

John, Gil, Dave, and the Man on the Buffalo Nickel

Part Two

"I wanted to see where my dad was born," Dave Brubeck said. "So I took Iola and the kids and we drove up there. When we got there we found a historic California marker, and I think it said, 'This is the site of the last Indian uprising in California.'"

"My mother's attitude was, 'Don't tell him that nonsense.' And my father toward the end of his life told his grandson, Peter Brubeck, to be proud of what you are. We just saw him yesterday. He owns a restaurant in San Luis Obispo called Brubeck's. He's Henry's son."

Peter and Elizabeth Ivey Brubeck had three sons, all of whom became musicians. Henry, the eldest, eventually was head of music in the Santa Barbara public and high school system. He is dead. Howard became dean of humanities at Palomar College. Dave, the youngest, was born December 6, 1920, in his mother's home town, Concord, California, which is a little north of Oakland, but the family moved to Lodi, about 115 miles east of San Francisco. Gil Evans was born in Toronto May 13, 1912, but his family settled in Stockton when he was seventeen, which would be in 1929; Dave was nine. From my conversations with Gil, I always got the feeling he considered Stockton his home town.

When the Dave Brubeck Quartet achieved an almost unprecedented -- for jazz -- success in the 1950s, even making the cover of *Time* magazine, an immediate air of condescension grew up among critics. That sort of thing is recurrent in jazz, a manifest of an underlying conviction that nothing good can ever be popular and, by corollary, what is popular cannot be good. Because of this popularity, and to an extent because Dave was interested in something esoteric called counterpoint, he was looked on as an effete white academic who had studied, heaven forbid, with Darius Milhaud and who was somehow poaching on a preserve that wasn't his. I remember talking to Dave toward the end of the 1950s, finding him a more sensitive man than his apparently inextinguishable optimism would suggest, and finding him quite hurt about some of the reviews. He was never given the credit he deserved for his early and extensive experiments with compound time figures. But the fact is that if being even an eighth Indian qualifies you for certain government Indian benefits, Dave could no more be considered "white" than Frank Trumbauer, or, for that matter, somebody who is one-quarter "black." And as for effete, Dave was a working cowboy by the time he was thirteen.

"My dad," Dave said, "was a cattleman and a top rodeo roper, maybe the top in California some years. He was the Salinas Rodeo and Livermore champion in roping. He wanted a son that would follow him. I was the youngest of the sons, so I was his last chance. He would come down to San Simeon and buy cattle from the Hearst stock."

Dave was referring to the huge ranch of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, which occupies magnificent hilly land

overlooking the Pacific. Hearst stocked it with exotic animals from all over the world, including dangerous wild European boar which turned native and are still hunted in that part of the country. The climate changes there; you are north of the Tehachapi, which divides California into its two distinct regions, and the magnificent Big Sur country starts just a little north of San Simeon. The huge, preposterous, and gloomy Hearst castle stands atop a long rise, overlooking the sea. Among its other architectural indulgences is a full Roman bath, which was photographed in the film *Spartacus*. Hearst raised some of the finest blooded cattle in the west.

"My dad covered the western states, buying cattle for a big company called the Moffet Meat Company," Dave said. "And like myself, he was always on the road. He wanted to settle down. So the company gave him a 45,000-acre ranch to manage, if you can imagine how large that is. In some places it was twenty-five miles across. He moved there and took me and my mother when I was twelve. The other boys stayed in Concord, where we were born, Howard to finish high school. Henry at this time was playing with Del Courtney and Gil Evans. Gil had a band out of Stockton."

"Jimmy Maxwell was one of the trumpet players in that band. Jimmy and I were talking about it one time, and he mentioned the persecution of the Japanese during the war. They confiscated their lands and sold them cheap. Jimmy's father had a Japanese friend. He bought the guy's land. When the neighbor came back after the war, Jimmy's father sold him the land back for a dollar."

"The Skinnay Ennis band was really from Stockton. When Gil and the band moved to Los Angeles, he really couldn't make it. Skinnay Ennis was a singer. He said, 'I'll take this band, it's wonderful,' and he fronted it."

"I didn't know Gil until I went to hear the session he did with Miles Davis, and he had arranged *The Duke*." *The Duke* is one of Dave's best-known compositions. Gil's magnificent arrangement of it is in the landmark *Miles Ahead* album.

"They were in the editing room. Teo Macero introduced me to Gil. Gil brought it up. He said, 'Brubeck. Did you have a brother who played drums?' I said, 'Yeah, Henry.' He said, 'I never put that together. He was a great drummer, and he played with me in Stockton!'"

"So Henry stayed in Stockton to play drums with Gil, and we moved to the ranch in Lodi. It's in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada."

Gil led that band in Stockton from 1933 to '38, and continued to write for it after it became the Skinnay Ennis band in Los Angeles. The band was not famous through recordings. It was known to most of us as the house band on the Bob Hope weekly radio show. Also in the band and writing for it was Claude Thornhill. It is probably impossible to sort out at this late date who influenced whom and to what extent, but certainly Gil and Thornhill were of a mind about the latter's big band. Gil seems not to have had the qualities of a bandleader, surrendering that authority first to Ennis, then to Thornhill, and later to Miles Davis. But Gil was the key figure in developing that strange, haunting, floating, open sound

the Thornhill band later had, utilizing two French horns, an instrument developed from the hunting horn, and one whose very sound evokes loneliness and distance. Gil wrote the superb charts on *Anthropology*, *Yardbird Suite*, and *Donna Lee* for Thornhill. The bariographers of jazz like to make Miles the leader of the movement that produced the so-called Birth of the Cool. But two of its architects were John Lewis and Gil, both of whom had a taste for space and distance in their work. Both were men of the west.

"It was collective," John said of the 1949 group that recorded for Capitol. "We were younger then. We used to meet around the corner from 52nd Street between Fifth and Sixth. Gil had an apartment, either behind or underneath a Chinese laundry. It wasn't even an apartment. It was just kind of a big room. Me and a lot of others, we used to go there between sets. A lot of the people, Gerry Mulligan and Lee Konitz and others, had already been friends and worked together in Claude Thornhill's band. It was through them I met Gil and became friends with Joe Shulman and Billy Exiner and Barry Galbraith. Gerry also played and wrote for Claude's band. That was the model for the small group. Gil was the inspiring influence. He was doing things we had heard with Claude Thornhill. They were another way to do things with a big band. And it seemed to be possible to translate them to a smaller group too, taking just the essentials. And then we

were young, things were much different then economically. It was cheap to rent studios. And we all just wrote music, 'cause we just enjoyed doing it. It had nothing to do with any commercial business. Whoever had some money paid for the rehearsal or whatever. It was a co-operative.

"Gil was a catalyst. He was a wonderful, wonderful human being."

Gil's music reflects his proclivity for things Spanish. The Mexican influence is everywhere in California, in the tile roofs and yellow stucco walls, in the very air, in the cuisine, in the love of bright colors, and certainly in the music. Consider his writing in *Sketches of Spain*. There was never a more Californian composer than Gil Evans, and to get the real feel of what he was all about, it is helpful to know not just America but California. If the north is in Sibelius, the west is in Gil.

The terrain around Stockton in summer is a dry beige color, a baked land scattered with dark California oaks. It is lonely country. And Dave Brubeck spent his adolescence a scant 35 miles from Gil.

Dave said, "On our ranch there was a reservation for Indians. There was maybe the last sweat house in California, where the Miwoks used to come. They're just being recognized as a tribe -- maybe! -- this year. And maybe they'll have some benefits. All these years they haven't been recognized.



Dave Brubeck, working cowboy, on the ranch at lone. He was 16.

Many of my friends were Miwok Indians. Mother's piano assistant when she moved to Lone was Ramona Burris, an Indian girl. I'm still in touch with her. She recently sent me some Indian songs that I wanted from this great friend of mine, Al Walloupe, a cowboy. Full Miwok. He was my father's top cowhand. I always tried to ride with him.

'We moved from Stockton to Lone when I was in the eighth grade and went through high school there. I could ride horses from the time I can remember.'

'Could you rope?' I asked. 'Do all that?'

'Oh sure!' Dave said.

'Did you work the ranch?'

'Sure. Oh sure.'

'You were actually a working cowboy?'

'Yeah.'

'How did you get into music?'

'My mother started all of us in music. She was a classical pianist. She studied piano with Tobias Matthay in England.' Tobias Matthay, an English pianist born in London in 1858, gradually gave up his concert career to teach, first at the Royal Academy of Music and then at his own school. He developed what is now known as the Matthay System of playing, and students from all over England, the Continent, and America, then went home to spread his method, which tended to produce a glorious warm tone. He died in 1945. He taught an approach to piano at variance to the German school of playing. It emphasized a particular approach to touch and tone, a way of pulling on the key rather than hitting it hammer-like from above. It is an approach that Margaret Chaloff, Serge Chaloff's mother, imparted to a whole generation of jazz pianists, including Mike Renzi, Steve Kuhn, and Dave Mackay. It produces the radiant golden tone that Bill Evans brought into jazz, now manifest in countless pianists, including Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, Alan Broadbent, and Chick Corea.

'This was after all three sons were born,' Dave said. 'My mother was one of these people with tremendous drive. After three children, she went to college and she was in class with her oldest son, Henry. They went to summer sessions in Moscow, Idaho, until he could get a master's and she was just trying to get a college degree. In 1926 she went to London to study with Matthay. I was six, and she boarded Howard and me out.'

'She also studied with Dame Myra Hess. And that's why she quit. There were some kids walking along the street in London. My mother looked at them. Myra Hess said, 'You're staring at those children. Do you have children?' And she said, 'Yes. I have three sons.' And Myra said, 'Why don't you go home to them? That's where you belong.' Whether it was a kind way of saying you'll never make it as a great classical pianist, or that's a wonderful life to live, I don't know.'

'You see, Dame Myra Hess was always panicked about playing. She said walking from the curtain to the piano was always terrible for her. She said there's a river of ice between you and the audience until you break through to them. She hated all that. So she told my mother, If you've got three

children, just go home and be with your family.'

'So she came back and taught for years, taught so many people who are in the music business. She insisted that I go to college. My dad didn't ever want me to leave the ranch.'

'When I first started playing at four or five, I only wanted to compose. For some reason my mother didn't discover I couldn't read music until it was too late to correct all the wonderfully wrong habits I had, which was to listen and learn that way. I fooled her. I'd stare at the music and play it well enough so she didn't know. They weren't hard pieces, they were kids' pieces.'

'When I went to college I switched from pre-med to music the second year, 'cause the head of zoology said, 'Brubeck, your mind's not here. It's across the lawn in the conservatory. Go over there, will you?' It was then College of the Pacific, it's now University of the Pacific in Stockton.'

It's curious that Dave didn't meet Gil at that time, for Gil was still in Stockton, still leading his band, presumably for dancing. Dave did meet Lola, his wife-to-be, in Stockton. She came from northern California. Her family had been in California since 1835, shortly after the Mission period of its history. She too was a student at College of the Pacific, a drama and speech major.

Dave said, 'At this point I transferred to the music department, but I couldn't read. And my mother had this great reputation as sending great students. My brother Henry, eleven and a half years older than I, had graduated as a violin and percussion major, and was a teacher. His first job was at Lompoc. Howard is four and half years older than I.'

'So I went over there, and in order not to embarrass the family, I was pretty sure I could hide the fact that I couldn't read a note. Everything went well. You had to take a string instrument, a brass instrument, a reed instrument. And when you're learning these instruments, it's the scales and stuff that even somebody like myself could slip by a teacher. But you still had to take keyboard. So I waited till my senior year.'

'You mean,' I said, incredulous, 'you faked it through college without reading?'

'Yeah, harmony, ear training.'

'That's really what they mean by faking,' I said.

'Yeah,' Dave said, laughing. 'You know it. Like, in ear training, I'd usually be asleep, 'cause I'd been working in some joint the night before until two in the morning. There are stories about the teacher saying, 'Well, can anybody play this progression and tell me what I've just played?' Then he'd say, 'Well, if nobody can, then wake up Brubeck.'

'In my own way, I could do it. He'd say, 'What chord is this?' and I'd say, 'That's the first chord in *Don't Worry 'Bout Me*.' Then he'd say, 'Well explain that, Mr. Brubeck.' I'd go play that chord. He'd say, 'Well can't you say that that's a flat ninth?'

'I didn't know it was a flat ninth. But that's the way I got through.'

'I had to take organ. I thought, 'If I take organ, it'll be harder for them to know I can't read music yet.' So the first lesson, I left the damn electric organ on after my last practice.'

The teacher was furious. It was on all night, and he said, 'You could burn up an organ this way.' He kicked me out and gave me an F. I still had a whole semester. In a way I'd taken keyboard and gotten an F, but I'd still done it.

But then they insisted that I take keyboard. I got a wonderful piano teacher who figured out I couldn't read in about five minutes. She went to the dean and said, 'Brubeck can't read *anything*.'

The dean said to me, 'You were going to graduate this year. I can't let you graduate. You're a disgrace to the conservatory.'

'So I said, 'It doesn't make any difference to me. I don't care whether I graduate or not. All I want to do is play jazz. And I agree with you.'

The word got around to the counterpoint teacher and the ear-training and harmony teacher that I'd been disgraced and flunked. The counterpoint teacher went to him and said, 'You're making a mistake. Brubeck has written the best counterpoint I've ever had in this class.'

'But how did you do it?' I asked.

'I struggled,' Dave said, 'but I could do it.'

'Well,' I said, 'I can write music faster than I can read it.'

'Oh!' Dave said. 'So you know!'

'Yeah,' I said, 'and what's more I've known a number of arrangers and composers who can write better than they can read. Gary McFarland was one of them. Gary couldn't read well.'

'There's a lot of guys that way,' Dave said. 'Maybe even Duke. I've been in some situations where I thought Duke had some of my problems.'

'Reading and writing music are different skills.'

'Yes,' Dave said. 'So the ear training, harmony, and composition teachers went to my defense and said, 'You know, you're making a big mistake.' So the dean called me back in and he said, 'You can graduate with the class, but you have to promise you'll never teach.'

'So I made that promise and I graduated. Then I went into the army for four years.'

'Since your father wanted you to stay on the ranch with him, how did he take it when you switched to music? Was there a break with him?'

'I thought there would be, but he took it pretty well. He said, 'Well we'll always be partners.' He kept track of how many cattle I had. He gave me four Holstein cows for \$80 -- that's \$20 a piece -- when I graduated from grammar school. He kept those separate in his herds. I could always come back to the ranch. My herd had grown, and he always wanted me back. And many years I wished I were there, when it was rough. We would go home once in a while, wouldn't we, Iola? When we just couldn't make it.'

Iola is an Indian name, but Iola is not Indian. Dave said, 'In one tribe it means A Cloud at Dawn. And in the other tribe we've looked up, Never Discouraged.'

'I went into the army in 1942 -- for forty-six months, to be exact. Iola and I were married in Carson City, Nevada. I was on a three-day pass. I went into a band, and then for D-Day



In the Army. Germany 1945.

they sent us all to infantry. I went overseas as a rifleman. We went right across England, we didn't even stop, from the boat to the train to the boat, and then across to the LeHavre area, to Omaha Beach. It was three months after the landing. We went up to Verdun. I was a replacement in Third Army, under Patton.

'I was almost in combat every day. I was on the other side of the German lines twice, trying to get back. You didn't know where anybody was. We were always at the front and the front would move on you. I spent the Battle of the Bulge in a cellar, being told by Axis Sally we should all come out with our hands up.'

'You were through the siege?'

'Yeah. I was behind German lines, trying to get back. When we saw that movie *Patton*, when you see all the trucks moving up, I said, 'They forgot one thing. The one truck going the wrong way. Me.' All the guys at the sentry point had been killed the night before. Germans in American uniforms killed every guy right there. So when they came up to us, they took the pins out of hand grenades and held them

out. They walked right up to the truck. If you shot one of them, he'd blow up and you with him. They weren't believing my story.

"I was one day away from fighting.

"Then I got a hand."

At this juncture Dave's line of life intersected that of Ray Wax, who would later be a builder and stockbroker. Studs Terkel interviewed him for his 1984 oral history *The Good War*, whose title he put in quotation marks for irony: there are no good wars.

Wax said, "If there is anything more goddamn bloody boring than the infantry, I don't know what it is." Wax too was in Patton's Third Army. When troops came back from the front suffering from what was called in World War I shell-shock and, in the second war, battle fatigue, he saw that what they most needed was diversion. He got permission to set up an improvised movie theater for them. Then he had another idea. He told Studs:

"The ingenious Germans had these prefabricated houses. I hit these places and found prefab sections of flooring. I put together six sections and I had a portable stage. I went to my drunken colonel, who was marvelous, and asked him for a two-and-a-half ton truck. The army always said, 'Never volunteer. Fuck 'em, I always volunteered.' He gave me the truck and I carried these six sections of prefabricated flooring. Everywhere I went, I could drop down and I had a stage. I put that stage all over France. I put on Dinah Shore, I put on Bing Crosby. These were the live shows comin' in behind the men . . .

"Someone came to me and said he wanted to organize a band. I said, 'Who've you got?' He said, 'I play sax and I think we got a piano player.' I talked to this piano player. 'What's your name?' 'Dave Brubeck.' I said, 'Who do you play like?' 'Stan Kenton?' He said yeah. I said okay.

"I pulled his form 20: Brubeck was a rifleman, an infantryman. When I pulled his form, he couldn't move forward. It's like he disappeared. That's what I did with eighteen people in the band: I held their form 20. They stayed alive and I had a band. I had the power of life and death. I really thought I was doing something valuable. I bumped majors and I got my fine drunken colonel to back me. I was able to do any goddamn thing I wanted.

"I made something happen for those men."

He certainly did, and he may have somewhat altered the course of American music. So did a chaplain somewhere else in Third Army: he pulled the form of another soldier who was a pianist, a young man with an Italian name from a steel town in Pennsylvania. Though his father was born in Abruzzi, the boy spoke no Italian, having been made ashamed of his heritage by the bigotry of the society around him. He too had been bumped out of a band and handed a rifle. The chaplain, who stole precious antique stained-glass windows from churches across Europe and shipped them home for post-war profit, pulled Henry Mancini out of the 1306th Engineers Brigade to play a portable organ. Had both of these young soldiers been killed, the color of our music would have been altered; but we would not know it; we would be traveling on a different line

of history.

As I was writing the previous paragraph, I wondered what outfit Dave had been in. I took a break and went down to browse in Bart's Book Store in downtown -- if you can call it that -- Ojai. It is the best used-book store I have ever encountered. On some obscure impulse, I went back to the office to say hello to Gary Schlichter, the owner, whom I hadn't seen for a while. He said, "I've got something to show you," and handed me a copy of Spengler's *Decline of the West*. "Look inside it," Gary said.

I opened the book. I was dumbstruck as I stared at the printed signature of a twenty-four-year-old GI who had inscribed it on this flyleaf nearly fifty years ago: *David W. Brubeck 140th Infantry Regiment A Company*. And in the book was a photograph of Dave at the age of four, taken, of all places, at the Franciscan Mission at Carmel, according to the writing on the back.

Flabbergasted, I rushed home and called Dave. He was astounded. "Where did he get it?" he said.

"I haven't the slightest idea," I said.

"I carried that all through the war!" Dave said in astonishment. "I carried that and a Bible in my knapsack! With all the other stuff you're carrying, any extra weight has to be something important. I couldn't be more thrilled that you found it. I never knew what happened to it."

The next day, September 21, was Dave and Lola's wedding anniversary. Gary Schlichter gave me the book to send to them as our joint anniversary gift. And he said, "How many soldiers were reading Spengler in the middle of war?"

Dave said, "My memory is that we were outside Verdun. If the train had turned left at Verdun, we'd have gone to Omar Bradley's army. If we'd turned right, we'd go to the front with Patton's. We turned right. We were in box cars for three days. Stand up or sit on your pack, that was the amount of room. We were as if we were in cattle cars. So we wound up there and Red Cross girls came up to do a show and they asked for a piano player. I was sitting on my helmet and I volunteered to play piano. The colonel said, 'This guy shouldn't go to the front.'

"In the morning we were supposed to do this horrendous thing . . ." Dave stopped speaking. Tears appeared on his face. And he released one deep, shuddering sob. We were in his hotel room in Santa Monica. He was to play the Hollywood Bowl that evening. I looked beyond him, through the curtains and across that strip of green park with palm trees that runs along the seaward edge of the Santa Monica palisades. Children on the grass, playing. Beyond that the sea, shining in the sun. Lola was sitting behind us on a bed.

"We don't have to talk, Dave," I said. He was silent for a long time. Then he resumed, struggling to control his voice:

"There was about a foot of mud. We were sleeping on reeds, three guys in a pup tent. The tent was supposed to hold two, but if you took in a third guy you could put his shelter half on the ground under you. They brought up some huge cannon on the railroad and started blasting, to try to

blast the Germans out of an emplacement on a hill. It shook the ground. Everybody just ran out in that mud. It was the damndest sight you'd ever want to see.

"The Germans were shelling down. The only way they could get them out was take the replacements and send them in there to climb up there and dump oil into the bunkers. And that's how those German guns were silenced. Those guys had to go right up a mountain at point blank range and dump the oil and light it. That's where I think I was going. Some guys I never heard from again were in on that, where I should have been that day.

"And they called three of us out to start a band. We got pulled right out of that formation. Most of my guys had purple hearts. They'd been shot at the front. If they said they were musicians, they sent them over to me, and I would keep them in the band.

"I spent the rest of the war in that band. I integrated that band. It was the first integrated unit in World War II that I've ever known about. The trombonist was Jonathan Dick Flowers, who was black, and we had an emcee who was black, but his name was White. We had all kinds of guys who had been shot and had come back. So we could play at the front very well, because my guys all wore their Purple Hearts. I asked them to.

"I remember we'd be playing a show and the Germans would come in to strafe, and they'd try to shoot the planes down. Then we were in the Maginot Line, underground."

"I've been in the Maginot Line."

"Were you?"

"After the war I was a military correspondent, and I was shown through part of it. I was at Metz."

"Yeah, we were at Metz," Dave said. "Metz and Nancy. Like *Star Wars*, with the trains underground."

"The Radio City Music Hall Rockettes were touring Europe and they needed a band, and they chose us." He started to laugh. "So we got from sleeping in haystacks and barns and on the ground to this unbelievable luxury in hotels."

Mustered out of service in New Jersey at war's end, Dave headed west immediately to join his young wife. He enrolled at Mills College in Oakland on the GI Bill to study composition with Darius Milhaud. For a time Dave and Lola lived with Milhaud. Dave thought of himself as a composer who played piano, not as a pianist. He still could not read well, but Milhaud saw his potential as a composer, and encouraged him to apply his studies immediately. The first of the six Brubeck children arrived at that time -- David Darius, born June 14, 1947, in San Francisco.

As a vehicle for counterpoint exercises, Dave formed the Dave Brubeck Octet, whose members included clarinetist Bill Smith. Paul Desmond, a saxophone and clarinet player, and drummer Cal Tjader, both students at San Francisco State College, used to come over to sit in. This was the beginning of Dave's professional association with Desmond, and almost the end of it.

"In '46, '47, when I was studying at Mills with Milhaud, I was

in a trio called the Three Ds, Dave, Darryl and Don. Paul would come in and sit in every night. Paul had a chance for a gig. He hired the bass player and Frances Lynn, the singer. All of a sudden I was in a group that wasn't a group any more. Paul had hired them away to work in a Quonset hut kind of place called the Band Box, near Stanford. Paul wrote a song for us to sing."

"Oh yeah," I said. "Paul told me about that. I had a lot of trouble picturing you and Paul singing. I remember saying, 'You and Dave singing?'"

And to prove he was telling the truth Dave broke into song, rhythmically chanting a lunatic lyric that was typically Desmond:

*It's the Band Box,
that's the joint for you.
Get high when you're happy
and blind when you're blue.
The whisky is old
but the music is new
at the Band Box.*

*If the state you arrivin'
encourages jivin',
relax on the sofa
with a chick you can go for
That's where the proletariat
make merry at --
at the Band Box.*

"We all sang it," Dave said.

"You were a quintet?" I asked.

"No. We had no drummer," Dave said. "Paul's favorite situation."

"He really hated drummers," I said, "except Connie Kay and one or two others. He just wanted them to stay out of his way."

Dave said, "Joe and Paul and Gene and I were really friends, regardless of any differences that came up between us. I remember Paul saying to Joe Morello, 'You're the world's greatest drummer, but sometimes you play too much.' When Paul was at home dying Joe sent one of his drum students to stay with him."

"Do you know the story about Mingus going to see him? We'd known Charlie since the early days in San Francisco, and he and Paul were good friends. Mingus and I were too. We were really close for years. Paul had to leave his apartment door unlocked, because he was too weak to answer it. Charlie let himself in while Paul was asleep and stood by the bed. Paul woke up and saw him standing there in a black cape and a black hat, and Paul said for a moment he thought it was the angel of death."

"Charlie said to me, 'Dave, when I'm dying, will you come to my bedside?' And I said I would. But he died in Mexico, and I couldn't be there. I felt bad about it."

Lola said, "I have a new Desmond story -- at least, new to

me. Bill Crow told it to Chris. Paul saw a picture in a newspaper showing Aristotle Onassis in front of the Hollywood home of Buster Keaton, looking at it with an eye to buying it. Paul's comment was, 'Hmm. Aristotle contemplating the home of Buster.'

'We all miss him, don't we.'

We laughed for a while, as Paul's friends always do when his memory is called up, and then Dave resumed the story.

'I went along with Paul on that job. I had been making a hundred a week and Paul offered me forty-two a week. An offer I couldn't refuse. But I enjoyed Paul's playing. I didn't know how the hell I was going to live on the money.'

'And then Paul got a job at Feather River, the Feather River Inn. You know why he liked Feather River? Because he could go over to Reno to gamble.'

'He's gonna leave me. I'm stuck. I can't go back to the other job. There's very little work. I said, 'Paul, okay, I'm going to bring Bill Smith in on clarinet because the guy at the Band Box will keep me on.' He said, 'No! It's my job!' He wouldn't let me take the job, he got furious. He said, 'I found this job, it's my job when I come back!' He was going to Feather River for three months.'

Feather River is about 80 miles north by northeast from San Francisco, and 20 or so due north of Sacramento. It was in those days, and for that matter still is, extremely bucolic and quiet, horse and cattle country yellow-brown under the fierce summer sun and brilliant green when the rains of winter come.

No one who really knew Paul would gainsay his borderline solipsism. Yet he could be kind and he was very gentle, and he was very, very funny. Iola said, laughing: 'Paul could charm you out of anything.' But at the time of that Feather River hooking, he didn't charm Dave.

He didn't even come back to the gig; he went on the road with the Alvino Rey band. Dave, meantime, had lost the Band Box and had a family to feed. He said, 'I told Iola, 'I never want to see Paul Desmond again. I don't know how we're going to make it.' Scale at that time was forty-two a week. I got a job for scale and room and board at Clear Lake, and we lived in a corrugated tin room about the size of these two beds and no windows. Just a door. So we got sacks and dipped them in tubs of water and ran a fan. We had to get out of there all day. It was miserable.'

'And then Jimmy Lyons called me and said, 'I've got a job for you, if you want it, at the Burma Lounge. It was right in the center of Oakland. We went in there with the trio and everything was going great. That's how the trio started.'

Jimmy Lyons at that time was a prominent San Francisco disc jockey. He and the late critic and columnist Ralph J. Gleason were probably the most influential spokesmen for jazz in that city. Later Jimmy founded and directed the Monterey Jazz Festival, and he is still a significant force in jazz. It was Jimmy who in 1977 flew out over the Pacific and scattered Paul's ashes, in accordance with Paul's wishes.

'I owe so much to Jimmy Lyons,' Dave said. 'He got me a once-a-week shot on NBC. I was on with the trio, Cal, Ronny and I, for three, maybe six, months. And being it was NBC,

you could hear us clear out into the Pacific, and all up and down the coast. It was a very strong signal. And when the sailors would come in, and they were always coming into San Francisco, they'd look for where I was playing. That really helped me in my club work, this constant flow of sailors every week. We developed a very good following, and we were at the Blackhawk for maybe six months of every year. It was a good home base for us.'

'I said to Iola, 'If Paul Desmond comes back, don't let him in the door.' He'd heard the trio on the radio while he was in New York with Alvino Rey. So he knocked at the door. I was on the back porch, hanging out diapers. Iola always liked Paul.'

He looked so forlorn, Iola said, that she went to the back porch and told Dave, 'You just have to see him.'

'Paul's charm,' she said, smiling and shaking her head. 'And he was full of promises to Dave. He said, 'If you'll just let me play with you, I'll baby sit, I'll wash your car.' The memory trailed off into laughter.

'So he broke down my resistance,' Dave said. 'And of course it was a good thing. We worked well together. Seventeen years. Longer. Right to the end. His last concert was with me.'

'The trio I had grew out of the Octet. We couldn't really work with the Octet. So I took the rhythm section, Ron Crotty or Jack Weeks on bass, and Cal Tjader on drums, and the trio became very successful. It won the new combo of the year in *Down Beat* and *Metronome* and got a great review from John Hammond. We were doing very well. Paul was always trying to sit in. People would ask me, Please don't let Paul sit in. We had already recorded, and they wanted it to sound like the record.'

'The trio's first record was made for a label called Coronet. Jack Sheedy of Coronet wouldn't pay me so I could pay Cal Tjader and Ron Crotty. Sol and Max Weiss who ran the Circle Record Company told me, 'Go tell Jack Sheedy that you'll buy back the masters for what they cost him. Because we press them and we know they're selling.' They were originally a pressing company. So I bought back the masters for \$350, four sides, 78s, *Back Home Again in Indiana*, *Laura*, *Tea for Two*, and *Blue Moon*. The Weisses started Fantasy Records to put them out. At first the Weisses just wanted to do our re-releases.' Fantasy today, with its subsidiary labels such as Pablo, Milestone, and Riverside, is probably the biggest jazz record company in the world. It is also an important movie production house, turning out quality movies such as *Amadeus*. It occupies a square block of Berkeley, California, its building housing some of the most advanced recording and editing studios in the industry.

Dave said, 'Paul also made his first record for Coronet — as a clarinetist in a Dixieland group. Joe Dodge was the drummer.'

'I was going along. I went into the Haig in Los Angeles. Gerry Mulligan and his quartet moved up from the Haig into the Blackhawk in San Francisco where we'd been playing. We

just exchanged. Paul came along to sit in with us. We went into Zardi's in L.A.

"We wanted to buy a house. We'd been living in a flat in San Francisco. We were living in a little two-room on the sands, right here in Santa Monica, near the pier. You can see the area from here." He pointed out the window. The two-room houses are gone now. The sand is clean and yellow.

"We put the down payment on a house in San Francisco. I remember packing Iola and the two kids in the car and having her slap me all night to keep me awake driving. We got to San Francisco and the deal had completely collapsed, which it shouldn't have. The money was in escrow. But we had no place to live.

"A job came through in Honolulu, at the Zehra Lounge. I said, 'We have no place to live, everything we own is in storage, let's take this job.' We were so broke I bought a few cases of burned baby food. I always had to buy stuff at the dented can food market, or stuff that had been in a fire. And the kids wouldn't eat it. So I had to eat it all in Honolulu.

"I got over there and I got into a swimming accident about the first week. I was running and diving and a wave disappeared and there was a sand bar. Instead of hitting it head on as I should have, I turned. And there almost went my piano playing. Nerve damage, damaged vertebrae. It still bothers me down into my finger. I was in traction for twenty-one days, with a weight over me. I remember writing to Paul, overhead, he got this scribbled note. He saved it all his life. I told Paul, 'Maybe now we can start the quartet.' I intended to bring in the whole octet. But this time it just worked. This time around, we were ready for a horn.

"I went back to San Francisco. I couldn't work for quite a while, but finally we put the quartet together.

"The trio was really successful, and I had to build up again with the quartet on Fantasy. We did that *Jazz at Oberlin* album. Paul is so fantastic on that album.

"Eventually Fantasy Records and I made some kind of decision that we were going to split up. George Avakian came to hear me at the Blackhawk, with the idea of signing me for Columbia Records."

(To be continued)

Chet and Zoot

Poor Chet Baker was the archetype of the junky jazz musician, one of those holdouts who kept the image alive, the "Hey man like wha's happenin'" figure of mythology, a sort of real-life Shorty Pederstein. His life is the more tragic for the scope of his gifts. He was an original and lyrical player whose work I appreciate even more now than I did when he was at his most productive. But the very out-of-it quality that he had made him inadvertently funny, and sometimes you'd laugh through your heartache for him.

There is a classic story about Chet Baker that I would never print because I could never verify it. Probably ever musician in jazz has heard it; it is endlessly repeated. The story is this:

One of the ironies of jazz history is that while the music was persecuted by the Nazis, in Italy, Benito Mussolini's son, Romano, was in love with it and studying it. After the war, indeed, he developed into a fine jazz pianist in a traditional as opposed to bebop mode, and eventually recorded with Ruby Braff, Spiggle Willcox, and other Americans. Though I have never met him, I find he is a respected and well-liked man.

Some years ago, according to the story, he was to record with Chet Baker. Someone at the session introduced them. And Chet said: "Nice t'meet you. Sorry to her about your old man."

Musicians love that story, but I was reasonably sure someone had invented it -- your bebop joke simply applied to Chet.

Not long ago I was in Germany with Roger Kellaway. We wrote a project, a portrait in song of New York City, to be performed by Caterina Valente and the WDR (for West-deutscherfunk) Big Band in Cologne. This is a marvelous big jazz band that broadcasts on the west German radio network.

I wrote a long narrative poem about New York, segments of which were interspersed through the concert, recorded for later broadcast. Roger wrote a twenty-minute sound portrait of the city, an avant-garde piece developed from the Doppler effect of a subway train roaring through the tunnel, and Roger and I wrote a new song called *New York Night* for Caterina.

After one of the rehearsals, Caterina and I were sitting around laughing, and telling show business stories. She is, by the way, a brilliant singer and all-round musician with a deep feeling for jazz. She is French by birth and nationality, Italian by ancestry, and speaks something like six languages. I said to her, "Hey, by the way, there's a story I've been trying to verify for years." I told her the Chet Baker story and said, "Do you know if it's true?"

"It's true," she said.

"Are you sure?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "I was there."

"And the only thing wrong about the story is that it wasn't a record date. We were starting a concert tour."

Andre Previn told me the next story.

Years ago, when he was still working as a studio pianist in Los Angeles, Andre was on a record date with a rhythm section that included Ray Brown, Shelly Manne, and Barney Kessel. The rest of the orchestra was of like caliber. The music was more or less experimental avant-garde jazz by a composer whose work, Andre said, he didn't care for.

One of the tunes was to be played at a ferociously fast tempo, with a change on every beat. When it came to the solo section, one musician after another tried it only to crash in flames.

Finally the solo was assigned to Zoot Sims, who sailed through it effortlessly.

At the end of it, Conte Candoli said, "How do you do that, man?"

Zoot said, "You guys are crazy. I was just playing *I Got Rhythm*."