

**Dashiell Hammett Society of Studs
San Francisco International Headquarters**

Officers

President (the PREZ)
Communications Czar
Procurer of Venues
AgendaMeister
Archivist of Knowledge

Bill Diefenbach
Geoff Noakes
Lee Tyree
Ken Monk
Dale Fehringer

◆◆◆

Minutes of Meeting

John's Grill

Thursday, June 14, 2007

Waiting for the Prez



Da Burd was already on the table when I arrived, and for all I know, it may have been the first one there. It was prominently perched on its antique wooden pedestal in the middle of our table -- commanding quite a presence. It caught the attention of our waitress, who didn't know what to make of it, or of us. She was new.

So we drank and talked and solved several complex issues as we waited for the PREZ. The restaurant filled up, our drinks were refilled, and still we waited. We didn't start without the PREZ because of respect or lack of direction, since he deserves none and provides none, but we knew if we started without him we would have to go over everything again when he arrived and he would be pissed off.

Finally, just as we were about to give up, he arrived -- breathless, tie askew, and exhilarated after celebrating completion of a major work project and downing five [Rum Runners](#). The DHSOS toasted him and ordered another round of drinks.

Presence of Da Burd

"Let's talk about the black bird."

-- Sam Spade to Gutman, in *The Maltese Falcon*

Everyone at John's Grill was aware of Da Burd (including other diners at nearby tables) and though they tried not to stare, they felt its presence. Some asked about it: Was it the "real" Maltese Falcon? Who were we? What did our group stand for?

We are used to these mundane questions, and were happy to answer them, as the DHSOS is always pleased to have new fans. We handed out DHSOS business cards to attractive young ladies (possible new members?) and bantered with the staff.

Our waitress brought the head waiter by to inspect Da Burd. "It's not ours," he immediately assessed. (Readers will notice that he did not say, "It's not the original," since the only Burd he had ever seen was John's Grill's copy of the original).

Others were doubtful, too, about the authenticity of Da Burd. But we knew what we knew, so we went on with our meeting with confidence, and da Burd kept an eye on it all.



Back in the MotherLand

It was nice to be back at John's Grill. Our last meeting there took place in February of 2005, during the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the publication of *The Maltese Falcon*. Fans of the DHSOS will recall that meeting as a Society highlight, as we dressed in period attire, enjoyed free food and drinks, and were [featured on KQED radio](#).

John's Grill is a natural place for the DHSOS, since Dashiell used to dine there, and it was home to a copy of the *Maltese Falcon*. But earlier this year the restaurant suffered a setback when someone pinched their Burd.

Maltese Falcon flies the coop

-- John Koopman, Chronicle Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

The busted cabinet doesn't look like much. It's old wood and is stained with the smoke of a thousand cigarettes. A piece of molding on the front dangles from a nail like the hopes and dreams of every tourist who ever fell in love with the foggy city on the Bay.

It's the last place anyone ever saw the Maltese Falcon. Except for the weasel who took it.

John Konstin owns the joint. It's been in his family forever, or 40 years. That writer, Dashiell Hammett, used to eat at his place, called John's Grill over on Ellis. When he wrote the book, "*The Maltese Falcon*," he mentioned the place a couple of times. Said Sam Spade used to eat there. Chops, potatoes and sliced tomatoes, to be exact. And smoked there.

So John's Grill is some kind of shrine to Hammett and Sam Spade and "*The Maltese Falcon*." The book and the movie with that actor, Humphrey Bogart.

The real one was made of lead and heavy like the stone you'd tie around a dead man's neck before you tossed him into the bay. They said Bogey dropped it

on his toe and limped through the whole picture. The movie people made a couple others, for publicity, out of plaster. This was one of those.

Konstin got it from one of the actors in the movie, Elisha Cook Jr. A local boy made good in the movie business. If you saw the movie, you remember him as Wilmer the gunsel.

Now the coppers want to know who lifted the goods.

Konstin reckons it was one of his many customers. Or was it an inside job?

Konstin wants the bird and the books back so much he's willing to fork over some cash. \$25,000 in cold, hard for whoever brings the stuff back to his joint.

"No questions asked," he said.

They never are. Not in this town.

The DHSOS responded quickly to the theft, and [posted a reward](#).

What Knee Surgery???

We felt lucky to be together again, as the Archivist of Knowledge flip-flopped on whether he could make it more times than John Kerry flip-flopped on political issues. First, he was on ... then he couldn't make it ... then he was on again. It was hard to pin him down. He apologized for the run-around and explained that his knee surgery had been scheduled, then cancelled, and he is now looking for surgical alternatives. The group toasted him and ordered another round of drinks.

Thelma and Louise on the Run

The PREZ fiddled with his Treo, and gave an up-to-the-minute report on the whereabouts of his spousal unit and eldest daughter, who were in process of driving across country.

Thelma and Louise (a.k.a. Ruth and Christina) left the D.C. area at 2:00 PM on Tuesday, June 12, spent a night in Cincinnati, toured the University of Missouri, drove by Lee's farm (which was too dark and "not worth seeing"), and arrived that evening at a friend's

home in Golden, Colorado. They were presently watching the final game of the NBA playoffs. ("Is that baseball?" the PREZ asked).

We thought everyone in the world had seen the movie *Thelma & Louise*, but it turns out the PREZ has not. For his benefit:

[*Thelma & Louise*](#) is a road movie from 1991 starring Geena Davis as Thelma, Susan Sarandon as Louise, and Harvey Keitel as a sympathetic detective trying to solve crimes that the two women find easier and easier to commit. Brad Pitt (in his first significant role in a major Hollywood film) plays a robber on parole who befriends Thelma on the road. The film was released on May 24, 1991.

From Golden, Ruth and Christina plan to drive to Salt Lake City, then home to SF, where Christina will work for the SF Ballet, and Ruth will resume supervising the PREZ.

Giants Assessment

A good portion of the pre-meeting discussion centered on the woes of the baleful San Francisco Giants, who were in last place in their division, and had just been swept by their cross-town rivals, the Oakland As.

It was a generally glum discussion, with all agreeing there didn't appear to be a way out for the Giants. Ken raised the question of who is most to blame for the situation the Giants find themselves in -- the ownership, the general manager, the players ...? Most agreed that Barry Bonds still brings in attendance (and revenue), but overall the Giants "old veterans" aren't getting the job done. That led to a discussion of how "old veterans" are not necessarily a good thing in baseball, but are a good thing in the DHSOS. Lee observed that he "is as good as he's ever been," which his wife says is part of the problem.

Call to Order



The meeting was called to order by the PREZ at 7:24 PM by clanging his knife on his empty martini glass. The group toasted being together again and ordered another round of drinks. The PREZ took the opportunity to share the Society's goals with our waitress.

Visitor

A discussion ensued regarding the visit of Alan Chappel (from Australia), and the group agreed to schedule a dinner with Alan on Wednesday, December 5, at John's Grill. A reminder will be sent as the date draws near.

Disposition of Da Burd

Lee introduced a motion to abolish the "pass-around" method of sharing Da Burd, and to change the way it is stored. The proposal was to store it in the PREZ's basement, and for the PREZ to bring it to each subsequent meeting, where it would be prominently displayed on the table during dinner.

The motion was immediately and enthusiastically seconded by Officers Noakes, Fehringer, and Monk.

A discussion ensued, with the PREZ asking that the motion be amended to allow storage anywhere in his house, and suggested it will stand proudly on the mantle above his fireplace. He stated that “my wife supports Da Burd – 100%, ‘cuz unlike the rest of you I can control my wife.” Dale bet him \$20.00 that Ruth would not tolerate it in their house through the end of the year (including New Years Eve).

The PREZ’s amendment was accepted, discussion was ended, and the DHSOS unanimously voted to adopt the motion. This may have been the first motion ever proposed and adopted by the Society.

The Honorable Geoff Noakes

Geoff reported on his recent business trip to Beijing, China, where he is known as “The Honorable Mr. Noakes.” While there, he noted an incredible amount of construction in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, including a new airport, hundreds of skyscrapers, and ubiquitous construction cranes.

For his trip, Geoff was armed with a temporary new title and business cards that made him seem even more important than usual, and throughout his trip he was treated as a VIP. The food was excellent, and the people were generally friendly and accommodating. While in Beijing, he encountered “movable” bus stops (consisting of a person holding a bus stop sign), a group of young ladies who wanted to practice their English with him, and a tea shop that charged more for tea (a gift for Nancy) than Geoff expected.

Click and Clack

There was a discussion of the PREZ’s letter to [Click and Clack \(the Car Guys\)](#) regarding the shoddy and over-priced treatment he received while trying to get a smog check on his Explorer. Ken referred to the letter as “wordy;” Geoff said it was “pithy.”

Pithy: Brief yet forceful and to the point, often with an element of wit.

-- Encarta Dictionary

The entire Society is now hovering on the edge of their seats to hear if the PREZ gets a response.

The Cost of Living in SF

Several Society members commented on the conditions of life in San Francisco, and concluded that the City’s board of supervisors consists of a “big bunch of yahoos and one actual crook.” We also noted that real estate prices and taxes are going through the roof, and the price of water is skyrocketing (with more price increases on the way). But we agree that despite those minor blemishes, San Francisco is still the best place to live in America.

Bill’s Carport

The PREZ invited the DHSOS to view his recently-completed car port, which is possibly the most extensive and expensive of its kind in the City. Unfortunately, it is presently occupied by his aging Explorer, as his original Porsche is in the garage for repairs.

As to Bill purchasing a new car for his spousal unit, he stated that she doesn’t need a new car because he chauffeurs her to work every day.

Driving Miss Katherine

Geoff reported that Katharine now has her learner's permit to drive – though she hasn't yet started driving, pending completion of a driver's training class. All agreed that the hardest part of driving in the Bay Area is not driving your car, or even finding your way around, but instead trying to anticipate the mistakes of other drivers. For example, Lee observed that SF drivers now frequently run not just yellow stop lights, but red ones.

Ken's Trip to Ashland

Ken reported on a successful trip with his spousal unit to Ashland, Oregon. They enjoyed their stay in the [Ashland Springs Hotel](#), two excellent plays (including *As you Like It* – set in the 1930s), and several hikes, which were recommended by Chronicle writer Tom Stienstra – some of which were better researched than others.

Drakesbad Update

DHSOS members are looking forward to their week in Drakesbad and patted themselves on the back for a successful lobbying campaign to prevent several rules there from being changed. In addition to being a literary society, the DHSOS is also a politically-able group.

Snopes to the Rescue, Again

The Society discussed a recent broadly circulated e-mail (our copies came from Janie) that discussed the results of the 2000 U.S. presidential election. Ken pointed out that once again, Snopes came to the rescue by proving it false, and thus helping the DHSOS avoid embarrassment.

John Lescroart

Lee reported on a series of detective books by Bay Area author, John Lescroart, written about San Francisco, in the Dashiell Hammet tradition. DHSOS members were highly interested and professed intent to begin reading those books after finishing the books of Raymond Chandler.

Cattlemen's Ball

Dale gave a trip report on the Cattlemen's Ball, a fund-raiser for cancer research, recently held near Chappell, Nebraska. The event turned out to be quite a success, both in terms of attendance and funds raised. There were several ranching-oriented events, including a style show, art display, and a live auction that included the sale of cattle trailers, a colonoscopy, and a [head gate](#) (for immobilizing cattle). Lee commented that he needs a head gate for Misty.

But the highlight for Dale's spousal unit was pasture bingo, during which a well-fed calf was released into a corral that had been chalked off into squares, which had been sold for \$20 each. When nature took over and the calf deposited the now-digested food on a square, the holder of that square was declared the bingo winner.

Lee's Golfing Win

Being a generally shy and bashful person, it was all we could do to coax the story out of Lee, who had just finished first in his flight during a three-day golf tournament in Monterrey.

Lee's comment on his win: "Every now and then even a blind hog finds an acorn."

Beck's First Night in Chicago

The Beckster is now in Chicago, comfortably settled into a house in Lyons, west of Chicago, and about half way between his job in Naperville and the bars in Chicago. His first night in his new home was eventful, as he drove in to encounter an all-out party in the house. It turned out to be a going-away party for the girl moving out of the room he was moving into, and his new roommates interrupted the party to move Beck in, and then invited him to join in the party. For someone fresh out of college in a new town there's no better start to a new home than that.

Beck is now gainfully employed as a photographer at the [Naperville Sun](#).

Patty's Near Tow

Dale reported that his spousal unit recently had an encounter with a tow truck. It seems she was parked on the street near the Metropolitan Club, and when she went to retrieve her car she saw it hooked to the back end of a tow truck. She approached the tow truck driver, who was just taking off his gloves and preparing to drive away, with a look of incredulity. His comment was, "I suppose this is your car? Well, I'm going to let you off this time." Unable to respond, Patty watched in disbelief as the driver unhooked the car and drove off. A meter maid, who had driven up behind the tow truck, did the same.

A survey of Society members indicated that all of us are certain that our cars would have been ticketed and towed in a similar circumstance. Lee would probably also have been jailed, after calling the tow truck driver a #*!#sucker.

Misty's Broken Toe

At this point, we were getting hard up for topics, so Lee reported that Misty had broken her toe, after catching it in a drain in the showers at the Metropolitan Club. The DHSOS sends it consolations to Misty, along with wishes for a speedy recovery.

Adjournment

We had exhausted our agenda and occupied prime real estate at John's Grill for much too long, so the DHSOS wrapped it up and headed for home. Da Burd was carefully returned to its trappings, and the PREZ proudly carried it outside. We issued hearty handshakes all around, and walked out into the foggy San Francisco summer evening.

That's it for now, Man.

###

The next meeting of the DHSOS will take place Thursday, August 30.

