

Shy Man from the Rock

by Frank Green

I first met Jack at the Thirsty Trout pub in London about 20 years after he came from Newfoundland to Ontario in search of a good job. He came with his friend Danny and they shared an apartment for a few years in London. As luck would have it, Danny got a job at the 3M plant and Jack got a job in the maintenance department at one of the hospitals. Because he was a good carpenter and a skillful solver of practical problems, Jack did well in the job. Thanks to his skill with people he became an officer in the support staff union at the hospital.

Around the time I met him Jack was a key player in getting the hospital support workers in London to vote to become members of the Canadian Auto Workers union. He thought the CAW would do a better job representing them. When some veteran CAW members did not like the addition of the hospital workers as improbable co-members with workers in the auto industry, Jack said, "F*** 'em if they don't like it. The more members in a union, the stronger it is and the better for everybody. Besides Danny is a member of the CAW and 3M makes scotch tape, not cars."

I got to know Jack better when we became partners in the annual NFL football pool at the Trout. Neither Jack or I had a clue about the football standings, but he said, "No problem. One of the secretaries I work with at the hospital knows all about the teams. She will make our picks each week." So Jack and I split the entry fee. We did not win any of the weekly prizes for best picks but at the end of the season, we did well in the overall standings and the bartender gave me a cheque for \$210.

"Now Doc, when you cash the cheque, get all the cash in loonies," said Jack.

"OK, Jack," I said.

The next Friday night, when there was a big crowd in the Trout, I said to Jack, "I got the cash, Jack."

"Good," said Jack, "bring it over to this little table in the middle of the room." I did so and gave Jack the bag of loonies. He proceeded to divide it, saying in a loud voice, "One for you and one for me, one for you and one for me... until there was a pile of coins in front of each of us.

This little ceremony did not go unnoticed by the surrounding football fans who had not been as successful in the pool. In particular, Sam Watson, the tightest wad in the place, was furious. Sam and his wife Betsy were often quite lucky buying Nevada tickets and in other games of chance. This had led both of them to have a certain expectation of success and less than a joyous enjoyment of wins by other players.

"You two f***ing idiots don't deserve to win," said Sam, "the money should go to that secretary, not you."

“Bingo!” said Jack.

“We’re going to buy her a nice bottle of wine,” I said.

“You don’t know anything more about wine than football,” said Sam, “no doubt you’ll get her the cheapest bottle of piss you can find.”

“Thanks for your good wishes, Sam,” said Jack with a big grin.

A few years later I learned that Jack had been going to the Kentucky Derby every year since he had been in London. When he told me, it was close to thirty consecutive races that he had attended with a group of friends. Jack always bought the unique set of souvenirs that went on sale every year (later he made a tidy sum by selling the entire collection). Needless to say, the trips involved a bit of partying.

Some years earlier the group had struck on a scheme to get better seats to watch the race. Ten of them kicked in enough money to jointly buy one percent of a horse. Their new status as owners gave them the right to be in the section right next to where all the celebrities sat. So Jack’s party had a better view of the race... and of the celebrities who included well known TV and movie stars.

“Last year,” said Jack, “Superman’s girlfriend was there, just on the edge of the next section. (I believe Jack meant the actress Terri Hatcher who was on that TV show.) “She was wearing a little red outfit not big enough for to flag down a wheelbarrow. When she dropped her program and bent over to pick it up my dick was harder than Chinese arithmetic!”

The discerning reader may have so far surmised that Jack was not an excessively shy character, nor one easily embarrassed. That, at least, was my impression. However, I did see Jack flummoxed once.

The occasion was the grand party thrown for Jack at the Trout when he retired from the hospital. He was planning to return to Newfoundland where, as he would often say, “I can give MOM a hand.” Jack’s former wife and two kids were present as well as his new wife. There was also a big crowd of Trout regulars and Jack’s friends from the hospital.

There were a few speeches, a lunch, parting gifts and music for the occasion. Then Jack’s friend, Danny, got up to speak. Naturally he evoked the early days when he and Jack had left the Rock and come to London to seek their fortune. Sharing the apartment, tough times, good times.

“I remember one Christmas in particular,” said Danny, “our apartment was on Gammage, just off of Oxford Street, behind where the restaurant is now. It was the Friday before Christmas and a bunch of us went to the old Oxbox at Adelaide and Oxford after work.”

At this point, Jack said, “Oh no Danny, don’t tell that story!”

But Jack, used to having the last word, this time pleaded in vain.

Danny went on, “I had won a big turkey at the Box, so I decided to walk on home with it. Jack stayed. When I got near our apartment, I notice that there were still a big bunch of Christmas trees for sale outside the grocery store (where Kelseys is now)”.

“A few hours later, I heard Jack crying outside our apartment door. ‘What’s wrong my son?’ I said as I opened the door

“‘I was lost in the forest for more than an hour,’ sobbed Jack.”

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