



Bags of Fun!

(more from David's adventures in London ...)

This week and next, let's have another couple of episodes continuing the thread of the story of my year in London after dropping out of university. In some of the previous episodes I mentioned busking at the Royal Festival Hall, and I suppose it's time to let you know how that 'career' came to an end ...

As the autumn wore on, it started to become apparent that playing flute outdoors on an exposed riverbank had certain drawbacks. It started to get very cold ... Playing flute with gloves on is next to impossible, but I found that by cutting off just the tips of the fingers, I could fashion a pair that would keep my hands from freezing completely.

One night, when the weather had been bad for a number of days running, I cast about for an alternate location to the river-front plaza; a place where I could play under cover, but still catch the stream of concertgoers. I found that patrons for the concert hall also approached the building from the large Waterloo Station located a short distance away in a different direction, walking through a series of covered walkways ... The largest of these walkways was sited just at the exit from the station, and I thought that if I played there, then I could 'catch' not only concertgoers, but also large numbers of people going about other business.

I gave it a try one evening, but hadn't been playing for more than a couple of minutes when I suddenly found myself face to face with two rather unfriendly listeners to my concert ... two 'bobbies', London policemen. All these years later, I can't remember what it was they said to me, but a minute later there I was, briefcase under my arm, walking between the two of them as we made our way towards the local police station. I was being 'taken in'.

And I can certainly remember what I was thinking. Are they going to make me phone my parents? What am I going to say ... "Uh, hi Dad! How are things? Good, good! Say, I've got a little problem here ... I've ... uh ... I've just been arrested ... No, no I'm not joking ... I've been arrested for vagrancy. They want you to come over and bail me out ..." Were these policemen going to put me in jail? Me, in jail? Would I have to go to court? What was going to happen now ...

As it turned out, I never was to find out what they had in mind for me. We didn't make it to the police station. No, I didn't make a dramatic escape, suddenly running away; I was rescued by ... of all people, a bag lady. This woman materialized suddenly in front of us, and started asking the bobbies a number of questions: Why were they taking me in? What had I done? It now seems inconceivable to me that they even talked to her, instead of just pushing her aside and continuing on, but they did. And not only did they talk to her, but after a couple of minutes of 'negotiation', they released me ... into her care. She grabbed me by the arm and steered me into a nearby tea shop in the station concourse, and they moved off and continued on their rounds.

It was like some kind of weird dream. Here I was, sipping a glass of murky tea together with a real live bag lady, a disgustingly dirty bag lady, complete with a trolley of gigantic bags of junk. I couldn't imagine which

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>

was worse, to be in custody of the two policemen on the way to the station, or to be with her. I vaguely remember her as being quite amiable, and concerned about my welfare. Did I have any money? A place to sleep? But my overwhelming desire was just to get away from there; to get away from her, away from the policemen, away from that place ... just get back to my room ... Eventually, I was able to break away, thank her for the 'rescue' and the tea, and get home, pockets empty, but full of relief at not having to make that phone call to Canada.

I never busked again. I learned about a 'labour exchange' near Charing Cross Station, and to support myself, started going there Monday mornings, signing on as a casual labourer for a week at a time, a new job in a new location every week. Thinking back to these events now, I suppose that little 'run-in' with the police was a good experience to have had. It cured me of 'begging', got me off the streets and into more gainful employment, and certainly left me determined not to ever get on the wrong side of the law ever again.

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>