

Excerpts from C.I.A. Brat  
written by Ken Albertsen

While assigned to the US diplomatic Corps in Copenhagen, the first-ever defection by a MIG fighter pilot took place. The Soviet pilot decided, correctly, that if he went full throttle in a bee line for a landing strip in Denmark, he could break free from his USSR controllers. This was at the beginning of the Cold War and during the Korean War, when Soviet and US jet fighters were skirmishing daily. You can imagine what a great prize it was for the US and Europeans to get their hands on a fully functional MIG fighter plane, plus a pilot who was glad to divulge all he knew. Dad was the first American at the landing site and he escorted the pilot from the field. From that moment on, Soviet military planes were not allowed to fly solo. If a plane diverted from flight plan, the other pilot was required to shoot it down.

Less than ten years earlier, dad had been actively assisting the 'Danish underground' during WWII. One successful assignment was to assist underground Danes in blowing up a commandeered corner restaurant used exclusively by Nazi brass for meetings. Right after the war, dad received a 'White Cross' decoration for heroism in a ceremony hosted by the King of Denmark. So, when stationed in Copenhagen a few years later, he and his newlywed wife essentially had a 'Key to the City.' There were parties and balls nearly every night. Champagne flowed like water. Cigarettes were considered chic, as movie stars were always seen with them. Little me, as an embryo and fetus, had no choice in the matter. I was along for the ride. The bit of life-giving placenta between the mother's and baby's body doesn't discern between nutrition and drugs. It all gets passed along to the baby swimming in amniotic fluid. In sum, I was tipsy from day 1.

Age 6, near Paris, France:

I went with my older brother Ron, to visit one of his friends. The friend had a child's chemistry set, which included small samples of many chemicals. The friend put a little bit of yellowish powder on a wooden match, then lit the match, blew it out, and put it under my nose. "Here, sniff this." I did, and the burning sensation of sulfur caused me to cry immediately. It felt like a hot poker had been rammed up my nostril. As the tears poured down, the two bigger boys were consumed by hilarity, completely racked with laughter. I stomped out, filled with pain, embarrassment and anger.

While walking home alone, I picked up a stout stick and hurled it as hard as I could, as a way of venting anger. I watched the stick fly like a boomerang across a grassy area, and then 'smack!' It squarely hit the side of a delivery truck, 70 feet from me. Screech, went the brakes. Out popped two big men. One yelled at me, shaking his fist, while they both walked quickly and menacingly toward me. I stood.

"What the hell are you doing?!", yelled the bigger guy, in French. "Do you want to buy me a new van? I should punch you, but you're just a puny little kid."

"Je ne comprendre pas," I lied, while scowling, still immersed in my anger from the chemistry experiment.

"Why do you not understand?" he asked in French.

"I'm American"

The big guy's demeanor changed at that moment. His scowl morphed into a grin. Then he smirked at his friend; "Americain. Ha, That explains why he didn't run." He then stood in front of me, bent down and firmly patted my small shoulders, and said in French; "You Americain won the war for France. You didn't have to, but you came all the way across the sea, and fought like devils to free France." While strolling away, he kept saying 'merci' and then turned to his buddy and said, "That's why the kid is so brave. He's American, and he hit a moving van with a stick. I'd like to see you do that from that far away."

Age 8, Bethesda Maryland:

Early on, there was an incident where I was walking along a field with my elder brother and one of his friends. All of a sudden, the friend shouts out, "The Sharkeys!" I hadn't heard about the Sharkeys before that moment, but I would hear about them in ensuing years. The Sharkeys were three brothers who liked to get in fights, which they usually won. To this day, I don't know if they were any relation to Jack Sharkey, a famous boxer of their father's era. The first word to follow "The Sharkeys," ....was the word "run!" We three ran down a hill into a wooded area. I took one look behind and saw the boys chasing me were considerably bigger, so I hightailed it down a side path. I don't know what ensued with the two boys I was with versus the three Sharkey brothers, but I don't think there was any fighting, otherwise I would have heard of it later.

When I came out of the woods onto a road, I was disoriented. I then sensed uphill was the way to go, so up I went, heart still pounding. Upon cresting the hill, I came upon a group of five men sitting in a line on the curb. They were construction workers, and were taking their lunch break. One colored fellow (yes, at that time, we used the word 'colored' not 'black') probably close to twenty years, was making some great sounds with something on his mouth. It was a harmonica, and he was playing some of the sweetest sounding notes I had ever had the pleasure to hear. I stood mesmerized in front of him for I don't know how many minutes. He played with both hands, bending notes and every few phrases would gain eye contact and offer me a nice smile. My introduction to blues harp.

Bethesda, age 9:

Speaking of TV dinners, there was a big drama one night. Dad wasn't home, and mom was again fuming about something, but no one remembers what. Probably related to bruised ego. I had pissed her off so much - she came at me, oven mitt in hand, carrying a TV dinner she had just taken out of the oven, holding it aloft like the waitress from hell. She was striding towards me, a wicked snarl on her face, with full intent on slapping the piping hot TV dinner on my face and body.

It should be mentioned: the upstairs of our house was wall-to-wall white shag carpet. Anyone reading this will know shag carpet, particularly white color, is the most ridiculous thing to have in a home with three young boys.

So there she was, ready to permanently scald my epidermis. My back is against a wall, so I instinctively put a foot out in front of me. Raging woman carrying hot tray aloft walks into foot, woman is stopped, tray continues in a downward arc, plops face down on floor. A once-white patch of shag carpet is now impregnated with salisbury steak swathed in tomato sauce. What a waste of a TV dinner.

Mom shrieks as if her teeth are being pulled out by pliers. I dart out the door as quick as a mouse. Ah, freedom of the outdoors, with sweet warm night air, subtle whiff of cherry blossoms. But wait. Big brother is yelling at me. In an instant I realize he is taking it upon himself to be mom's avenger. I run. He runs. He is older and bigger than me, so he's faster. He tackles me on the hill of a neighbor's house. I'm on my back and he's got his heavy knees on my shoulders. He's about to pummel my face with his fists. We get eye contact. I grin. He grins. In a moment, we're both rolling on the grass, laughing. Within a span of seven minutes, I had alternately dodged being scalded by one family member and being pummeled by another. Yet another typical evening at the Albertsen's.

Guinea, Africa, age 13:

Conakry was where I had my first driving lesson. With my mom alongside, in the Peugeot 403 stick-shift, we rolled along some of the dusty downtown streets. As with nearly all cities, there were slums. Row upon disheveled row of tarpaper and stick shacks, each about as big as a gas station restroom, were spread out over large areas. In front of one, sat a distinctly Chinese-looking man; fat, blotched-skin, with several black African wives seated around him.

We drove past a newly-built stadium with massive cyrillic letters around its entry, and I asked mom, "is that Russian?" She mentioned how the USSR had indeed built the football stadium as a gift to the Guineans. The Americans had also built things to give to the Guineans, such as; dams, roads, bridges. This was during the thick of the Cold War. Guinea's headman, Seke Toure, had not committed allegiance to either side, so both the Americans and the Soviets were vying for his favor. It seemed clear: the Soviets were playing a better game. It's easier to wow the populace by building a sports stadium, than by paving a road.

My first day learning to drive: while grappling with the clutch and the stick shift of the old French car, my mom and I were approaching a small intersection. A woman was crossing the road. Not just any woman, but a stately well-coiffed African woman dressed beautifully, using a folded umbrella as a walking stick. She saw me approaching. Our eyes met. The car was going slow and I was frantically trying to figure out how to stop the darn thing. For prior minutes minutes, mom had been grilling me on which pedals to use at which times. The strolling woman stopped in the middle of my lane, her curvy body was edge on, head turned sideways to afford me a steely gaze. It was if she was saying, "Ok white boy, what are you going to do, drive in to me? I dare you." At the last second, I found the brake pedal, and wound up stopping with an inch between the front bumper and her majestic leg.

England, age 13

The teachers at Aldenham were more engaging than the teachers I had in prior years in the US school system. They were jazzed about the subjects they were teaching and therefore the students were thinking and learning more than they would with ho-hum American teachers. One instructor in particular stood out: Mister Stevenson personified a raven. Not only because he dressed in a long black olde-style smock, as the other teachers did, but also because of his raven-like mannerisms.

His classroom had an elevated narrow walkway, about two feet high, projecting nearly 4 feet from the front wall, and running the gamut along the front of the room, just below the blackboard. It was his

stage. Along it, he would stroll menacingly, from one end to the other. He was bent over like a walking bird of prey and, more often than not, would be facing sideways. Large flecks of dandruff were always settled on upper parts of the black smock, directly below his receding hair, combed straight back. His face was ruddy red stretched over a skull, and his mind was nineteenth century genius. If you've seen a bust of either Dante or Tycho Brahe, you get the idea.

He had wide ranging voice tones which more often dwelled in the higher registers. To call his voice rasping and borderline sinister, would be close to the mark. He was like an alternately intense and wicked uncle who might haunt your house at night when your parents were away. Often, when making a point while writing something in chicken scratch letters on the blackboard, he would add emphases by slamming the point of the chalk so hard, bits would splay out like a mini explosion. His favorite places to smack the chalk into the blackboard were underlining a particular word or phrase, or simply stab a direct hit on a full stop at the end of a sentence.

He, like the Irish Sargent, had a strange fixation on me, the only American. He would watch me unnervingly. If I wasn't taking written notes feverishly, he might take a piece of chalk and throw it me - hard. He would have never made it as a major league baseball pitcher. He had the speed and intensity, but his accuracy was lacking. Or perhaps it was because I was quick at dodging. The main difference between Mr. Stevenson and the mean Irishman, was Stevenson had a modicum of the 'milk of human kindness' and a twinkle in his eye, even when throwing chalk or an eraser at me.

Italian Riviera, age 14:

One perfect Mediterranean day, we walked down the hundreds of steep stairs to the jetty. All the boys and girls, lying around on towels, were older than us. Vanity was thick, as every big boy had skimpy brief bathing trunks made of less cloth than a cocktail napkin. As for the girls, each looked like a well-oiled model. Bikinis were the style and these were the days before kids were brought up on fast food and subsequently ballooned out like their mama had mated with the Goodyear blimp. Girls' bikinis were so skimpy, nothing was left to the imagination. All of a sudden, a young Italian man's voice split the serenity; "Why you no a-look at me?" His no-nonsense loud words blared forth at the Swedish blond lounging alongside him. She blushed and said, "What?"

Again he blasted the words at her pretty head, "Why you no a-look at me. I am a-right a-here, next-a to you." She turned redder. He continued; "You a-look out to the sea. You a-look at da sailboat. You a-look at all de oder men a-here, but you no a-look at me. Why you no a-wanna look at a-me?" For all I know, the girl could have been a young Agnetha from Abba.

She got up, grabbed her towel, and split. He remained inclined with a serious countenance. He waved one hand at everyone watching, as if to say, 'Can you understand why she no a-look at a-me?'

That summer, at 14, I had never had a real kiss. All that was about to change in a few racing heartbeats. A bunch of us youngsters were casually hanging out one night in the basement of a large hotel. There were a few old mattresses on the floor, no bed frames, and each mattress had a few kids sitting, smoking tobacco, talking, laughing. I was playing guitar. I didn't particularly notice the pretty girl sitting next to me. All of a sudden, the power went out. Complete darkness. I stopped playing guitar. A moment later, there was a mouth on my mouth, and a warm tongue wiggling inside. It was such a surprise, I didn't even know what was happening in the first moment. Then the lights came back on, and I could see the cute Italian girl with the lovely mouth.

Rome, Italy, age 15:

One of our most fun concerts was a rare occasion when the ladies from an all-girls international boarding school were invited to a dance at NDI. A week earlier I had broken a bone in my right wrist playing American football. A plaster cast hobbled my right arm from above the elbow, to half-way covering fingers. Even so, I wouldn't have missed playing the event even if half my head was blown off. For our first song, we picked Spencer Davis Group's (the inspiration for the name we chose for our group) first big hit, 'Keep On Running.' It has a solo bass line as the lead-in introduction. I was playing a Paul McCartney style bass guitar shaped like a violin, and my cast was rubbing on its edge, with flakes of white plaster snowing down.

Just before starting the opening song, most boys and girls had gravitated to a side room, perhaps because there were pool tables there. However, when those punchy bass notes started playing, kids came streaming out of the side room like a flood gate had been lifted. A mass of youngsters moving in one direction for several minutes. The Morgan Davies Band had made its debut.

Majorca, Mediterranean beach resort, 1967:

The parties at that pad were haute-couture mixed with flower power. Speaking of Flower Power: that defined his younger brother Cedric. The first time I met Ced, he was at Derek's ice cream sandwich booth. He was alternating between eating ice cream and smoking a doobie, one in each hand. He offered me a toke, right there in the middle of the day, with tourists all over. He was wearing an unbuttoned brown buckskin jacket with his hairy chest showing, but his most distinguishing feature was the hair on his head. Long, partially brushed, dirty golden - he had to be the coolest hippie for miles around. Oh, and the Harley Davidson.

Ron was particularly impressed with Cedric who had that quality, so particular to the coolest hippies: the 'gift of gab.' Ced was witty all the time, but it was particularly evident when everyone around him was too drunk and stoned to function, how Cedric would have his funny observations going full throttle.

Somehow, Ron had gotten hold of a sheepskin jacket. It wasn't just sheep's wool, it was the actual hide of a sheep with the wool still on it. It was worn with the hide against skin, and off-white wool showing, and came down nearly to his sandals. When Ron and Ced were standing together, down by the boardwalk on a hot summer's evening, it was a sight to behold. Neither wore more than a swimsuit under their jackets. Ron with his dirty blond jacket and long black hair, Ced with his brown buckskin jacket, with 8 inch tassels and his nearly dreadlock blond curls cascading over his shoulders. Both had their jackets open, baring hairy chests. If you wanted to know where the hippest (or hippiest) party was on any given night, follow those two guys.

One fine day, us four guys in the band called the 'New Things,' went to a hotel called Formentor. It's the same name used for one of the smaller Balearic islands, but this hotel was on Majorca. It was white, large, and majestic. It was designed to be accessed only by pleasure boats, but we got there by driving along a terrible back country road which was probably only used by construction crews when building the place. When we got there, we went through the giant lobby and came out on the hotel's rear terrace. It was as big as a baseball diamond, all tiled and landscaped, with fountains, gazebos, alcoves, sculptures, and flowering trees. The view of the Mediterranean was magical, particularly with

the host's super yacht moored nearby. In the center of the courtyard was a giant circular table with a gaggle of glitterati types. At its head was a white haired man, impeccably clad in a dashing white suit. The hotel valets tried to usher us boys out, saying in hushed tones, "This is a private party. You must leave now."

When the host saw we were being asked to leave, he called out magnanimously; "No, it's alright. Everyone is welcome here. Let these young men come and join us at this table." We felt like instant nobility. We found out a bit later, the host was #2 shipping magnate of the world. #1, at that time, was Ari Onassis, who had made headlines by marrying John F. Kennedy's widow, Jackie. Not only did we partake in a feast fit for princes, but I alone was invited onto the super-yacht boat by the host's daughter.

She was a couple of years older than me and looked like a cross between a princess and a super-model. We spun records for at least an hour, until I heard my buddies calling out for me over the water from the hotel terrace; "Hey Kim. What's up? It's getting dark and we gotta go. We gotta drive that god-forsaken road back to do a gig tonight. Kim, come on!"

The lady and I had been drinking white wine and spinning 45's from her ample collection. She took my hand and asked me to stay, even saying she could get me a job as a deckhand. Our eyes met and for a suspended moment, I considered staying on board. How things might have been different if I had sailed away on the ship, hand in hand with a latter-day princess. Then again, I might have got tossed overboard, or drop-kicked off the ship at the next port of call.

Christmas in Denmark, age 16: Every night in Copenhagen, was a night out on the town. I always ventured out solo. Once I wandered down by the docks after dark. If I had asked anyone beforehand, I'm sure they would have cautioned against going there. I was just following my fancy. I saw a lively bar, and strolled in. I was barely four steps inside, when a pretty lady, early twenties, grabbed me and started to dance. It wasn't rock and roll or jitterbug dancing which I was accustomed to, but instead was a spirited, one arm on the waist, olde style dancing. We each had an arm out, clasping hands – while facing one another, nearly touching. It's a timeless style, and, if you ask me, the most joyful type of dancing. We were filled to the brim with good cheer. After a few dances, she asked if I'd like to go upstairs with her. I said "sure." She followed up with, "you know you're going to have to pay?" I then realized she was prostitute, but I was too unsure of the ways of the world to deal with it. She smiled and pulled away. At that moment, I was called over to a nearby table, "hey boy, come here."

It was a long heavy wooden table with about eight stout men lining each side. At its head sat the eldest. The old salt was calling me over with a big grin showing half his teeth missing. He pulled up a stool so I could sit close by him. He couldn't stop grinning at me and making pronouncements to all who were listening. But it was all in Danish, so I didn't understand the words. However, the good cheer was palpable. When I told him I was American and couldn't speak Danish, he grinned even more. Now he had his arm around my shoulders in a camaraderie way. It became a bit clearer why he liked me so much, when the fellow on my other side explained how: all the men sitting at the table had asked the pretty girl to dance, and she said 'no thanks' to each in turn. Yet, she lit up to me, the instant I walked in the door. She must like 'em young.

One of the seamen suggested I bargain a low rate for her, maybe get her for free, because she liked me. The old salt chimed in with something like; "No no. The lad is barely 16. Give him time to enjoy life, before he gets all hobnobbed with women." Several free beers later, I extradited my way to the

street, and merrily stumbled back to Ebba and Hagbaard's place.

Madrid, Spain, age 16:

Night clubs in Madrid, as with every other European city I visited, didn't seem to have any age restrictions. Such limitations are more of an American proclivity. As such, I was able to play electric guitar in clubs, both as a sit-in guest musician and with my own combo. One stand-out night, I was with a pick-up band in a smoky club. There was a small crowd. I chose to play the opening song, an up-tempo blues instrumental called 'The Stumble' in the key of E - which I'd lifted from the Bluesbreakers' album. It so happened I played the song while facing the drummer, so my back was to the audience. When the song finished, I heard a hardy amount of applause, so I turned around and was happy to see the club had filled up while we were playing the tune. Not only were the folks smiling appreciatively, but the British group called The End were right up front by the bandstand. They also beamed me on. The End was the band with Terry Taylor as its very able lead guitarist. It was Terry who broke the heart of one of his groupies, who happened to be Julie, weeks before Julie and I met.

A month later, I bought a lovely natural blond maple Fender Stratocaster from Terry. When handing over the '64 guitar he said with a kind grin; "That Julie is a handful, isn't she?" I didn't know what to say in response, so just grinned back. It would become clear, over ensuing years, how right he was in the brief assertion. Actually, 'a handful' was a gross understatement.

Washington D.C., 1968:

One day, dad asked his two eldest sons to do him a favor. Ron and I were assigned the task of meeting two men and showing them around Washington D.C. The men happened to be the top brass of Ghana's Police and its Secret Services, respectively. It was their first visit to the U.S. and they wanted to get acquainted with the capital city of the strongest country on the planet. We had loosely planned to drive around the most scenic parts of downtown, taking in things like the National Monument, The Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, and any of several other impressive sights in the Nation's Capital.

We picked the visitors up at their hotel. They were dressed in drab black business suits complete with ties and cuff links. We were dressed in tie-dyed shirts and bell bottoms. Our wheels were a convertible VW bug, spray-painted day-glo pink, so sloppily applied, the white underlay was visible. Ron was driving, and his sense of direction is akin to a kite with a broken tether. Additionally, there were some streets blocked by burning piles of broken wooden furniture.

"Why is that?" we wondered. We didn't have a functioning radio in the car, so we didn't know, less than an hour earlier, Martin Luther King had been shot dead in Memphis Tennessee.

Word had spread fast to cities across America. Wherever dense populations of black folks resided, there were riots. The fact that the shooter was a white man certainly exacerbated the anger, frustration, and sense of loss, radiating around those regions. The four of us were in the hippie car; a pair of disheveled white guys in front, and a pair of dignified black men in back. We must have presented an odd scene to onlookers.

We slowly drove by long blocks where smoke was coming out of shops and locals were grabbing all sorts of valuables to take to their homes. TVs were popular, followed by bulk food, and we saw at least one air conditioner still in its packing box. We saw several guys menacingly wielding baseball bats,

staring at our car as it drove by. They were usually standing alongside small burning piles of trash. They might have thought we were press corps, but either way, without the black fellows in back, Ron and I would have been plum candidates for head bashings. There was palpable anger in the streets, and we were in a convertible the size of a fridge.

Back in Washington DC area, I got well acquainted with Walter. He was unique in several ways. Starting with his attire: he wore a black leather jacket with shoulder loops. Through one loop would dangle a length of chain about two feet long. It must have been only for looks, because he was never seen handling the chain for any purpose. He also had a matching engineer's cap with a plastic visor, and usually sunglasses. He could be seen with shades on at night, or even in a dark room, similar to then-hipster Lou Reed.

He fancied himself as a song-writer. I would good-naturedly chuckle when I'd hear him say, for example, after a particularly lively party the night before, "Hey, did you like those songs I wrote last night?"

I'd say, "Sure, I liked the songs you did, but how can you say you 'wrote' them? You didn't write anything down. We didn't even record them. They were all spontaneous. They're like leaves in the wind."

I'd make a note to myself to arrange to bring a tape recorder to subsequent parties. I would be the first to admit that Walter's 'songs' were borderline genius. His style was like early Bob Dylan with end-on-end sentences meandering on for a minute. If the lyrics had been written, they'd have had hardly any punctuation - just sentences going on for pages. There were some rhymes, but no rhyming schemes. As for themes: they were a mish-mash of politics, trends, and a dollop of Cheech and Chong type humor with no holds barred.

Walter and I performed at dozens of parties. Most of the folks within earshot would get drawn to us, and stand around listening intently. I would usually be sitting, and he standing. I would have an acoustic guitar, sometimes slightly amped, and he would perform with or without a mic, depending on what was available.

Walter took the limelight. I didn't mind doing accompaniment. I would start a rhythmic simple chord progression and he would layer on his spontaneous end-on-end lyrics. He performed in the spirit of Lenny Bruce in the sense that Lenny liked to tell stories, and didn't mind pushing peoples' buttons - no verbal boundaries.

More than a few times, Walter would be performing to a group of onlookers, and the words pouring forth would be offensive to one group or another. It was akin to a ripple effect. I would look at the audience, and if Walter had some lines going which would offend gay women, then some of the women folk would be visibly offended. If the next lines went on a rant about blacks, Jews, Christians, or Muslims - then each sub-group in attendance would, in turn, get visibly affected. The reactions weren't so much of anger, but more of getting their offended buttons pushed. Walter was an equal opportunity offender. He also had an engaging smile, not unlike Sonny Bono of Sonny and Cher, who Walter physically resembled.

Bethesda, Maryland 1968: Mom didn't like doing housework so, like many other suburban women



of that era, would hire cleaning ladies. In those days, we called them 'maids.' Pretty much all the women who hired out for that sort of work, were black and from downtown Washington D.C. Of the dozens she hired, I don't think any one woman showed up twice, and here's why: She would harass each one mercilessly. Actually, 'harass' is too lightweight a word. During the final half hour of the working day, mom would actively harangue each poor lady who ventured to cleaning our house for a few bucks.

Many a time, I would come home from school, and mom would be shouting at a maid. It was vicious, though it never came to blows, as far as I know. The maid would cower with a mix of embarrassment, fear, anger and resentment. It was clear the maid just wanted her payment and to never see the ungrateful, and vindictive white woman again.

Washington D.C., 1968:

I did heroin less than a half dozen times. The first time was when I went to a downtown music show with my buddy Paul Holder. Every Thursday evening, we would go to a little stone church in Washington DC to hear real blues. I wish we'd brought a recording device, because each performer was great.

One Thursday, Elizabeth Cotton did a set. She was a soft-spoken saintly woman with wispy white hair as befits someone in her 90's. She showcased her timeless hit 'Freight Train.' Before and since that special night, it's been a song I often play. Though she had written it when a young girl, the song alludes to death.

'Freight train, freight train, going so fast / freight train, freight train going so fast. Please don't tell what train I'm on / and you won't know where I've gone.'

'When I'm gone please bury me deep / way down on ol' Chestnut street / so I can hear that old 89 / as she goes rolling by.'

'When I'm dead and in my grave / no more good times will I crave / Place a stone at my head and my feet / and tell them all that I've gone to sleep.'

That simple song, to me, is like a breath of fresh air. In most societies, people are taught to fear death, as if it's such an awful thing. Cotton's reference to death is as light-minded as the concept of a train rumbling by town, a few blocks distant.

There were other iconic blues performers at those Thursday night sessions. There was no stage, just a space in front of the folding metal chairs. Gatemouth Brown had a great way of telling stories with his deep-toned voice, to introduce each song. We felt like we could be sitting with him on a front porch of a rural cabin in Alabama or Mississippi, or wherever he was from.

After the concert that night, two young black guys took Paul and I aside and asked if we'd like to "try some H." We said, "sure," and ponied up a few bucks. With some able assistance from them, we 'hit up' alongside the exterior of the old rock-walled church.

More Washington D.C, '68:

I'm directed where to drive, and wind up parking in front of a small apartment building. Bill gives clear instructions: "I'm going up to the 2nd floor. You wait here, fifteen minutes. After fifteen minutes, you two (pointing at the others) go on up to the 2nd floor. You knock on the door. The moment it opens, you power your way in with the rifles and rob us all. When you're there, you don't know me. You treat me as shitty as you treat the others in there, but keep it quiet, we don't want to freak out the neighbors. Don't shoot, and don't hurt anybody. You get whatever money you can quickly, then leave. Go straight down to the car and split back to the Cairo without me." Pause. "You got that? Don't hurt anybody, just scare 'em. I'll meet you an hour later at the Cairo. Don't spend any money before we meet there. You got that?"

Bill goes on up to the apartment by himself, as if he just happened to be stopping by for a casual visit. I stay in the car's driver's seat with the two big guys filling up the back. All of us are stoned on heroin, so we don't feel a need to be chatty. Plus, we have little handle on the passage of time. I look at the rifles each guy has, and a modicum of reasonableness creeps into my addled brain. After waiting about seven minutes, I break the silence, "It's been a long time. I'm going up to see what's up."

The two guys look at each other, and decide to join me, even though I didn't want them to tag along. I walk up to the 2nd floor, and knock on the door. An attractive and visibly stoned hippie lady answers. I ask if Bill is there, even though I could see him clearly sitting on the floor facing the door. Bill gives me a look which says, "oh shit, you've blown the operation." Just as quickly, he adapts and gives me a fake smile of greeting. A second later the hippie girl looks beyond me and sees in the partial darkness of the stairwell: the two big black guys kneeling down, each on one knee. Each has a rifle, but not pointed at anyone. Her expression instantly changes to concern as she calls to her boyfriend in a low tone, "Rick, there is something going on outside in the hall."

As if on cue, Bill gets up, strolls toward me by the door, and says curtly to his hosts, "Thanks for your hospitality. I gotta go now. Bye." The four of us go down, and back to the car. As we pull out, I glance up at the apartment, and see two spooked but assuredly relieved long-haired folks looking down at us in the convertible.

I took the three junkies back to the Cairo Hotel, and then split to go home. I found out later that Bill almost got the bejeezus beaten out of him by the two bad boys with the rifles. The reason was simple: Bill had taken along an amateur, me, on a mission and I had screwed it up. I contributed to them missing out on getting money that night. Good thing I wasn't there when they were browbeating Bill because I would have been an added punching bag for unloading their anger.

Madrid, Spain, '69

....while on a public bus in Madrid. I was traveling solo, the bus wasn't crowded, just a few elder women along the other side of the aisle from me. I was mildly meditating, as I often did. It was a type of pleasant meditation where cascading waves of bright yellowish-white light appear at several-second intervals. While in that state, I chanced to have a three-second eye contact with one of the women across the aisle. She immediately crossed herself in the Catholic manner, and exclaimed, "Dios Mios!"

She went to rattling out loud in Spanish about seeing a saint, all the while trying to regain eye contact with me. Within a moment, the other women were trying also. I humored them by allowing split second eye contact, but that took away some of my highness.

To get drawn into another person's consciousness, even if only for a half second, can be sobering. The average older person has pain, suffering, worries and fears zinging around in their minds. When a person is pleasantly stoned, he won't want to tune in to all that stuff. Really enlightened beings can probably deal well enough with that. In other words, they can gain eye contact without getting brought down by that person's worldly consciousness. I wasn't that far developed. As I stepped off the bus, I looked up to see the five or six women looking at me pleadingly, while crossing themselves. I hadn't done any drugs for weeks prior, not even alcohol.

Each summer, Washington D.C. hosts a festival to commemorate the good ol' USA. Each annual event features an individual state. One year, the showcased state was Mississippi. The festival takes place along one of the long rectangular 'reflecting pools' which stretch most of the distance between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. If you had been at the southern end of that pool on a particular afternoon in the mid-60's, you would have been among the crowd which heard Martin Luther King give his famous 'I Have A Dream' speech.

The reason the Mississippi festival is mentioned herein is because at one of the booths, there were two old black fellows. Their names are forgotten, but the music they were playing was endearing. It was as close to field-hand call and response singing as I had ever heard live.

It was a minimally small booth, big enough to park a golf cart in. At the time, I was the only one standing there listening, but it was enthralling. They had one guitar between them, and were singing songs which might have hailed from when slaves first worked the cotton fields in the southeastern states. Heck, some of the songs may have even been derived from earlier times when their ancestors were still in west Africa. One of the songs which stood out had the line, "Little bitty baby, dressed in swaddlin' clothes. Little baby Jesus, thought you'd like to know."

At a Washington D.C. inner city all-black high school, as part of a student exchange program:

That afternoon there was a rally in the school's gym. The whole school must have been there, over 1,000 students. I never knew the proper term, whether it's, 'Pep Alley', 'Pepper Alley', or 'Pep Rally.' I think it's the latter, in the sense that 'it rallies the pep' or, to put another way, motivates students for an upcoming sporting event. Either way, it was rousing. After everyone got seated, the house lights dimmed and a group started drumming. It wasn't a consortium of various types of percussion, like you might hear at a white suburban pep rally. No siree. These were several bass drums and tom toms, and the pulsating beat couldn't have sounded more African than if we were in a village hut, preparing to raid another village along the Congo River.

The drumming was coming from the back of the hall, and the lights stayed low. A few moments after, cheerleaders came bounding down the aisle in single file, decked out in purple and white, with their pom-poms thrusting provocatively. If you could harness the energy of just one of those young women, you could power a locomotive up a hill. The entire body of students went nuts, myself included. There are few things in life more motivating than pulsing low tone drums. When combined with sweating, gyrating amber-skin girls, watch out.

(later that evening, at a private party held in a dark room. I was the only white person there):

The girl I picked was petite, perfumed, and had lovely soft kinky hair - an all-around dreamboat

package. Slow dancing was the only way to go. We were grinding so well, I thought I'd ....(fill in the blanks). At the end of the second LP, the lights came on. She looked up, and the immediate surprise on her face indicated she didn't know she had been coupled with a white guy. She quickly looked over at her friends and shrugged the same awkward message to them, and then sauntered away in their direction.

Back in Madrid, 1970, staying clandestinely at my girlfriend's room in her parents' house:

Her parents already knew to never enter the room, though once there was a breach of that rule. For some odd reason, her step-dad, a redneck army sergeant, came home in the middle of the day. Julie was out shopping and I was in her room alone. The step-dad had no idea I was there. He was so out of touch with his step-daughter, he didn't even know she had a boyfriend. He knocked on the door and called her name - no answer. As he was pushing the door open, I quickly hid behind her dresser which was against a window that had see-through curtains, which I tossed over my head, with see through curtains over my head and upper torso. The step-dad crept in, went straight to her dresser and, less than two feet from me, opened the top drawer. One by one, he lifted out her panties and sniffed each one. If he had nodded his head forward, he would have bumped my chest, that's how physically close we were. I could clearly see him through the gauzy curtains, but thankfully he didn't think to look up and see me standing there. That evening, I told Julie and naturally she was livid. It cemented her hate for him.

Washington D.C., 1970:

A fat black musician friend named Leprechaun took a room downstairs. One afternoon, he brought back a new guy he'd just met. Leprechaun was gay, and his new friend was a small rough-looking Latino guy who had just got out of prison that morning. It so happened I had adopted a kitty, so to save money had opted to make some kitty chow by boiling beans. The beans were put in two mason jars, tops sealed and placed in an upper kitchen cabinet. That night about 3 am, there were several loud blasts from downstairs – followed by some voices calling out, and another crash several seconds later. After a couple minutes I arrived downstairs to see what the commotion was about. I brought a golf iron.

Leprechaun was standing there in his shorts, looking like a walrus without tusks. He was nearly crying. There was a big mess in the kitchen. One of the bean-filled mason jars had exploded. That immediately caused the jar next to it to explode, which concurrently blew open the wooden cabinet door, which slammed against the wood wall. The door then slammed back against its frame for added effect. The Latino guy thought it was a double barreled shotgun blast, and proceeded to dive out the first floor window, punching a hole in the screen. Leprechaun was calling out to him, while the kid ran down the road in his underwear. Easy come, easy go.

Virginia, 1971:

Jim called me with a one-off job proposal. I knew he was gay and he knew I was straight, so I wanted to make it clear to him I wasn't going to play a part in any of his warped fantasies. He said he was offered a gig for doing sound for a big concert. The venue was William and Mary College in northern Virginia, and the headliner bands were Deep Purple and Fleetwood Mac. Those familiar with those bands know they both had hits in the 1960's. Deep Purple had a stronger track record at the time, as it would be several years hence before Fleetwood Mac (FM) added two American singers and

became superstars with their 'Rumours' album – one of the 10 highest selling albums of all time.

The request to do sound was such short notice, there wasn't time to gather and train a crew. Instead, Jim and I loaded the equipment and drove through Georgetown. From each side window of the truck we propositioned hippies on the sidewalk, as we cruised slowly by. We told them, “ten dollars to join, and an additional ten dollars when we bring you back in two days.” Several guys in their mid-teens took up the offer. Now we had a small crew but none but Jim and I had a clue about sound systems for concerts. Neither I, nor any of the young guys were familiar with Jim's equipment and none of us had done sound with him before.

We arrived the night before the concert day and stayed at a Holiday Inn. The next day we started setting up. Lunch time came and went with no food, so around 2 pm I told Jim I was going out to get some sandwiches to-go for the crew. Jim reluctantly gave me a few bucks for that. The concert was slated to start at 7 pm, so we did a sound check at 5 pm. There were about twelve microphones which today would sound silly, as an average concert just a few years later might have twenty to thirty mics.

It was a big hall. Besides the main speaker cabinets which were 'Voice of the Theater' brand, there were four monitor speakers facing the musicians. Again, today's concerts probably have ten or more monitors. Yet, the equipment Jim provided was adequate. The problem was the arrangement of the microphones, particularly as they plugged into the 'sound board' or 'mixing board.' The two opening bands did well, and all went smoothly. It was when Fleetwood Mac came on that problems showed their shaggy heads.

I was Jim's main assistant positioned on stage. My job was to liaison between what needed to be tweaked onstage with what Jim was doing at the mixing board. Jim had set up his mixer earlier in the proper place, about 60 feet out from and facing the middle of the stage. Just as FM was about to start their first song, a long haired British man in his forties came over to Jim and declared, “I'm Fleetwood Mac's manager, and I always run the board when they're playing.”

It wasn't a request, it was a statement. Immediately, the Brit positioned his ample bulk in front of the mixing board and started tweaking the knobs. Trouble was, he didn't have a clue about which knobs were associated with which microphones. I saw and heard immediately there was a major problem brewing, so I jumped off the stage and jogged over to the commotion. Jim was trying to assert himself, but he was no match for the coked-up British man who was full of himself. Jim had sweat beading up on his face and dripping off the tip of his nose. I realized the only way I could get the British bulldog's paws off the board was to physically push him aside and probably add a few punches to his face and body. I chose to jog back to the stage, but the Brit wasn't looking at me, or paying me any mind.

By this time, Fleetwood had started their first song. The levels of the mics were swinging wildly up and down. The reason was: the coked-out Brit manager thought the microphones were plugged in perfectly left to right on the mixing board. They were closely arranged like that, but not precisely. So the Brit was running the volume levels up and down, trying to determine which knob on the board corresponded to which microphone. That's ok if you're doing sound at a basement party with perhaps four channels, but it doesn't cut the mustard to do it in a large amphitheater with thousands of people, while a top notch band is starting their live set.

While on stage, I could see up-close how the band members were getting frustrated. Not only were the main speakers going up and down in volume, but similar was happening with the monitors. The

bass drum pedal would start booming, then go down. Then the lead singer's voice would get very loud, then go down low. All sorts of screwy levels were being heard. After the first song, pretty Christine McVie, FM's singer/keyboardist stopped playing and declared to the capacity crowd, "this sound system sucks. We can't play anymore." Then she turned and walked off-stage. The other band members followed sheepishly.

I went backstage and saw the Deep Purple guys sitting in a row, smoking tobacco or weed. I had a long sleeved T-Shirt with the letters MC prominently showing. The letters stood for a college I attended, Montgomery College, but to anyone around the stage it looked like it stood for 'master of ceremonies.' My adrenaline was going. I told the Purple guys I was doing sound and that we would get things fixed. They looked at me with stoned eyes and mumbled a few lines like, "It can't be fixed, man." The audience naturally felt shorted. Someone started a fire in a restroom waste can. Another attendee poked holes with a pencil in the thin black paper of the 16 inch speakers. It was a sad ride back to the D.C. area.

Washington D.C. 1971:

Another night was quite different, but a thrill in its own right. We were gigging in a small club that tried to be a cabaret. It was our first night gigging there, and not many folks were in attendance. However, there were two big black sailors at a small table, directly in front of the stage. SJB played a few songs which went over well. When we started an old James Brown song called 'I don't mind,' it was like electricity went through the sailors. They immediately jumped up and asked if they could accompany the song. I was singing lead and said, "sure." They positioned themselves at the second stand-up mic and proceeded to provide a seamless vocal accompaniment along with synchronized mirrored body motions one would expect from guys singing back-up to a James Brown song.

rural Blacksburg, Virginia, 1972:

Once, while hiking alone in the woods, I spotted a young deer curled up sitting on the ground. It was a cold morning, and the deer was completely covered in frost, except for its black eye which was clearly watching me. It froze in place, thinking I hadn't noticed because she was behind a bush, blended in with the leaf litter. But the bush was spindly, and the deer was, to me, more beautiful than a pile of cut diamonds. I was just a few feet away and didn't want to startle it by getting any closer. I kept walking and the deer probably thought how lucky it was to evade detection.

Another close encounter, this time with a skunk: I was walking with my friend's dog, again along a forest trail, when all of a sudden the dog stopped on the path and pointed at a bush. He wasn't on a tether. Being taller, I could see over the bush and clearly saw the biggest skunk known to man or beast – about the size of a 9 month bear cub. It was reared up on its hind legs, ready to spray. The two animals were no more than a meter apart with just that little bush between them. I immediately reached over, and firmly grabbed the dog by the loose skin at the scruff of its neck and then brusquely coerced it on down the path with me. If I had tarried another second, the dog would likely have lunged at the skunk and would have suffered the worst of the encounter.

1972: When back in DC, I went to see the guys who had put a popular blues band together called the Nighthawks. They were suburban white guys, and their lead singer was Mark Weiner. I went to where they practiced, and showed them a country blues song I'd written called, 'Eli Whitney and his Cotton Gin.' My band, the Saints Jam Band was already performing it, but I thought since the Nighthawks

were strictly blues-oriented, they would like it also. They did, and included it in their repertoire.

A week later, they phoned to ask me to go see them at a popular club in Georgetown. When they saw me enter, they called me up to sing the song with them backing me up. I thought I'd be standing on the right side of the stage, so I put an earplug in my left ear because the drums would be on my left, and an earplug would dampen the intense clanging of the cymbals. Additionally, all the band's amps would be on the left. When I climbed on stage, they shuffled me over to the left of the stage.

In all the excitement, I didn't think to switch the earplug to my right ear. We cranked out the song, and a bazillion decibels zapped my right eardrum, while my left ear was plugged. I felt imbalanced but didn't realize the earplug was a factor until stepping down from the stage. Even so, the set was a hit with the capacity crowd. I had an offer to join the Nighthawks but declined because the Saints Jam Band was still happening. All that happened around the time a boyish Bill Clinton was wooing a cute young Georgetown University student named Hillary in the vicinity. Perhaps they were there dancing that night.

with a Congolese drummer, 1972:

The next day, I was sitting with the alpha African guy, Pauli, and he told me a little story about how he had visited Larry's rural Virginia homestead a few days earlier. Larry brought Pauli to a secluded meadow and they saw some wild deer in the distance. Pauli asked if he could eat a deer if he caught one. Larry said, "you mean if you shot one with a bow and arrow or with a rifle." Pauli said, "no, if I catch one with my hands." Larry laughed and said, "sure," thinking his friend could never catch a deer and take it down.

Pauli had a plan. He got hold of a couple quart containers of Morton's Salt and put the salt on the ground by a tree near where Larry and he had seen the deer the day before. Pauli hid in a bush, an arm's length from the salt. I don't know how long he waited but he claimed he was actually able to lunge out, grab a deer by the leg, wrestle it down and kill it. Soon after, he butchered it, and stretched its hide on a wood frame.

While Pauli was telling me this story, I was aghast. He expected commendation, but I was leaning to condemnation. Via the influence of Jethro Kloss's book, I had recently become a vegetarian. Plus, from the time I first read Doctor Doolittle as a little kid, I had always harbored a love of wild animals.

The African could tell I wasn't pleased with his story. Offering me some dried meat didn't soften my outlook. We were sitting by a large picture window. Outside was a majestic old oak tree. In plain sight was a squirrel. I said to Pauli, "You come to my country, you go out and kill a beautiful wild animal. You want some meat? I'll go and buy you some meat at the supermarket. No good, man. Is nothing safe? Is that squirrel not safe, with you in my country?" At that point, he dissolved to laughter so intense I thought he might have a hernia. He fell on the floor, doubled up in laughter for at least a full minute. I must admit, I laughed also.

. . . . . the above excerpts are from the e-book: C.I.A. Brat / written by Ken Albertsen