

The

Real News

Retro-Inspection

Indy Insanity 1982



There are times in the early adulthood of men and women when they get a lightning bolt of an idea that sounds great but in retrospect (34 years later) was probably stupid. I cannot recall whose great idea it was to charge down Interstate 57 to gather up part of the old Eastern News gang on Memorial Day Weekend to head to Speedway, Indiana.

In digging through *the Real News* archives, I find a fading legal size photocopy of a handwritten legal sheet with chicken scratches of observations fueled by a pony keg, a cooler of Crotch Grabbers, picnic food provisions and visions of the madness of young, naive journalists in a van through the mass of inhumanity of the Indianapolis 500 infield.

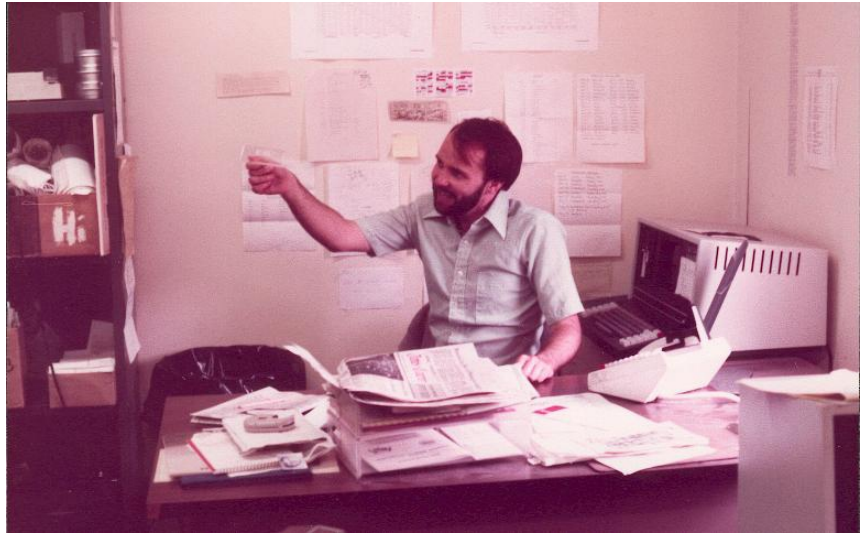
It appears to have been well documented with cameras, a sketch pad and a tape recorder (I forgot about this one - - - who knows where those tapes gather dust). Again, I have no idea who had the bright idea of forging into the mecca of American motorsports on a threatening thunderstorm weekend.

So, I recently reminded Andy that this year is the 100th Indy 500, he has a godsmack moment of wanting to see the pictures and get the band back together. So between a graduation and bitter heat stroke golf under, naturally, threatening skies, I begin a search and rescue mission at the homestead to find the long lost photographs and RN edition, Indy Insanity.

For good or ill, mission accomplished as the records were found. Whether they should have been found is a matter of (bad) judgment to decide.

----- Ski

A casual observer would see an energetic journalist at his desk making sure his readers got every sweet drop of his written sweat. But this is Andy at the Casey Reporter. Ask Andy about Casey is like dropping depth charges in the Atlantic to shake up U-Boats. But look at this photograph: he had modern technology to make his craft - - - paper, ink and what appears today as a microwave with a keyboard.



This 1966 Batman modern photograph shows an apparent desperate Andy searching his desk drawer for something . . . important? I don't recall what it could have been - - - a press pass, his keys or his sane mind. But journalists are as organized as Jimmy Hoffa search parties. Behind him is poor Betsy, who is trying to feed the microwave with wisdom contained on a large floppy disk. Ask your grandparents what is a floppy disk.

This office photo essay does seem to go on and on, which probably was why I continued to snap pictures to capture the non-verbal cursing of "Mr. Ready."

Considering it was getting towards late afternoon, and the only directions I had was to head toward Indianapolis to find the Speedway (or follow the other 200,000 vehicles converging on an asphalt oval), you could hear the second hand of the clock click like church bells.

This may be a good point of reflection to recall that Brian

was "supposed" to have joined us in this sojourn. But this may have been the birth of his phrase "There will be people there, won't they?" So Brian baled on the chance to rub elbows with the mass of humanity circus I wrote down as:

Old men in Winnebagos with electric drills; women with tattoos; sexually verbal ignominy; loud, crass dirt bikers; a million discarded beer cans; passed out drunkards lying where they last staggered and idiots wallowing in the hogwash.



While waiting for Andy to change and lock up the news room, a large shaggy brown dog wandered up to my driver's door. He looked longingly at me as to say "Hey, I wanna join your adventure crew." But I thought this is Casey - - - where dogs wander without their masters the main streets on a Saturday afternoon.

I recall as Andy crossed the street he gave us the finger then when he got in, directions to pick up another passenger.



The highway miles burned quickly in the rear view mirror as we crossed the State Line with questionable intent. There was probably a lot of shop talk, horror work stories and some weather report updates about possible terrible storms.

With innate directional sense (since Indiana does not believe in street signs), I found the crowded causeway to the Speedway.



The streets were littered with RVs, rip-off quarter newspapers selling for a dollar, and loose gears.



The plan was to stay over outside the Brickyard on Saturday night. We did not know that this 40 acre plot would turn by dawn into a cesspool of Detroit machinery and Freudian psychosis.

Here, Doreen finds a place to sit upon our arrival in last line of vehicles next to the outer fence line of the park. She was probably doubting her life choices until the keg was tapped to start the show.

Roughing it meant Andy wearing a fashionable straw hat by the small grill. On the menu was the standard post-graduate fare: hot dogs and alcohol - - - mass quantities of alcohol.

I don't recall the exact recipe Betz had for her evening nightshade drink but it was lemonade, a clear liquid (vodka, everclear or both) and beer. She kept making pitchers of this party ale until the weather turned wicked and we all had to stay in place in the van.



As Dusk came, so did the monsoon rain. The darkness meant no more photographic record of the chaos. But a trusty pen and paper recorded from the front seat the close quarters.

There was a portable TV and plenty of beer to calm the nerves of the never ending tornado warnings for the metro area.

My notes indicate a three hour Star Trek marathon, followed by The Revenge of the Creature and a playback of 30 minutes of the tape recordings of the day.

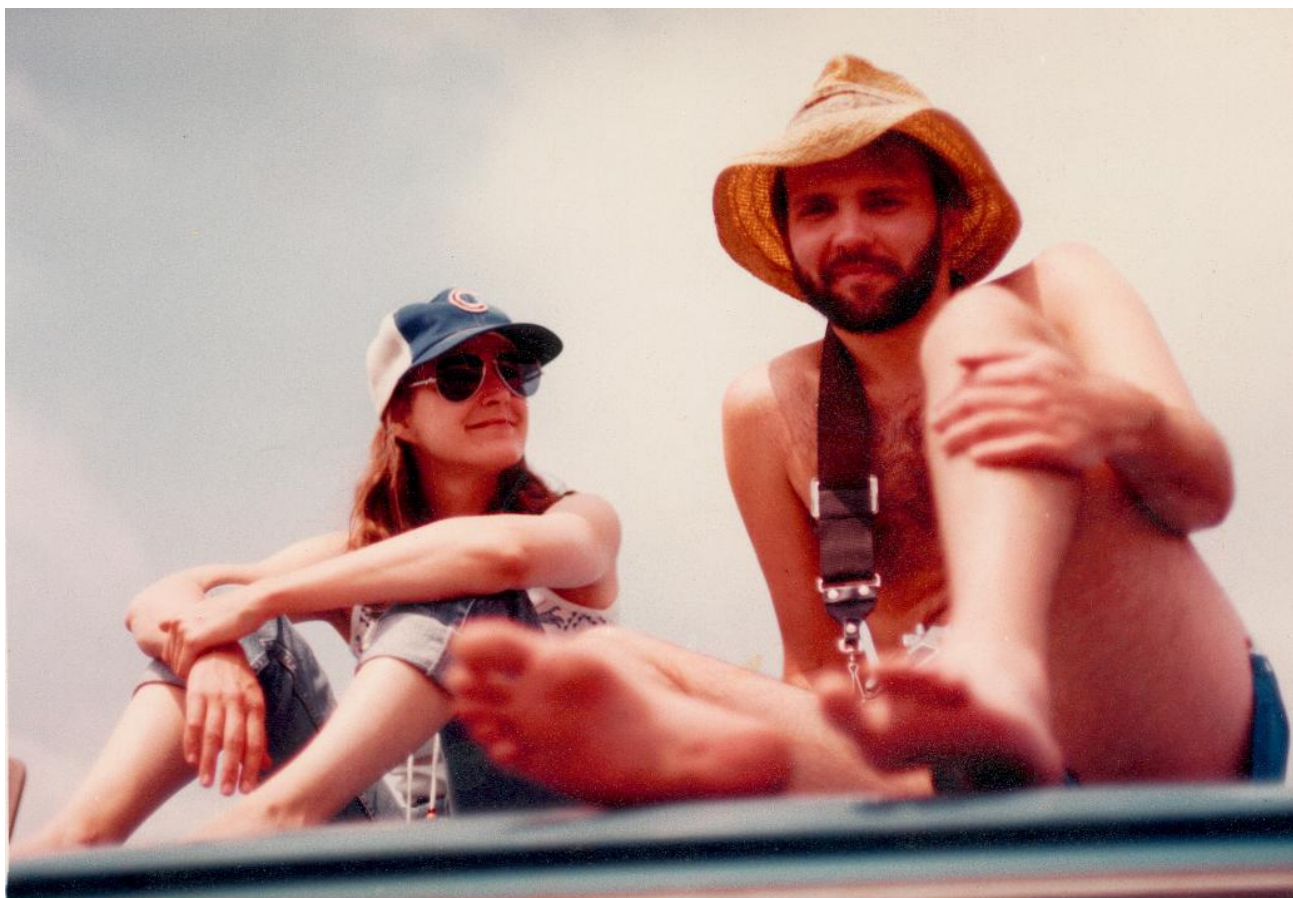
There was no sleep. No rest. The propulsion of AD/DC's "For Those About to Rock" shook the van at 4 a.m. from a neighbor down the auto line.

The gates for the infield were supposed to have opened at 5 a.m., but some anxious idiots began running their vehicles between the auto rows trying to smash through the gates. Hundreds of cars piled up in the mud outside the main gate.

In the morning, we found a man passed out behind the van. His name was Michael from New York. He must have gotten lost in the darkness - - - well before even thinking of traveling to the Indy 500.

When we finally made it into the infield, the soggy, godforesaken infield, we parked in a row and observed the specter that is the Indy 500 infield. We could only speculate which level of Hell we had landed upon.





At some point, Andy and Mary wanted to be like the Natives. So they climbed on top of the van to see the view of the track and the rest of infield metal village.

The yells, the taunts, the drunken slurs, the loud music continued until the race grid drowned out the hippie commune atmosphere.

You don't go to the Indy 500 to "watch" the race cars. At least not in the infield, where you only really "hear" them whiz by at 200 miles per hour. There is a flick of neon color and the race car is gone a quarter mile down the track. The constant drum of the engines passing by is like a thousand bees nesting in your bone marrow.

Race day went by in a blur. We heard that the race finished as the closest in race history; the winner by a fraction of a second in a photo finish.

I probably had more detailed stories but my file indicates that the original story was lost when my computer crashed and lost the data. Like archaeologists looking for the ruins of a past civilization, only the moments seared onto the inner skull wall remains for examination.

Betsy, Doreen, Mary, Andy and I followed the path of previous lemmings to participate in a massive gathering of primal wildness. The edge of lawlessness. The loss of personal space in mosh pit of clouded judgments.

As a life lesson, it was an exercise in controlled madness. What do you do when someone at midnight starts pounding on your van door? What do you do when you park in the infield next to a band of Southerners who still think the Civil War is being fought?

It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. You only have to experience Indy once. Once is enough when you live through the front lines of the nonstop party.

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