

HATLESS... DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... JANUARY 2017

I should have been back in the dorm studying, but I ran into Dave who lived down the hall and we agreed we had to go down to "N" Street and watch. Dave was from New Jersey. "Man, this is history, we've got to go."

"Cold out there, we better bundle up."

"I know. We've got to see this."

We walked, shivering in the cold. There wasn't any snow, just a mean wind. Approaching the house, we could see a small crowd gathered, not so many people, considering the occasion. The street in front of the house was blocked off, with a couple of cars from the Secret Service. There may have been a cameraman filming, but I don't remember. We waited across the street. I don't know how long we waited, standing on the other side, hunched into our jackets. We whistled and stomped and did jumping-jacks.

After a time there came a stirring across the way, and the door opened. The crowd broke into polite applause when President Elect John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline came out the door and got into the waiting limo, and with Secret Service cars in front and back, drove away into history. He was handsome, she was radiant as in the photos. It was unbelievably cold, and in what would become a historic moment in the evolution of men's fashion, he went forth hatless.

Back at the dorm we watched some of the inauguration on TV. I remember Robert Frost reading a poem and the wind blowing the papers on which it was written. Dave and I were roommates our sophomore year, and shared an apartment with a Colombian fellow across the Potomac in Virginia. I recall that Dave had a crush on my sister.

Georgetown and I were not a good match, and I washed out of there after three years. In November of 1963 I was down in Cali, Colombia living with a family. To avoid the draft I enrolled at the *Universidad de Cali* as an *asistente*, auditing classes at the *Facultad de Derecho*. (Many years later the algorithm bots at Facebook would list this institution as the *Universidad Autonoma de Baja California*). Those were good days: My draft board was happy, I got a better grip on Spanish, and I even met a girl. I bought my first guitar down in Cali, and started teaching myself to play. Then J.F.K. was assassinated, an event forever seared into the minds of my generation.

Returning to the States, I enrolled at the University of Saint Thomas in Houston, where I graduated in 1966. In the fall I entered Peace Corps training with my first wife. Lyndon Johnson was president and the war was heating up in Viet Nam. In 1969 I came home to a different country.

On my way to Nashville in 1971 I stopped at the first Kerrville Folk Festival, where an evening show was held at the high school auditorium. Lyndon B. Johnson was in the audience, and in an instant of utter serendipity, I caught his eye. Those are the only two US presidents I've ever seen in person. I've only seen the others on television. But since the days of JFK, I've never seen any of them wearing a hat.

There's a new inauguration this week in America, with a new President Elect assuming office. As an expatriate, it's hard for me to figure what's going on in America. I go back every year and sometimes twice, and I don't notice the changes so much. String them all together—the Bush years, the Obama years—and we see what they have brought and wrought. This new one is different from the others.

Fifty-six years have passed since we used to see J.F.K. and Jackie walk to mass at Holy Trinity Church, always with Secret Service discretely near. They would be walking with little Caroline. Camelot would come later. Cuba. And Dallas.

Last month I wrote about trying to sort out my thoughts from my feelings. I'm not sure my thinking has revealed anything new. I'm pretty sure this is all a dream: Maya, the vanity and posturing of apes. I've decided to write my way through this New Year and look after my own. I feel like my life has been blessed, and if I ever thought or imagined myself at this age, I would have seen myself doing what I do now. I could have done better—and I have a ways to go nurturing compassion. But I feel okay with that now too.

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I have learned a lot from Texas authors Mike Blakely and W.C. Jameson, both of whom happen to be accomplished songwriters. They always have the next book in the works. Spurred on by their example (they're Western writers), I was determined to get started on another project before the last year was out. I'm delighted to report I'm about twenty pages into a new book now, 7500 words and counting. Not a memoir, this is a collection of stories. *All of This Was Mine*, my novel on the 1900 Galveston Storm and its aftermath is finished for now, and I hope to have some news on this in the coming months.

In music news, I'm going back into the studio in February recording tracks for a new collection of songs. Produced by Peter Uehlinger and engineer David Bollinger in Schaffhausen, this is the first time I've made a record here in Switzerland. I'll have more on this, and on an upcoming spring tour with W.C. Jameson.

We've had snow, and cold to keep it on the ground. The Rhine is way down, lower than I've ever seen it. You could probably wade across now, but it would be mighty cold. Peace,

Ricardo

Richard J. Dobson

Diessenhofen am Rhein, 19 January 2017

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