

The Further Adventures of Stanwyck – Your Necessary Diversion from the Ascension of Il Douche



Hello legions. It's been a while.

Today marks a transition. Obama to Trump. This is a damnably bitter pill to swallow.



FFS

I barely slept last night. When I did sleep, I dreamt of a three-headed beast terrorizing me and my family. A little too on the nose, really.

Whaddyagonnado?

Here's a mild palliative, a little something something that might amuse you. Bitter Southerner ran my piece about the Art Basel Miami Beach fair last Tuesday. It was nicely received, with a fair amount of enthusiasm about my trusty sidekick, Stanwyck. (If you haven't read it yet, go ahead on: you have even more good fun to distract you from reality.)

Here's an outtake, a part of the tale that did not make the final cut. Consider it lagniappe. Hope it makes today's harsh medicine easier to take.



The All American Event Attenders

At the lower end of Ocean Drive are hordes of easily recognizable rubes from away – like me! – prime targets for aggressive shillery. Smart people walk down the beach side of Ocean Drive relatively unmolested, but the landward sidewalk is a treacherous gauntlet of garish sidewalk cafes, each with

its own bass-heavy soundtrack, volume set to stun, and a stadium's worth of neon and LED lights programmed to trigger seizures, all the better to help the customer realize how much fun she is or should be having. Employees – buff and exhibitionist – entice innocent wanderers with touts for two-for-one specials and all day happy hours. Thus did I find myself in front of a half-gallon of something that tasted vaguely like after-shave. It was delicious.

At this other end of the barfly spectrum, we found our bliss in a bucket-sized liver-ripper called the CoronaRita. It is apparently a favorite of some creature named Snooki.



Definitely NOT Stanwyck

What's in it? So glad you asked. Dump a can of citrusy soda, a can of frozen lime concentrate, and 12 oz. of crap tequila in a plastic fishbowl. Garnish with two upended bottles of Corona and a couple of jumbo straws. This drink makes the Hurricanes on Bourbon Street seem quaint.

Judgement: 12 shots of tequila and two beers in one serving, the CoronaRita is the ugliest enticement to vomitous excess I have ever seen.

I ordered one immediately.

The Bourbon Street analogy is apt. There is equivalent desperation at play among both employees and their marks. The vendors occupy some of the most expensive real estate around, and even at \$42 for a jumbo fruity liquor drink, survival hinges on serving vast amounts of event-attenders vast quantities of near-toxic comestibles. The marks are themselves determined to have fun, dammit. The exchange is relentlessly logical.

Stanwyck ordered a martini, naturally, slightly dirty. Eighteen bucks. A bargain. It came in a red plastic martini glass. She was Not. Fucking. Amused.

"Drink up," I slurred cheerily, certain that her ether stash was close hand.

Stanwyck glared. If looks could kill.

"You drink it. I got my pride," she says. And she does, you know. She does. She dumped her plasticini into my drink bucket. "When are we gonna see some art, anyway? Watching you drink that thing might be performance...but it pure sure ain't art."

Everybody's a critic. I went to work on my fishbowl – with martini booster – straining to ignore the glare of sheer hatred Stanwyck was throwing my way. It was Kigali all over again.

The rest of the night was a blurred swirl of Bosch-like hallucinations. More. Bigger. Louder. Splashier.

There was the Corona Electric Beach Party, with special guest DJ Matoma (yeah, I don't know either), just steps from our café. Security looked lax. I crawled atop The Cleveland Hotel's poolside roof to join the shimmy-shimmy dancers in their matching yellow spandex outfits.



The moment YN was seized by the terpsichorean muse

The crowd roared approval, but the bouncers frowned on my lithely gyrations. Cazart! Miami Beach might have a reputation as a fun-loving place, but the choke holds from those ruffians tell another tale.

I awoke near dawn amongst the other rough sleepers in Lummus Park. I was no more than 75 feet from my hotel. My pockets were emptied and my shoes were gone. This was where Stanwyck had left me to my fantods. Damn her.

While Your Narrator slept, Stanwyck claims that Heidi Klum dared her to arm wrestle Venus Williams at the *Miami Beach Magazine* gala. She sipped bubbly out of Pitbull's slippers at the Dom Perignon bash. The Bombay Sapphire Gin shindig, the Perrier party, the Perrier-Jouët soirees. She says she got into them all.

I sez she's a liar. She smiles quietly to herself. Over a

breakfast of eggs, sausage, and, for me, another CoronaRita, she flashes her phone. Pics of Stanwyck and Paris. Stanwyck and Sarah Jessica. Stanwyck and Madonna! She knows a move or two, that Stanwyck.

One more. Stanwyck and Clooney.

Damn her.

My Favorite World #13



Mardi Gras from the Inside

My Favorite World always has a bit of New Orleans in the mix, even when it doesn't, which isn't often, and even then, it does. So for Ash Wednesday, this raw journal entry recounting the time Your Narrator marched as a member of Krewe du Mishigas in the Krewe du Vieux parade.

We pick up the journey as the Narrator and She Who Makes Me Better arrive at the staging warehouse in the Marigny on the afternoon of the parade, Feb 3, 2007.

... and stayed there until 4:30 when our host drove us to the Den of Muses in Architect Alley. This is a huge, old warehouse

A photograph of a brick structure at night, resembling a tower. It has several cylindrical sections with text like "A SAFER SMARTER STRONGER" and "Krewe du Mischigas Rebuilds the Tower of Babble". A sign on the brick base reads "OY!! WHAT A MESS".

This place is a Fellini set on mushrooms. Huge bits of floats from years past hang from the ceilings – oversized papier mache busts of Peewee Herman, Bush, Nixon, local politicians, not to mention the anatomically (extremely) incorrect sculptures of semi-private body bits. A very colorful and lively setting. In the middle of this, a brass band led by the esteemed Trombone Shorty. These guys can get a crowd cooking.



And this crowd was well cooked

All around us, hundreds of creatively festooned paraders, with lots of food and drink, and the aroma of cigars (cheap *and* Cubano), patchouli, and high-grade pot wafting on the breeze.

There are vendors hawking shrimp and oyster po'boys, bowls of jambalaya and gumbo,<fn>A po'boy is a traditional sandwich on a loaf of French bread with lettuce, tomato, ketchup, pickles

and mustard, with some kind of meat that is usually deep-fried. It is truly heaven on a stick. Jambalaya and gumbo are traditional Cajun dishes, the first a rice based casserole and the other a stew, usually filled with seafood and other delights. When done well, there is no better food anywhere. Period. All of these foods were originally poor peoples' food, true folk dishes. Now you can pay bookoo bucks at linen napkin restaurants to eat like a pauper.</fn> huge bags of strung beads to toss to parade watchers, pocket-sized bottles of liquor, and several essentials that fall outside the legal economy. Heavy local TV coverage.

It is fucking cold, and I am under about five layers of clothes. We wander around a bunch to stay warm, checking all the other floats and krewe costumes because once the parade begins all you really see is your Krewe<fn>And the ass of your asses.</fn> and the passing parade route. Sort of an inverted viewing of a parade, if that makes any sense. At one point, someone stops She Who to verify that it is really her – one of her students! So come Monday, J will either be known as the coolest prof in her domain or will be typecast as a representative of the pointy-headed liberal elite, some sort of demented, libertine queen of debauché leading our youth down the primrose path of Sodom and freethinking secularism. Maybe both. The pink wig was certainly an eye-popper. Here we are *en regalia*.



The prettiest accident
victim you ever saw



A pair of Jewish
carpenters

Finally, at 6:30, we move to the beginning of the parade route, where we stand and wait and apply some more special cough syrup while the handlers lead in the mules<fn> KdV is the only parade that still uses mules for float propulsion. This is both a feature and a challenge. Mules are testy beasts, and we were repeatedly warned that i) they kick, and ii) they bite. They are also highly flatulent and have efficient intestinal function that produce copious steaming piles. Figure a dozen mules in the parade, and our team next to last in line, and you can well imagine that we did a lot of fancy stepping to avoid the mule memories. Mules also have a tendency to stop and back up without reason or warning. On the other hand, there were no nasty diesel fumes, and the humble mule is certainly more true to the tradition of Mardi Gras.</fn> and hitch them to the floats. Then more waiting, and it is getting verry fucking colder.<fn>At this point, mid-30s. By end of the parade, 27*.</fn> Another nip of special cough syrup to stave off the cold.

By this time, all the brass bands are in place. Several of the best bands are here – Treme, the Original Hurricane Brass Band, Trombone Shorty's gang, this bunch.



Paulin Brothers Brass Band

Our krewe hired NOLA's only marching klezmer band, the Panorama Jazz Band. I did not know about this ahead of time,

and when they started a traditional second-line drum beat, I expected the traditional good stuff. Instead, trumpets, saxes, alto horns, tubas, and clarinets began wailing an improvisation in a harmonic minor mode, Eastern European in maximus, and then hit the most jaw-dropping ensemble passage I've ever heard on the streets of New Orleans. This team was ace, and even had several women players,<fn>Especially the incendiary Aurora Nealand. Look her up.</fn> which is pretty rare in the brass band world.<fn>Panorama has since become one of my NOLA faves. And the presence of wymmins in the second line is not quite the rare sight it was then.</fn>

Finally, we begin marching at 7:15. I'm not certain exactly where we are,<fn>SOP for carnival season.</fn> but I eventually suss that we began in the Bywater area and thread through Marigny. Crossing Esplanade, I recognize our route as we forge ahead through the French Quarter to end at the Central Business District and the State Palace Theatre where the ball is underway. But that's getting the float ahead of the mule.

The crowds in Bywater and Marigny are mostly residents. Lots of people on their front porches and balconies, and very cool crowds in the streets clamoring for beads and trinkets, which we tossed with abandon. Occasionally I would notice a stunning old building like this one.



Hail Krewe!

Peering through one window, I spot a wall of oversized stuffed heads of cartoon characters watching us sashay. No idea what the place was about, but it is somehow an appropriate audience to view our passage.

One of our krewe's trademarks is handing out painted and decorated bagels, so in-the-know revelers know to shout out for these. We also toss beads and bubble gum, fake nose toys, party cups, wooden nickels, and tiny dreidels. Judy received an airline-sized bottle of bourbon in return for a special bagel. More cough syrup.

Once in the French Quarter<fn> Krewe du Vieux is the only parade that still traverses the French Quarter. The narrow streets of the Quarter cannot handle the kinds of crowds that show up for the later parades. </fn>, the mood got very boisterous and the crowds were much bigger. Scores of people hanging from the balconies, the crowd was 10-15 deep in spots. Lots of kisses exchanged for beads and bagels, the occasional naked breast proffered<fn>Hey, Mister!</fn> and heavy excitement over the Tower of Babble's offerings of Double-Bubble Babble Gum. Basically, a great exchange of goodwill energy. I am typically nervous in big crowds, being that a crowd is never more than a turn or two away from becoming a mob. But not tonight. The crowd is generally generous, festive, and filled with joy. Several times, She Who got the crowd going with a chant of "Oy!" For my usually-reticent wife, this is quite something.

Lots of good humor mixed with lingering resentment at the poor performance of local and national government post-Katrina. This pervades all of life in NOLA these days, and it is only natural that the parade theme (Habitat for Insanity – Rebuilding the Tower of Babble) would reflect this.

This parade in particular reflects the "real" New Orleans, and

the locals know this is one of the parades that is a must-see during the season. For one thing, the krewes in this parade builds all the floats without professional help.<fn>Some of the 'bigger' krewes spend up to \$40,000 to have their floats built by a local specialty business. These are enormous constructions that can carry several dozen people. Member fees for these krewes can run into the five-figure range. By comparison, it cost us less than \$350 for the whole season, and that included the babysitter to keep our kids while we marched.</fn> And because it comes so far ahead of Fat Tuesday (the peak of the tourista invasion), it is pretty close to a locals-only event. This helps tamp down the wretched excess that accompanies the later parades...this night was simply about excess.

But it was also about joy, and shared community, and resilience and tragedy. Because the roots of Mardi Gras stem from the deep Catholic culture here, originally a big 3-week celebration of the prevailing *carpe diem* of NOLA before the more sober re-assessment and reflection that accompanies the Lenten season. And because reflection here inevitably leads to contemplation of the loss and horror of Katrina – with all the attendant challenges of dealing with the breakdown of systems like garbage collection and public safety, not to mention the greed-soaked and sloth-like responses of government at all levels.



Vast parts of New Orleans still look like this – this is the house where my grandmother lived when I was a wee sprite

So for these few weeks (and especially at these earlier parades and the other krewes that are less geared for the tourist industry), this is a community that comes together for a rolling thunder of celebration of what remains the most distinctive civic culture in the United States; and a living memorial for all that was lost; and finally, at essence, a mass prayer for what is possible and what could be.

After the parade, we visited the Krewe Ball at the State Theatre on Canal for about ten minutes. Too crowded, too grungy, too loud. Fittingly for this post-Katrina realm, the bathrooms flooded and there were 4-5 inches of standing water everywhere except the balcony. Not even Ziggy Modeliste and George Porter on the stage could keep us there. We were sensorially overloaded, and had been on our feet for 7 hours, small bits frozen, so we left and found some food and a drink. Alas, the world's very worst blues band began playing (they were ugly, sounded like shit, and were very loud), and we bailed quickly and returned to Chez V to tumble abed at 1 a.m.

This morning, coffee and breakfast and enjoying some quiet time with our friends. And for the past little while, typing this report, hoping to convey some of the essence of a really marvelous and rare experience. I'm not a New Orleans insider, but I have been privileged to see this magnificent celebration from the inside.

My Favorite World.