

## Supplement to the 2021 Winter Solstice Abbot's Report submitted by Brother Nom de Plume (Sean Poole)

North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina --- December 2021

Greetings, Brothers!

I traveled to Tune Town in October at the behest of Alala Linda Alvarez to attend the life celebration of her late husband Richard P. Alvarez with whom I shared some history. We met at KODA 99FM in Houston in the late '70s. We performed together at TRF in a variety of stage and path shows. We wrote a novel titled "The Saga". It remains unpublished.

We partnered with Taso Stavrakis in 1985 to produce a dramatic short movie. Shot entirely on location, on broadcast quality video equipment in and around TRF's Guild Hall, it first collected rejection slips then dust for more than a decade.

Ric digitized the original ¾" VHS tapes in 2002. Using an AVID editing system he re-mastered a digital version on disc, designed a label and began submitting our sword and sandal epic to film festivals nationwide.

"Half Of Everything: A Tale From The Crimson Clover Tavern" won awards at the Utah Film Festival and at World Fest Houston in 2003.

Ric Alvarez was one of the foundational talents whose contributions to a show set a high standard for performance and production values in the Renaissance Festival business. Best known on the Ren Faire circuit as a swordsman, jousting and combat choreographer, Ric was a prolific writer and a regular award winner on the independent film festival circuit for much of his career. He cranked out scripts, screenplays and short stories. His novel titled "The Christmas Closet" is a haunting and nostalgic story well worth the read.

From the beginning our friendship was creatively driven, collaborative, competitive and contentious. I loved him like a brother. He was one of the first people to buy a picture from me when I started painting in 2014.

We last spoke in September 2020. We hadn't talked in a year. We enjoyed a wide ranging conversation on many topics. He had irons in the fire and sounded happy. We did not speak of Papa Hemingway or Hunter S. Thompson. I've not yet wrapped my mind around his abrupt departure.

Ric left us on 11/12/20. Grief and shock impact his family and friends daily.

Alala Linda scheduled the memorial for Saturday 10/23/21, the first day of Pirate Weekend at TRF. A passage of time seemed the only way to assuage the pain before a memorial could be properly observed.

The Benevolent Order's Monk reunion shindig in 2016 was the occasion of my last visit to Ren Faire Drive. I cooked at Nuevo Chile in 2011 but I've not set foot on the festival site since 2007.

Brother Chutzpah picked me up at the Houston Airport on Tuesday 10/19. We met my son Ian at a Mexican joint in the Woodlands. We feasted on tacos and planned our itinerary. Bro C offered to put me and Ian up in style at the Faux Real Ranch. She was leaving town that weekend to manage a yoga retreat. Ian and I were assigned to pet sit her fur babies Jack and Sally. Serendipity was in full effect. I was happily anticipating crossing paths with dear friends some of whom I'd not seen in years.

Brother Chutzpah grieves deeply for Dave Shepard her beloved husband, creative collaborator and closest friend for more than 40 years. Cindy grieves yet she is not sad. Dave was a blessed creature whose light illuminated the lives of all of us who are fortunate enough to have known him. The art work Dave Shepard designed and executed for King George Coulam, on both sides of the highway, set a visual standard at TRF and in KG's personal art collection.

Dave's happy ghost haunts his studio and the grounds of the Faux Real Ranch with a palpable presence. His aura emanates from decades of his art work in every stage of development from inception to decay. Eye candy abounds inside and out everywhere you look. Airbrush Dave has left the building but his spirit remains!

A distressing number of beloved friends who were road Rennies or denizens of Tune Town have departed this mortal plane since last I saw the streets of old Todd Mission five years and one pandemic ago. In addition to Ric and Dave we've lost Gus Stavrakis. Bill Potter. Johnny Fox. Bob Bielefeld. Ted King. Jerome Smith. Marshall and Lynn Ritz. Clark Orwick. Joe Babcock. John Myers. Billy McCray. Daoud Thompson. The list goes on. It is overwhelming. I wanted to renew ties with as many of those still on this side of the daisies as I could find.

Don E. White generously loaned me his golf cart on Wednesday and Thursday. I thanked him profusely. We had a safety meeting and I took off, cruising Ren Faire Drive to Spam Blvd. On my last visit Cindy and John Myers cooked a delicious meal and hosted me with an evening of eats and chat. This time I was greeted by Jim and Joyce Lillquist who call Spam Blvd home when in Tune Town. Cindy Myers introduced me to her brother Bill Bills. Hugs and howdies were exchanged all around.

On our previous visit Cindy and John had not yet begun to construct their new grain silo conversion house - the Bindominium- but the plans were in John's head. Like many of us over the past few years I've been following the hard working Kevin Hunt online as he demonstrates a supreme act of love and friendship by completing the construction in which John was immersed until his final breath.

Cindy Myers and brother Bill Bills gave me the grand tour. And it was GRAND!

None of the photos I'd seen on Facebook had prepared me for the true scope and complexity of the engineering and construction involved in converting a corrugated tin grain silo into a palatial home. Kevin Hunt has MAD skills.

The monumental volume of the structure with its cylindrical geometry presents logistical problems that would challenge any knowledgeable and experienced journeyman carpenter that ever built a Ren Faire booth.

The inimitable Mr. Hunt analyzes and solves those problems with intuition, invention and finesse. He is bringing to reality the hard earned dream of a departed friend with passion like a metaphor. Like a metaphor for bona fide love, loyalty, energy and devotion as made manifest with blood and sweat and hard labor. Kevin is a blessed creature. His light illuminates us all.

On Saturday morning Ian and I hit the TRF site half an hour after the opening cannon. Phillip Perry and Rhonni DuBose introduced us to Louis M, the man who runs the rickshaw concession. Louis assigned us a driver named Red. We struck a deal to have Red haul us around the show until closing time for a nominal fee plus beer and tips. Ian put it on his credit card and we were off to see the festival!

George Coulam looked to Walt Disney and Disneyland as his inspiration and template since he first envisioned his version of an American Renaissance Festival more than fifty years ago. I was viscerally aware of the energies, aura and presence of all those people who contributed their labor, their art and their lives to bringing George's vision to vital, vibrant fruition, as we rode around the City of New Market (\*tis hardly a village nowadays this thriving metropolis).

The Texas Renaissance Festival would not be what it is in its forty seventh season without the talent, energy and devotion of people like Lowell, Shorty, David Coulam, Johnny Griffith, Raul Martinez, Ric Alvarez, Phillip Hafer, Hobart Reitan, and countless others too numerous to mention here. Joyce Floyd who is still very much alive is another one of many who helped make TRF what it is.

From the approach to the front gate to the bustling town square that greets the visitor upon entry the architecture sets the stage for immersion in the solid reality of the illusion. There are lanes, streets and avenues. There are gazebos, kiosks and a skyline equal to any of the great city states of history.

We kept Rickshaw Red busy dragging us around the place for hours. Attendance was high. Every stage we approached had many butts in the seats. We heard a lot of fine music. We saw some entertaining shows. We visited with many old friends. Laurie Watson. Rick and Cheryl Dodson. Bob Platz and Ellen Horr. We renewed ties. We were haunted by the ghosts. It was a very good day.

At seven PM we gathered at Sir Loin of Beef to visit and reminisce. The Alvarez family set up a table top memorial in the form of photo albums and portfolios archiving and commemorating Ric's life. Tears were shed. Embraces were shared. Precious memories and tales of times gone by were brought out and enfolded the attendants in a warm blanket of nostalgia and shared experience.

Just before eight o'clock we made our way to the Joust arena.

Alan Hutton, TRF's resident pyrotechnic wizard a former student and acolyte of Ric Alvarez, had conspired with Alala Linda to load her husband's ashes into the cannon which concluded what has to be one of the longest, most heavily ordnanced fireworks shows your humble reporter has ever witnessed. Ever.



In the sudden stillness following the ultimate volley of rockets, mortars and sky flowers, as the final shower of embers rained down, that concluding cannon boomed out. Darkness and silence fell over the field like a curtain. Amongst those of us assembled to celebrate and remember there wasn't a dry eye.

The next day I hung out at Faux Real Ranch wandering amongst the abundant and wonderful treasures. I fed the dogs and cat then called a cousin in Bryan, Texas I'd not seen in years. We met in Magnolia to dine on tacos. We enjoyed a grand reunion.

On Unday morning Brother Chutzpah drove us down to Nuevo Chile. There on Rio and Mary Lee's patio, overlooking the koi pond and amidst the happy din of the Bizarre Bazaar surrounded by the requisite number of monks, we attended my first BOOSM meeting in a long

time.

The Weenie Roast was the primary topic of discussion. It seems there had been some confusion in the community regarding the separation of the Weenie Roast from fund raising events which might occur concurrently. The assembled brothers agreed that the long established tradition of the Weenie Roast being solely itself and not aligned with any other sort of event was valid, legitimate and must be maintained. Simultaneously all in attendance agreed that supporting various fund raising efforts with their own events was a vital part of the Order's ongoing commitment to the community. A consensus was reached. Weenie Roast funds were collected from the assembled monks and the meeting was adjourned with hugs and fare thee wells.



Visits with friends and family continued for the remainder of Unday.

Come evening Ian, Cindy and I joined Don E. White and Orbra Pruitt for a delicious sushi feast in Magnolia. My how times have changed! I recall when finding a decent cheese burger in that burg was a dim hope at best.

Dona Carter paid Brother Chutzpah and me a visit on Tuesday morning. It was her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday! We share a lot of history. Dona is as radiant and beautiful as she was when we first crossed paths 40 years ago. Renewing our friendship was one of the high points of this visit.

Bro Chutzpah deposited yours truly at the Houston airport a few hours later. As we drove Cindy said, "Maybe you could write a report on the weeks activities for the Abbott's Winter Solstice newsletter." And. So I have.

Y'all are blessed creatures, Brothers. Have a cool Yule and a Merry Wanna.

Safety first.

Nom de Plume, B.O.O.S.M