

Summer of '83

As Told By Steve Welling

There were a lot of great days in Eureka's Summer of 1983. On one of them, I had everything going for me. I had just graduated from high school, the weather was beautiful, and I was going with a friend (I'll call him John, since that was his name) to play some jazz music at Merriman's Restaurant on Moonstone Beach. Derek Senestraro, Ward De Witt and a few others from the EHS jazz band would be waiting there to join us. This was a unique gig in all my life's performing experience; we were going to get paid.

We had to turn back at one point to pick up some gear I had forgotten. John was trying to make up time in his little Honda Civic. Then came an awkward moment when we passed a Highway Patrol car going the other way. I was thinking: "If we get a ticket, it's on me." I felt a knot in my stomach as we watched the CHP flip on his party lights, very deliberately cross the meridian and begin pursuit.

But getting a ticket was the farthest thing from John's mind. "Sorry about this, but I already have a couple of judgements against me and I can't afford a ticket". I didn't know what a 'judgement' was but I was totally OK with him keeping this new part of his life to himself. Then he said something under his breath which I couldn't quite make out but the feeling it conveyed to me was "They'll never take me alive."

Without asking me how I felt about any of this, I find myself barreling down California's Highway 101 at 110 MPH in John's Honda Civic. Thankfully, the weaving around cars going 50 MPH slower than we were ended when John took the next exit. We found ourselves entering a quiet, or at least previously quiet, neighborhood. John slams on his brakes and pulls immediately into the carport of the first house. "Get down!" he said. He obviously had more experience at this high speed chase thing than I did, so I followed his example and reclined my seat, all the way and leaned back. Sure enough, a CHP comes blaring right past us, lights and sirens ablaze. I'm counting in my mind. After just 5 seconds of ridiculously intense silence, John powers out of the carport, and gets us back on 101 North.

We stuck to the posted speed for the rest of the way. Neither of us said a single word. When we finally reached the exit to the restaurant, he turned at me and smiled a nervous "OK, I guess we're clear".

We arrived at the gig with just a few minutes to spare to set up. A fine summer day turned into a wonderful summer evening, as I played along with but mostly listened to one of my favorite musicians, John Majors. I will never forget the time when he drove his car like a wild man un-chained. But he could also drive a band and its audience anywhere he wanted, with his saxophone. That night it was to the beat of the waves, as they rolled in at Moonstone Beach. If you're out there, John, thanks for those memories. And please drive carefully '(-).