends among the reporters, two of whom had been Rhodes scholars. And I met all the famous composers whose work was performed by the orchestra. I met Gregor Piatigorsky. I met the Budapest String Quartet, even saw Piatigorsky "jam" with them one night, playing a Schubert quintet.

I had lunch with him the next day. He was a huge man; the cello looked like a toy in his hands. I knew he had known Ravel. I adored Ravel and was curious about the man: the biographies never mentioned a sex life. Usually this was a clue that the subject was homosexual. No book would flatly say so in those days. And so I asked Piatigorsky about Ravel's sex life. In that thick Russian accent, he said, "I do not go around peeking in bedroom windows."

Later, in Paris, I came to know a number of Ravel's friends, and my best conclusion is that he lived an almost sexless existence. Sad. And lonely.

I became friends in Louisville with Larry Parks, who was playing the translator in a touring company of *Teahouse of the August Moon*. His Hollywood career had been destroyed by his admission that he had once been a member of the Communist party, and he was trying to rebuild his career on the stage. I met George Grizzard, who came through in a play, and we became immediate friends. I met Jimmy Raney during those years. I studied piano and harmony with a Louisville pianist named Don Murray, one of those first-rate jazz players you find all over this country whom nobody has ever heard of elsewhere. Don was also a gifted teacher. I wrote some of my first song lyrics in Louisville, to Don's music. He died a few years ago of alcoholism. I met Terry Gibbs when he came through Louisville, and Don DeMicheal, a local vibes player and drummer whom I encouraged to write. Various movie people would come through to promote their pictures, and I usually interviewed them.

An actor whose career had slipped and who was now a spokesman for a corporation arrived, and I interviewed him too. By now I had my own daily column, with the freedom to write about almost anything within reason, and I was always looking for material for it. So I really wanted to get something from this man. He just didn't have it. I sat alone with him for 45 minutes in a room at the Brown Hotel, pencil poised, and couldn't get three paragraphs worth printing out of him. He was vapid, and shallow, and uneducated, and dumb. In this case ignorant was also stupid. He was the dumbest public figure I ever interviewed. His name was Ronald Reagan. One thing he did have was a smug and unshakable sense of his own importance.

I thought we'd never hear much of him again. So much for my crystal ball.

I met Montgomery Clift and Lee Marvin and Johnny Green. I reviewed the film *Raintree County*, which had its world premiere in Louisville. I panned the picture but raved about Elizabeth Taylor's performance, particularly a scene in which she makes you realize the character she's playing is insane. The next day my phone rang at the office. I picked it up. A male voice said, "Gene? This is Mike Todd. My wife wants to talk to you."

And she got on the phone and thanked me profusely for the review.

That didn't happen too often. To a kid who a few years before had been diving off into the Welland Canal, it was yet another shock.

I met Richard Widmark and Alan Ladd, and liked them both.

And I met a black local tenor player whose nickname was Prez, because that's who he played like.

I had learned a few things about black society, including poor black society. One of its devices is a certain evasiveness, a certain skilled obfuscation when dealing with the distrusted white man. They -- then much more than now -- were very cautious in dealing with whites. Can you blame them? This entailed a certain calculated vagueness, and sometimes a hiding in nicknames. I'm sure it is the legacy of slavery.

All the black musicians called him Prez, and I never pressed him to know his full name. Odd, but I didn't. John Woods introduced me to him. Once the two of them were at my apartment. The paper had just taken some photos of me for use in ads about my column, which had made me something of a local figure. There was a stack of prints on a coffee table. Prez asked me if he could have one. Though the request struck me as odd, coming from someone I scarcely knew, I of course gave him one. I still have a print of that picture. I'll show it to you.

Time passed. One Saturday night I was in some club or other, listening to the Louisville Prez. After the gig I invited him back to my place for a drink. He put his tenor in the back seat of my car, and we made the usual trip up the fire stairs. We listened to records for a while, and then I drove him home, across the Ohio River to Jeffersonville, Indiana. He mentioned that he had an afternoon gig the next day. He gave me directions and I dropped him off in a poorly-lighted neighborhood. Then I went home.

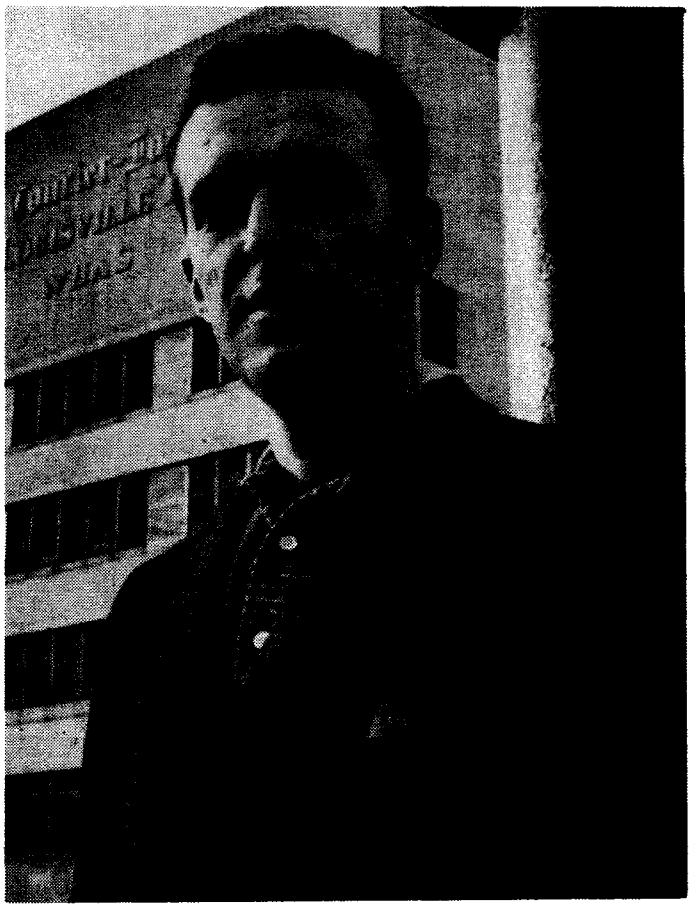
In the morning, I saw his tenor still resting on the back seat of my car. And I knew he had a gig. I didn't know what to do. I drove over to Jeffersonville, not even knowing his address. I felt my way around, soon finding myself in a neighborhood of dirt streets and unpainted clapboard houses, the wood gray with age and weather. There wasn't a white person to be seen anywhere.

I began to ask about Prez. And you have to picture this. A young white man, six feet tall, in a black neighborhood, asking black strangers if they knew someone who bore the nickname Prez. You know what they thought I was: fuzz.

I encountered silences and shakes of the head. Finally, desperate, I told an elderly woman that he was a musician. I opened the horn case. "That's his saxophone. He needs it today. I have to get it back to him. And all I can tell you is that he goes by the name Prez."

Slowly she took my measure, her face absent of anger or hostility, but full of distrust. And then she made up her mind. She pointed to a house. She said, "He lives there. Second floor."

I thanked her profusely and got out of the car, carrying the horn. I mounted a flight of stairs so creaky I thought they might collapse under me. I knocked on a door at the top.



And the Louisville Prez opened the door. He looked startled to see me. I told him I had his horn. He invited me in, quite shyly. I had never seen such poverty. The "apartment" was unpainted, and sparsely furnished, and very dark. Lying on a bed was a naked, smiling little baby. Prez introduced me to his young wife, who seemed in shock to see a white man in her home. And above all one who was not a cop, not a collector, not someone wishing her ill. I shook her hand; she held mine gravely. I suppose it is entirely possible that she had never touched a white hand.

And then I saw something that gave me the worst shock of those years in Louisville. There pinned to the wall, in all this darkness and poverty and pain, was my photo.

Its very presence there said, "I have a white friend."

Not long after that, I was awarded a Reid Fellowship, $5,000, a fair amount of money in 1958. It allowed me to live and study in Europe for a year.

I had come to know a black woman probably in her fifties. She was a cleaning woman at the paper. I was often there at nights, writing. She was an elegant and very beautiful woman, with gray hair, gorgeous features, and somewhat lined handsome orange skin. I used to chat with her of evenings; in the course of three years we had become quite friendly.

On my last night before leaving for Paris with my young French wife and the toddler with whom I recently wrote a couple of songs, I was cleaning out my desk. I bade good-bye to my friend, giving her a huge hug and kissing her on the cheek. She stiffened and drew back; white people didn't do that. And I realized that even she accepted the separation.

I stayed in Paris a little over a year. Al Braun came over to join me. He got a job at United Press International, and later founded a highly successful photography agency. He stayed in Paris, and still lives there. An atheist in his youth, he is now a practicing orthodox Jew. I think of him fondly and often.

I returned to America and within a few weeks became editor of *Down Beat*. Soon I had all sorts of black friends and acquaintances, none of them poor, all of them successful, and most of them musicians: Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Blue Mitchell, Donald Byrd, Art and Addison Farmer, Jo Jones and Philly Joe Jones, Benny Golson, John Coltrane, Ahmad Jamal, Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Ed Thigpen, Sahib Shihab. And a lot of white friends, too. I met Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond then, and Phil Woods, Bill Evans, Gerry Mulligan, Scott LaFaro, Woody Herman, Zoot Sims. It was a very long list. One day it struck me that since Louis Armstrong was still alive, I had met and in many cases knew well most of the great jazz musicians who had ever lived.

The years slip irrevocably away. I'm a long way from diving off the boats into the green waters of the Welland Canal. But sometimes I think of people who meant much to me and never even knew it.

Mike the old Polish paper-maker, his clothes all splattered with dried paper pulp and a wrench in his rubber boot with which to fix machines. Cedric Phillips from Barbados, whose playing was ended by a stroke a few years ago. But he's still my friend. John Woods, the janitor and guitar player. The lady who cleaned the newspaper's floors whose name I no longer remember. Charlie Dorsey showing me his precious poems and sinking a wood hook into my ass to save my life.

And the Prez of Louisville. I held back the tears that day. I'm not doing so well today.