

Lowdown & Dirty from Down Under

There is an International Small Business Conference in Nashville and my boss wants me to cover it.

‘How many pages of copy do you want?’ He doesn’t think the answer through, what he says amounts to only eight pages, or 6000 words.

That’s – say – two or three half-hour interviews, 1500 words about small business life in America and as many short news items as I can get. It sounds to me like couple of days work. ‘How many days?’

‘Eleven. I’m sending you to New York too.’

‘Why?’

‘Do you good. There’s \$10,000 in this debit account,’ he says, handing me a plastic card. ‘And I don’t want you bloody driving.’

‘What about a hire car?’

‘I said no,’ then he frantically searches for something buried in half a metre of papers on his desk. I’m still standing there, so he says, ‘You’ve got your orders. Now fuck off Lowlife. And try to stay off the piss.’

Lowlife, that’s what calls me. And he swears all the fucken time.

Advice No 1: Don’t drive.

Advice No 2: (from Teabags) To avoid jetlag, drink heavily on the flight.

Advice No 3: (from Allan) Don’t chase anything. Take everything as it comes.

Thursday 26 September

News broadcast: Two Australian army engineers are among a group of UN officials being held hostage by Iraqi troops on a bus in a Baghdad car park. United States President Bush has threatened air attacks against Iraq if it does not free the UN team.

I wake up when I wake up. I bang off a couple of articles and spend time with Robbie. I go to the bank and pull \$1000 cash for her while I'm gone.

Then there's the gift list: Joel – 15 – wants a Powell-Peralta skateboard deck. Five-year old Zoë and 17-year old Amber want something good. Amber is currently watching *The Mouse's Tale*. She says, 'There are no cats in America and the streets are paved with cheese.' And all Robbie wants is for me to come back in one piece.

My plane leaves at 2.00 in the afternoon, I leave home at 11.00 which gives me plenty of time to sort out the \$20 Departure Tax and the Return Visa. I'm travelling on a British passport. I migrated when I was 10. I've been in Australia 31 years and I'm not taking the step until Australia becomes a 'proper' country with its own Head of State. But anyway – the passport is British.

Curse you Paul Simon! I am obsessed with the idea of making the pilgrimage to Gracelands for no particular reason, except your song. The other agenda item is - I am working on the Tiny Tim story with Martin Sharp. I've been doing so for nine years.

Tiny lives in New York. I am going to New York.

He recorded a Country album on the outskirts of Nashville. I am going to the International Small Business Conference in Nashville.

We are boarding Flight QF 011. I am in the middle aisle, which is some 10 seats across. I am sitting next to a young lawyer, Lisl, and her father whose name I don't catch. They are going to Canada for a conference, and to also

catch up with some rels. Lisl works for Justice Michael Kirby in the Appeals Court.

‘Funny...my mother’s name is Liesel,’ I tell her. ‘It’s a derivative of Elizabeth you know?’

Lisl gives me a valium and falls asleep, wrapped in the rug provided to every passenger. What is there to do? I fiddle with my free in-flight traveller’s pack. Look, a Traveller’s Toothbrush as well as the tiniest tube of toothpaste. That’ll surely come in handy. I always forget my toothbrush. But the valium doesn’t work. Neither does more scotch. It’s a 12-hour flight and *Flirting* is the flight movie, which I can’t watch. Annoyingly for them, I squeeze past a few sleepers on my way to the toilets. This where some passengers hang out for a chat because it’s the only place you’re allowed to stand. Officious flight attendants ask you to return to your seat, friendly flight attendants keep bringing free drinks, which is what is happening now.

We arrive at LA at 3.00am Australian time. I clear Customs, find a bar, order a Heineken and catch my breath.

In America everything seems bigger in every way – there are more beers to choose from, more books in the bookshop, more flights, more passengers, bigger people, bigger hats, bigger presence. And all these polite *black* people cleaning, sweeping, taking away ash trays. True, some flight attendants and pilots may also be black, but there are no white people cleaning up, not that I can see. This is one of several periods of my life when I am keen about the Aboriginal issue, so blacks being servile pisses me right off.

From LA, I go to Gate 44 to catch the American Airlines flight 1138 to Nashville and I fall asleep for two hours.

On arrival, I tell the cab driver to take me to Opryland, where the conference is being staged.

Opryland Hotel is located in the north-east part of Nashville between the Briley Parkway and the Cumberland River. The cabbie reckons it’s the world’s biggest hotel under-the-one roof. That’s twenty-five acres in a city that’s about the size of Newcastle or Wollongong. Even though Opryland is on the same

parcel of land as the Grand Ole Opry – in fact it's the next building - everything is so huge that the famous music hall is nowhere in sight - and probably a couple of miles away, at least.

I tip the cabbie 25 per cent. He thinks I'm great and before leaving Allied Cab Car 17 the driver tells me that there's a big Country Music Awards night coming up this Wednesday. They say President Bush will be attending and Garth Brooks will be there.

'Keith Brooks, eh?' I say shaking my head.

Then a splendidly dressed guy scoops up my luggage and says a sentence ending with the word 'sir'. The last time somebody called me sir was 1978 when I was a school teacher.

I want my bag back, I try to get it back, 'Nah, fuck it man – just tell me the room number...'. He seems programmed to carry my bag, no matter what I say. This Ken Bailey from Clarkesville, real black, real big, real uniformed-up and real polite. Bloody hell, this bugger needs a trip to Alice Springs to get his perspectives right. His little mate joins him. *Two* of them to carry one bag to Room 7369. *Two* of them now calling me sir. I don't like this one bit. But I can't very well say, 'Listen you dopey pricks, stop carrying white people's bags!' or they'll say, 'Sir, are you sure you're not barking mad?' Well, they wouldn't be using the word 'barking'. I don't know what they'd say in Nashville.

As we walk through the chintzy sparkling hotel entrance the small guy says, 'Welcome to Opryland sir, the Opryland Hotel has 1891 rooms and over 500 Garden Terrace rooms overlooking the tropical Cascades or the breath-taking Conservatory – a two-acre Victorian garden under glass. We offer tennis, swimming and...'.
'That'd be the bar over there, right?'

'That is one of many bars sir, we have the Jack Daniel's Saloon, the Pickin Parlour, the Stagedoor Lounge...'

We get to the room, Ken puts down the case and waits. I once saw an Aboriginal walk into a whitefella's house at Docker River and wait. He stood inside the back door while the whitefellas kept talking. After about half an hour, somebody said something. That's how it was done. Likewise, these two are waiting in my room.

My room has two double beds and it costs \$180 per night, all pre-paid. The water runs down the sink the wrong way. I flush the toilet and the same thing happens. I stare at the toilet bowl for a few moments and when I walk out of the bathroom I notice the two of them are still there, so I express what's on my mind.

'I need someone to drive me to Memphis via Burns. Burns is where Tiny Tim recently recorded a Country album...'

'We can organise that for you sir – with a relative of ours,' Ken says, glancing at his mate. They still seem to be waiting for something.

Then, leaning on an armchair, Ken tells me a brief account of his past, how he previously pursued a life of petty crime but he has repented of his lowdown ways – yes siree – all because of his counsellor who's name was *Lowell*, the same as mine.

'Lowell huh? Wow, I've never met another Lowell,' I reply, wanting to get to the bar before closing time. 'But can you get me the driver?'

They stand there like a couple of dummies – still waiting for something. Then they abruptly leave.

I hit the front bar. I also notice a stage up-in-the-air, there are photographs around the place of the in-house harpist who dresses like Liberace. Behind the bar is a 40 ft waterfall, cascades and all sorts of stuff. Lining the passageways I take note of the ash trays that are sand trays, each is stamped with the Opryland logo. I stub my cigarette in the sand. A blackfella scurries out from someplace and instantly removes it, imprinting the Opryland logo. I'll never do that again.

The barman's name is Tim. At this hour, I am his only customer.

‘G’day Tim,’ I extend the hand, suddenly strengthening my Aussie accent.
‘Make that scotch with no ice, mate.’

‘Hey,’ he laughs. ‘Put another shrimp on the barby!’

‘Huh?’

‘You know...?’

‘Naah, I got no idea, mate, but tell me something – when you sell me a drink, I’m supposed to tip you, right?’

‘Only if you want to, sir...’

‘Naah, cut the bullshit. I’ve arrived from Australia 10 minutes ago and I don’t know how to tip. I think I fucked everything up with the porters.’

Tim explains the 10 per cent thing, sometimes 15 per cent. He also explains bar etiquette – and that you always leave the change on the bar.

‘So I should have left the \$7.50 where you left it, and you take a peck everytime I order?’

He nods half-heartedly. ‘Hey Tim, it’s been a bloody long flight and I have a need to point Percy to porcelain...’ (back home I never talk like that).

I am loosening up just nicely. Then I launch into it, ‘You know, shake hands with the wife’s best friend. Syphon the python. Splash the boots...’

‘Haw haw haw,’ he says. ‘Shake hands with the wife’s best friends was a good one sir.’

‘No...it’s friend, not friends...’

‘The rest room is over there, sir.’

‘I need a piss, not a rest, mate.’

‘Haw haw haw.’

Is he paid to laugh at bad jokes? Is he a polite guy? Does he really think I’m funny? Who can tell. So I run the lizard.

A man walks in. He heads for a cubicle possibly because I am standing at the urinal, staring into it and saying out loud, ‘Wow, this is *fantastic*’. I flush it a second time and watch the water flushing backwards. Back to the bar.

‘What do you do Tim, when you’re not serving drinks?’

He’s a musician, hoping to make it in Music City. He only does bar work to stay in Nashville and hopefully get discovered.

Then a married couple, Ed and Lisa, come to the bar. They are slightly older than me. They’re from Florida and they look like it. He’s even wearing a big-checked sports coats. And Lisa would be attractive if you could hose down all the make-up. They are full of genial US hospitality. I hope they can’t read my thoughts.

‘Hey Lowell, we’ll take you pickin’ and a-grinnin’...’

‘Pickin’ and a-grinning?’

‘Yeah buddy.’

They take me to the Pickin Parlour - past the waterfall, past the restaurants, down the retail stretch comprising a hair salon, a men’s clothes shop, a clock shop, a bloody doll shop...then we reach the late-night section. The Pickin Parlour plays bluegrass music and the waitress’s skirts are simply too short. It shits me. This is not a sex joint. They shouldn’t have to dress so skimpily to hold down a waitress’ job.

The guy with the moustache on guitar is Joe Manuel; the lightly bearded guy on fiddle, squeezebox, mandolin is his brother Abe. Blonde, wearing glasses and looking more like librarian than a musician, on vocals and keyboards is Catherine Styron. They play, *All My Ex’s Live In Texas*, *Livin In The USA*

(‘The only Rock song we know’), *If I Left It Up To You, Bubbles In My Beer, Cajun Born*. I can’t believe this band! *Big Mamou* is red hot, and the guitar break in *Jambalaya* is faster than God. Then Catherine sings *Crazy* like it’s dripping off her chin. This place is Heaven, I need another drink.

After the set, I buy her a coffee. Joe comes over and joins us. I tell them they are all geniuses and they like me. They stick around for half an hour.

‘You’re the Manuel Brothers but in Australia we’ve got the Emmanuel Brothers. That’s some fucken coincidence!’ Nods all round, they agree. Ha ha ha. Haw haw haw. They’re drinking coffee, I’m drinking scotch.

Somewhere near closing time, I stagger to my room.

I phone the White House on 202 456 1414 and talk to an answering machine. I fall asleep at 12.30 US time.

2

Friday 27 September

I wake up at 9.00 and have breakfast at *Rachels* in restaurant row. I check out the price of flights to Memphis - \$154 each way, which is too much. I phone home and talk to Joel. I tell him all about the flight, the Pickin Parlour and Joe Manuel’s insane guitar playing. Joel is watching lots of *Black Adder* videos. Amber is preparing for her school formal.

I check out the actual location of the International Small Business Conference so I’ll know where to show up on Sunday. I get the program, head back to my room, rip off the suit, call a cab and head for the hock-shop part of town. I am interested in purchasing a Fender Telecaster at around \$750 Aussie. Many of my Aussie friends have doubled their money by buying a Fender or a Martin guitar in America and importing it into Australia.

The cab fare is \$30 plus tip, which is \$60 there and back. But I can hire a Pontiac Grand Prix for \$60 per day. It says so on a flyer they gave me back at the hotel.

So I go back to my room, find the flyer, hail another cab to drive me to the place where I can hire the wonderful Pontiac. I flash my International Driver's License, plus proof of identity and I hire the Beast for five days. Nobody seems perturbed that the wipers go on when I think I'm hitting the indicator. Nobody thinks it strange that the headlights go on when I think I'm switching on the wipers. Everything about the roads is the mirror opposite. I must remember that. I frighten the shit out of myself driving on the wrong side of the road but I make it back to the hock shop part of town, where I was before all this Pontiac hire car excitement.

It's the right kind of store, the sign says 'Money Lender' and its full of cameras, stereo equipment, watches, rings, brass instruments, etc. I check out guitar prices but I can't see how I could possibly make any profit with that differential. Maybe times have changed. I decide to look elsewhere.

There is a shoeshine boy on the sidewalk, a razor-faced kid talking to a street drunk. When he sees me, the kid cuts his conversation and asks if he can clean my shoes for \$3 – sir. He's not black, so I say okay.

I'm wearing Doc Martin shoes which are quite plain, nothing like Nashville styling. He does a marvellous job. He clicks back into his conversation without missing a beat as soon as the money hits his hand,

I buy Barry Maguire's *Eve Of Destruction* LP in a secondhand record shop for \$3. The vinyl is really thick. Then I buy a metal Crucified Christ for \$2 then I decide to seek out another Fender guitar.

I can't believe I'm in Nashville USA. Confederate flags are commonplace. I must be in a dream. I wonder what Robbie is doing? What about the kids? I look right before crossing the road, having forgotten that everything is mirror-reversed. Someone hauls me back onto the sidewalk and a car misses my leg by inches.

'What you doin, motherfucker?' exclaims this cowboy.

'Jeez, I dunno...' I reply, touching my head like a lunatic.

'You Orstralian?' saying *Orst* where we say *Oz*.

‘I am.’

I tell him I’m Lowell. He says he’s T-Bone.

T-Bone is slightly too tall. He’s a regular cowboy all right - with the hat, the belt buckle and the boots. He’s got straggly brown hair, a hairy beard and he uses his fingers unexpectedly graciously in conversation. He says he’s a musician and that he was an extra in the movie *The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James* which is how come he knows Johnny Cash, Kris Kristopherson and Willie Nelson. But he can’t introduce me to the Man in Black, because Cash is touring Canada, otherwise he certainly would.

‘What type of guitar do you play T-Bone? A Fender?’

‘Loll, ah got no guitar.’

‘Why not?’

‘Fifteen minutes ago ah just took it into that shop and traded mah own instrument.’

‘What is it?’

‘Takemine.’

‘How much did you get?’

‘\$30.’

‘It’s worth at least five hundred!’ I reply – thinking Aussie dollars, and lots of other thoughts too (Memphis...Burns...). ‘By the way T-Bone, have you got a driver’s license?’

‘Sure - why?’

‘Do you live anywhere in particular?’

‘Nope.’

‘Hell, I’ve got \$30 in my wallet right now. Let’s get your guitar back, then we’ll find a pub. I have an interesting proposition for you, T-Bone...’

In Nashville there are no pubs, just bars. It’s like drinking in a shop and they’re open all day. It’s 3.00 in the afternoon when we walk into this dimly lit joint. The singer looks up, says g’day to T-Bone and offers him a performance spot. ‘In a while...’ he replies, making that hand gesture.

I need a drink first. Then I need to find out what I can about my driver.

He tells me that he hasn’t got any money. He split with his wife 18 months ago and he’s got sons. He and his wife have got bonds, insurance or some kind of pay-out figure stashed in a fixed deposit account which they intend to use to send the kids to college. Meanwhile, the money’s untouchable. T-Bone says he’s been to Vietnam. He also casually admits that he’s done a couple of small robberies here and there, but he is currently devoting his time to music. Johnny Paycheck is getting out of jail soon and will want to record. T-Bone knows him and wants to submit songs for Paycheck’s next album.

He then gets his lanky body (plus hat) onto the small stage and sings real down home Country tunes on his reclaimed Takemine and everybody claps a bit, especially me. While this is going on, his buddy asks about Country Music Down Under. I tell him about the Tamworth Country Music Awards held every January. He slaps me on the shoulder and says, ‘Put another shrimp on the barby, buddy! Ha ha!’

‘What’s a fucken shrimp?’

‘You joshin me?’

I shrug and he resumes the stage.

Now I think about it, I hate most Country music. Nevertheless I tell T-Bone, ‘That was fucken good, mate’.

‘You liked it?’

‘Sure, I think you’re a very talented guy and I hope you’re famous someday so I can tell everybody I knew you. Seriously mate, you must never again part with your guitar. It’s more important to you than food.’

I then explain that I need someone to drive the Pontiac to Memphis via Burns, where Tiny Tim recorded, etc. Also if he’s sleeping on the streets, I’ve got a better idea. I have two double beds in my room at Opryland.

‘It’s a deal.’

Being on the verge of a major drinking session, we intuitively understand that we should get the Pontiac to the hotel car park then cab the rest of the night. On the drive back to Opryland, T-Bone points out Tanya Tucker’s house - visible from the highway. He tells me about Twitty City - Conway Twitty’s pad, open to the public for a fee. I barely know who he is, though I have heard the name.

Then we hit five bars.

At about 2.00am T-Bone says it’s time to go now. I don’t think so. He says yes, it’s definitely time. He straightens right up and wants me to do the same.

He explains that on the sidewalk between the bar door and the cab, the cops can pick me up as a Public Drunk if I attract undue attention to myself.

‘But,’ I exclaim. ‘It’s only three steps?’

‘That’s right,’ says T-Bone

‘I’ll tell them not to be such a bunch of dickheads and I’ll walk off.’

‘They will then draw a gun and say, *Stop right there motherfucker or I’ll shoot.*’

‘I’ll give them the finger.’

‘They’re supposed to shoot out an arm or a leg. But most of the time they miss and it goes straight through the heart.’

‘Oh yeah? Every journalist in Nashville will be screaming headlines, *Cops Shoot Harmless Aussie!* They be crucified!’

‘They *won’t* you know, motherfucker,’ says T-Bone walking out soberly and hailing a cab.

I can’t believe that only yesterday, I was in Australia.

I phone Queen Elizabeth II on 00441 930 4832. Some posh English bloke says I can’t talk to her. I tell him he’s up himself and he hangs up. I phone back, this time he hangs up immediately. I phone back a third time but he doesn’t answer. I fall asleep.

3

Saturday 28 September

It’s 9.00 and someone is in my room. Oh, that’s right – it’s T-Bone. Today we’re driving to Memphis to see Gracelands. This is very pleasant.

We breakfast at *Rachel’s* and - with T-Bone behind the wheel - we hit Highway 40 for Memphis via Burns.

Burns is about a quarter of the way to Memphis, an hour and a half out of Nashville. It is a straggly little place, with paddocks, very much like little towns I know on the south coast of New South Wales. The side-roads are much the same, similar housing, similar fencing, similar dirt roads, different trees.

Gordon Stinson is the man I have to see. He is the executive producer and owner of Tiny’s *Leave Me Satisfied* Country album recorded in 1989. Stinson lives in a caravan – a ‘trailer’ - which has full-on Southern décor, especially the spectacular red velveteen upholstery. Stinson wears heaps of rhinestone, embossed boots and the biggest belt-buckle I’ve ever seen on a little man.

My mission here is to find out why the album is no longer available - and if some of Tiny's Australian supporters – like Martin – can do any reasonable thing to help, let's party!

However, we are at cross-purposes - Stinson's mission is clearly a sales job – it is an attempt via me, to sell 50% of the *Leave Me Satisfied* project (ie. video, the single, the album, the tapes, the marketing) to Martin, whom he has somehow ascertained 'has money'. Stinson wants \$75,000 for a 50 per cent share in the *Leave Me Satisfied* project, with which there is clearly no cooperation from Tiny.

He lives in the trailer in the backyard, the house is his recording studio. Maybe he's got a wife, maybe he hasn't, I can't tell.

Stinson shows us where and how Tiny recorded. He explains something about Union Master Scale and shows me (and T-Bone) all his receipts. Time is passing, at this rate we ain't never gonna get to Memphis. I am now trying to extricate T-Bone and myself. Stinson explains that although he is the sole owner of NLT Records, RT 1, Box 92, College Street, Burns, TN 37029, he needs 15 days to check with 'his people' before we can conclude the sale.

What sale? The sale to Martin, of course.

Next, he shows us promotional videos, underscoring that Buck Owens – the legend himself - accompanied Tiny on guitar when he sang *Tiger By The Tail* on national TV.

'Ah'm am telling you this Loll, so you can see we did everything praperly right down to his Tony Lama boots. But,' says Stinson, 'how often does a Tiny Tim single chart? It charted, and ah pulled it.'

'Why the hell would you do that?'

'Ah did it because ah felt Tiny was being most unreasonable in not promoting the LP.'

'Doesn't sound like the Tiny I know.'

'How well do you know Tiny?'

'I'll be seeing him this week in New York.'

'Well, you tell him from me ah'm ready when he is. Ah love the man!'

'I'll talk to him as well as to Martin, but it's no good if there's no relationship between you and Tiny.'

'Yes siree, ah love the man, but ah'll never work with him again.'

'Sure you would,' says T-Bone who has been silent the whole time.

'Okay, maybe I would.'

'Can we patch up the past?' I ask.

'You can try,' Stinson replies.

'What's the problem?'

'Oh Lord, he says ah owe him money.'

'How much?'

'\$1500.'

'Is that it? Is that the whole entire problem?' Apparently so.

'When I talk to Tiny, what do I say about the \$1500?'

'Ah love the man, tell him ah'll do the right thing.'

'No worries then, I've got your drift.'

'Good boy. And tell Martin that if there's anybody that's got confidence, Loll, you know by now ah must have - because you have seen it from the inside-out. In fact you and T-Bone know more about the working of what ah have in

preparation than does Tiny himself. That's fact of the matter. But ah believe Loll, we can stir up one heck of a commotion. Ah jess want to make sure that ah am dealing with honesty. And ah feel that if you and Martin would assist in guiding me, Martin would not allow an unscrupulous decision being made on my part in Australia. He too wants to see the best for Tiny...'.

'That's all mighty interesting, Gordon. You get together the \$1500. I'll talk to Tiny. And we'll do what we can from Australia, and we're back in business, right?'

'Raaht own!'

We shake, then T-Bone and I are outta there.

'Whoo-hoo!' I yell while speeding down the highway. 'I've just about patched everything up between Tiny and Stinson.'

'Ah doan think so,' says T-Bone.

'Are you outta your fucken mind? You heard him – he's gonna pay Tiny – then we're all back on track.'

'Is Martin gonna to buy a half share?'

'Probably not. But at least the Tiny and Stinson thing is resolved.'

He shakes his head, 'You doan understand Good Ole Boys...'. We stop at a roadhouse restaurant. Apart from corn bread and grits, the food is similar to what we get in Australia, except the serves are seriously huge. The coffee is remarkably weak though – the opposite of the Italian-style coffee that I am used to. I am sitting in the passenger's seat – which is on the right. I am studying the roadmap and realising that we're nowhere near Memphis.

'I don't think we're gonna get to Memphis now,' I speculate.

'Ah reckon you're right, motherfucker...'

'What next?'

‘Get some gas, ah suppose, then think about it.’

We drive out of that little roadhouse restaurant – literally a road house.

‘Doan get me wrong, Loll – but do you mind if ah tell you something about last night?’

‘Naah, go right ahead,’ I reply, expecting the worst.

‘Doan go talking to blacks so much.’

‘Whaddy mean, don’t go talking to blacks?’

‘You do it all the time.’

‘I talk to blacks all the time in pubs, in Australia.’

‘Well here, they don’t like it. Hey, it was only 20 years ago that we was hanging em on the Town Hall steps – awright?’ That shuts me up. ‘And can I tell you one more thing?’

‘Why not...’.

‘Are you sure you doan mind?’

‘Mate, if you gotta tell me – you gotta tell me.’

‘Doan swear in front of women.’

‘You crazy? You do it all the time!’

‘Ah never.’

‘You say *motherfucker* all the time...’

‘That’s not swearing, it just means *person*. It doan have no meaning.’

‘So I can say *motherfucker*, but I can’t say *fuck*?’

‘Yee-hah! You got it Loll!’ he slaps his thigh and everything is shining again.

‘Why do they call you T-Bone?’

He relates an afternoon when he was BBQ King.

‘So, what’s a fucken shrimp?’

I walk into the filling station and approach the counter - and suddenly, lined up against the back wall, I see an extraordinary array alcohol. I check it out, of course and find that even adjusting for the \$Aussie, the prices of spirits is ridiculously cheap. I buy a two litre jug of Jim Beam plus half a dozen Buds for the road.

‘T-Bone!’ I am all excited now. ‘This filling station has a fucken Bottle Shop against the back wall!’

‘Sure...you can buy beer everywhere...supermarkets, gas stations...’.

‘Man, the beer’s stashed next to the fucken Pepsi!’

‘Yes, but the law is very strict on underage drinking. They can’t drink until they’re 21 in this country.’

I crack a Bud and hand it to him to help with his driving, and I say, ‘What are we doing next T-Bone?’

‘Well, we can call on a friend – she lives not far from here.’

‘Sure,’ I feel at peace driving along country roads. Everything is familiar, the dogs, even the type of woman we visit – except that she has a gun near the back door, which startles me a bit. In Country Australia, men have the guns – to own a gun, an Australian woman would have a specific reason – usually either to do with snakes or the ex-husband.

T-Bone announces me into the room, ‘This is Low-down and Dirty from Down Under.’ Four men sitting around a coffee table look up. It could have been a Saturday afternoon Blokefest in Cobargo, watching the footie on TV, smoking heaps and cracking stubbies.

‘What’s everybody doing?’ I ask. ‘It looks like you’re all hanging foul and drinking piss?’ This electrifies the woman.

‘Hanging what? What was that? Are you Orstralian?’ she stammers. Talk to *me* boy. What’s a billabong? What’s a prawn?’

I tell her I used to live in Bermagui, and we’d catch them in the Dark.

‘Night-time, you mean?’

‘No, it’s the darkest day of the month – the opposite of the Full Moon. We’d stand – in gumboots - under the Cuttagee Bridge, spot them with our torches and scoop them up.’

‘What are they? What do you do with them? How do you cook them?’

‘You just chuck them on the barby.’

She’s nice enough, other than the fact she calls me ‘boy’ all the fucken time. T-Bone told me ‘boy’ is an insult – in fact, a white man would get a crack to the head if he called a black man ‘boy’, even a teenager. I entertain her with my accent, then I ask her for the Snakehouse. The three Buds are taking their toll.

It is near nightfall when T-Bone and I pull into a truck stop bar somewhere out of Dickson. It’s an out of the way place – a bit like the Bewong Café near Nowra – down-to-earth and dusty - a home converted into a business.

‘Loll, ah need to tell you something before we go inside,’ says T-Bone.

‘Yeah yeah, no swearing in front of women and stay away from the blacks...’

‘No – nothin like that. Ah need to explain that ah’m a wanted man.’

I laugh only because of Fix-It Bob. He'd often pull me aside before walking into some dive, and he'd say, 'the Hell's Angels are after me' or 'I'm a wanted man' and it never amounted to anything. So hearing this from T-Bone is par for the course. The only surprise is that he appears to mean it.

'Before we go inside ah want you to write down this number... Virginia Wright 799-8154. She's my ex and - ah - mah name is James Wright, in case you need it.'

'What are you wanted for?'

'Non-repayment on some stereo equipment,' he says walking in now, into a bar that used to be someone's house. It still even has a front and a back yard. I bet there's a chook shed round the back.

'I'll have a scotch, no ice,' I tell the barman.

'It's a beer bar!' T-Bone laughs. Then to the bartender he says, 'Loll is from Down Under. He drinks hard liquor. Give us a couple of Buds.' Then he introduces me to a mountain called Glenn. We talk drunken shit, in this all-male bar with pool tables, juke boxes, heavy smoke and the Confederate flag. Glenn thinks I'm funny and promises to beat the bejesus out of anyone who gives me shit, which I appreciate very much. Then T-Bone comes up to me as pale as death and says, 'They've got me!'

'Who?'

'Terry Herrod is out the front door waiting for me to walk out.'

'Terry who?'

'A cop.'

'For a stereo unit?' I laugh. 'Gimme a break!' But he means it all right and I need an adventure. So I say, 'There's a back door to this house. Slip out there, lie on the floor of the car. I'll walk out the front and drive you away. It's a piece of piss. Let's do it now.'

I tap Glenn on the shoulder, 'See ya mate'.

'Bye buddy,' he responds. I put the glass on the table, leave the change on the bar and casually stroll to the front door. T-Bone is quite right, there are indeed two policemen outside, plus at least one other inside the wagon.

This time I don't have to remember to straighten up, it comes automatically as I wonder whether or not to make eye contact. If I speak to them, they will recognise that I'm Australian, which will be an advantage. But they will also know I'm full as a boot.

So I say nothing, I walk to the car and get in without incident. I turn the key and the motor hums. The cops look up – everything is normal, so they look away. We fooled em!

'G-day T-Bone,' I whisper – just checking.

'G'day Loll' he whispers back, from the back seat floor. He's taken to saying 'g'day' all the time now – it's a piss-take on me. So everything is cool. All we've got to do is drive off.

But I can't find the headlights – everything is backwards remember? The wipers go on, the squirter goes on, the fucken radio goes on. Where are those lights? I'm losing my cool. None of the switches are doing what I expect. My wipers are maniacally over-cleaning the windscreen. There's fucken suds on my front windscreen. And I still can't find the headlight switch.

Then a cop opens the back door and says, 'Git out, T-Bone.'

This is your Southern Sheriff all right – fully armed, with the famous star badge on his shirt. His shirt buttons strain against his fat belly and he is wearing the sickly smile of victory. He's chewing and spitting. God, you'd hate to be an Indian with this bugger on your case.

They grab hold of the two of us, though they are more earnest about him because they don't know who I am. They handcuff him as roughly as possible

then they turn their attention onto me. They lose interest as soon as they hear my accent.

‘An Orstralian? Go home boy.’

T-Bone said you mustn’t call anybody boy, so I suddenly spring into life. ‘You’re taking away my driver! How am I going to get to Nashville? I’m not safe.’

They check my International Driving Permit and reckon, ‘Sir, you fully qualified to drive. Go home.’ Then he spits into the dirt, the bugger.

‘I’m not, you bastards!’

The cops no longer care what I say or do. Twisting his arm behind his back, they anchor T-Bone to the back of their car, frisk him and chuck him in the back of the paddy wagon.

So...*we got the guitar out and we got T-Bone in.*

‘Don’t leave me here Loll!’ he begs. It’s sad to hear. They drive him away.

I ask the Sheriff if he would kindly show me how to turn on my car lights, which he does, even though I called him a bastard two minutes ago. I follow them all the way to a cop shop in Charlotte, a tidy little town – which is nothing like Burns. It’s dark, I can only see the formal architecture. The place reminds me of a Victorian country town – a tiny Bendigo perhaps.

Two hours pass. I am sitting inside the Police Station waiting for the bondsman to release T-Bone from his cell.

‘Go home,’ says the sheriff.

‘I don’t know my way home, and I can’t drive the car. You wouldn’t have caught us if I could.’

He is unresponsive. Another hour passes then the bondsman arrives. I spot him parking his car and walking towards us. It can only be the bondsman. I can tell

by the way he is dressed on a Saturday night. These are court clothes, not party clothes. I go outside to meet him and to ask for my driver back.

‘Listen to me boy, and listen good,’ says this short, balding matter-of-fact guy. ‘This matter is no concern of yours. You are fortunate not to have been arrested for aiding and abetting a wanted man.’

‘What fucken wanted man?’ I burst. ‘Missing a repayment on a stereo unit – gimme a break!’

‘Is that what he said he did?’ says this man who is never wrong.

I fumble for a cigarette and shrug, ‘What’s it all about then?’

‘Armed robbery!’ He announces this with the expectation that I will express shock, horror and remorse – as any decent citizen would. But I don’t.

‘Hell,’ I retort. ‘I didn’t know he was that *good!*’

Then the bondsman explodes, ‘Don’t you fuck with me! This is not a joke! Get out of my sight, get out of town and get back to your own country!’

‘I can’t find my way home,’ I beg. ‘Two days ago I was in Sydney, now I am somewhere called Charlotte. I don’t know how to drive on the wrong side of the road...’. That’s not his worry. I doubt he even listened.

There’s nothing for me to now do but handle the scary drive back to Nashville. I am most fearful. A few cars flash by, reminding me of the correct side to drive on, yet I repeatedly find myself gravitating to the wrong side, at least mentally. It is a nightmare. Everytime a truck flashes by - on the ‘wrong’ side of the road, I can’t believe it doesn’t wipe me out.

I am still alive on a dark night. (I could have been prawning.) And I will continue to remain alive if I remember one rule: *drive wrong because wrong is always right*. Whenever I feel safe, I know I am about to die. I had hired T-Bone to expressly avoid this very situation.

On the outskirts of Nashville I hail a cab to angrily follow back to Opryland.

T-Bone and I could have gone anywhere else tonight. Instead – he found a bar in which he expected to get arrested, I spent three hours in a cop shop and he's still in a cell. Is he mad? We were okay when we hung around Nashville.

I phone Martin and tell him about Stinson and T-Bone.

He likes the sound of T-Bone, not Stinson.

I phone home and chat to Robbie, Zoë and Amber. It's AFL Grand Final weekend. I want to know what's going on, but none of them know.

Of the Stinson interaction Robbie says 'well done'. But she doesn't like the sound of T-Bone. The arrest puts her instantly off-side and the armed robbery doesn't help. She adds, 'How is it that within 48 hours of leaving the country you wind up in a Police Station? Stop drinking.'

I pretend to be ashamed – though in my heart I am determined to get T-Bone back.

I phone the Kremlin on 077 095-205 2511 and I don't understand anything being said.

I phone Tiny on 212 496 1287 and leave a message.

Realising that 2 litres is an awful lot of Jim Beam, I fall asleep at 3.00 am.

4

Sunday 29 September

I awake with a sense of great responsibility. The conference starts with a bang tonight and I've also got to make sure T-Bone gets out of the slammer.

I phone his ex-wife on 799 8154. The problem is now – hopefully – out of my hands. Virginia has got a nice voice and a pleasant phone manner. 'James hasn't been making up stories again?' she says.

On my way out, the receptionist says, 'I have a message for you sir. Tiny Tim returned your call at 4.30 am last night, that's New York time.'

'Thank you - any word from the Kremlin?'

I go downtown and visit the Car Collector's Hall of Fame – featuring JFK's Lincoln, Presley's Cadillac, Marty Robbins' Packard, Tammy Wynette's Something, etc. Then to the Elvis Museum where I see his suits, the original script for the Jailhouse Rock movie, his credit card, the badge Nixon gave him, oh heaps of Presleyana.

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, Music Valley Wax Museum, Minnie Pearl's Museum - bloody museums everywhere. Americans really celebrate their heroes. There's even a Roy Acuff Avenue or Place. I remember his How To Play Guitar books when I was 13, that's all.

I don't see one street busker. All buskers seem to be associated with the music bars, which the musicians play like inside-buskers – the bar doesn't pay them, they've got a money hat. I always chuck in a coupla dollars.

For lunch, I eat at *Rhetts*. What did Ken's mate say about it? 'Enjoy a uniquely Southern menu in gracious surroundings...'

In honour of the Manuel Brothers and *Jambalaya* I order the Gumbo Soup, which is delicious – rice, mussels, sausage, celery all with a strong tomato bite. *Ah'm goin Cajun!*

I spend the rest of the afternoon walking around Opryland, checking out the retail strip, especially the made-in-India Cowboy shirts. I want to buy one. Strange how it all creeps up on you. I'd love to wear that shirt in Nashville, whereas in Sydney – in front of Robbie, Martin and the kids? I dunno. Back in my room I fiddle with the radio: all the Nashville radio stations play wall-to-wall Country music. I'm looking for Cajun, Bluegrass – even Western Swing. You're all hiding from me - you buggers.

Time now to get into my suit and tie and meet all the conference attendees in the Imperial Ballroom where we are given drinks and told that we will be conducted by bus to a Theme Park where we will spend the night travelling the

Cumberland River on the magnificent 4-deck General Jackson Showboat. This is a spectacular night, but on the showboat, I hit the bar and stay there, so I miss the view, except for the occasional woman walking past dressed as a Southern Belle, and there's heaps of them.

I meet lots of business people and I start jotting notes in the notebook I always carry. I avail myself of every opportunity to line up stories cover my ass, because sooner or later I reckon T-Bone will be back and I'll have less time for work. I meet a British Professor of Small Business. We talk about Aboriginal land rights.

I learn that in America the basic wage is \$460 per week and that the people I am expected to tip only earn \$260 per week. For example, a waitress earns only \$2.13 per hour - but is also taxed on 10 per cent tip money – which is assumed for Internal Revenue. Therefore, when some prick like me doesn't tip, the waitress or bellhop (or whoever) is actually *losing* money. Fancy that? You learn something new every day.

So that explains all this bloody 'customer service' – it's all about bumping up the tip. It half shits me. Nobody is telling me the truth. Every waitress beams the word *ENJOY*. Plus there's no problem smoking in any cab, 'If that's what the customer wants it's fine – because the customer is paying...'. But I'd rather the cabbie barked at me, 'Put your fucken cigarette out, arsehole,' then I'd know exactly where I stood. Now, I don't know whether or not to smoke.

The International Small Business Conference is launched on that riverboat with showgirls, 20 piece band, firecrackers, a stageful of Southern Belles - the works. A genius – maybe Chet Atkins, or someone like that – performs. And he's okay. Mostly, I'm chatting at the bar.

For the 5-course meal, I sit with two black women – Cindy, a grandmother and Lesi, who is about my age. Sensitively, I launch straight into the Aboriginal question.

Later that night, I run into her in the Stagedoor Tavern. She is hanging on the arm of her boss, a boring white corporate guy who doesn't like me. I am quite boastful, telling him that I am currently telephoning the White House. Haw haw haw, they laugh at me. I explain that if you've got a good reason,

politicians are easy to access in Australia – easier than Rock stars, easier than CEOs, easier than actors, easier than anyone else famous.

‘Well not here,’ says the white boy. The *honky*.

I am with six people who I met from...well, who cares? One of them is a smooth Country guitarist called Jimmy Wells. He said something about Bonnie Raitt, though I can't remember what. Maybe she is playing Nashville or she's already played it.

I go to bed at 4.00am after telephoning the White House on 202 456-1414. I leave a message that I am only in America for a limited time and would like to interview their equivalent of the Australian Federal Minister for Small Business.

5

Monday 30 September

Breakfast at *Rachel's*. Walking to the conference, the receptionist says, ‘There's a message for you from the White House sir...’.

‘What is it?’

‘You need to contact the White House Press Officer, Marlon Fitzwater. His number is on this piece of paper...and there's another message, this one is from Virginia Wright, asking you to call.’

I phone. She says that she would like to drop off some of T-Bone's ‘stuff’ at my hotel because I will see him before she does. Fuck, what is this?

Then I hurry to the conference room and take notes flat-out all morning. At the break I ask the Vice-President of the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) - David Cullen - if I can conduct a face-to-face interview with him later in the day. He agrees. We do it in the Imperial Lounge at 2.00 pm.

With 500,000 members, NFIB is the biggest small business association in the world. A sales team sells memberships business-to-business. David says, 'For the last 20 years we've been in a tight liaison with the Presidents, Members of Congress, as well as Treasury – though not so much the Commissioner of Taxation.

I tell him tax is Australian small business' No 1 concern. He says in the US top three small business concerns are insurance-related – health insurance, liability insurance and worker's compensation.'

'That's mighty interesting David...'

Interview one. This will yield a 1500-word article. Plus, what I gathered at the conference this morning will contribute a few fillers, even though some of the small business stories were specific to Korea.

In the afternoon, I phone Tiny who is pleased that Stinson has promised to pay the \$1500 by the end of the week.

He says, 'We'll see it when I get it. But there will be no cooperation between us until I receive the money. It's a question of honour Mr Tarlin. I know he loves me. But let me tell you about Mr Stinson. His problem is drinking. After 6.00 he becomes another person. He did send me a cheque for \$1500 – and it bounced. Unfortunately I cannot go to that cash chequing place again – the Garden Checking Cash Company – even though I did nothing wrong. I have a mental block because that cheque bounced and I had to pay from my mother's account back in 1988. I talked to him about it and he promised to send the money but he never did. I tell ya, as soon as he returns the money, I'll buy him a pitcher!'

We agree to catch up in New York this coming Friday afternoon.

'I'll take this to the courts of Heaven,' Tiny continues, 'Because when he returns the \$1500 out of principle, we got no more problems. I'll get on that album quicker than he can breathe!'

Virginia has driven to the hotel with T-Bones' boots, clothes and a terrible suitcase. She reflects a T-Bone that I don't know, and will never meet.

Likewise, I represent another of her ex-husband's personas that she doesn't want to know.

This overload of T-Bone ephemera annoys me, so I make a point of carrying everything myself, I storm past the doormen. Porters – assist me if you fucken dare! The expression on my face has everybody backing away. I press the lift button and shoulder all this crap into my room, where I chuck it on the floor. Fuck you, T-Bone.

Then I get into the suit for another big International Small Biz Conference night – this one hosted by the Jack Daniel Distillery, who is launching a mixer drink called *Tennessee Tea*. The receptionist says, 'There's a message for you from James Wright sir... it appears that he's *out* – when I questioned his meaning he said you would understand it'.

'He's outta the bloody slammer!' I exclaim with a rapture that startles everybody a bit.

All conference attendees are now back on the bus. This time we are driven to the site of what I am sure is the biggest marquee in the universe. There are hundreds of us in the tent – maybe a thousand. I am seated on a table with mostly Australians and Irish – there's Dazz, Suzy, Razza, Big Al, Julie, a Pom called John – who I met on the riverboat, Michael Feeney from Ireland - who's going to present a paper tomorrow. They are all good drinkers, but the waiters keep bringing this mixer drink which nobody on this table can stomach.

When Michael introduces himself as the Executive Director of the Industrial Development of Ireland, I immediately ask, 'Can I interview you?'

'Sure,' he replies.

Everyone at our table complains about the lolly water. I don't know what it is. Tennessee Tango or somesuch. It's probably guava and Jack Daniel's. I call for the waiter.

'Sir?'

‘Can you bring over a couple of bottles of Jack Daniel’s and get rid of this mixer shit.’

As the evening pushes on, the Japanese businessmen go off their heads in the far corner of the marquee – yelling – dancing about – falling down – all on this two and a half per cent stuff. But we’re all right on the Jack, except maybe for Dazz.

Two men approach our table. They introduce themselves as Mr Arthur Hancock, the Executive Vice President, Jack Daniel Distillery accompanied by Mr Paul Varga, the Associate Brand Manager.

‘G’day Art, you’re a beauty,’ says Dazz. ‘On behalf of this table I’d like to thank you for a fucken wonderful evening. And as for you Paul - how’s it hangin mate? I’m in marketing just like you. Let me introduce you to the folks on this table - this is Sue from Sydney – Sue runs her own show, Lowlife also from Sydney – he’s a fucken writer, Mick from Ireland, Johnno from London...’. John stands and shakes hands most formally.

‘Pleased to meet you gentlemen, I’m Professor John Stanworth, from the London Management Centre.’

Dazz is launching into an explanation of why the new mixer drink is shit. Art smiles generously and says that he is pleased to see that we are enjoying ourselves.

I feel I must say something to save Dazz from falling over in public, so I add opportunistically, ‘Dazz is trying to say that Jack Daniel’s is too beautiful to mix’.

‘Jack Daniel is made in Lynchburg, Tennessee. Although they make whiskey there – it’s a dry town’.

I ask to interview him. Art hands me his card, agreeing to a 10.00am interview tomorrow morning at his office in the Baker Building, 21st Street Nashville.

‘I’m looking forward to it Art,’ I grin.

‘Holy snapping duck shit!’ exclaims Dazz, sliding off his chair.

And we all raise our glasses to Arthur S Hancock – the man who made this night possible.

Then I turn my attention elsewhere. ‘John? You’re Britain’s first Professor of Small Business – right?’

‘Right.’

‘Well how bout a fucken interview some time tomorrow?’

‘Okay, you drunken stoat,’ he replies.

I call on the Pickin’ Parlour before going to bed. The Manuel Brothers aren’t playing, so I don’t bother hanging around. I run into Michael Feeney, still drinking at midnight, in the Imperial Room. ‘Hang on,’ I say. ‘I’ll fetch my tape recorder and interview you right now.’

‘It’s midnight,’ he smiles.

‘What else is there to do?’

‘Gee, I like your form!’ he laughs and we do the interview. Interview No 2.

I return to my room and face the two litres of Jim Beam wondering what I’m going to do with it, especially that we do all our drinking in bars and none in the room.

I telephone the Pope on 00396 69-82 but I can’t understand a word. Then I telephone my workmates – because it’s daytime in Australia – and I tell Gomez about T-Bone and that I am chasing the President of the United States or at least his Minister for Small Business. He laughs. He can tell that I’m quite shot.

I phone Robbie but I don’t tell her that T-Bone is coming back. We have a nice conversation. Amber’s boyfriend Lex – a bass player – is performing at the local Fitz Café next Saturday night. Amber and Joel are going to attend.

Tuesday 1 October

Breakfast at *Rachel's*. The receptionist says, 'Sir, a phone message for you from Mr James Wright. He says that he will be arriving this evening.'

I go to the Baker Building in 21st Street and interview Art who tells me that Mr Jack Daniel – he always calls him Mr - was five foot two tall, went into the whiskey business at 13 and owned his own distillery when he was 16.

'How'd he manage that?'

'He went to live with an uncle – Dan Cole – who was a Lutheran preacher. Together they began this distillery. After awhile Dan Cole's wife insisted that he make up his mind between whether he wanted to make whiskey or remain a preacher – so he gave it up to Jack Daniel and that's how Mr Jack ended up owning a distillery at 16.'

'When did the brand become famous around the world?'

'That probably didn't take place until the 1960s. In the 1950s it was well known in certain parts of the United States. The old Rat Pack on the west coast had among its members Humphrey Bogart, Frank Sinatra, David Niven and people of that ilk. In order to be a member you had to drink Jack Daniel. It was the official whiskey for their group. We put together our first advertising campaign in 1954, before that we never advertised.'

'Do you like the macho man image associated with your brand?'

'Absolutely.'

'Bikers?'

'It has it's downside.'

'Metalhead guitarists?'

‘Haw haw haw. Oh that! Jack Daniel has always been a macho kind of drink, but the image our marketing is promoting is *credibility, work ethic and pride*. That’s all about Lynchburg a town with a population of 400 people 150 years ago and 362 at the last census, I believe.’

‘That’s mighty interesting, Art...’.

He promises to give me two bottles of his smoothest whiskey, Gentleman Jack. He says we probably don’t have it in Australia yet. But by the end of the hour he’s forgotten all about it. To remind him, would be bad form. And what would I do with two more litres of spirits? I’d have to carry them in my bag, and if I did I’d be frightened they’d be smashed by the porters who are by no means gentle when they chuck the bags around the terminal.

Interview No 3 - I am now ahead with my work. I’ll have plenty of time back home to clean up the copy. All that’s left for me to do is to get as close to the President as possible.

The receptionist says, ‘Sir, a phone message for you from an Australian gentleman who says that he is your boss.’

‘Bloody hell, what is it?’

‘He says to keep away from the President,’ the receptionist gives me an odd look. ‘He’s coming here tomorrow.’

‘The President of the United States? Here? Opryland?’

‘Tomorrow night the Country Music Awards are being held at the Grand Old Opry, and the President is going to attend.’

‘Will he come here, to the hotel?’

‘They all will sir – the Imperial Room will be sealed off and the President will personally meet the stars.’

I rush back to my room and phone the White House.

‘Marlon Fitzwater?’

‘Speaking.’

‘Lowell Tarling from Australia, an attendee at the International Small Business Conference in Nashville. Marlon – er, can I call you that? – I am an Australian reporter specialising in SMEs...small and medium-sized business...and I was wondering if it might be possible for me to conduct a 10-minute telephone interview with your Minister for Small Business?’

‘Unlikely?’

‘Why is it so unlikely? This would be possible in Australia – hell, it’s just a 5-minute phone hook-up, right? Okay, okay, I’ll call back.’

I run into Lesi at the conference and boast that I got through to the White House. ‘Tell your boss to shove that up his honky ass...’. (See how I’m picking up phrases?)

As soon as I take my place inside the afternoon small business session, I realise I can’t do this. I want to be somewhere else. So I leave.

‘Ken! Ken!’ I hail Ken Bailey across the hall. ‘President Bush is staying here – can you get me the number of his room?’

‘Sure,’ he says in a whisper – holding out his hand as if expecting something.

‘Oh, good. Well if you can do that for me, I’ll be very grateful mate.’ Seeing the hand hanging out, I give it a good shake, and walk off, looking for Professor John Stanworth, academic, researcher and Director General of the Small Business research trust.

Interview No 4. I now know that there are three million small businesses in Britain – 12% of the economically active work force is self-employed compared with pre-Thatcher, when it was 7%.

‘So we’re a little bit worried,’ says John. ‘We’ve started a lot of new firms, but there’s an awful lot of duplication and displacement. The average size of firms has actually decreased quite substantially over the last 10-15 years.’

‘That’s mighty interesting, John...’.

I head back to the room, only to be intercepted by a message from T-Bone at reception. It says that he is in the car park waiting for me right now. I walk over and find him inside an old car with two other people. I’d hug him if he wasn’t such a cunt. Of course he asks for \$20 to give to the friends who drove him here, ‘for petrol’.

‘Fuck you T-Bone!’ I tell him, handing across the money. ‘Because of you I’ve got all this shit in my room – fucken boots – your guitar – the place looks like a brothel.’

We catch the lift to the room, I am so angry that my hands begin to shake. Nevertheless, I have heaps of guilt because I was the dopey fuckwit who couldn’t drive off smoothly. He never would have been arrested if I’d gotten my shit together. So it wasn’t totally his fault, though I’ll never admit it.

‘Are you still pissed with me, Lowell?’ he asks, in a humble tone.

I hesitate to answer, because in Australia that would mean, ‘Am I still drunk with him?’ which makes no sense. Then I catch his meaning and hit the roof.

‘Am I still pissed *off* – fucken oath I am! We could have gone *anywhere* in the fucken State except that place – and you deliberately walked into it! You even made me write down your wife’s phone number – you *knew* you fucken dumbfuck, you *knew*!’

‘I waited for you for three hours. Everytime I wanted to go for a piss – which was most of the time cos of the beer – I had to go outside, and the door would lock behind me, and I’d have to wait to be let in. We could have gone anywhere but there. Are you on a fucken deathwish or something?’

‘Three hours?’

‘In that godforsaken cop shop.’

‘Why?’

‘Cos you said *Don’t leave me here* – so I waited until the bondsman came.’

‘Did he tell you why ah was wanted?’

‘Sure, he said Armed Robbery,’ I shrug.

‘What did you say?’

‘I said that I didn’t know you were that *good*.’

‘You said *that*?’

‘Sure.’

‘Haw haw haw,’ T-Bone cracks up laughing. ‘You said *that*.’ He is holding his sides and I start laughing too. Then I remember the two litres of Jim Beam and the tape recorder.

‘What the fuck’s going on T-Bone? I wanna know.’ Interview No 5.

‘They took mah benefits. Ah was in the Processing Battalion and we were policing the area and ah walked by a fucken chewing gum wrapper and he’s seen me. And ah walk by it and he comes back and snatches me by the shoulder, turns me about, points down there – *Soldier, halt!*

‘*Ahhh, yes sir*. Ah’m lookin at this young dude man. Ah’m used to blood and guts and packin it back there – putting their intestines back inside – and he’s going to point to me about a Wrigleys chewing gum wrapper that ah missed when policing the area? *Yes sir!*

‘*Don’t you see that?*

‘*Yes sir*.’

'Why didn't you pick it up?

'Ah didn't see it sir.

'You just said you seen it!

'Ah seen it when you pointed it out sir.

'Then he starts, Soldier I think you're fucken with me, rah rah rah and pokin me in the face – you know – pokin his finger like this – almost touching me.'

T-Bone is in my face.

'Ah really drove him up because he couldn't excite me. Ah was expressionless, like Go away kid, you bother me. You know – why don't you kiss my ah-ss.

'He poked me in the eye and as soon as he did, ah snapped. Ah grabbed him by the ears, ah stuck my thumb in his eyes, ah kneed his face. Ah took him down, they dragged me off. Ah was in a fury. And two sergeants, ah got into it with them – they beat the shit out of me.'

'They took your benefits?' I ask, almost knowing what he means.

'Took everything,' he lifts his hands skywards.

'How long were you in Vietnam?'

'Aww...almost a year.'

'Whereabouts?'

'All through. Ah came to Cam Ranh Bay and ah stayed there, which was easy duty, for 13 weeks. And then we got dutied out to a little place called Tui Lai which was off the trail where it got bloody. Ah was wounded twice.'

'My cousin was in Vung Tau,' I tell him about Australia & Vietnam in the 60s – and my Cousin Ken, who also beat on an officer.

‘That was heavy fighting. A lot of heavy fighting where your cousin was.’

‘He killed people.’

‘Oh yeah - had to.’

‘Killed kids.’

‘Had to,’ he moans.

‘With a machette.’

‘Had to!’ he screams.

‘And so you robbed a bank right after your dishonourable discharge?’

‘Had to,’ he settles back, takes another pull on his cigarette, tops up our drinks, glances at the tape recorder and I’m sure that he realises – as I do – that this is his perfect opportunity to put James Wright aside and become the T-Bone this Australian wants him to be.

‘What kind of gun did you use for holding up banks?’

‘Ah always used a 38.’

‘What’s that?’ I ask, never having robbed a bank myself.

‘A revolver – a Smith & Weston 38.’

‘A hand gun, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you get away with it?’

‘Several,’ he laughs.

‘Several! I told that bondsman you were good and I was right!’

‘You crazy motherfucker, you did. Ah never wore a mask, always disguises. What do you wants to know? Why did ah do it? Ah did it because ah felt the United States Government turned their back on me when ah’d stood up and fought with all my heart and soul in Vietnam.

‘And because ah beat the shit out of some little pissant, they took away everything they owed me. They took my Distinguished Service medal and everything from me. All my benefits, everything. Why? Because I lost my temper when some junior poked me in the eye – some fuck who wasn’t even there. That’s what it all boiled down to in mah mind.’

‘Were you a conscript?’

‘Ah enlisted. Ah volunteered! Ah wasn’t drafted. They didn’t have to chase me in fucken Canada or anywhere else. Ah love mah God and mah country and ah stood for both. And then they turn around and kick me in the bawls and bust mah chops. Where the fuck is justice? Where is justice in this? Ah could not find any and ah looked everywhere. Ah went to several different organisations – Swords To Plowshares – they said, *Man you cannot beat on an officer,*’ he paces the room, upset.

‘This guy had no combat duty, no fucken combat experience, no field experience – know what ah mean? No understanding what it’s awl about. Ah’m in a special processing battalion with hardcore motherfuckers who hear a tyre pop and they go...’ and T-Bone drops – well, slams - onto the floor.

‘Ah was like that. Ah’d hear sumthin and ah’m on the fucken ground man. Ah’m lookin for the muzzle flash. Ah didn’t see the justice in it, so ah went *Okay, y’took all this from me – excuse me – but ah really don’t have any skills except for the ones you taught me. You taught me how to observe a situation in a building – a compound – and penetrate it successfully. You taught me how to penetrate it, get in – do the job – and get out. You taught me well.* And ah paid close attention to those lessons. There’s banks still on the books...’

‘What do you mean?’

‘They don’t know who done them, never will,’ he shrugs.

All of a sudden I stand up and say, ‘T-Bone, I’ve gotta do serious Snakehouse duty.’ While I’m staring down the urinal he starts strumming a Country song about weeping in his beer. You can’t leave these buggers alone for a moment. Even the Manuel Brothers are a bit like that – one minute they’re tearing down the house with *Jambalaya*, next they’re into some sentimental Country tear-jerker about wanting to be a *Better Man* or somesuch. T-Bone is just the same. He’s gone all wistful on me all of a sudden.

‘For the rest of ma life ah’ve decided ah’m gonna help everyone and anyone ah ever see that needs help – and that’ll probably keep me broke. But ah’ve been broke anyway.’

‘More Beam?’

‘Thanks. Ah’ve provided for my children. They have – in separate bank accounts – their college fees. It’s locked in there. Ah set it up so that neither one us could molest it – not Virginia, not me. Ah set it up with the help of mah mother and her parents who thought they were going to retire as millionaires and it turned out the last two years of their business went down, down, down until they found themself struggling – which is a shame.’

‘What kind of business?’ I ask – ever ready with the small business question.

‘New and used cars. Ah always felt intimidated by all that big money.’

‘In what town?’

‘Detroit, Michigan.’

‘Fair enough. More to the point – what’s the best time of day for robbing a bank?’

‘That depends what State you’re in. Now ah’d say in Kansas City a good time is about 10.00 – an hour and a half after they open up.

‘What about the people standing around?’

‘They take care of themselves.’

‘Have you got a car outside waiting?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘Have you got a mate in that car?’

‘Sometimes. Ah just walk in with an overcoat, a hat, specs, a brown sack. Ah set it up – open my coat – show em mah piece – close the coat – put mah hand on it – give them the note – open the sack – fill it with money – *G’day!*’

‘You’re taking the piss...’.

‘Haw haw haw...*g’day.*’

‘So you don’t wave it around?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘And what do you say?’

‘That says it awl.’

‘I thought you might get into combat stance and yell, *Hear this motherfuckers, one move and I’ll blow all your fucken heads off?*

‘That’s in the fucken movies. In reality it’s, *yes fucken sir, right now.*’

‘A bit of a furphy, right?’

‘A fur whut?’

‘A bullshit story...but what about bank security?’

‘They’ve got a camera going.’

'They have *now*.'

'They did then too.'

'So you check all that out first?'

'Ah did. The United States Government taught me how to do that. It specifically taught me and several others in a unit that was very elite for six months, we were even flown to Saigon to retrieve some documents.'

'You said about handing them a note? What are the exact words?'

'Three words – AWL the money – AWL the money. Those few little letters might be cut out of 25 magazines or newspapers – ALL THE MONEY.'

'And the teller? Does he have a hot button?'

'Oh yeah.'

'What do you do about that?'

'Eye contact. You know the story of the snake – how a snake looks its prey in the eye – hypnotises it to where it's frozen with fear. It's the same effect when it's done properly in a robbery.'

'So what does the teller do?'

'He's frozen, he ain't doin nothin – she ain't doin nothing - if you pick the right teller.'

'Have you ever had to shoot someone?'

'Never. Ah've never fired a shot.'

'What do you do once you've got the cash? Walk out or run out?'

'Always walk.'

‘And they run for the phones I guess...’

‘Ah never look back. Ah never look back to see what they’re doin. Ah always walk out and figure, *Well, this is it – ah’m out the door – there’s either people out there waiting to take me or there’s not – and if there’s not ah need to blend into the populace as quickly as possible.*

‘It would be a crowded street?’

‘Always, if it’s the proper time of day.’

‘Do you get into a car?’

‘Sometimes. Sometimes you might time is just right and catch a bus. Haw haw haw!’ He’s flying now.

‘Bullshit?’

‘No!’

‘How much money can you expect from the bag?’

‘Hah, you don’t stop to count that. That’s later. Your first goal after leaving the bank is to get away from the area clean. You’ve got to become just Joe Blow goin down the road, walkin down the street, catchin a bus. You get out of the area first. Sometimes ah have even caught a cab and reached into the bag – what is it? A fifty? That’ll do.’

‘What’s the most you’ve taken?’

‘\$26,000.’

‘What’s the least?’

‘About \$3000. Just over three. One day I did three jobs – two banks & one Savings & Loans office all in the one day.’

‘I guess that’s the reason they picked you up in Dickson.’

‘No, it’s not at all. You know, the only thing I could think about the other night is that Terry Herrod knows my record. He was in Vietnam. Now he’s Chief of Police in Charlotte.’

‘And he’s into you?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘He’s – er – on your case, he’s got your number?’

‘I see what you mean. Well...it’s the only thing I could think.’

‘How many times did they bust you?’

‘Once.’

‘And they put you in San Quentin?’

‘Yeah.’

‘That’s heavy isn’t it?’

‘Yeah.’

‘How long?’

‘Three and a half years.’

‘Did you have to give back the money?’

‘No. Haw haw haw!’

‘Ha ha ha!’

‘No...that’s not how the game is played. Do you know why Saturday night was so ridiculous?’

‘Because you got yourself deliberately arrested?’

‘Now listen here Loll, ah made a legitimate contractual agreement with a company for some stereo equipment and ah reneged on the deal. It’s a civil – not a criminal – matter – yet that man took out a warrant and ah was arrested. It is mind-fucking boggling! The way our American justice system works is ridiculous.

‘If ah renege on a stereo deal ah might get from 30 days to six months in jail and it will cost me \$5000. Now if ah go out and steal \$100,000 – rob it from a bank or something – they’ll give me five years, Ah’ll be out in two-and-a-half and ah ain’t got to give the money back.’

‘You said you got three-and-a-half.’

He is silent for a time, so I continue, ‘Why ain’t you rich?’

‘Ah got scared. Ah stove the money in the fucken river. The money’s goan! Ah went to Las Vegas and gambled it away. The money’s goan! The insurance companies pick up the tab for the robberies. Insurance companies do fucken nothing. They don’t produce nuthing for nobody – all they do is collect money. Very seldom do they pay out. For most part all insurance companies do is collect-collect-collect – from millions and millions and millions of motherfuckers. That’s billions and billions of fucken dollars. Billions! And they don’t produce anything!’ He’s pacing again.

‘Let’s go eat mate, you must be hungry.’

7

Wednesday 2 October

News Broadcast: An appearance by President Bush will highlight Wednesday’s 25th anniversary telecast of the Country Music Association awards.

Lunch again at *Rhett's*. I introduce T-Bone to the waitress. He is overly polite, calling her Ma'am and laying it on thick. The waitress is over-doing it too, everytime she puts anything on the table she beams the word, 'Enjoy'.

'What's a sweetheart like her workin in a place like this?' asks T-Bone.

'What's so sweet about her?' I reply. 'She's paid to be charming. I can't tell when anybody is fair dinkum. I don't know where I stand.'

'Whaddya mean Loll?'

'Everybody's like that in this country – polite for a fucken reason. Plus I don't know what's happened to Ken.'

'Who's Ken?' T-Bone replies.

'Ken's the guy who is giving me the President's room number - he doesn't seem to be around. Bugger! I shoulda tipped him.'

'What are you going to do with the President's room number?'

'Get as close as I can.'

'What for? The President isn't going to even be in there. He'll probably just take a piss in the room – say thank y'awl - and split.'

Immediately the lunch is done, all Opryland snaps to attention. Every speck of dust is removed, logos pressed into every sand tray. Two choppers fly overhead, shoom shoom. Hundreds of us gather on a massive verandah, outside the Imperial Room, overlooking a quarter of a mile of lawn with deer supposedly somewhere (according to the Opryland brochure). After the lawn there's the Briley Parkway - along which the President is about to drive.

'Ah hope you don't mind me saying this Loll,' says T-Bone.

'Go right ahead...'

‘Steady down a bit,’ says T-Bone. ‘See that roof over there? If you point a broomstick you’ll be picked off by a sniper. And stop telling everyone that we can assassinate your Orstralian Prime Minister any time we care to. Nobody thinks it’s funny.’

‘Okay T-Bone, okay. But we’re only talking about Bob Hawke and George Bush. It’s no big deal. This is not exactly John Lennon.’

Eventually the cavalcade of cars drive past, and if it can be said that seeing a tiny speck in the distance counts as ‘seeing the President’ – I see him from three different spots. I move around a bit, of course.

At the end of it all, T-Bone – or should I say, James Wright - gives a confirmatory nod to the guy beside him and says, ‘A job well done’ – meaning that the fucken security kept us all in line perfectly and their bloody President didn’t get assassinated.

The other guy returns the nod as a matter of pride that they mutually understand. (Shut up Lowell, don’t tell T-Bone that in 1886 an Irish-Australian took a pot-shot at Prince Albert, the second son of Queen Victoria and got him in the back. Remember that it was T-Bone who said, ‘Ah believe in my President, ah believe in my country, ah believe in mah God!’) I interviewed Ben Lexcen once, the star of the American Cup Yacht Race. He told me that he’d like to see Canberra flattened and a plough drawn over it. Australians talk like that because nothing dangerous ever happens to us.

‘Ah hope you don’t mind me saying this Loll,’ says T-Bone.

‘Go right ahead...’

‘While you’re in America you should maybe pick up some good footwear and a good shirt...’

‘You don’t like my Docs?’

‘Ah didn’t say that. *But* as you are flying out tomorrow, this is your only chance to buy that Nashville shirt ah know you wanna buy.’

‘Let’s go for a drink T-Bone, while I ponder the proposition...’. My problem is that I can’t justify spending family money on myself. I feel guilty enough already, drinking my way around America in ritzy joints knowing that back home they’re worrying about money a bit. I phone Robbie. She says we’ve had \$97 and \$145 income from our private newsletter business over the past two days. The Made-In-India Nashville shirt costs \$70 Australian dollars. Hmm.

Then the idea comes to me.

‘Okay let’s do it,’ I grab T-Bone by the arm and we head for Opryland Retail. I decide to sling the shirt on my expense account, and write it up as ‘shirt bought at Opryland’.

If my boss says, ‘What’s this?’ I’ll say, ‘A shirt bought at Opryland’ and he probably won’t ask me to pay it back. I can get away with just about anything, as long as I don’t lie to him. So I buy the Nashville shirt. In fact I am wearing now.

While the Grand Old Opry is doing its thing – from say 8.00-10.30 pm, we are at the Pickin Parlour, of course. The Manuel Brothers are starting their third set. *Kill ‘em, Joe!*

‘We’d like to welcome everybardy to the Pickin Parlour. We’d like to remind everybardy that we dew have a huge dance floor over here, if anybody would like to dew the 2-Step, the Jitterbug or anythang you maht want to dew. And now, here’s some Clint Back music...’

‘Hey Loll, I’d like you to meet someone. Loll this is Billah...’, that’s T-Bone calling out across the room.

‘Loll?’ says Billy shaking hands. Billy is a young dude who looks and sounds like a hillbilly. His accent is so thick, I don’t understand a word he says all night.

‘Lowell,’ I emphasise.

‘Loll?’

‘They call him *Lowdown and Dirty from Down Under*,’ adds T-Bone, clearing up the point.

‘What’s goan down mutherfucker?’ Billy asks me.

‘He wants to know how long you’re staying in Nashville,’ says T-Bone.

‘Leaving for New York early tomorrow.’

‘Whoo boy, them’s crazy mutherfuckers up themways!’

‘Billy doesn’t like New York,’ T-Bone translates.

‘Has he bin there?’

‘Nope. Never will.’

Catherine sings *Crazy* and tickles the ivories. That song cracks me up in Nashville like it never did in Warragul.

‘Willah Nelson wrote that one...’. Thanks T-Bone.

I go to the bar and order Jack Daniel’s, and lo there’s my mate Jimmy Wells, the smooth Telecaster picker from the Stagedoor Tavern.

‘What’s a-happenin Jimmy? Why all the women got cameras?’

‘Aww, now the Awards are over at the Grand Ole Opry, all them Country stars are going to walk raht along past here and into the Imperial Bawl Room.’

‘Right past *us*?’

‘Yawl.’

I head back to T-Bone. I’m loosening up rather nicely and now that the stars start walking past, I’ll take my drink outside the Pickin Parlour and watch the glamour for a while.

‘Who’s that?’ I ask some woman who is dressed in crimplene.

‘Shh!’ she snaps at me, then snaps a photograph of someone sauntering past, someone most revered, if the hush is any indication.

‘Who’s that one?’

‘Garth Brooks,’ someone else replies in a superior tone. From the buzz all around me, I get the impression that Keith Brooks is gonna be the saviour of American Country Music. Good man! ‘Go Brooksey! Go Keith! Go!’

I can’t tell one Country star from another but I’m still going to enjoy myself. Oh look, here comes a woman who isn’t Dolly Parton.

‘What’s *her* name?’ I ask the crimplene queen.

‘Shh!’

Despite the fact that the women all around me are about to faint with delight at this star-studded galaxy, famous people cease to be famous when you haven’t heard of them. I’ve got to keep pestering people to know who’s who – even then does me no good because I don’t recognise the names. I’m better off going back to the T-Bone & co table, better off listening to Joe, Abe and Catherine howling up the joint.

‘Here’s a song we’ve got on the brand new album...’, says Joe in his clipped Southern drawl.

‘Aw raht!’

We’re all yelling and screaming. Abe bursts open *Cajun Born* with saw-cut fiddle. We all leap onto the dancefloor. I’m dancing with women, dancing with T-Bone, who cares? Big key change, here it comes.

‘Kick arse!’

‘Hey! Piétre c’m over here!’ I yell to a cute young guy that the girls around us are sure to appreciate.

'Who's that?' asks T-Bone.

'Some Danish guy from the conference. I met him on the riverboat.'

'Piétre mate - scream *Git own down*. Do it like a fucken American!'

'*Get on dawn?*' he says awkwardly. The women gasp. This innocent European boy brings out the mother in all of them.

'C'm on Piétre, you bugger - do it loud for T-Bone and Billy – *Git own down!*'

Things are picking up at the Pickin Parlour. A searing fiddle break from Abe and the fastest tear-arse picking I've ever seen from Joe. *Big Mamou* is the song.

The words are Creole, Patois or something - this is what he's singing according to me:

*'Oh wha do you go mam-oo
julie blon, jolie fee, jolie n'ici passa
oh papa, oh me on
oh mi blache ba Big Mamou...aaaah hah!'*

Fiddle.

'Burn the fucken house down Abe!'

'Eee-ha!' Guitar now. Impossible stuff.

I lean right across the table and knock over an empty glass, 'Say T-Bone, is this the *best* guitarist in the fucken world?'

'Loll, ah think so...'

'So what the fuck happened?'

'Joe Manuel is black-bawled. He's only allowed to play small bars.'

‘How’s that?’

‘Did the wrong thing by Conway Twitty’s daughter...’

‘He did the deed?’

‘Yeaaaah, he did the deed but not the Deed.’

‘Yawl kookie northern motherfuckers can shove ole Ulysses Grant up yaw ass, ah tell ya,’ says Billy.

‘What’s that mean, T-Bone?’

‘That means Billy’s had too much to drink. But say Loll,’ says T-Bone. ‘You oughta git onto some *real* Cajun music, ah reckon you’d like it.’

‘What’s *this* then?’

‘Well this is a mix of Cajun, Bluegrass, Country and Western Swing. These guys do it cos we like it, but it’s not like hard bitchin downhome Zydeco. Git own down to New Orleans sometime, ah reckon you’d travel well.’

‘This is our last song for the evening folks, *Jambalaya!*’ Big scream from our table – that was me, of course. Oh man, they sing half the words in Creole, I’m so impressed. T-Bone is whooping. I’m joining in on the chorus, Billy is screaming out something about the Civil War. People are dancing. The glamour parade has long gone and everybody else has either hit these Opryland bars or gone home.

I buy the Manuel Brothers cassette tape from Joe – who gets everybody in the band to autograph it for me. They thank me in three different spellings – Catherine wrote ‘thanks’, Joe wrote ‘thanx’ and Abe wrote ‘tanx’. I talk about the Tamworth Country Music Festival, Tex Morton and the Emmanuel Brothers. I am about to launch into a rendition of a humorous Kevin Bloody Wilson song when I remember something T-Bone told me about swearing in public.

I pause for a moment and realise that I'm the only one bringing down the tone of the conversation. It's not Catherine, Joe or Abe, it's me. They're drinking coffee not Jack Daniel's. For all I know they could be Christians if the thanks on the cassette are any indication, *Thanks to the Lord, Mom & Dad, Eddie, and everyone else involved for hangin' in there with us*'. To think I was about to entertain them with a rendition of a Christmas ditty by Kevin Bloody Wilson, *Santa Claus you cunt, where's me fucken bike...!* I must have been mad.

Dropping back a few gears means they like me better. Joe walks off to tend to something leaving me chatting with Catherine, who I call Kate. I tell her that she is awesome, Joe is awesome, Abe is awesome. Nashville is awesome. I'm running out of vocabulary faster than expected. 'I reckon I've figured out some of your words,' I add.

'The Creole?'

'Yeah – I figure that Julie Blon isn't a person, it's French for *jolie blonde* – pretty blonde, right? And Julie Fee is *jolie fille* – pretty girl.'

'You'd pick it up in no time in New Orleans, if you already speak French,' says Kate, then Joe comes back and asks lots of questions about various Australian Country Music festivals and Australian performing artists other than Kevin Bloody Wilson. I tell him about the *Folkways* label and Warren Fahey, and he writes a few things down.

I buy a round of drinks for T-Bone, Billy and a big woman called Shing that someone – possibly T-Bone - has picked up.

I give the waitress a \$5 tip and ask for a receipt. She signs, 'Cindy Cash' and says, 'You'd better remember that surname in Nashville. He's my uncle.' Cindy then kneels before me. She picks something up from the floor and in that short skirt she is being forced to wear, I cop a flash of her white knickers. Cash knickers! I quickly look away, feeling terribly guilty.

T-Bone, Billy, Shing and I stumble into my room. What time is it?

5.30.

I sleep in one of the beds, Shing sleeps in the other. Billy and T-Bone sleep in the armchairs.

Tomorrow I am going to New York. My bags are already packed.

There's a lot of Jim Beam left, which means I'll have a jug in my luggage. I hope it don't get smashed.

8

Thursday 3 October

The cabbie wakes me, chucks me in the car and gets me to the airport in time for my 8.40 flight. I don't say goodbye to T-Bone, Billy and Shing - I just grab my bag, throw on some clothes and collapse in the back of the pre-ordered cab and I also sleep on the plane. Flying into New York is like flying into Mordor. There's a thick black cloud over the whole city and we fly right through it. The Twin Towers are standing like the 10 Commandments, the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, the Hudson River...New York fulfils the promise of all its postcards.

At the airport a taxi-hustler approaches me for the ride. I say yes to everything. He hustles me through the crowd, and with the cooperation of airport officials, he extracts my bag in no time, chucks it in his boot and whisks me away. If the other people treated my bag that roughly, I am convinced the Beam is smashed and that all my clothes are ruined. Glass will be everywhere. Everything will reek of alcohol. It's smashed for sure. There's nothing I can do about it until I get to the room. Think of something else – hey this is New York New York, right? *Start spreading the news...*

My cabbie writes music when he's not driving. He a musician, hoping to make it in the Big Apple. He only drives cabs to stay in New York and hopefully get discovered.

I am staying at the Wellington Hotel on Upper East or maybe Upper West Side, I haven't got a bloody clue. The Wellington is a scumbag hotel just up from Carnegie Hall – and it costs \$180 per night, same as Nashville. The television doesn't work. The cooler doesn't work. I have a single bed and not

much else. The jug travelled fine. It was all bullshit. There was no broken glass.

The black woman who cleans my room has a very different accent to the black woman who cleaned my room in Nashville. She has a type of New York ‘shh’ where you’d least expect it. Like, ‘Shoo happy with the room?’ I don’t know how to tip her. But, that’s usual for me.

The first street person I see is an elderly woman with only one tooth. She asks me for money. I burst into tears on the spot. I give her a \$20 bill which brightens her immediate future. Then I buy a good looking Disney-endorsed Mickey Mouse doll for Zoë. This is New York City. Buy buy buy.

I catch a cab to Greenwich Village on a Bob Dylan pilgrimage. I find 115 MacDougal Street, which is *Café Wha?* 110 MacDougal Street is the *Folklore Center* where Dylan wrote songs on an old typewriter in the back room, and 116 is *The Gaslight Café* where Dylan premiered *Masters of War*.

‘Excuse me,’ I ask a guy on a bicycle, who instantly stops.

‘Do you know the site of *Gerdes Folk City?*’

‘Yo! You Orstralian dude?’

‘I am,’ in fact I am wearing my *Hard Rock Café – Sydney* sweatshirt to save everyone asking.

‘Gerdes, you say?’

‘Yes.’

‘Dude, I’ve never heard of it?’

‘It’s where Dylan played his first professional gig in 1961.’

‘Who?’

‘Bob Dylan.’

He shrugs.

‘Well, 11 West Fourth Street is the address, I don’t know if it’s still standing.’

‘West Street, you say?’

‘Yeah.’

‘You’re right own it. No 11 is maybe three blocks after you go over the crosswalk at the Avenue of the Americas.’

‘Thanks mate.’

‘Take it easy, dude,’ and he speeds away, weaving between cars and pedestrians.

I notice a young blonde outside Café Wha? She is holding a map of New York and I say something to her. Her name is Annika and we are both tourists. We hang out together for an hour. We eat pizza slices and I tell her that the cover to *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* was photographed in West Fourth Street – ‘which is just over there’ – but she doesn’t have a clue what I am talking about. She is only 25 and pretty enough, I guess.

I have to split - I have Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Tiny Tim pilgrimages to make. I tell her I’ll meet her tonight in a Blues Bar at 8.30 – someone handed us a card on the street. We both know I won’t be there. I can hear it in my voice.

There is a range of groovy t-shirts for sale on the sidewalk. I buy a Cure t-shirt for Amber. I hope she still likes the band as much as she did when I left for America.

I see a handsome man being filmed with a woman – a model – he doesn’t interact with her at all when they’re not filming. I bowl straight up to him and ask, ‘Mate, what’s going down?’

He says he is a famous Canadian singer called John le Loup and he is filming an MTV clip.

I also see an extremely rich black man in a stretched limousine. Believe me, there is no racial prejudice where money is concerned. As the J J Cale songs says, 'Money talks'. This man is King, which puts a different slant on the race issues I am constantly wrangling about with every American who gets to know me. I'm a prick aren't I? Our Government hasn't even drawn up a treaty, and here I am carrying on as if we're getting it together and they aren't.

I go to Washington Square where everyone tries to sell me drugs. Every 10 paces someone says, 'Hey dude, do you wanna be like me?' He points to his eyes, 'Crack, cocaine, acid...ah've got it'. Then the next one and the next one. People asking for money. Someone trying to sell me a watch. A domestic argument right here on MacDougal Street. Money, drugs. I think I'm going mad. M-m-ad, I say.

The driver taking me back to the Wellington drives so erratically that I am flung across the seat and I jolt my head against the door. Any harder, and I would feel it tomorrow. The cabbie lets me smoke in his cab and tells me to keep away from 42nd Street and Central Park if I don't want to get mugged.

I get away from the Village and back to the Wellington. But first, I take a walk in Central Park, then to the Equitable Tower, 787 7th Avenue, to check out the seven storey Lichtenstein picture, *Mural With Blue Brushstrokes*.

Everywhere I go someone is asking me for money. I give money until it's gone, then I start giving away cigarettes, until finally I have nothing more to give – so within a matter of three hours I become just like everybody else in New Yorkers, avoiding eye contact everywhere I go.

I phone home and talk to Robbie. She's okay. I'm not. The New York mentality is to leave every situation a little bit ahead of how you walked into it. And I am consistently behind.

I dream about an endless stream of tattered people never-endingly asking me for money.

Friday 4 October

I wake up to a major feature movie being filmed at the front door of our hotel. We have to use the side door, scurry about and not interfere with the movie. But I'd rather get involved.

First I chat to the 'old bag lady' in make-up. She tells me that's Danny Aiello over there, sitting in a director's chair on the sidewalk and roped off from the crowd. She tells me he's a big *big* star.

'He was in *Hudson Hawk* with Bruce Willis,' she says.

'That was a *great* film! My kids loved it. That English guy was in it, and also Madonna's friend.'

'That's the one.'

Then I chat to a handsome blonde guy who looks like Bowie – probably someone very famous, he certainly looks the part. I also say G'day to the star himself. I shake his hand, tell him we all loved *Hudson Hawk* and he tells me this one is a Paul Mazursky film to be called *The Pickle*.

'That's mighty interesting Danny, I'll look out for it and watch it with the wife back in Sydney.'

I go to the Museum of Modern Art to see Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* but the curator tells me it's not on exhibit.

So, I miss *Starry Night*. I haven't missed much else.

Before meeting Tiny at Hotel Olcott at 1.00pm, I pay my respects to the place where John Lennon was shot at the Dakota Hotel.

'Where did it happen?' I ask the security guard, lowering my eyes.

‘Just there,’ he says, making a slight gesture towards the ground. There is nothing more to say. A moment of embarrassment passes between us. I am sincere. The gothic edifice leans above me like a curse. I bow my head at the sight of the concrete ground and I think of *Imagine*.

Having paid my respect to the darkness, I move into the light. I walk half a block to Hotel Olcott and ask for Tiny. Tiny is the only person I know in New York. He comes down the lift and looks great in a red-zip top jacket, grey – near white – elastic topped trousers, and awful footwear, as usual. Yes, he is carrying the trademark calico bag. Yes, probably with an alarm clock in it. He takes me to the Olcott Eatery, orders a pitcher of beer for himself and food for me. He also orders cornbread – plus 10 corn cobs and cold slaw to be taken to his room. As we talk, he nibbles the corn bread, which is the first time I have seen him eat anything in public.

‘Mr Tarlin, I can't complain. You know it's *One Wonderful Moment's Time*. - words that are so true - especially here. *I'd trade all of my years for one wonderful moment's time*. That was written by Shelley Cohen - may he rest in peace - who died in a drowning accident.

‘Miss Bronwyn was one wonderful moment's time. I forget the name of the club in Sydney. Was it Kinselas? It was right in the heart of Sydney?’

‘The *Kakadu*. It's been re-named, *Mars*.’

‘Well she took *me* to Mars in April of 1989. She came in from nowhere. It was the second show. It was as if the Good Lord said, *This is what you want. I’m giving her to you for one moment.* One wonderful moment’s time - but be careful. She was like a diamond. She was everything I dreamed of. That was one wonderful moment's time.

‘The early times just in Australia alone were Miss Cameron in 1976 in Martin Sharp’s house - one wonderful moment’s time! Going back to the 40s - be it from Audrey Dash in 1942, to one of the greatest of the 60s, Catherine James. And Marilyn Rosenberg - they were all one wonderful moment’s time. And I’ve had these moments with only one stipulation: *Look but don't touch unless you're going to marry.*’

Tiny’s in good form. In fact, he pays for my meal which he should not have done.

He takes me up to his dingy little flat. On the way, he tips big – like \$5 or \$10 to whoever presses the lift button for us. Every time he talks to a porter, he hands over a bloody note. Shouldn’t I be doing this?

His quarters comprise a kitchenette, a small lounge sitting area – where his mother slept when she was alive – and his bedroom. In his bedroom, a large bed, a dressing table packed with cosmetics, a phone near his bed and not much else. No memorabilia. He pulls out a 1976 *Oui* magazine from the top drawer in a bedside table and he shows me the nude centrefold of his first wife, Miss Vicki. When I visit them most people don’t show me nude shots of their ex-wives. Not for openers, at least. If they did, maybe I’d drop by more often.

We discuss how we should spend the afternoon and agree that if I pay for a two-hour limousine @ \$58 an hour, he will show me the places of his childhood. He keeps reception on their toes by placing the call for the limo in a camp voice. *Hello, this is Tiny Tim here...*

The limo arrives. Our driver’s name is Arvie.

‘Ah Broadway,’ says Tiny, as we drive away. ‘This is where the late *George Gershwin* used to live in 1919. *Ted Lewis* - one of the kings of jazz in 1919-1929 also lived up there. Also *Frankie Lyman* of the *Teenagers* lived up there.

And the late great *Freddy Prinze* who used to be a star in the 70s. *George Raft* used to dance at the *Autobahn Ballroom* in 1922. So we're passing a neighbourhood where a lot of celebrities from 1918 lived.

'This is Upper Manhattan?'

'This is Mid-Lower Manhattan. Upper Manhattan is where we are going. Over here is the *Beacon Theatre* where they still have Rock acts but back in 1940 it was a movie house. In fact everything here was movies back in the late 30s and the 40s when movies were the biggest thing in the world.

'In 1935, this was one of the greatest neighbourhoods in this country. Back in 1937 the greatest comic strip in the world was *Dick Tracy*. Ooh, there was nothing but Dick Tracy! I was one of the few that did not like him. My favourite comic in 1937 was *Mutt and Jeff*. *Nancy* by Ernie Bushmiller. I don't know if you remember Nancy? And also I liked *Loony Tunes* with *Porky Pig* and *Bugs Bunny*.

'Anyway, this whole area here in 1935 was strictly movies and the chicken-type markets. Now we're heading into Harlem. These project homes were starting to be built in 1957. The blacks started to settle here from 1904 but by 1920 a good portion of blacks were already situated in Harlem. *The Cotton Club* was near here, I don't know exactly where. By 1920 this was really starting to move. My mother used to work around here in 1955.' We drive a little further.

'I used to go to school right over here in 1937. I went there for about six months in 1936-37. I used to live on Amsterdam Avenue at 147th Street. This is 141st Street, right? We're talking 1935-36, mostly everything was white up here.

'Over there where it says *Beverages* was the *RKO Hamilton*. That's where I saw *Snow White* in 1937. It was a great theatre at the time, it's all gone now.

'You're also passing the biggest coke area in this country. This is the biggest uptown coke area in the world.'

‘What about Greenwich Village?’

‘Not Greenwich Village! You might find transients down there, but over here is the biggest coke-drug area in the whole world.

‘So if I walked here I’d get beaten up?’

‘If you walk around here you have a wing and a prayer and good shoes to run, ha ha ha!’

‘You know, this store used to be here for years under another name. This was here for over 50 years, this store. Unbelievable but it’s true. That Candy Store that says *Toys and Cards* - the original owner was here since 1935. And it’s still here! This is the *American Indian Museum* on the left here. Over there, down there is *Sugar Lane* - used to be a beautiful territory. The very wealthy used to live down that area.

‘This is West Broadway. *The Olympia Florist* was here for more than 60 years. When Rudi Vallee was a star in 1931, this place was here. The Olympia Florist is a landmark of this area.

‘Now as you go beyond 162nd Street, here’s where I lived in 1942. In 1941-42 this is where I bought early issues of *Marvel Comics*, *Planet Comics*, *Jungle Comics*, *The Ranger*, *Captain America* and *Prize Comics*. In 1940 comics were the biggest thing in this country - now Mr Arvie, if you don’t mind we’ll turn left here. This is where I lived. This is the block I lived on. I lived in this white house here with my parents - may they rest in peace. I lived here from ’42. My parents lived here at 601 West on 163rd Street. This is the place. Two houses here on the right hand side was where George Gershwin lived for a while in 1919.

‘This is 601 West, 163rd. That’s exactly where I lived from 1942 to 1967. My parents lived here til 1981. Right here.

‘That door?’

‘You can take a picture if you want, Mr Tarlin.’

'You've got a good memory,' sparks Arvie.

'Thank you. You can't forget certain things. Things that are close to you, you can't forget.'

'You born in New York?'

'Yes.'

'Cos you know better it than me.'

'Where are you from?'

'Israel.'

'Listen, if I went *there* I wouldn't know anything,' Tiny laughs.

'Charleston Court?' I read, above the pale blue lintel.

'Yes. At one time it used to have elevator men. It used to have everything. And I used to live in Apartment 1B, and then we moved up. In fact, I think this is the original gate which was put in here in 1950. This whole area was very wealthy, of course it's all changed. Down here is where I played Kerb Ball. I used to hit it off the stoop, a little kerb - four on a team. I'll never forget it.'

'I'll never forget it either, Tiny.'

'Turn right here and we're going up to Broadway again where I will show you some very historical mementos. I had friends in this block too, they used to call me *Herbie* ha ha ha. Wow, they used to call me Herbie. They left me out of the games, but so what? Who cares?'

'You were here from 1942-1967?'

'Yes.'

‘You travelled from here to Greenwich Village to play gigs?’

‘That’s right.’

‘How?’

‘With a subway. But this has all changed now, boy has it changed! On the right you see the famous *Autobahn Ballroom*. This is where Malcolm X got shot in 1965. It used to be the most famous movie house in the Heights.’

I see a great big building with white pillars, boarded up. There is a Cuban flag, a Rasta flag and some other red, white and blue flag that I don’t recognise. Messy spray can graffiti tags the building, of course.

‘Did you see the sign, *Malcolm X Lives?*’

‘I missed it, but that’s where George Raft danced. On the left side this used to be the *Yankees Stadium* back in 1902.’

‘They’re the Bad Guys, right?’

‘Well, to me they are.’

‘Back in 1945 this was the most prestigious building of its kind. It’s all changed as you can see. It all used to be Jewish here. Jewish and Italian. We’re in Upper Heights. I can show you where *Dr Ruth* still lives. Dr Ruth is the famous sex doctor. She’s about 85 and talks of sex.’

He shows me a church in Edgecombe Avenue where he met a beautiful girl in 1935. He shows me where Reverend Ike preaches, where he saw Errol Flynn in 1940, where the RKO Colosseum was, the site of the old *Heights Theatre*, the location of the Stamp Store, and the George Washington High School from which he was expelled for calling the headmaster an ‘old man’.

‘We’re going to my wife’s house, then to 42nd, and then up to where I was discovered on 46th.’

‘Have you and Miss Jan ever lived together?’

‘Well here and there, but never really,’ he shrugs.

‘You met her here in New York?’

‘Sure did - 1983 at the Williams Club.’

‘Is it okay with you if I give Mr Stinson a call later on?’

‘Call him any time you want, it don’t bother me.’

‘I’ll explain the problem about the money and...’

‘And he’ll give you a million excuses. If you really want to make a call, you call Bernie Bishop. He’s listed in the book in Dixon Tennessee. You want the real story, you call Bernie Bishop.’

‘Stinson told me that he has poured \$150,000 into that project.’

‘Call up Bernie Bishop and see who put the money up.’

‘I have T-Bone as a witness,’ I insist. ‘Stinson said he bought out Bernie Bishop’s rights to the record, though he does keep referring to “his people” everytime there’s a major decision.’

‘Maybe he did, maybe he didn’t,’ Tiny shrugs. ‘But Bernie Bishop was the main money man. Who’s T-Bone?’

‘Well, I reckon I should still give Stinson a call, if that’s okay with you.’

‘Please. He’s a fantastic talker. Be careful yourself. He sounds good when he talks. But it’s *deeds* that count and there’s no \$1500 here. It’s a matter of principle. When he puts it down, we start to talk.’

‘He should do exactly that and then release *Tiger By The Tail*,’ I enthuse.

‘That’s one of the best ones on the album. He’s a brilliant man. Another genius,’ he sighs.

Then he addresses Mr Arvie, ‘We’ll turn on the right side of 42nd Street and we’ll go up to Miss Jan’s block, then I’ll show you where I was discovered on 46th and we can take it from there...’.

As we approach her house, Tiny looks increasingly nervous. ‘Right here - 257! Where this white building is - oh-oh, this guy may be waiting for her.’ There’s a guy having a smoke on the sidewalk.

‘Who knows who she’s with, but that’s where she lives,’ he smiles uneasily.

‘We can now turn right and go straight to 42nd about 7th Street towards 8th and I’ll show you where I played *Hubert’s Museum*.

‘Is Hubert’s anything now?’

‘*Anything* is right. That museum was there since the 1920s. I got that job in 1957. That’s when I sang with the high voice. Boy time flies.

‘What happened to the other people who were there with you?’

‘You mean the Elephant Lady? And the man who played *Anchors Away* on 10 glasses? And also Professor Hubert’s trained Flea Circus - 25 fleas dancing to music - among other acts? They were freaks of nature.’

‘Only a week. I was there only a week, my friend...’, he says – implying that I shouldn’t get too excited about his short-term billing as the Human Canary.

‘We’ll now turn into 42nd. They play chess here on the streets. Now where it says *Private Booths, Peepland, Multi-video booths...*’

I can see the black building with the tacky lights and a big yellow and red eye as a logo. There’s nothing special about it – it’s neither run down nor run up.

‘That’s where *Hubert’s Museum* was,’ he says as we pull over so that I can take a picture.

A young black guy spots Tiny Tim in the limo, ‘Tiny Tim! Want some weed?’

‘Oh, I never smoke that,’ he replies with a brush of the hand. ‘Thank you, ha ha ha.’ And the dude goes away.

‘Over here is the *Port of Authority Bus Terminal*. You want to keep away from that place. This is where the homeless have their homes, unfortunately in cardboard boxes. We’re now going to *Steve Paul’s Scene*, where I was discovered. This is 9th Avenue... no no, keep going ... past that parking lot.

‘And the Scene was ... boy, where the heck was it? Keep going, keep going. This is where the Scene was, right here.’ And he points to a black door next to a gift shop.

‘You mean that downstairs door?’ It looks like the sidedoor of an Aussie pub where they roll the beer barrels in. It’s couple of steps down from the sidewalk. There is plenty of dirt and graffiti on the walls. Pigeon shit everywhere. I can’t imagine this place being trendy, then again – I never saw it from inside. In 1966.

‘Yep,’ Tiny sighs. ‘Jim Morrison played here before he became a star. The Young Rascals too...this was the in-place.

‘How did you get along with Morrison?’

‘Before he became a star he offered me a song he wrote. It was called, *People Are Strange*. And the next week *Light My Fire* was a big hit. When he was here, you couldn’t get in - even before he charted. The women would go crazy over him.

‘He was a very good looking man,’ I admit.

‘One of the best looking men I’ve ever seen. Unfortunately, he passed away. The Lord gives, the Lord taketh away. Praise be the name of the Lord. I tell you ... whatever the gift is, you have it for a season. Once it goes...’.

We remain together until 6.00pm. He is anxious to watch the Dodgers – his baseball team – they play tonight at 8.30.

I must fulfil my promise to Joel and buy that Powell Peralta skate deck, which I pick up at The Paragon near the Village. In the Village, I also buy the Sgt Peppers picture disk for \$15 – it's worth \$75 in Australia - then I come back to the hotel and eat.

In my room, I drink some of that bloody Jim Beam and I phone Stinson.

'Good morning Lowell, how are you this morning son?'

'Like a monk. But we won't talk about my sex life.'

'Ah ha ha ha! Well you've got things timed right on the money, oh Lord. Within the next couple of days I'm going to execute. Now Lowell - if you can – make an attempt to speak with Martin and here's what I would like to do once I get Tiny straightened out this week.

'I think it would be wise to work toward getting a reliable honest record label in Australia to pick up on it because I can furnish everything. I think we can all do well with this – Martin, you, me, Tiny – everybody – if it's handled totally above board and with an honest effort.'

'I don't want to seem indelicate Stinson, but what about the \$1500?' my tone is clipped and tense.

'Just give me a couple more days to see where my situation is. Legal work does not go rapidly,' says Stinson. 'Haw haw haw son, you know how it is...the other thing I am very aware of – and in a sense this is dangerous – you know how Tiny is when you tell him something? You need to be reasonably accurate when you execute because he gets tripping on things. So you just sit tight until the close of the week and I shall call you at home. Meantime put your efforts into seeking an approved label in Australia. When you get home send me a kangaroo and a few koalas. Have you ever heard of a Darwin Stubbie?'

'I sure have.'

‘I need about 10 of them now! Haw haw haw! I’ll catch you later.’

Before falling asleep, I phone Marlon Fitzwater’s answering machine at the White House and tell him the fucken American Minister for Small Business – or whatever he’s called – has missed out on a golden opportunity to be featured on the front page of a small Australian newsletter. Cop that shithead.

10

Saturday 5 October

There’s still half a litre of Jim Beam left in the flagon. I pack it between my suits. If it didn’t get smashed between Nashville and New York, hell – it can surely make it back to Sydney.

I tell the cabbie to take me to the airport. He takes me to Newark.

I hand my ticket across and I am told I’m at the wrong airport, I should be at JFK.

‘Wrong airport? How many have you got?’

‘Three.’

‘Shit.’

Never mind. They send me to LA via Dallas – where Americans really do dress as Texans – and finally I get to LA hours before my flight.

I hail a cab, chuck all my luggage in the boot and say, ‘Take me to Venice Beach’. I go to the hippie shops, where I buy Robert Crumb comix and Death cigarettes. But on the beach itself – I get glared at for smoking because I don’t know that in LA – possibly California - I’m not allowed to smoke in the open air. Every bugger is Body Beautiful and I feel like trash. I feel guilty for my imperfections. I’m short Black Coffee and they are Orange Juice.

I hate being alone at airports. Every time you want to pee you have to take all your luggage with you.

I run into Lisl and her Dad briefly. 'How was Canada?'

'Good. How was your trip?'

'Well there was this bank robber...'

Eventually I get the Qantas flight home. I'm desperate to see my family to give them the gifts I have bought. With the skateboard and the perfume I'm about to buy, I know I'm all trumps – but does Amber still like the Cure? Will Zoë like her Mickey?

An Aussie mum with kid on her lap wants to sleep. I've got nothing to do, so I nurse her 3-year old. I entertain the kid for three hours over the Pacific Ocean while she grabs a sleep – he's a classic! Scotch after scotch, with this interesting little child on my knee.

Amber, Joel and Lex meet me at the airport. I have to queue for ages, being on a British passport, remember? In my bag I am carrying the spoils of victory: a Powell Peralta skate deck with a New York design not yet seen in Australia, a Cure t-shirt, a Mickey Mouse, a made-in-India Nashville shirt, a Manuel Brothers cassette tape featuring all their best songs, a Sgt Peppers picture disk, a Barry Maguire album, a metal Crucified Christ and a jug of Jim Beam about a quarter full (this time, properly packed). At the duty free shop I pick up a Chanel perfume called *Coco* for Robbie.

'Let's grab a few croissants and the Sunday papers and head for home,'

'It's Monday Dad,' says Amber.

'Whatever happened to Sunday?' Suddenly I feel extremely tired.

11

Sunday 10 May 1992

70

Joel and I go to the video shop and hire *The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James*.

That's T-Bone all right, on screen for at least two seconds, dressed in brown and admitting people into the courthouse with that hand gesture.

Strange to see him on the side of the cops.

