

XXIX - Ringo Starr's Bed

Danny (my English rocker friend) and I shared our own wave of communications, uniquely ours and highly skeptical of the world beyond the East Village. We joked regularly and contemplated a new world order every day. Danny loved my kids, and they got to know and trust him. It felt like family for both of us. His failing was cocaine and downers of any kind. On top of his naturally wired persona, his drug usage toasted his likeability for others. He was a drug user who could not hide his high. Seeing Danny drugged was like watching a motorized Mexican jumping bean. He was up, down and sideways. But for me easy to love. You wanted to care for Danny, like sweet but lost Stephanie, you knew the goods were there, "just a little bollixed up", as Danny would say. Do not get me wrong. Danny was not a drug addict; he was a nasty drug user.

One of Danny's more infamous bouts with indulgence happened when he and I and my two kids, Glen and Chris, went to Los Angeles. Through an inside deal with a friend who managed Phil Collins' tours, Danny arranged a week of cheap hotels, food, and rental cars. It was too good to pass up, so we bought the tickets and headed west. Our United Airlines flight left JFK without a hitch. About fifteen minutes into the flight Danny's Mexican jumping bean motor got revved up. He started sweating and rocking in the seat. He was as white as a ghost. He must have snorted a big dose of cocaine because he showed all the signs - his eyes got wildly animated, and his body was jittery - he started to attract attention. Heads were turning - chitchat between passengers -and my kids looked worried.

Two in flight stewards suddenly showed up to ask if he was okay, Dan took it as a cue to amp it up because he started rocking harder and telling the stewards that he was having some kind of medical episode. Hearing the conversation switch to landing the plane to get him medical help, got me out of my seat from two rows back - interceding immediately. My story was that *Danny always goes through this on flights*, some bullshit along those lines. I then leaned over and angrily whispered in Danny's ear to get over his bullshit, or I'd tell them he is high on cocaine. He subsided right away. It was such a typical Danny episode. He was the king of cocaine-induced panic attacks. And boy could he draw on strangers for sympathy.

Danny had business in London with his label, mainly detailing a promotional campaign for the album's release. His visa was not legit anymore so he was afraid to leave

New York City fearing he would not get back into the US. The ever-conniving Danny persuaded his record handlers that his new manager, me, should go to London and do this sort of work. Danny gave me the instant music industry course - enough to talk a game but without a stitch of practical knowledge. And then I was off to London to promote a real rock album with names like Phil Collins on it, in over my head for sure, but cocky enough to ignore my ignorance.

The Air India flight left JFK around 10 PM. It was a cheap redeye that Danny hooked up. The trip was uneventful other than the overdose of curry and cigarette smoke. Back then international flights provided a total smoking zone as opposed to no smoking. Taking the job and Danny seriously, it was paramount for me to learn as much as possible fast. I arranged meetings with a variety of music industry executives, producers, musicians and friends of Danny. There was a real excitement about this for me. Just maybe a part-time career could come out of this. Way, in over my head, I had committed to a serious business venture my first trip to Europe and that had me high as a kite as well. It turned out to be the first of many.

Danny arranged for a friend to pick me at Heathrow, the same guy was giving me a room in his townhouse for the ten-days I'd be there. My assumption was that Mickey was in the music business. So, I'm expecting a suit and tie guy. The plane landed early morning and the airport was humming. I went through customs and immigration and on my way out immediately spotted a motley old man holding a piece of paper with my name on it. Must he be the driver?

Making my way around the fence, I walked up to the man with the sign and introduced myself, "Hi, I'm Lawrence Scott, Danny's manager." He was as charming as he was motley and with a rusty slurring Cockney accent he says "I'm Mickey and this is Liz." Liz was a blonde about twenty-five, and she had a Cockney accent as well. So it was obvious that Mickey was not an executive. Liz turned out to be his "tow" whatever that was. I barely understood Mickey at all and Liz, just enough to get the functionary stuff established.

We made our way to one of those fantastic London cabs. It was a dark day with thick clouds but no rain. Between the effects of the redeye and the excitement of being in London, what I did not need was two barely understandable and, at first glance backward, hosts. Liz sat between Mickey and me. She was excited about my arrival, so we had a flurried exchange. Out of nowhere Mickey slaps her across the face with the back of his hand, hard and

deliberate. He told her to “shut your gob, I’ll do the talking, you just sit there.” I’m not in London 30 minutes, and the Mickey circus had started. To say this is not what I expected is a massive understatement. My vision was a sensible Englishman with manners and sophistication instead I got a 1970’s version of a British hoodlum. For the rest of the trip to his Kensington Townhouse he spoke nonstop, but I never did figure out about what. His accent was so impenetrable there was no way for me to figure it out. The little information I picked up was about knowing all the rockers in London. His girlfriend just sat there mortified.

Kensington is one of London’s most elite neighborhoods. His four-story townhouse had a stone façade with a white cast iron gate lined with flowers in terracotta pans. It looked a lot more presentable than he did. To my surprise, the inside was clean and well organized. He walked me around the ground floor and told me to feel at home, handed me a key to the front door and led me up the stairs. His bedroom was there as well as an adjacent second room. He took me into the second chamber filled with silver and gold plates, cups, chandeliers, bowls, boxes and many assorted items, all gold or silver. With a vast amount of pride, he told me this is what his “boys” bring him from their various “nicking” jobs. It sounded and looked to me like he sent his “boys” out to steal this stuff. So, as far as I could tell my host was the leader of a burglary ring and he did pretty well. He showed me my room on the third floor - a pleasant space that looked out on a crumbling courtyard. He was so sweet about all this, very hospitable and charming. Except for barely understanding what he said, he was growing on me. With a smile, he put a big chunk of black hash on the dresser top, declaring it to be Afghan Black and mine to keep. No small gift, there had to be a ¼ pound which in New York might fetch \$1,000.

Mickey knew I had a meeting that afternoon and talked me through the London subway map and the various tricks for riding. It all looked comfortable on the map and it turned out to be easy. Once you know the New York subways all the rest are easy. He handed me a city map as well and told me to call him or jump a cab if lost. He then told me he was going to sleep and he’d see me later. After cleaning up a bit and putting on a suit, I ventured out on my first of many London Tube journeys. London fit like a glove for me.

The weather was terrible. The sun did not come out once during my entire trip so it was chilly but not cold. Dampness defined my state of mind. With real professional diligence,

I went to all the meetings and planning sessions. Taking notes, marking the calendar, creating budgets, and writing press releases, an entirely new world; I'd never done anything like this and found myself amazingly satisfied with the accomplishment. My days in London were a joy and it was as if I had a new life. My nights in London were a whole different story.

Mickey was up all night and slept all day. As it turned out Mickey knew everyone in the rock business because he was the go-to drug supplier for rock's royalty. He had guys circulate the recording studios and at night he had a stop in business at his townhouse. Mickey's was also the place to party; his pad was one big whirl of rocker types coming in and out and hanging all night. By experienced observation I could see both Mickey and Liz were severe heroin junkies, high functioning, but with a big jones. It turned out we had different schedules that made my nights sleepless and miserable. But Mickey maintained a wonderful demeanor with me. He fed me, drugged me and connected me. But the all-night rock parties killed me. We went out a few nights for dinner and even took in a concert, it was a favorite London band named Brand X. Mostly Mickey liked to party at home which he did non-stop.

One night before we went to eat Mickey offered me what I thought was cocaine. He put out a few lines of clean white powder, and in his Cockney mumbling, I thought he said to try some Lady, which in New York meant cocaine. So leaning in on the coffee table I sniffed up a line and almost choked, it wasn't cocaine it was smack. It stopped me in my tracks. Of course, I got nauseated and started passing out. It made me a wreck and dinner was a complete disaster with my puke as the main course - on the restaurant floor, on the street, out of the cab window and right in front of a date Mickey set up for me.

One of the record executives at GEM arranged for me to spend a weekend at Ringo Starr's mansion and recording studio. It was in Ascot UK, about 40 miles south of London. Called Tittenhurst Garden or Startling Studios, this estate figures prominently in Beatles lore. John Lennon and Yoko Ono owned the mansion before Ringo. The Beatles last photo session was taken there and the album cover photo for "Hey Jude" is the fab four standing at the entrance of the mansion. John recorded his masterpiece "Imagine" in the studio here - Lennon could patch into the studio from his bedside and record riffs as they came to him. John and Yoko famously spent a month in bed in the master bedroom.

I showed up at the gates to the gigantic estate, not sure what to expect. I wasn't sure what I was even doing there or whom I was supposed to check in with or even meet.

Members of the bands *The Kinks* and *Genesis* were recording there that weekend, and part of my trip was to see that process. The only name I had was the record executive and the sound engineer at Startling Studios, the name Ringo gave to the place. As it turned out they had expected me, and I was surprised at how welcoming it was. With free run of the place, it was like stepping back into history with hundreds of years of art in every corner. I ate big English meals with the band members and other visitors. They were an industrious bunch that recorded all day and half the night. Everyone smoked hash all day but no hard drugs as far as I could tell. Watching them was inspirational.

My bedroom was down the hall from Ringo's, formerly the Lennons. My compulsion to sneak into John Lennon's bedroom was strong enough that I at once sneaked in. Sitting on the unmade bed, I imagined John and Yoko making love right in this very spot. For one exceptionally long moment, with my eyes closed and hands extend palms open, I concentrated on Lennon to feel his vibe. I still do that when I am in higher space - it is a Hopi Indian belief. At that moment, a housekeeper came in and it all ended fast. She sternly told me Mr. Starr would not like this that he would be agitated and to get out fast. I had not thought about it, but it was Ringo's unmade bed.

My first trip to London was not my last trip but the first of many. My music career with Danny did not pan out but the rocker friendships I made there did. Danny's music career fizzled but he managed to get his citizenship by marrying an American-born teacher. His drug problem made him intolerable for me, and he became one of those people you love but can't have around a lot. Don't get me wrong, Danny was not a strung-out junkie, I just could not take him in his Mexican jumping bean mode.

London was calling me, but not for music. For drugs. Almost all my trips back to the UK involved drugs - what else. Heathrow turned out to be an easy place to move bags of pot through which put me deeper into the Mickey's cockney world. With the pound sterling strong it was good money, Mickey a good time and for me it was a deep cultural dive. For a while it was like a second home.