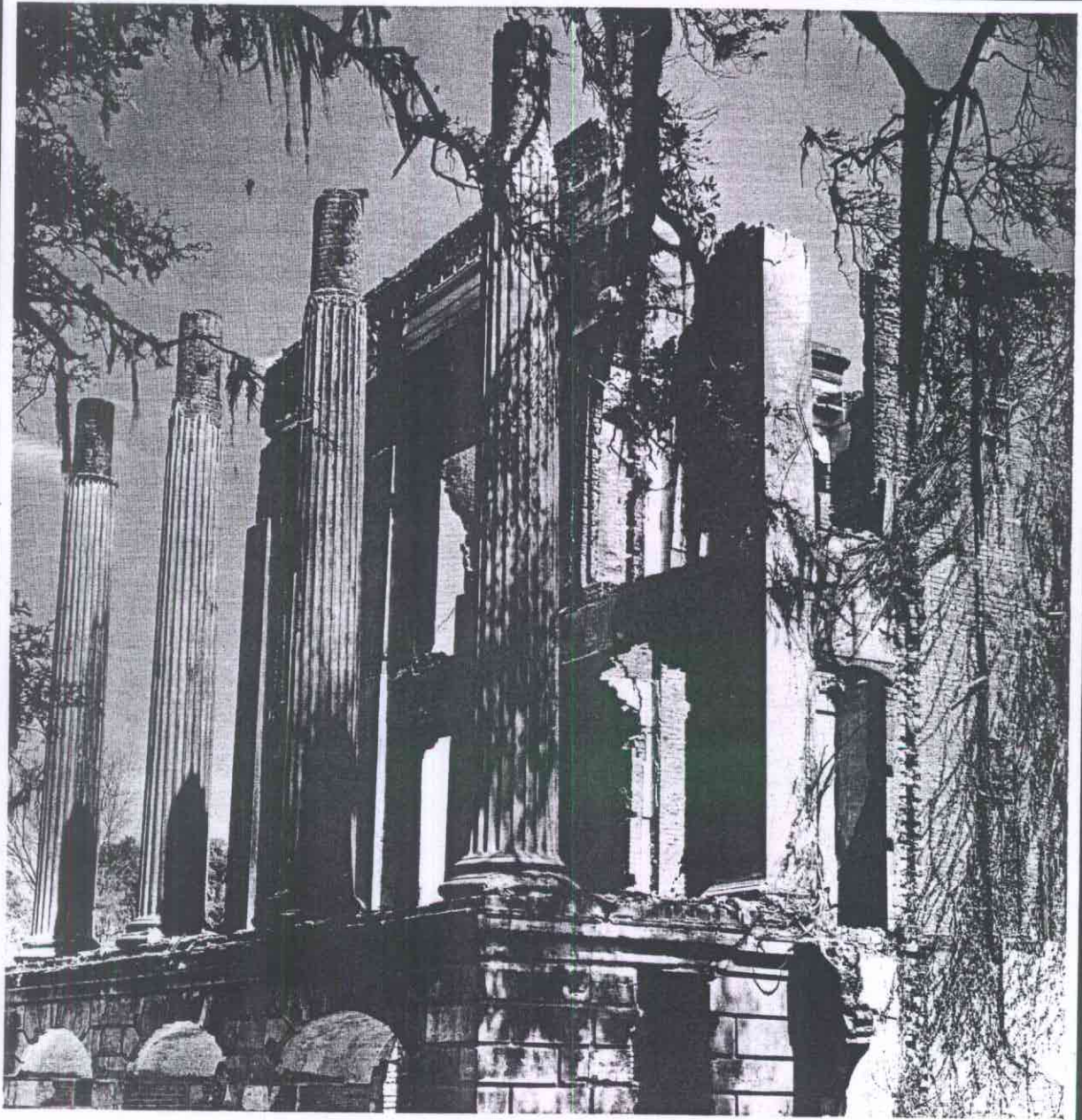


NEW ORLEANS

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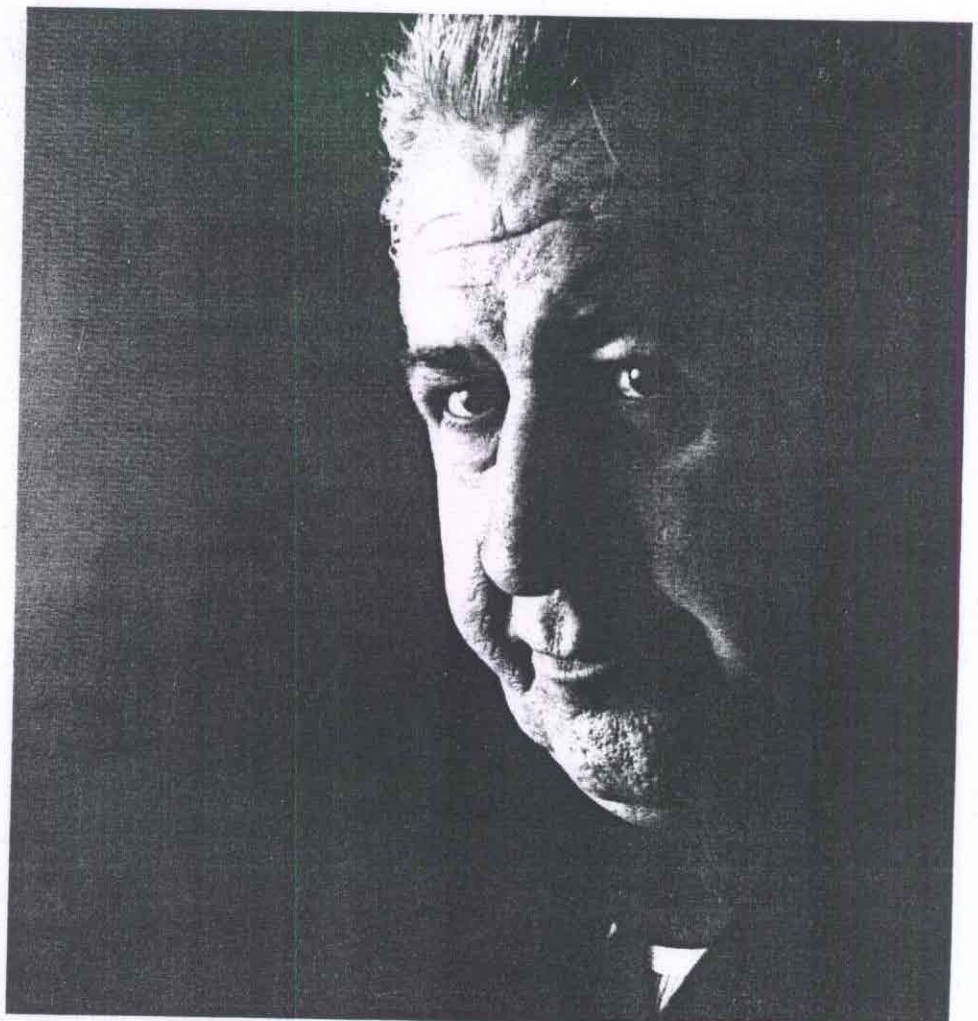
PERSHING GERVAIS TALKS AGAIN



A SIGNIFICANT MAGIC

A Mysterious Phone Call- Pershing Gervais Talks From His Unknown Hideaway

By Rosemary James



Pershing Gervais, the mystery man of local intrigue, has disappeared from the New Orleans scene. Few people even hazard a guess as to where he is now living. One of the few people Gervais has communicated with since his departure is Rosemary James, an old friend from the days when Gervais was an investigator for District Attorney Jim Garrison and she a reporter for the New Orleans States-Item assigned to that office.

After a number of phone calls to Mrs. James, Gervais agreed to an exclusive interview for New Orleans Magazine, based on his confidence that the magazine would print the interview without arbitrary editing, other than at his request or with his permission.

Q. Why did you decide to become a witness against Jim Garrison?

A. That's like me asking you, why did you decide to go in television. There are many, many reasons . . . I couldn't tell you at what point I decided this. You're just asking a very difficult question.

Q. Was there anything he did that turned you against him?

A. Apparently there was. Let me say . . . and the thing that worries me is sounding corny, you know? . . . But the constant and forever and ever and endless attacks on the government, you see . . . and attacking the government is nothing new. We've got a lot of nitwits out attacking it, the lunatic fringe attacking it and just a lot of people attacking the government. If I attack the government, that's one thing . . . but if a man in his position attacks the government, constantly attacks it, that's *another* thing. The lunatic fringe rallies around that. And, of course, that kind of got next to me, but this is just one of many, many reasons and I really don't believe that my motivation has any real bearing. What difference does it make what my motivation was or is?

Q. Was the government holding anything over your head?

A. Not a single solitary thing in any way, shape, form, in the past, at that time or in the future.

Q. Did the government offer you any money?

A. Absolutely not. Listen, you know that's always a stock question when the government makes a case. You know it would be awful stupid for them to offer anybody any money because I suppose, and I don't know that anybody's ever said, "Yes they did", and what happened to the case . . . I don't even know what

that really means, "Did the government offer money?" . . . Apparently there's sound legal reasons why they shouldn't offer anybody any money like that. If they offer money, it weakens their case. The government certainly isn't going to spend all that time and all that money and all the things that go into making a case and then ruin it all by giving somebody some money.

Q. Well, a lot of people are saying that you betrayed an old friend by turning in evidence on Jim Garrison. Do you feel that you've betrayed anyone?

A. No. Absolutely not. No, ma'am.

Q. Do you feel that maybe he has betrayed a trust?

A. I hesitate to answer that because of the court case pending . . . but . . . I would think he's betrayed many trusts. As you know, Rosemary, he's renowned for betraying trusts and, if you don't believe that, ask the Governor.

Q. Do you recall when you first got disenchanted with the Giant?

A. There were a lot of things that made me get disenchanted with Jim Garrison . . . None of them have anything to do with this case and let me make that perfectly clear. None of them, in the final analysis, had anything to do with whether or not I worked with the government . . . or for the government . . . or however you want to put it.

Q. John Wall, the head of the federal strike force, said in a public courtroom that he thought one reason you might have decided to work with the government was the fact that your oldest son is missing in Vietnam. Did you ask the government for any special help in trying to locate him?

A. I never asked the government to give me one ounce . . . well, we didn't even discuss any aid to me, concerning my son . . . we just never discussed it. Listen, if I thought there was a way they could do it, I would certainly discuss it. But there's no way they can do it. What can they do? Are they going to have a truce for two months to let me go over there and talk to, uh, what's the Chinaman's name, Ho Chi Ming or something? That was never ever discussed.

Q. Did they come to you or did you go to the government?

A. Let me say this. There was not one iota of pressure put on me and I don't even like to talk about it. They had nothing on me and they gave me nothing, period.

Q. And you asked for nothing?

A. Oh, I asked for *absolutely* nothing.

A. To go into your personal motiva-

tion again, does the fact that Garrison was constantly downing the government and the fact that your son is fighting in a war for the government when he was reported missing have anything to do with what you're doing?

A. You can say I do not want . . . in other words . . . here's the way I feel. I do not want to hide behind the condition my son's in today, whatever it is. I don't want to use that as a shield between me and my role. I don't want to use that. I don't want to say that it's because of what he did that I'm doing this. It would not be a manly position to take.

Q. Well, from your inside role, would you say the government's investigation of corruption in the state is legitimate or do you think it's a head-hunting expedition by some Republicans trying to get rid of some Democrat office-holders?

A. Let me say this to you: From where I stand, it can't be head-hunting. When we met at the parallel line, the DMZ or something, they did not indicate to me who they wanted to get. It's what lawyers call a "clean case."

Q. What do they mean by a "clean case?"

A. They didn't come to me and say, "listen", or I go to them and say, "listen." They didn't say, "We want Garrison" and I didn't say, "I know you want Garrison". We unfolded the case. You can believe me when I tell you that it just unfolded *very naturally*.

Q. Well do you, then, expect a lot of other heads to roll?

A. Well they've got this strike force with a building lease for seven years and I don't believe they did all that to make this handful of cases I'm involved in. I don't believe that's the whole purpose and intent. Hell, I know, and I'm sure that you know or at least you feel, I know and you must at least feel that this is a fertile field for heads to roll.

There are a lot of heads that need rolling.

Q. The government, so far, has only disclosed some information about your involvement with some pinball operators and Jim Garrison. Would you describe this as the meat of their investigation or just the top of the iceberg?

A. It's all that I know about.

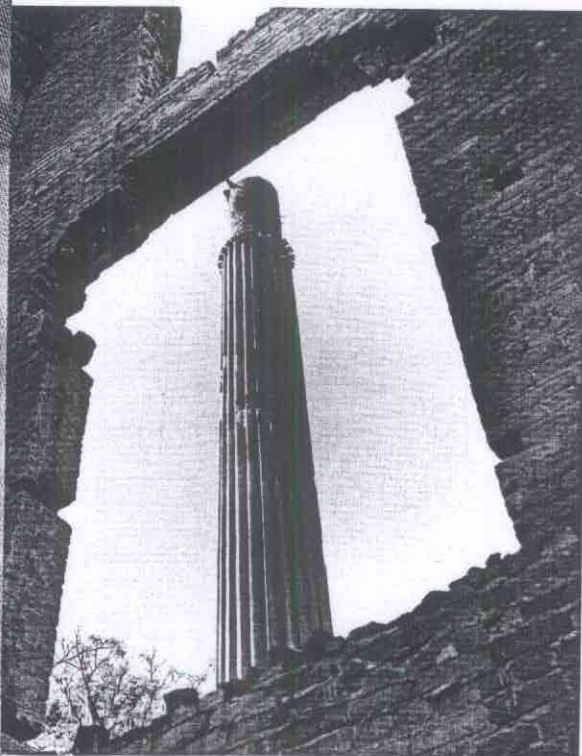
Q. You only know about the pinball business?

A. I know a lot of things, Rosemary. You know plenty of things, really. You couldn't prove them, but you know it. You know they've got a lot of bums around there that need a whole lot of

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A Significant Magic

By Clarence Laughlin



19. The Lonely Column

Editor's Note: Only one of the pictures used here appears in Clarence John Laughlin's book "Ghosts Along the Mississippi", now available in a reprint edition. But a circulating show based on the book has opened at the Downtown Gallery, 532 Chartres Street, on October 24 and will close on November 6. This show has toured America for the last several years, and Laughlin's articles, and pictures have appeared in many magazines and museums throughout the United States and Western Europe.

SECTION 1: FOREWARD:

Any careful approach to a study of the culture of the lower Mississippi Valley — whose apogee was reached, in the 1840's and 50's, in southern Louisiana — will reveal to the seeker an almost forgotten chapter of American History, whose real significance, and innate character, is hardly known to most Americans today — and which represented a way of life at almost the furthest possible remove from that of our industrial society.

It is true that historians have delved extensively; and sociologists have dissected. It is true, too, that superficial romanticists have imparted a glamour to the plantations which — if they only knew — often does not measure up to the actual strangeness and drama of many things which really happened . . . But, meanwhile, any widespread comprehension of Louisiana plantation culture as the last great non-urban culture of the United States; and of Louisiana as being by the 1840's, the first state — not merely in the South — but in the entire country, to be able to create a *truly indigenous* architecture — has had to wait . . .

This is true partly because historians have been confining themselves to writ-

ten records; while sociologists, of course, have been studying the slave system and its effects — while ignoring important developments in other directions . . . And, also, it's true partly because no sufficient study has ever been made at *first hand* — of the houses, and their methods of construction (though the Historic American Buildings Survey, in the 1930's, made an important step in this direction); of the objects off the beaten paths; and of the things which are not listed in the many books . . .

In an attempt to remedy, if possible, this situation — this writer, in 1939, began a series of photographs and written observations in which he attempted to deal with every aspect of Louisiana plantation culture (except the actual agricultural methods) — not merely the "big" houses — but the country cabins, the stone and iron forms in the rural cemeteries, the folk art, the people, even the little Negro country churches—any material through which, he felt, something of the spirit of this culture could be conveyed; and through which its significant regional differences could be presented. The series now numbers over 2,000 negatives, made with a view camera, and has resulted, among other things, in a book entitled "Ghosts Along the Mississippi" — recently reprinted — with 100 full page plates, and over 50,000 words of text. Most of the material seen here, however, is *not* in this book — since it was found after the book appeared in 1948.

Speaking as briefly as possible, and therefore, in somewhat oversimplified terms — the plantation architecture of Louisiana can be divided into two main periods.

The Colonial (which included the years from the beginning of the 1700's to about 1810), and the Classic (from

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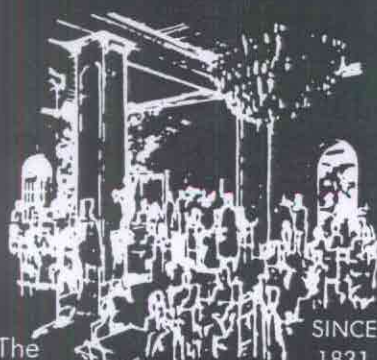
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PERSHING GERVAIS

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things besides having Honorable put in front of their names. How far they're going to go? I'm not privy to all that information. What they're going to do or who they've got cases against. I've got some ideas.

Q. Would it be fair to say that you gave the government some tips or leads?
A. No comment.

Q. When it became public that you had been working with the government, I was reminded of something you told me during an interview for *New Orleans* last year. You said, you would rather "kick someone in the ass, real hard", those are your words, "than to bug him." Now, how did you feel during this case when you were walking around like an electronics warehouse?

A. Well, that's not exactly true.

Q. Well, you don't have to tell me the technique.

A. We're talking about two different things. We were talking back then about using electronics on the weak and the defenseless. They already got problems. That's what I meant when I said I'd rather kick them in the ass and that would straighten them out. I just never did like making cases against the weak and the defenseless and the friendless. *I never did like it.* In this instance, however, you must admit that we're not talking about the weak and the defenseless and the friendless. This is a case where you just couldn't kick asses and anyway the government frowns upon kicking asses. This is a different alleycat altogether.

Q. So, you didn't feel bad at all, then?

A. *Not at all* because these are people . . . every person involved here had either or all . . . money, influence, power and community respect. To me, this is the kind of investigation needed around there for years . . . you know, *of the privileged!* This parallels the way people always talk about the narcotics situation in New Orleans . . . how stupid the whole approach to the problem is . . . they always talk about the clinics and the doctors . . . they want to do everything but that thing that would really stop it and clean it up. I have some serious doubts that they really want to clean it up. It presents such a beautiful forum for the political animal and people who are looking for office and people who want to demonstrate that they're really vitally concerned the community, you see. Sure they're concerned with keeping everything alive and keeping it going and pretending they want to clean it up. It takes drastic measures to clean up situations like that. It takes drastic measures to clean up political corruption. But to answer your

question, anyway, I have no, *I feel no re-creminations about my role in this case.*

Q. Why, then did you decide to leave?

A. The only reason I insisted that I leave the New Orleans area is to get my family away from it. I tried this one time before. It didn't work out too well. I recall exactly what it did to my life at that time and to my son's life, the one who is in the Army. I was not willing to subject my other two children to being around for that again. This is the only reason that I'm away from the area. Otherwise, I've got no compunctions about staying right there. I'm not afraid of these people.

Q. Well, that's another question I wanted to ask. A lot of people said you were afraid there might be reprisals.

A. Oh, Hell, reprisals . . . reprisals, my ass. You know, I got a message of that type when this first started . . . and I don't want to go into details . . . but I got a message that there was some thought about this and, when I got the message, I said, "Listen, I want you to go back and say that if I get the slightest idea that anybody's looking for me, their problem is going to be that I will immediately return and look for them." I'm not in the least bit afraid of anybody in that area. It's not that I'm so brave. It's just that I have that much contempt for them. I just know that they're a pile of crap.

Q. If you wanted to come back to New Orleans tomorrow, would the government let you?

A. Would they let me?

Q. Yes?

A. Well, let me put it this way: Listen that would really be up to me, wouldn't it? They would have no, they couldn't have no voice in that. *I'm not a prisoner.*

I could come back any time I feel like it. You know, you and I have talked about this . . . and it's a long, long story . . . how I acquired . . . I'm not bemoaning, I'm not crying about it. I'm not wailing . . . but how I acquired this unsavory reputation. It's always a coincidence, in my mind anyway. It started way, way back. For example, when I first came to the District Attorney's office, I was sincere. I really wanted to balance the scales out. It just wasn't meant to be. The newspapers found it convenient to sling me around to attack Garrison. O'Hara (Judge Malcolm O'Hara) ran for office (against Garrison); he found it convenient to sling me around to attack Garrison. Then, of course, out of this thing grew this situation, this pinball thing. This was a thing that kind of thrust itself upon me. So, I guess you would

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PERSHING GERVAIS

Continued from page 92

say, well, you should have quit and walked away. But . . . remember . . . at this point my reputation was already one that I was not virtuous. Ultimately, I did walk away . . . but it's a lot longer, more involved story than that.

Q. You mentioned the newspapers. How do you feel about the news media in general?

A. If you were to ask me what do I blame most of all for the immorality in all phases and branches of government, I would blame two things:

The news media and the inadequacy of all the religious leaders. In that order. I would blame the news media first.

Whatever problems we got there is because the news business got to be such a commercial enterprise that . . . what ever happened to the old time reporters that dug up stories and I don't want to hear that bullshit about "it's libelous" . . . libel is a damned hard thing to pin down. They don't have those kind of reporters anymore and, of course, I guess it's because big business dictates and controls it . . . but, I repeat, what ever happened to the jugular vein reporter? The days when the reporters went out and dug up stories and the newspapers printed them and blasted them and enlightened the people? Now, if the newspapers are after somebody, if they're on political opposites, they'll attack the person . . . but, for instance we've had bums on the Council in New Orleans that were sweethearts with the newspapers. They *never* would attack 'em.

Q. Do you feel like the news media has hurt you in your personal life?

A. Oh, yeah . . . but please don't let me read somewhere that I'm crying about treatment by the news media. *I say they completely destroyed my life* . . . because, A., when I first started out, I was sincere and it's a long, long story, you know, Rosemary. When I was a young policeman, I was a very productive cop, when I was a young guy. I really did produce a lot of stuff . . . but . . . it's a long, long story . . . and the newspapers labeled me a safecracker by inuendo, you know? You know why? They were after Joe Scheuring, they were after Chep Morrison, they were after these people, so they slung me around. It just happened that way. And they were trying to force me to tell them about the corrupt system . . . that I ultimately did . . . but let me tell you that the same people that are running the newspapers, the news media now, are the same people that were running them when we had slot machines all over the city, when we had whorehouses all over the city, when we had

handbooks all over the city . . . those same people that go sit in a Club on Canal Street, they were all around here then . . . and they didn't do anything. The same people . . . a lot of them on the police force that were very aggressive in collecting graft . . . are still around. Listen, in the old days, when the police force was being attacked, time and time again they found pay-off lists with cops on it . . . believe me, Rosemary, my name never appeared on a single one. I never solicited a nickel of graft in my life. But I got an unsavory reputation . . . because I said, 'yes, I got it, they put it in my hand every week, a ranking officer.' So you know what I am, I'm an admitted grafter.

Q. You never picked up a nickel in your life *except* when you stole the graft bag?

A. Oh, well, yeah I stole all that. I did it twice. And I enjoyed it and I would like to do it again. . . . But they were around then . . . the people running the newspapers . . . and, as I told you once before, at that time, the best and most able shakedown artist in the Criminal Courts Building was a newspaper reporter. And, Oh, what a shakedown artist he was . . . but nobody every says anything about that. Nobody printed that. Nobody says that as a young cop I was ordered to take two subscriptions to the newspaper . . . *two, not one, two!*

Q. Why?

A. Because they were having . . . I don't know . . . some problem. I was just a young policeman, but I'll never forget it. In those days, I think the councilmen were called commissioners and we were all called in and I was a motorcycle policeman . . . I'll never forget this dummy . . . a little fat guy . . . I don't remember what his name is . . . he said, "you know," and, can you imagine this analogy, "the newspapers act as a buffer between us and the public." Sounds like a page out of Adolf Hitler. And he said, "They got little problems here and we're going to show them we are all with them and we all take not one, but two subscriptions. We expect everybody here to take two subscriptions." And that was the *Item-Tribune*, I believe. It was the morning paper. I guess it was just a gesture because I don't imagine it could have helped much . . . just a political gesture. And remember . . . that was at the time there were slot machines at every corner . . . handbooks everywhere . . . we had a police official, a lot of police officials, who worked at handbooks.

Q. Well, do you think things are just as corrupt or, perhaps, more so today?

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PERSHING GERVAIS

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A. I would say that the corruption today is a whole lot more sophisticated. It's a lot more exclusive now.

D. Do you mean by that your old statement that you have to belong to the club?

A. Oh, yes, it's very exclusive today.

Q. Are you saying that the little guy isn't in on it anymore?

A. Yea, that's for sure. He's out of it, the little fellow. I'm not knowledgeable enough about the problems of sociology or political science or what have you to tell you what the exact difference is. All I know is that it's a meaner, more vicious, non-productive kind of corruption, if you understand what I mean. Everything has changed. Your police department is kind of teetering. It's very unproductive.

Q. With regard to criminal cases, do you think policemen help hustling lawyers?

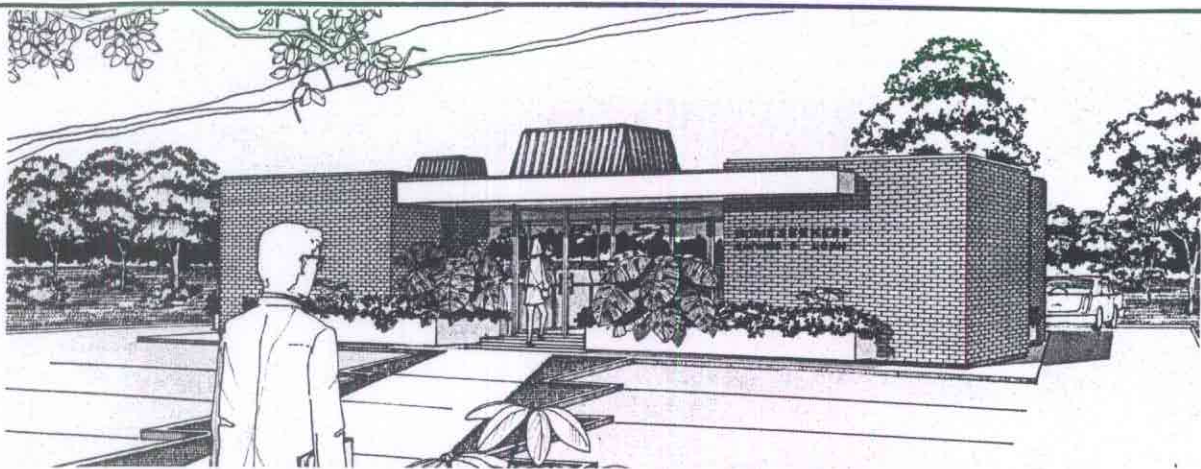
A. There's no question about it. In the Central Lock-up, it has to be. There has to be collusion.

Q. What do they do?

A. Well they call a lawyer up when there's a guy in the can with a lot of money. And some policemen are going to call certain lawyers. You'll find almost consistently on those books down there,



a handful of lawyers that are always on that book. Now, if you use the slide rule of insurance companies as to the probability of putting all the lawyers together and the probability of this one lawyer being called time and time again by so many clients, the odds are going to be like 1,234-trillion-to-one light years. You know that it's just not so. You know that they are getting calls and, when they go into Central Lock-up, they're supposed to have been summoned or sent. One of the guises they use to get in is that they say



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they received a phone call from a friend of the person in jail. But it's almost always only when a fellow has got fresh money in his pocket.

There's no question that there's some complicity with police in wide open "B" drinking in the French Quarter and you got a gambling casino that's been operating on North Rampart constantly, without interruption for almost a year now.

Q. Do you think the police are better now than they were?

A. It depends what you're talking about. Are you talking about nice, clean cut fellows or are you talking about policemen with two tons of hair on their head with the little cap sitting on top of it casually riding around just killing time.

They don't produce very much. It looks good statistically sometimes but I don't think they produce very much. And it's because they're being restrained and being made cowardly. And, of course, we know there's some that need restraining. But I always think of . . . you know . . . during World War II . . . we needed people like Patton and MacArthur because there was a war going on . . . Patton was the kind of guy that the editors and the publishers of the "Picayune" and "States" papers . . . they wouldn't let him

in their little club where they play cards and things. He would be too crude . . . When there was a war on, he proved that he could capture more prisoners and lose less men than anyone else . . . but he was a bad man . . . everybody was down on him . . . the minute the war was over, they removed him. And I don't quarrel with that. When the war was over, his kind of guy should not be in that kind of position, cause he's a rough, tough guy. And MacArthur had to be fired, too. But the point is, they would not get rid of Patton or MacArthur while the war was going on because they needed 'em. Here we got a war, but we will not commit the Pattons and the MacArthurs in our Army which is the police department.

You used to hear of one, two, three, four real tough cops . . . cops that stood out. You can't name one that has that reputation right now. Not one real tough cop.

Q. How about Irvin Magri?

A. Well, Magri's kind of like Garrison. He's got a little craft with the words. He gets by with it. But you certainly could never call him a tough cop. You know, if somebody slapped him, they'd make a little girl out of him. He sure ain't no tough cop.

But you need tough cops.

We want all gentlemen, all people who

know how to say the right thing and know how to flatter the proper people. If a chief of police acts like a rough, tough cop, they're going to be horrified. They want him out. They want a nice guy who goes to the Carnival ball, who goes out to the fishing rodeo, who knows how to say the proper thing, the old cliches, who don't ruffle anybody's feelings, who looks very statesman like, looks very objective . . . which is all horseshit. The problem with that is the criminal element don't listen to a damn one of those people. They're not impressed by that at all. So, it's crazy. It's just absolutely crazy.

You take this crazy idea recently of having some experts come down and study and then say what's wrong with the police department. They been doing that for years. You know when they used to do that regularly? When we had wide open graft . . . we always had those guys come down. Listen, I could pick you up four police characters who could tell you better what's wrong with the police department, how to correct it and how it should be done than these silly little boys do riding around with their maps and their stop watches and their pads and all that crap. Thank Christ it's not my problem. It's just another reason that I'm

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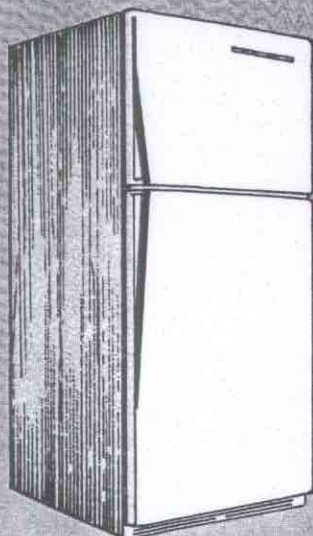
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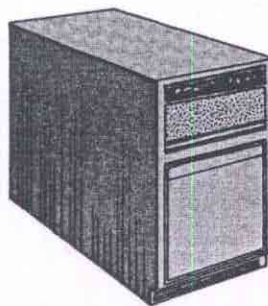
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PERSHING GERVAIS

Continued from page 97

delighted to be away from New Orleans.

Q. Is it better where you are?

A. No question about it.

Q. What do you think about the Metropolitan Crime Commission?

A. The question is, what good are they? What good is the crime commission? Number one, why is it necessary to have one? A watchdog? First of all, we've got elected people and the newspapers are supposed to watch them. Now we've got the crime commission watching them. Well, pretty soon, we're going to have to have a crime crime commission to watch the crime commission. Then, we'll do away with elections; we'll just have commissions in every big city and every big state. If it is proper to have a crime commission to bully city and state officials, why shouldn't we then have a master crime commission to bully the President and the Senate and the Supreme Court? What's different?

Q. After your long years of experience around Tulane and Broad, what is your opinion of the way criminal justice is administered?

A. I hate to sound repetitious . . . but . . . the news media are a lot at fault because they don't cover that properly. Whatever you're going to say about the Criminal Courts Building . . . remember . . . the reporters that are out there have been out there as long as the building . . . many of them . . . and it's foolish to think that they aren't going to fall into the same line. And they're kept there because they now know what they can say and who they can say it about and who they can't say it about. If you were to ask a reporter, "Have you ever been restrained?" he would tell you, "No." But if he were insistent and he kept exposing someone who was their darling, he would be taken out of there and put somewhere else.

Q. Well, over and above reporters, who are the real bad guys?

A. Who are the bad guys? Listen, how many people have they got in that building?

Q. Now, do you include everybody in that statement? One of the guys out there got mad at you when you made that generalization once before and you know who I'm talking about, don't you?

A. You're talking about a judge?

Q. Yes.

A. Well, you see, he's an unpopular judge . . . even with the news media, incidentally . . . To me, he (Judge Frank Shea) is nobody's darling and the poor, the weak and the friendless are going to come closer to getting justice in his court.

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room than anybody else's. He talks bad . . . and maybe he's a little overly sensitive about people trying to use him as a tool, sometimes. He will not permit himself to be used by *anybody*, nobody. He just will not be used.

Q. Well, you say almost everybody out there is a bad guy, who do you think are the worst.

A. You know what my answer to that is? The news media, the reporters, they know who the bums are. You know what happens, Rosemary, you're going to get the news media so they can quote me . . . but they know who the bums are, they know who the drunks are, they know who are the horrible bastards in the courtrooms that treat people like dogs if they are the weak and the friendless and the poor and who bow and scrape if it's somebody in authority. They only want somebody to quote. So, whatever is bad out

there . . . I come back to the same thing . . . *I look to the news media*. It's their fault that they are permitted to get away with it. But to get back to your question, nobody at the building is ever going to get . . . to suffer from battle fatigue.

Q. You think they're pretty overpaid, then?

A. There ain't no question about 'em being overpaid and underworked. They talk about the terrible overload . . . they got to keep adding judges . . . and they can't get their cases up in court . . . they only need to cut out the bullshit and quit currying favor. Go look at Frank Shea's record, his docket . . . he don't fool around, he disposes of cases. He sits and he works and he won't dilly-dally. You know, lawyers often use as an excuse for a delay . . . they come up and they say, 'Judge, I didn't get all my fee yet.' That's grounds for delay because he

didn't get his fee! Which is usually a lie . . . and the fee is usually exorbitant anyway. You won't see that in Shea's court.

Q. Do you think the majority of the criminal court judges know the meaning of justice?

A. To say do they know what the meaning of justice is . . . and let me tell you, I would like to include with them the civil court judges . . . nobody ever talks about them, again that's the *establishment* judges, that's the judges that belong to the same club that the newspaper editors and publishers belong to . . . they come from the same bolt. But . . . to ask me, do they know what justice is, is like asking me, does a whore know what sex is? *They know what it is . . . they know how to use it . . . to their benefit . . .* but whether they know what honor is,

Continued on page 100



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PERSHING GERVAIS

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whether they're concerned with honor, whether they're concerned with manliness . . . that's a better question. I go back to the old whore. She knows what sex is but she don't know what being a real lady is or what virtue is.

Q. How about the lawyers?

A. Listen, they're the best customers them whores has got. Listen, those whores can't survive without tricks.

Q. You mean the judges can't survive without tricks?

A. That's the whores . . . the judges.

Q. I just wanted to make sure I understood you?

A. Yea.

Q. Do you feel some judges just shouldn't be on the bench? How about the senior judge, Bernard Bagert? Right now, his former minute clerk is suing him for non-payment for work done outside the courtroom.

A. You know that Bagert used to swear the witnesses in. He would act as the minute clerk.

Q. When the minute clerk wasn't on the job?

A. Yea, when the minute clerk was out doing his business. This can't be completely repugnant to Bagert since we already know he used to use a prisoner to do work for which his son was getting paid for and that prisoner escaped, if you remember. We know, too, that this guy is involved in all kinds of drunken escapades. He's been punched and beat up more times than anybody can count. We know that his driver's license was taken away from him and he continued to drive. So, how can this man sit in judgment of anybody? Let me tell you this: *He would not be permitted in the circles of the Mafia.*

Q. Why?

A. He would not be considered trustworthy enough. He's a drunken, unpredictable bum . . . He's unreliable . . . and, of course, back to his minute clerk . . . therein is a big story in itself. I would make much to do of the minute clerk's suit. I would make this kind of prediction: It's safe to assume that the Donahue-Bagert suit will be settled out of court . . . some how, in some fashion . . . because the Court cannot permit Donahue to air out all of its dirty laundry or its skeletons.

Q. What was the worst case of corruption you ever saw?

A. The worst case . . . Jesus Christ . . . the worst case of corruption? That's kind of hard when you see it every day . . . It's kind of hard . . . but . . . I would say that probably the worst case is when the letter of the law is administered against the



poor, the weak and the defenseless with such indignation . . . you know . . . when these judges peer down and scream and hand down these outlandish sentences to the friendless. It's so easy to do it to the defenseless. To me, this is the most reprehensible because they're only trying to balance the scales for the rest of the crap that they do. This is worse than whatever benefits they reap. And I've always maintained that it ain't only the girl who takes money that's a whore. There's all kinds of corruption besides taking money. If a man corrupts his integrity, his oath of office, and everything else for political expediency or power or to help get somebody else elected or to get himself re-elected, how is he different from the guy who does the same thing for money? I don't see any difference!

Q. How does it feel to be a displaced person?

A. I don't consider myself displaced.

Q. Well, wherever you are, do you like where you are?

A. Oh, sure . . . sure. Listen, a good question for me is, when did I become disenchanted with New Orleans?

Q. When was that?

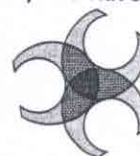
A. The moment I found out that the cafe society or the silk stockings of New Orleans really, in fact, controlled everything there. Or, if they didn't control it, they were responsible for setting up the monsters.

Continued on page 102

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PERSHING GERVAIS

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Q. How does your family feel about the role you decided to take?

A. They're delighted to be away from New Orleans. Every one of them. They are delighted to be away from New Orleans.

Q. Are you able to live comfortably?

A. Very comfortably and it is my sincere wish that I never cast my eyes upon New Orleans again.

Q. Well, what about the trial, if there is one, will you come back?

A. It is not for me to just arbitrarily say that I will or I won't.

Q. Do you have to come back?

A. I don't like to comment on the trial. I don't think it's right. But the government has not forced me to do or

say or promise anything. I'm my own man. For instance, I'm talking to you, am I not? I didn't ask their permission. I'm talking to you because I want to talk to you. I repeat to you . . . I'm not there because *I don't want to be there*. I have contempt for New Orleans and if there's anything that I have contempt for in New Orleans, honest, it's the newspapers. Contempt! It's beyond even talking about it. They are in my opinion what you call total, complete whores, the newspapers. They are unreal. They are dishonest. The mere composure of the newspaper itself is dishonest.

Q. So, you don't feel like an outcast . . . you feel like you could come back any time you want to come back?

A. You mean that I would be afraid to come back?

Q. Yes, someone was teasing the pin-ball operators and one of the lawyers

said he wished he knew where you were, not so he could do damage, but so that he could put a 24-hour body guard on you to make sure nothing happens to you.

A. Every time there's a witness, they always say that. But let me say this, there's one problem with harming you . . . they can't do it over the telephone, or via satellite, somebody's got to come personally and do it. And New Orleans is unique from any place else in the world. When you talk about New Orleans people, even people from the underworld, I don't know how to say it . . . I guess the most effective way is that they're a pile of crap.

Q. Do you think they'd be too lazy to come after you even if they wanted to shut you up?

A. I don't know, I haven't really thought about it, but let me say this,

if I ever get an idea that they're looking for me, I will be looking for them. I don't consider myself tough but I'm at the very least, equally as tough as they are. I am certainly not afraid. I'm not personally afraid. I would not want my children and my family . . . now they've done this to me before . . . years ago . . . I never had problems but they used to call my house and threaten my son when he was just a little bitty kid, he was about seven or eight years old, literally threaten him . . . they threatened my house, they did all kinds of things . . . they did a lot of threats over the phone . . . and I don't want to subject my family to that.

Q. So, that's the main reason you left?

A. That's the main reason I left.

Q. Besides the fact that you're tired of New Orleans?

A. Am I tired of New Orleans? You know my picture of New Orleans? You know how they always portray the old, phony southern aristocracy. What's that club that all those *#*#@*# belong to on Canal Street? You know the gang . . . the ones that sit around and cluck, cluck, cluck about the situation and to me this typifies everything that's wrong with New Orleans.

Q. Cluck, cluck, cluck?

A. Yea. The old hens up there, all those silly old bastards. For instance, any time anything big, progressive happens to New Orleans, it's never New Orleans money . . . it's always out of state money that has the foresight and the wisdom and the willingness to gamble. But these people, the cluckers, they say, "My family heritage . . . and we go back seven generations" and all this garbage and, man, they dwell on and loll around in it.

You know, years ago, when I was driving the superintendent of police who belonged to that club up there. He was in it, he was in the car, and the man who was running for governor was in the car and some other local personage. I'll never forget, I was driving them some place and we passed a policeman's residence and he was out washing his car, a nice one . . . it was a maroon Ford, a new one . . . and they were almost at the point of outrage because he had this nice home and this nice new Ford, as though he were not entitled to it because he was a peasant. I was a young fellow and I'll never forget it . . . because if ever we fall apart it's going to be because of those silly bastards, those old grandmas sittin' around up there.

That's probably enough of an interview, because I keep getting visions that *New Orleans* magazine ain't going to let

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PERSHING GERVAIS

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you use a lot of that stuff . . . like some of my expressions and all of those choice things I've got to say about the newspapers.

Q. Is it better where you are?

A. No question about it.

Q. Palm trees and coconuts, huh?

A. No question about it. Of course, let me say this: I've been saying for some years now that the whole problem with all government is that honor has no meaning anymore. And that's where it's got to begin. Until honor has a meaning, until honor is a sensitive thing that people are sensitive about, it's never going to be any better. It can only keep getting worse. And I don't know any other way to put it than that. They just don't have honorable men anymore. The people get exactly what they deserve.

Q. Are you going to vote absentee in the governor's race?

A. I quit voting a long time ago. I said it's ridiculous. The last time I was approached to register, I said, if you bring the registration books to my house and, then, when the voting time comes, bring the voting machine to my house, maybe. But do you think I'm going to get out and get in line to vote for the kind of bums that we're putting in office, you've got to be crazy. It's insane. Then they give you the old crap about bad officials are elected by good people who don't vote . . . but all you've got to choose from is bums. It's just a joke. The whole thing is a joke. I'd much rather be my way, to Hell with them all.

Q. What is your way?

A. Well, I can't do anything about it, so my way is I don't vote and, therefore, I'm never mad at myself. Of course, I don't know what's the qualification for a man to run for office. I keep hearing them people talk about . . . every time a candidate runs . . . you always hear him talk about his qualifications. Never any real evidence of his honor . . . except, you know, what he says . . . and honorable men wouldn't go about it the way all our bums run after the office. Every time they tell me they want to serve me . . .

Q. You're afraid they want to serve you up on a platter?

A. Exactly.

Q. Well, what are you doing for kicks?

A. Not anything much, really . . . not right now. I'm looking and hoping that things will change nationally. I'm beginning to see some evidences of muscle on a national level and I'm for it. I'm for muscle. Without muscle we're just in bad shape. You see, I love the way they do things in Spain. It's beautiful in Spain. You know, you get off the plane in Spain

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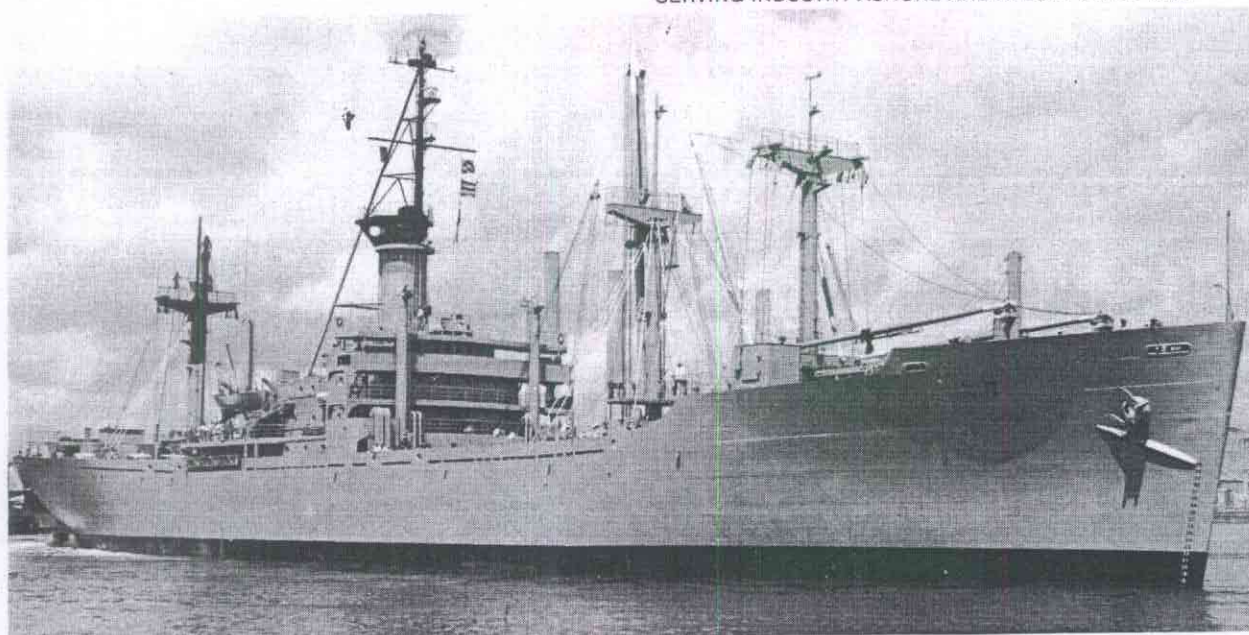
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with long hair and a guitar and barefooted and you don't get out of the airport. They'll put your ass on the next plane out.

Q. Well, what do you object to about long hair?

A. Oh, it's beautiful if it's on a woman. You know what I mean . . . I'm talking about long, *dirty* hair and feet; the people I'm talking about now are the people who contribute nothing and complain about everything. It's like saying, what do you complain about blacks? Nothin' until they start with the clenched fist business. Oh, well, these are problems, I guess, for the sociologists.

Q. You sound like you're becoming one.

A. You think so?

Q. Yes. Anything funny happen to you lately?

A. No not really. I haven't seen any-

thing. I've been too busy moving around. Actually, it's been kind of dull. I'm beginning to feel like it's kind of a hopeless thing. I don't know what's going to happen. I never seem to be able to get anything done, really. I feel kind of like . . . who was it . . . Churchill, who said his race is run . . .

Q. You're resting, huh?

A. Yea. My race ain't run but I feel like I've been dropped down a class or two.

Q. Well, are you getting fat or are you losing weight?

A. Oh, no, I'm losin' weight. I dropped about 35 pounds.

Q. You're getting that lean and hungry look?

A. Not yet. I'm working at it.

Q. You're going to make a dramatic entrance when you come to court, huh?

A. Damn right. I'll be a pretty sonof-

abitch . . . I'll have a monocle and everything.

Q. How about a cigarette holder?

A. Naw, I don't smoke anymore. Haven't smoked in 10 months.

Q. Well, maybe you can smoke a pipe just for effect.

A. Oh Christ, no. I hate bastards that smoke pipes. To me this is the badge of a jerk. Just always rubbed me wrong. Every time I see a guy with a pipe, I expect see him with a bow-tie on . . . the pipe, the bow-tie and the last badge you have to look for from him is white cotton socks. Then you know you've got a total jerk. It's kind of like the guy who walks into a whorehouse eating peanuts. They'll run you out. I guess they figure you're too casual . . . I don't want to be too casual.

