

# ADVENTURE IN A GREYHOUND TERMINAL



"The Road," Part XI by Jude Acers, US Senior master

After this morning I will be alone. The three blankets that kept me warm in 1968 keep me warm in my studio apartment today. They were filthy then, but are clean now. I look across the floor of Max Burkett's apartment on Haight Street. Dennis Fritzing is asleep on a mattress by the 12-foot long phonograph. He has brought me to San Francisco, bought me Orange Julius treats, shown me magic Chinese restaurants, where a man can get by on a few pennies.

Today Dennis Fritzing has allowed himself to be talked into transition. His father will come in formal military regalia, the gold medals, ribbons, bringing the whole family to Max Burkett's flat. They will take Fritz the poet to the army recruiter. Dennis Fritzing is going to kill people in Vietnam. He is uneasy about it, but actually believes his father knows best.

We had no money, but Max Burkett was amazed with his miraculous "loans" of six or eight dollars, which just happened to be exactly what a stingy chess bum needed to make the Fillmore West new year's blast. You saw the Vanilla Fudge, Ritchie Havens and Quicksilver Messenger Service all night and were served breakfast by Mr. Bill Graham in the morning! We were all on the floor, which was cozy and offered excellent PVC.

Max Burkett and Mary are asleep in the closet room just in front of the bathroom. Burkett will be furious if we go to shave, take a bath, use the telephone. We are blocked off by the Rincon Annex mail handler and can damn well find somewhere else to live if we disturb the host. This means that Jude Acers will fumble with the door, while putting on his Navy surplus peacoat to cross the street, where there is a school that is never used by anybody, as far as Jude Acers can see. Jude has learned to pop open a window, jigger the door open and perform necessities. He has done it 200 times during greatest emergency. It was a little cold though.

You could see four blocks of Haight Street pour down the hill to Market. You could see an occasional neighborhood holdup in front of the bars three blocks up Haight. The guy just comes right out at closing time and they put the gun in his back or stomach and take his money. They're patient robbers, as they've waited in the bar to check out the money availability, and come out right with their client.

This does not happen very often, however. You have only seen it three times in three months with your own eyes. One time the hoods walk parallel with you for three blocks after you have witnessed the entire holdup! It's called chicken. Who will leave the street first? I decide to be chicken and not lead two robbers to Max Burkett's apartment, because it is very important to "never, never bother the host," according to Fritzing. Besides, they both have real guns and will have to shoot me, if possible, through Max's stained glass living-room window.

They gave chase, but I easily outdistanced them after a brief, thrilling seven-block sprint, which saw the evil pursuers stay absolutely even with me. But both had been smoking cigarettes when they had robbed a man before my eyes. I knew that my powerful furnace-like lungs, all conquering willpower, fortress-like superman muscles and the fact that I was absolutely scared out of my mind would be the decisive factors. I turned toward them when my lead was a full two city blocks and screamed, "Good-bye, gentlemen! Join the unhooked generation!" Then I gave them Dennis Waterman's favorite sign of the eagle, gave them my usual take-that-knives-bow and zoomed around the corner like Super Jude. People on both sides of the street found me very interesting to watch, but they would spot the real gun, half-held beneath a hood's jacket a block away and suddenly lose all interest in the traveling show. Two people stuck their heads out of windows, saw, pulled their windows down with the danger of decapitation very real but ignored.

So much for Haight Street and past flower-children years in Burkett's neighborhood. Only 11 people were murdered because people burned their neighbors on drug deals within a mile of Max Burkett's residence of heavies. We survived because we were good guys. After the third holdup, it was getting boring. Even the tour guides dropped Haight Street in 1969.

Checking the mailbox to find a letter from Sheila Holland of Fayetteville and Little Rock, Arkansas was necessary. Her art, magnificent handwriting, warm reassurance had never been imagined during our first all-night conference in a box car. She would tell Jude quite correctly, bitterly that she had wasted much time on him. It was fortunate that she had not traveled on "Odyssey: 5,000 miles and How To Survive," because "Jude" it would have been such a bummer. You

are such a bummer." And it was true, very true. Her letters would stop today.

Back inside, you crouch by the gas heater. Nobody is awake, and you look at the living room, which you will live in until the wreckers are tearing down the walls outside, sealing off the windows, totally unaware that there is a real live human-being chessmaster inside there, who is making several hundred free long-distance phone calls on a telephone that, miraculously, the phone has not reclaimed from the condemned building! It will be no problem to dial the numbers in lightless, lifeless condemned buildings. You finger-feel the telephone dial and call up Dr. Milan Vukcevic in Cleveland, Ohio. He is amazed as you just keep talking, talking to the famous theorist and one of the strongest chessplayers in the world.

You call two people in Australia, six in New York, four in Canada, two in Mexico and shoot the works by trying for "the Chinese National Weather Bureau, English Report Division, please." They're still working on placing the call, when windows are being busted by wreckers, and you leave by the back door for the last time, grabbing a handful of brown sugar from a sack as the front wall caves in...

US chessmaster Dennis Fritzing's eyes are getting zinged by the noonday sun. This will be the last time that our two-year team will make existence quite a flavor. He cannot see without his huge lenses. He does not do anything fast. He gets up very slowly. He does not possess an ounce of egomania, arrogance. He is too kind, too giving. He spends \$75 on a ring for his sister, which leaves him with no money to live! No matter. He writes poetry, plays one rapid transit chess game after another, chuckles, laughs and hardly says a word.

I have never seen Dennis Fritzing get angry at anyone. He rarely speaks unless spoken to most carefully. You have to place the question, for Dennis firmly believes, like Tarjan, that the meek shall inherit the earth. We get along because I am girl crazy, chess crazy, while Fritzing is into letting everything, anything happen.

Now it is really cooking. Big Daddy is coming. "You realize, Dennis Fritzing, that you are absolutely out-of-your-mind. How can you, the supreme pacifist, go off to Asia and engage in outright murder? What has happened to your freedom of choice? You know this land permits you to choose to remain out of war. You know Vietnam will be stopped by the people of the United States. How can you go, Dennis? Have you gone mad? is the opener breakfast conversation.

"Jude, I just want to see what's happening over there. I won't be killing people over there...I suppose that you could interpret my going, my body as supporting the war. But, I really don't have anything better to do right now. It's tough just living in the city. My dad is into my going. Guess you know."

They take him away. "It is the poet in him, the desire to really live in the boiler," William Addison concludes.

It is 1974. In City Lights book store I'm looking at eyes, nose, hair and ruffled clothes of a poet named Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I have come to look him squarely in the eye. I cannot believe that 600,000 people have bought a collection of his poetry. I know that if you want to look at Ferlinghetti's cackling face in a poetry reading it costs you \$1,250 plus all expenses from San Francisco International Airport. And there are a lot of takers, too many in fact. He owns his own bookstore, his own publishing company. He is actually a successful business in two shoes. Now a publisher in Chicago has told me Ferlinghetti's total sales have to go over a million copies. Is this a lie? I want to ask Ferlinghetti to brag a little, to say it is so, Jude. How can a poet sell a million copies? Can it be real? ...The great Shig is staring at me as I hear Ferlinghetti speak first, without hesitation, planned.

"Jude, do you know a chessplayer named Fritzing Dennis Fritzing?"

Jude Acers freezes. "Well...ahh...sure...He brought me to San Francisco. He beats and draws with top grandmaster and national master in big chess tournaments. He knows me better than anybody, I guess. Day and night we were together, crashing at a dive on Haight about 1968. How do you know him?"

That's when Lawrence Ferlinghetti says, "Fritzing writes lovely poetry. I am publishing some of his poetry, in fact. Jude, I am really amazed. He says he knows you."

Jude Acers just stands there with his jaws immobile. Fritzing Our Dennis Fritzing? How? What? Who? No words.

Ferlinghetti is famous for being tough on manu-

scripts. He has passed up on more major writing by poets than any publisher I know. Such praise is an ovation for a young chessmaster who may well be one of the monster poets of my generation. Ferlinghetti never accepts manuscripts for guaranteed commercial value. Quality, the feeling he gets for his publishing house is the dictator. He is just as tough on prose and has rejected cash-on-the-line manuscripts. It's like a high school football player going straight to the Miami Dolphins. Go Fritzing!

The shock of Fritzing's getting up in the world comes complete. I never dreamed Fritzing was any good, because he never once thrust his poetry under my nose. All those days I thought it was gonna be the longest diary in history. When the shock hits, it is twofold. Fritzing knows so much, if it's like Ferlinghetti says, if Fritz can just get it out, then an awful lot of chessplayers are going to be spending sleepless nights very soon.

But wait, wait. This is a dramatic scene. The Jude Acers opinion is requested by the newspaper reporters, Ferlinghetti and Shig the great. Yes, Mr. Acers, what is your opinion?...

Jude Acers says, "He's like Helen Gurley Brown." Ferlinghetti squints his eyes. "Who?...Hellen who?" "Never mind. Wow, that's great, Lawrence. He is a person of such excellence, such class. He is stoic. I don't know how I could get a surprise as wonderful Gee, wow..."

The television set in the 64th city of my United States chess tour promised me that an old friend would beam out little tidbits of information on how to seduce your neighbor, think positively and have fun doing it. She is Helen Gurley Brown, little miss thin bombshell, who is *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Ten years before women's liberation, Ms. Helen was writing *Sex and the Single Girl*, which only said straight out that you get all the goodies in a free land by getting all the goodies. It's up to you. What you must watch out for are religious, political and moral idiots who deny you the right to choose exactly what you need from living and do it, take it. Of course, Ms. Helen had to be deviously subtle, not ever warn that your mother or father are probably the idiots, leading empty lives, and in the final death state without ever having lived. It was nifty and people ate it up like M-andM's candies.

You have to listen closely as Helen puts it to Johnny Carson between the lines, "Johnny, I mean, if the sound of a woman's nylon stockings swishing together, swish...swish, makes a sound that drives men crazy... why hide it? All a woman has to do is rub her thighs together to produce an exquisite friction." Nobody listened. She was too insignificant, funny ten years ago...

You sit there in your hotel room at one in the morning. Everyone is laughing at or with Helen. But you do not smile. You have read that tip in one of the hundreds of magazines you desperately read on the road week after week. You switch off the television and put on the cassette machine. And remember. You wonder if Helen Gurley Brown is listened to (several million dollars later) by her publisher. I listen all the time. My first Helen Gurley Brown experience came years ago...

It is one of those unforgettable bus stations like Cheyenne, Wyoming, where they clean the bus, transfer passengers, give you smelling salts and hamburgers. It is the St. Louis hound terminal, and it comes after the huge arch that serves no purpose and is therefore important. It comes after two solid days on the bus from Phoenix, Arizona. I have met five different new girlfriends, one worldwide traveler from Scotland. They are all gone now. It is one o'clock in the morning. "Watch your step please. We had a lady break her toe here last week. Take your time. This bus will be here one and a half hours. You have all that time to get off the bus. Thank you for going hound." The passengers laugh, applaud courteously

Jude Acers waits until everyone is out of the bus. He stumbles slowly down the aisle to his magnetic chess pieces and wall chessboard. He shoulders his black travel bag, which is already legendary coast to coast. The guy is death. He even carries a black bag.

He cannot think clearly about which lane the New York bus will be in. Must buy another ticket. Switch luggage labels from St. Louis to New York. Hobble. Hobble. Tired.

Jude Acers, the greatest of them all, is dropping a dime in the automatic chocolate cocoa mixing machine, when he sees them in the mirror. He does not understand, and turns to see them.

There is a tall Indian lady and a girl crying, wrapping her arms around the woman's legs. The woman is

# ...IT PAID TO BE A GOOD GUY

pressing her head in both hands, shaking her head quietly.

Jude Acers walks over, leaving the chocolate in the machine forever. He is suspicious as two people stand holding each other. The ticket agent is smiling slightly. "Ma'am, a luggage identification marker is not proof of purchase. We know you had tickets, but there's nothing we can do."

The Indian lady says quietly, "The driver man take all ticket. We have no ticket. We have no money. We do not have way to St. Petersburg. Must be mistake. Driver...last bus take all our ticket."

The ticket agent looks away, says nothing. You can smell his game. He gets his jollies by the game. He has them trapped helpless in the St. Louis bus station and there is no help, for they are dirt poor.

Jude Acers watches and considers the problem. What would the greats do? San Francisco insurance millionaire Karl Bach would remember running from Germany with nothing and sleeping on the street from coast to coast. He would whip out a spare thousand dollar bill and limp up to the desk, saying "That's all right. Just take it out of this." You know, with a nice, friendly life-insurance type salesmanship. If the agent couldn't change the bill, Bach would be forced to part with one of his spare hundreds for the fare, which he would do gladly. The ticket agent would be shall we say, surprised. Bach would then disappear in a cloud of smoke. Hi-yo!

William Waguespack III is the legendary legal weasel, rules fixer, gamesman, cynic and sportsman in residence at the New Orleans Chess Club. A ruthless killer on the side of the underdog, Waguespack is in seventh heaven when the case looks hopeless. His specialty is defending those long-haired hippie types when the New Orleans cops plant evidence to put them in jail on general principles. He bails out all kinds of losers just for the blast, the cup of coffee with them. He is quite simply a murderer if it's a heavy push by Big Brother. He would love this action. He would pay 20 bucks just to hear about it.

I can see it now Waguespack, the supreme chess cheapo attack artist, the burglar, the man who swindles the clothing off masters and even grandmasters like Portisch, would just stand there in his \$300 suit and his royal leather briefcase. He would look immaculate, Ronald Reagan like. He would fix those weasel eyes on the ticket agent and the words would pour out in symphony!

"Sir, as a member of the bar, I have witnessed your unprofessional discourtesy to this woman, despite distinct, almost irresistible evidence that cruel unmitigated irresponsibility to the plaintiffs, uhh...pardon me...the lady and her little girl most certainly exists on the part of your company and, most certainly, you personally. This is to formally and publicly notify you that should you persist in your refusal to make the lady a duplicate ticket immediately, I shall make arrangements for their lodging in the city's finest hotel and we shall meet again in Municipal Court on an emergency basis tomorrow morning. The lady and her child will appear without a word before his honor. They will be well represented by enthusiastic legal counsel, namely yours truly.

"And, sir, besides making a thorough report to your superiors on this matter, we shall bill our in-city expenses to your company, to say nothing of my considerable fees. It is also my intention to notify the distinguished members of the local press as to the nature of the St. Louis Greyhound station, which leaves women and children stranded because it cannot refrain from stealing their tickets.

"We will certainly see to it that a photograph of them is made in your station as well, and a copy forwarded to your superiors to indicate your professional concern and pride in the performance of your duties.

"In short, should you persist in your refusal to repair damages done to these people, they will seek damages, and I will own your royal ass!" You would have to see Waguespack in action to understand how he does things. The ticket agent would be, shall we say, shaken up and writing.

These thoughts speed through Jude's mind. The deserted bus depot was no place for anybody to spend the night. But what can you do, Jude! You are not a millionaire (yet!), nor a murderous, uncompromising attorney who does not like to see people pushed out of windows 60 stories up.

"Please get in line, sir. Wait your turn," the agent says. Of course, the line is exactly three people: the lady, her girl, Jude. The absurdity, the joke, the collision is now inevitable. The joker wants to play We play.

My fuse was completely blown. It was not humanitarianism. It is not kindness. He wants games. Sometimes you put your money down and you play for the ride, to win nothing, but to win. O.K., here we go.

"I'm with them, sir. Please give them a duplicate ticket. I saw them buy the tickets in Phoenix, Arizona. They had lots of luggage. They had to have the ticket to send all that luggage. You know it. I know it. Please help them and do it now."

The agent smiles disbelievingly "Sonny, why don't you just wait your turn? Don't go jumping on your stallion until I say so. You expect us to take your word on the matter?"

The word of the greatest is questioned! The world has come to an end. This is it. Furious beyond words at watching this beetle-bugger-loser-man sink the two people and himself as well, Jude digs for his wallet. "O.K., I'll pay for new tickets for both of them." That's it. Go ahead and stick your foot in thy speaker. Sink yourself, Jude. Now you're in it good.

The agent isn't smiling now. "It's more than three hundred dollars!"

Jude does not blink. The game has come down. He fumbles his wallet on the table. It contains no money and the agent is busy noticing this. A BankAmericard flashes across the tabletop from Jude. Agent's turn to move.

The agent, of course, asks for three pieces of identification. By an absolute miracle, Jude has them.

Now, if you were an agent in an emergency situation which holds but two choices, (A) taking the kid's BankAmericard and (B) stranding two people in a bus station, which would you choose? You know which course this man chooses. It is no matter that the Greyhound company has hundreds of tough ticket agents and good-guy drivers who are not about to let some crazy foul-up leave a woman and a child helpless in a bus station. No, we had to get the dumb-dumb.

Where there is a will there is a way, but the agent would not get to toy with us all then. He continues the red tape and phones the computer banks in Seattle, Washington to check out the card. In the middle of the night the computer is being serviced and cannot work. Agent's choice...he can take it in the emergency or say no. You know what is coming.

"I'm sorry, sir. We can't check the card. Frankly, I don't know if I'd do it, even with authorization," he says with the deepest sizzling satisfaction. He had chopped Jude. Jude's move.

Fixing his big beautiful blue eyes on the agent, Jude Acers considered the matter again. Then he told the man, "Make out two one-way tickets to St. Petersburg, Florida."

"I'll have to see the cash, young man."

"I'll have to see the tickets before you see the cash, old man."

Our line was no longer three. Seven people were watching incredulously. They understood that somebody would win, that somebody would lose. Either Jude Acers would raise \$344 or he is all mouth like Ed Edmondson says. Well, well.

The agent motioned to the city policeman at the front door to come over. "Roy, watch this gentleman while I make up these tickets. We're having a little argument, is all." The cop wonders what in the hell is happening. He just stands there, quietly looking at all of us.

The ticket agent knew I had no money in my wallet. He would win. He thrust the tickets over the counter with both hands pressed on top of them.

"The question is young man, do you or don't you?" Jude Acers stepped back, as the lady, her child, the

cop and all passers-by were watching his every move. Then he raised his arms high up in the sky and brought them out wide, parallel to the ground. He left them there for two seconds. Then he slowly lowered his right hand and tugged at his right pants pocket, his left pants pocket. Three hundred and fifty dollars fell on the floor.

The people could not believe that Jude Acers was going to win. The Indian lady was absolutely out of her mind with astonishment, gratitude. Jude picked the money up and shelled it out. He received six dollars change from the tickets. This would mean that Jude Acers was not stranded in downtown St. Louis with nowhere to go, no place to stay and seven days to get to New York for the next chess tour appearance.

"You sure must like your friends a lot," said the agent, hurriedly moving to the next customer after losing the game. Jude Acers did not reply, but headed for the door, blindly.

I have always believed the Tom Mix and Roy Rogers movies which hold that Indians do not show emotion very well. Well, it kind of heavy as the lady grabbed my arm, trying to press her address into my hand, her little girl holding on to my legs now. But no, when you are the greatest, you put your money on winners. You don't take it back. The only worthy gift is one not repaid, with no reward but necessity, value in the eyes of giver and receiver. So what if it's going to be scary getting to the east coast. Besides, I can write about the weird experience in my recollections of a chess-master series. Think it will be called *The Road*.

Jude Acers steps outside the bus station to suck in cold air, clear the mind. Regain your calm. How do you hitch-hike to New York from here? There is somebody by a car. Ask him.

"Excuse me, sir...I have this problem. I need to get..." His words stopped in midair.

From out of a car trunk emerged the upper half of one of the most enchanting women on this planet. With saucer-like eyes she understood with amusement her dynamite effect upon Jude.

"Yes, did you say something?" she said, smiling in a come-hither fashion. Too much, man! Oh, fluttering heart throbation!

Jude Acers simply could not believe his eyes. "Uhh...uhh...Let's see...ma'am...I, uhh, have to get to New York City, and could you please tell me the best way to hitch-hike from here?"

The woman began laughing, clapping her hands together, pointing at Jude. He is bewildered. "What's so funny? he asks, smiling weakly. Had he blown it forever already?"

She purrs, "You are just a lucky boy! I'm going to visit my parents in New York tomorrow morning. Fancy that. If you're willing to stay overnight in my house, I'd be happy to take you all the way there. Can you wait until morning?" (Uhhhhhh) She added that her name was Verne. Would he? What about it?

Jude Acers was not influenced by Verne's 39-25-35 measurements, the fact that she was a crack gymnast, great conversationalist blast, free ticket to New York. Would he go with Verne? He took 1/10,000th of a second to decide. Yes! He would go to protect the wonderful fairy princess from all those New England wolves like Walter Browne.

As Verne was getting into her teenie-weenie foreign sports car, I could see that she needed protection. She was wearing only a red bandana and blue jeans cutoff shorts beneath her coat. Her clothes were old threads and about to fall off. My goodness gracious! I wrestled two more packages into the car for her, reminding myself how it pays to be a good guy. I was afraid it was a dream. I took as many reassurance peeks at Verne as possible while loading my travel equipment on the luggage rack atop her car. Yes, it was a short trip from the outhouse to the penthouse. It was paradise at dawn, a dream, a ride, a lady who stops all time. Ten on a scale of ten, guys.

As Verne got in the car at the hound depot I could hear "swish-swish-swish." She was wearing those nylon sound atomizers, just like tiny Helen Gurley Brown had recommended. I immediately asked her, "Did you get your swish-swish-swish nylon idea from Helen G. Brown?"

"Why, of course!" she says with delight. "How did you know that, Jude? It drives menfolk crazy, which is, of course, my goal." Just like that, she confirms that the HGB tip is not bad, not bad at all. Aha. Ha. Ha. Well, well. Help! Bruce Pandolfini and Walter Browne, where are you guys? ...What am I doin' here? Please, Mr. Custer.

There would obviously be one final problem I could see right away as I took my seat. There was much little sitting room that I would be squeezed right up to Verne at the wheel! I would be forced to notice her Cher-like belly bottom several thousand times. It would be sheer murder all the way to New York City. But no matter I would put up with these mere trifles as bravely as humanly possible. We would go forth like Ken Fitzgerald and Ruthie!

We estimated it would take two days of slow driving to get to New York. After all sorts of ups and downs we barely made it in six days. She would phone her parents and tell them of all sorts of pressing business a slow car, car trouble, sightseeing, friendly visits with friends and other activities that were delaying us. "Don't worry, we'll get there someday, Daddy," she promised on the New Jersey telephone. Her father warned that he was practicing up and using the extra four days to prepare for Jude at the chessboard. Jude still advised Verne to bet on Jude Acers, not Daddy, but she wouldn't listen.

"If Daddy doesn't draw by stalemate, I'm not going to talk to you for a year! Verne whispers. Daddy drew by stalemate three times.

We close with memories of Verne, her slow, wonderfully squeezing car. Believe, Verne was the real thing.

Verne still comes to my chess lectures and exhibition when I'm on the east coast. Usually, she flies in, on her father's company Lear jet, naturally.

Thou shalt reap what thou sowest, Daddy-o.

