
Chapter Forty Two

Cleveland, Believeland, The Dawg Pound, the Boss and Obama

November 1-2, 2008

Arrival and Tour

Ad Man Pat Morin had a pair of Browns tickets (courtesy copywriter Mark Doyle). He invited me to the game in the Cleveland Browns Stadium. I jumped at the opportunity and booked a Southwest Airlines “wanna go” fare round trip between St. Louis and Cleveland. My brother Dan and his wife Anette (Nettie) agreed to have me stay with them for a couple of nights. They have a small apartment in The Carlyle (a high rise overlooking Lake Erie). The futon in the living room has my name on it.

Dan was good enough to pick me up at the Cleveland Hopkins Airport on Saturday night. Dan and Netti are both Clevelanders but both are vested in the New York City lifestyle. The high rise overlooking the water could be Sutton Place on the Upper East Side, only the commute from their current digs is eight hours by Ford Taurus to midtown Manhattan. The drive isn't enough to dissuade them from actually taking this road trip periodically.

This isn't the same Taurus Steve Eggert sold Dan (above Blue Book value). That car was a piece of crap. But we'll never let Eggert know. “Yeah Steve that car was a dream. I put another 60,000 miles on it. That's why I bought another one,” Dan insists. Steve is an airline pilot on leave from his job at Delta Airlines. He's over 50 and lives alone in an unassuming boathouse on Clifton Lagoon. We drop in on Steve because it allows our random tour of Lakewood and surrounding environs to include the break wall, a view of the Cleveland Yachting Club channel, and a peek at the Graces' old house (the one they

sold before moving to Florida).

The tour continues. Bobby McDonnell lives over here. The Brockley house is getting a new roof. The house at 15106 Edgewater Drive doesn't look anything like the house I grew up in. My Grandmother's house is painted in light colors too. Both residences have chosen color schemes that hide the essence of their English Tutor character. So what. The whole trip down memory lane gives me the creeps anyway. Thank God Nettie has reservations at a new restaurant in town.

Luxe Kitchen and Lounge

Luxe is a trendy spot on Cleveland's near West Side. The mussels are to die for! The garlic from this very appetizer is on Amy Wain's breath, as a chance encounter of a college girlfriend leads to an awkward exchange of "So what have you been up to these past 15-20 years? A 14 year old and an 11 year old, you don't say? And your husband is here? Well let's go meet him."

Marlin is the owner of Luxe and a chef. He gets us a table straight away. His visit at the end of the meal could mean curtains for at least one Heritage Turkey. Dan will deliver it in person after an appropriate execution carried out by one of Dan and Nettie's Amish neighbors in Ashland, Ohio. The farm is now a rental property for visitors to sample country living. The Turkeys are a quaint touch but even they seem to know Thanksgiving is coming. The price of Gas and some sharp pencils lead Dan and Nettie to the conclusion that they wanted to move closer to civilization. Netti can better orchestrate her nursing career and Dan hopes keep building his commercial photography client-base.

The light Pinot Noir with dinner is selected by Nettie. Dan doesn't drink. (Good for him.) Dan and Nettie quit together seven years ago. Nettie recently decided to "not be a quitter" and drink responsibly.

Swingo's on the Lake

There are lots of shades of gray. The wine with dinner topped off by the retro club scene at Swingo's on the Lake with Wes

could lead to some trouble. Cognac is supposed to be a nightcap but the bartender offers a generous pour. This place is part of a restaurant legacy in it's the third generation. The five piece band on one end of the bar and the Texas Tech vs. #1 ranked Texas Longhorns on the TV at our end of the bar leaves no choice but to have another refreshing adult beverage.

We can't decide between Cognac and Heineken. Dan is politely drinking water with a couple of breaks to dance with Nettie.

"Do you dance?" Nettie slides off her bar stool and is determined cut a rug.

"No thanks, it looks like this game is going to be close. Texas Quarterback Colt McCoy is a Heisman trophy candidate." This information is offered but of no interest to Nettie.

"Yeah, I don't really get sports. Dan, let's dance."

Dan and Nettie are urban sophisticates even as they coolly move to the base, piano, and the soft snare drum beat. It could be NYC at The Algonquin or Top of the Sixes maybe. I'm happy to have a Football game and a Heineken.

The music isn't lively enough to keep the place jumping for long. A couple of numbers later the band takes a short break. Nettie and Dan rejoin me at the bar. Nettie sips the Cognac but would prefer a Heineken. We confuse the bartender enough so that we get another generous cognac and at least a couple more Heinekens before we're done.

"You know I didn't get married until I was forty. I had plenty of freedom and didn't need to be tied down. I met Dan and, well, I love him." It's the booze talking. Most of what Nettie has to say is sweet but she is the sort of person (like me) who uses sarcasm and personal jabs of wit that can be hurtful at times. Dan has a great sense of humor but he's not entirely amused. Good thing the apartment is just a short walk away. We left with 1:29 on the clock. Texas Tech beat Texas. (And Nettie could care less.) For the record that minute and a half lead to an upset of the number one team and may jeopardized Colt McCoy's Heisman trophy chances. (Who cares? Well a

few people in Lubbock, Texas at least. Netti was so excited it gave her the dry heaves.)

LUBBOCK, Tex. – After his Texas Tech football team had scored the biggest victory in its history, knocking off No.1 Texas on Saturday night, Coach Michael Leach stood in a narrow hallway under the stadium with a Styrofoam cup of coffee.

Instead of talking about Michael Crabtree's last second touchdown in the Red Raiders' 39-33 victory or their place in Bowl Championship Series standings, Leach, who was reading "The Wicked Wit of Winston Churchill," began quoting Churchill.

The New York Times, Monday November 3, 2008

The Dawg Pound

Fortified with a short stack of pumpkin pancakes, two eggs over easy and three strips of bacon from Grumpy's Café in Temont (West 14th Street), I was ready for a day of football. Dan recognized the waitress, Julia, and we learned about her struggling career in residential real estate. She's been at it for five years now. It's a crazy time to be selling homes in Cleveland because there is a lot of inventory and it ain't moving. (Julia is voting straight Republican ticket so Dan's pitch for Obama falls on deaf ears.)

Dan and Nettie returned me to the Carlyle to meet up with Pat Morin who agreed to pick me up at 11:30 a.m. sharp on Sunday morning. Like clockwork Morin pulls up in his Mercedes Benz Sedan.

"Ya know I may be over-thinking this thing but there's a rally downtown right after the football game and...I have a parking space but I'm thinking it might be difficult to get out. So, maybe we should take the Rapid Transit. We can pick it up at 117th and Madison," explains Morin as we pull out onto Lake Avenue. That's fine with me. The public transportation allows up to get into the spirit of the day with brown and orange everywhere: sweatshirts, wool caps and face paint. "Go Brownies!" All over town, it's not too early to be firing up grills and tailgating before the game between the old Browns (Art

Modell's The Baltimore Ravens) and today's Cleveland Browns in their new 73,200 seat stadium (The Stadium was designed by HOK Sports and completed in 1999.)

As we made our way from the Terminal Tower building to the stadium with throngs of Browns fans, Pat and I compared notes on our advertising careers. Pat and I both worked in New York at J. Walter Thompson (at different times). Pat managed to leverage his Ohio State Law School Degree and charming diplomacy into a long career that included being president and general manager of Griswold in Cleveland. Nearing retirement age now, Pat is now founder of a much more modest operation, Pat Morin Inc. I jumped the wall (going client-side) in 1998 and became a corporate communications specialist.

It was a perfect day for football (sunny and in the mid-fifties). Mark Doyle's seats are in section 108 near the 45 yard line. Great seats. Great day. (But not for the Browns.)

Ravens 37, Browns 27

Pivotal play: With the score tied at 27 in the fourth quarter, Cleveland WR Braylon Edwards dropped what would have been the go ahead 77-yard TD pass from Derek Anderson. The Browns never threatened again.

Unheralded performance: Cleveland NT Shaun Rogers continued his strong season, compiling nine tackles, including one sack.

Key stats: Baltimore out gained Cleveland on offense 429-274 and held the ball for nearly 34 minutes. The Browns partially offset that disadvantage with a 278-102 edge in return yards, including Josh Cribbs' 92-yard kickoff return.

Noteworthy: Playing in only his second game in a month, Browns TE Kellen Winslow II caught five passes for 64 yards. Browns fans screamed "Bra-dy!" Bra-dy!" hoping popular backup QB Brady Quinn would replace Anderson.

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At the end of the game, Browns fans dispersed, exasperated at the missed opportunities and disgusted with a 3-5 record. As they spill into the downtown area, the police and the barricades

and the helicopters let you know the Obama rally will soon begin. Bruce Springsteen will perform. Pat Morin has no interest in Bruce, Barack or in hanging around. After a hearty handshake, we part ways. It was reported later Monday, that Romeo Crennel the Browns head coach intends to start Brady Quinn at QB on Thursday night vs. the Denver Broncos.

Rise Up – Mall B adjacent to the Convention Center in Downtown Cleveland

Incredibly as I worked my way through the crowd and settled on a view of the big screen near the convention center, I ran into Dan and Nettie (who after some deliberation decided to be a part of history.) The election is just two days away!

We didn't wait long. Bruce Springsteen appeared, sang a half dozen songs including *Thunder Road*, an ode to Youngstown (an Ohio steel town), and folk ballad *This land is your land*. Bruce Springsteen is the Boss and he let Clevelanders know he wanted change. "Today we are at the crossroads. It's been a long, long, long time coming. I want my country back. I want my dream back. I want my America back."

Barack and Bruce embraced each other. Bruce is joined by his wife Patty. Barack is joined by his wife Michelle and their two daughters. Obama addresses the crowd. "I ask of you what has been asked of Americans throughout our history. I ask you to believe – not just in my ability to bring about change, but in yours."

(Back in St. Louis, on Tuesday, Election Day, I made my way to the line already forming at 5:45 a.m. to my neighborhood polling place.)