The Night I Blew My Chance at the C & W Hall of Fame

He was the star of a popular TV series during the 60’s. Appeared in a number of movies. A tall, reasonably good-looking guy with a great sense of humor and comedic timing that Johnny Carson would have yearned for. His TV show went on for years, and his Las Vegas career continues to this day. His name is a household word. You’d know him immediately. You probably admire him, and may have seen him in person. He’s still very active in show business. And, he’s probably still very gay.

And he’s the only human being who ever actively pursued me for a One Night Stand.

I must be the most naïve guy on the face of the planet. The day it happened, I was on a flight from Atlanta to Richmond. A “milk run,” meaning a flight that stopped several times in route. This was probably late fall, 1972. One of the stops was in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was seated by the window, reading Newsweek. As the boarding process began, I looked up and noticed that the passengers coming aboard appeared to be entertainers. They were young, dressed in flower shirts and bell-bottoms, with long hair. Most had sunglasses in a variety of colors, ranging from very dark to rose colored.

The last person to board was Tim. I recognized him immediately. His hair was longer than he wore on his TV show. And he was wearing a long mink coat. Not something he ever wore on TV, but it was definitely him. Tim Razor! Tim and I made eye contact, and I guess I must have smiled at the recognition of a big TV star.

“Damn,” I thought. “That’s Tim Razor!”

All the others went to the rear of the airplane. Tim took the seat directly behind me.

The door was shut and secured, and we taxied out to the runway. I was conscious that Tim was right behind me. A big star. One of My Old Man’s favorite TV personalities!

Hell, I’m in a position to get an autograph for the Old Man. Or, for anyone else, for that matter. How should I approach this? What if I ask for an autograph, and he gets angry?

It didn’t take long for my curiosity to be answered. I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was Tim, tapping me on the shoulder to get my attention.

“Pardon me,” he said. “Do you know what that is down there?” He gestured out the window to the small town we were flying over.

I told him we’d just left Greensboro, and those were, without doubt, the Greensboro suburbs.

He responded, “Do you mind if I sit with you?”
I was flattered. Tim Razor actually wanted to sit next to me?

“Sure,” I said. “Come on up.”

He had taken off the mink, and was in a tasteful (at least, in the 70’s) leisure suit. He took the aisle seat next to me. I don’t remember all that we talked about, but he told me he was on tour through the South with his troupe- a few co-stars from his TV show, his band, and back-up singers. He told me he was appearing that night in Richmond, and asked if I’d like to be his guest at the show.

“You could watch the show from backstage. Come to the after show party, and later we could have a drink.” This all came out very natural and easy. No suggestive overtures. Almost like one friend to another, making arrangements to get together.

I told Tim I was flattered, and that I was a big fan. Told him about the Old Man, and what a fan he was. Tim smiled at that, as if he was really pleased My Old Man liked him. But, I explained I was meeting my distributor Principal and some of his customers for dinner. A long arranged get together. I couldn’t get out of it. Much as I’d love to see the show from backstage, and meet the band, I’d have to pass. The job had to come first.

“Well, I wish you could be my guest,”’ he said. “Where are you staying in Richmond?”

I told him I was staying at a Holiday Inn near the airport. Tim was booked into one of the fine old hotels in downtown Richmond. A suite probably. Rats. If I didn’t have this stupid dinner to go to, I could rub elbows with a bunch of Hollywood types, drink champagne in a fine hotel suite with a Big Star. What a story to tell at the next sales meeting.

We landed in Richmond. The Distributor Principal was meeting my flight, and then we were going to work the territory. At least I’d get to introduce my associate to Tim.

Tim and I got off the plane together. Bill, my associate and the Principal of our Virginia distributor was there to meet me.

“Hi Bill. Shake hands with Tim Razor. He and I have gotten acquainted on the flight up from Greensboro.”

Bill looked at me questionably, and shook hands with Tim. Hmmm….Bill doesn’t seem to be as impressed as I thought he’d be.

Tim shook hands with Bill, then turned to me, took my hand, and told me how much he’d enjoyed talking to me. Said he hoped we’d meet again. Then, he walked over to rejoin his troupe.

Bill looked at me. “What the hell are you doing with that guy?” he asked.
I told Bill the story of how Tim had boarded the plane, and asked to sit with me. I asked Bill, “What’s the big deal? You’re acting like he’s an axe murderer.”

Bill smiled, looked me in the eye, and said, “Don’t you know that guy’s a queer? Hell, everybody knows he’s queer. Gay as hell! All he wants is what’s in your pants!”

Bet Bill wouldn’t have been so sarcastic if that was Tuesday Weld I’d introduced him to.

“Really?” I said. ”You’re joking! Tim Razor isn’t gay…is he?”

Bill just shook his head. “Ed, you gotta start reading people better. Why else would some Hollywood star spend all that time talking to you?”

“Well, crap,” I said to Bill. “I just assumed the guy spotted some latent potential for show business in my casual slouch in the window seat. Or maybe the Newman-ish way I wear my spectacles on the end of my nose.”

Actually, my hobby at that point in my life was writing Country and Western songs. It had dawned on me that perhaps Tim might be the catalyst I needed to be discovered, and to get some of my songs published.

Bill and I left the airport and made calls on several of his customers for the remainder of the day. Bill was in his late 50’s, a natural salesman and minor politician. He served on a committee of the Governor of Virginia. A very likeable guy, and fun to travel with.

That evening, we had dinner with Bill’s partner. We were at a table in one of Richmond’s better dining establishments. Bill was obviously known there, judging by the smiles and pats on the back from the manager, the bartender, and several waitresses. Bill told Norm, his partner, about my experience with Tim, and embellished the story out of all proportion.

Both Bill and Norm knew about my song-writing hobby. When you spend hours at a time in the car with a guy, you get to know a lot of things about him and vice versa. At one point, Norm grinned as he swirled the remains of his third martini, looked at me and said, “Hell Ed, this may be your big chance to get your songs published. And all it’s gonna cost you is a blow job!”

Maybe I should’a kept the songwriting stuff to myself, I thought. Too late now. Hell, this story’s gonna get legs and take off. But, still, the Old Man’s gonna get a kick out of me actually meeting Tim when I tell him the story.

I just won’t mention the part of Tim being gay.

Bill dropped me off at my hotel around 11:30 that night. Bill liked to drink, and we had spent several hours after dinner in the bar of the restaurant. Talking business, telling jokes, and second-guessing the management decisions of the Fortune 500 company we
represented. This was still the early ‘70’s, long before MADD, checkpoints, and the ban on open containers. Drinking in the business world is still around, but drastically toned down from those boozy days of the ‘70’s. (The event described in Chapter 2 probably wouldn’t happen in 2002). But, in 1972, relationships were built and solidified as much in bars as they are on golf courses today.

Come to think of it, things today really aren’t that much different than 30 years ago. People in business STILL drink, and play golf. Guess the difference is, we just don’t drink as much. Or we use designated drivers. Or take taxis!

It had been a long day, that day back in 1972, and I was beat. My flight to Atlanta left around 8:00 AM. That meant getting up by 5:30 or so to check in. I phoned the desk and asked for a wakeup call.

It seemed I’d just gotten to sleep in that Holiday Inn when the phone rang.

I came to, still groggy. Good Lord, I thought, it can’t possibly be 5:30. I opened my eyes and looked at the digital clock. The red numerals came into focus, and my alcohol deadened brain slowly registered the time.

1:30 AM.

I picked up the handset. “Hello,” I said, trying my best to sound bright and alert. In case it was my Boss. Or my wife.

“Ed,” the voice on the phone said. ”It’s Tim.”

My mind went blank. It was 1:30 in the morning. I was in a strange bed in a hotel- in where? Richmond.

My head hurts, and I’m talking to someone named Tim. I shook my head, trying to clear the cobwebs.

Before I could answer, the voice said, “It’s Tim, Ed. You know, we met on the airplane this morning. I was just calling to see if you could come down to my hotel and meet me for a drink.”

Tim. Suddenly, I was awake.

Tim Razor? He’s calling me here? How did he track me down? What the heck does he want with me? This is a BIG STAR, and he’s calling me? Am I dreaming? What do I say? Hell, I got Tim Razor on the telephone. He wants me to come down to have a drink with him? He’s asking for me to come down to his hotel for a drink?

“Tim, wow. How did you know how to find me?”
Hell, the REAL question was, WHY are you calling ME? But, I didn’t ask that. Maybe there was hope for C & W stardom after all.

“Hey Ed, you told me where you were staying. I just finished my show. Why don’t you get a cab and come down to my hotel? We’ll have a drink and get better acquainted.”

This was like an out of body experience. I pictured myself, sitting on the Holiday Inn bed in my underwear, hair a mess, bloodshot eyes, talking to a big time TV and Movie star, with a string of record hits.

And he wants me to come to his hotel. For a drink.

Visions of Bill and Norm, smiling knowingly, swirled through my gin befogged brain.

How do I get out of this gracefully…without offending my ONLY contact who’s actually a personality??

“Gosh, Tim,” I stammered. “What an opportunity! I’d love to come down to your hotel. I’ve always admired your work. My Old Man is one of your biggest fans! But, sadly, I have an early morning flight to Atlanta. It’s almost 2:00 AM. I’m beat, and I gotta be at the airport reasonably alert in just a few hours. Damn the luck!”

“Well, hey, Ed, I have to go to Atlanta tomorrow myself. What flight are you on?”

I reached over to my fashionably thin briefcase to find my ticket, conscious that I had one of the biggest names in entertainment in the world on the phone.

I was in my day old underwear, I was hung-over. Anxious to be LIKED. Anxious to be INTERESTING. So that maybe I could get him to listen to some of my stuff, to launch me into song-writing fame. And perhaps the C & W Hall of Fame.

Finally I found my ticket.

“Tim, I’m on the 8:40AM American flight to Atlanta.”

Tim said, “Well, I have to go to Atlanta tomorrow too. Are you sure you can’t come down tonight? I’d like to have you as my guest at the after show party.”

I told Tim about my long day. Stressful meetings. Late night dinners. Entertainment with customers. And reminded him I needed to be up and alert in just a few hours. Much as I wanted to get to know him better, and somehow try out my songs on him, Norm’s comment about the “price to be paid” painted a disgusting visual in the theater of my mind.

“Well, I sure wish you would change your mind,” Tim said. He even sounded wistful.
Visions of Johnny Cash singing one of my songs flashed through my mind, and I briefly wondered what a cab downtown would cost. Then thought about the smile on Norm’s face when he mentioned the B word.

I said, “Tim, thanks for calling me and I hope we meet again.”

“Maybe we will, Ed.”

Man oh man! That unmistakable voice on the phone, and he’s talking to me.

“Maybe we will. Good night, my new friend.”

The phone went dead. I hung up, and flopped back onto the pillow. Had I just blown a chance to be famous? Had I just kissed off my ticket to stardom and riches? Crap, now I’m wide awake. I’ll never get to sleep.

A major star like Tim had called me. Invited me to his hotel. I had needed a contact in show business if I was going to get exposure for my songs, and I blew him off.

Well, not really.

If I had been brazen enough to do that, who knows where it might have lead.

I must have dozed off, or passed out. Next thing I remember, the phone rang, and this time it was the operator.

“Five thirty, Mr. Free-all (man, that Virginia accent!). This be your wake-up call. You all get awake now!”

How the devil can anybody be THAT cheerful at 5:30 in the morning?

I got packed and caught a cab to the airport. Headed back to Atlanta and the office. The flight had already started to board by the time I got to the gate. (This was 1972, before security tightened up.) I looked at my ticket. 21D, well back in steerage. At least I had an aisle seat.

I entered the doorway of the plane. Turned to walk down the aisle, when a familiar voice said, “Hey, Ed!”

I looked up, right into the eyes of Tim Razor. He smiled widely, that familiar smile I’d seen so many times on TV.

“Howdy Tim,” I said, noticing that other passengers were looking at me curiously, probably trying to figure out if I was Somebody.
“See you in Atlanta,” Tim said, as I went past, through the curtains and back to the cheap seats.

As I was buckling my seat belt, I looked up toward the front of the plane. Tim had turned around and was waving to me. Several passengers turned to look at me.

I could hear whispered conversation from behind me. ”That’s Tim Razor up in first class. Wonder who this guy is?”

The door closed and we pushed back from the gate. Tim was signing autographs, apparently. People in first class were handing scraps of paper and ticket envelopes to him.

About twenty minutes into the flight, the stewardess from first class came back to my seat. She handed me a note.

She smiled at me and said, “Tim Razor asked me to bring this to you.”

I looked up. Tim was looking back and waved. I waved back and opened the note.

When we get to Atlanta, stay on the plane. We’ll get off together.

I looked up at Tim again, who was still turned, looking at me. He smiled and nodded his head, apparently affirming the invitation. I nodded my agreement.

The guy beside me nudged me. “He a friend of yours? Razor?”

“Not really,” I said. “I just bumped into him yesterday.”

My seatmate nodded, a smile playing on his face. What the devil was he thinking? Crap. I know exactly what he’s thinking. I thought I could feel my face redden.

We landed in Atlanta. Even 25 years ago, Atlanta was a pain in the butt, airport-wise. Seems no matter where you were headed, you had to change planes in Atlanta. The standing joke was, when you die, and you go to Hell, you’ll still have to change planes in Atlanta. Traffic around the airport was impossible.

I stayed on the plane as the other passengers got up and left. “Have fun with your friend,” my seatmate grinned, as he got out of his seat. He looked at me and winked.

Hey, asshole, I thought to myself, if you were an amateur songwriter, you’d be looking for a break too.

Everyone else had exited, I picked up my fashionably thin briefcase and started forward. Tim was standing in the aisle of first class, signing autographs for the pilots. He handed the scraps of paper back to them, thanked them for a good flight, then turned to me.

“Hey, Ed, they’ve sent a limousine for me. Ride with me and we’ll go to the First Class Lounge.”
This was starting to get interesting. And complicated. I was in Atlanta. Home. Due at the office at some point. Wife and kids expecting me after work. What am I getting myself into? Still, this was turning into an adventure. At the very least, something to tell the folks at the office. And at most, maybe a shot at having my songs listened to.

I got into the limo with Tim. The driver, a young black man said, “Welcome to Atlanta, Mr. Razor. I’m a big fan. Would you sign my trip sheet? My wife will flip when she hears I drove the famous Tim Razor.”

Tim reached forward and took the clipboard, and asked for the name of the driver’s wife. Then he wrote a brief note to her, and scrawled his name. I admit I was impressed. Tim was a gentleman. Humble. He actually seemed pleased at the recognition.

Tim turned to me. “Ed, I like you. I could sense the chemistry between us when we met yesterday. I have to go to Ft. Lauderdale to do a show tonight. Would you go with me? You’d be my guest. I’ll pay your expenses. You could see my show from backstage, and then we could spend some time together afterwards.”

So there it was. I looked at Tim. There was just a look of sincerity on his face. No leering. No sexual innuendo. Just a look of expectation. Hell, I was ready to believe he just wanted my company because I was such a friendly guy.

“Gosh, Tim. I don’t know what to say. I work here in Atlanta, and I really need to get to the office.” The limo was pulling up in front of the terminal.

“Let’s go up to the lounge,” Tim said. “We can talk better up there.”

The driver opened our doors, and got our luggage out of the trunk. My fashionably thin imitation leather briefcase, and Tim’s obviously expensive real-leather bag. The driver thanked Tim for the autograph, and shook my hand, studying my face to see which TV star I was. He had a quizzical look on his face as he studied me.

I followed Tim through the door and up the stairs to the first class lounge. The hostess recognized Tim, and asked for an autograph. She looked at me with a smile. Guess she figured I was somewhat out of place.

I was in a business suit, tie, and shoes that tie up the front. Tim was in expensive casual clothes. Dark slacks. A turtle neck. Patent leather loafers, and a soft leather jacket that probably cost as much as my car.

We sat down on a couch in a corner of the lounge. Tim ordered an orange juice. I think I ordered coffee. Several people in the lounge recognized Tim and came up to him to ask for an autograph. He was polite to everyone, and personalized each request.
After the last person left, he turned to me. “Ed, I hope your answer is yes. I really hope you can go with me to Ft. Lauderdale.”

Visions of me in the C & W Hall of Fame floated through my mind. Then, a vision of me at 2:00AM tomorrow morning. After the after-show party in Ft. Lauderdale. When good ol’ Tim might expect it to be SHOWTIME. And, exactly what would I tell my wife Agnes about why I was going to Ft. Lauderdale? I was pretty sure she wouldn’t approve of me agreeing to a one night stand with the Pope, the Apostle Paul or, for that matter, The Virgin Mary, let alone Tim Razor. Not even if I was guaranteed a shot on Hee Haw.

The ball was squarely in my court. Time to fish or cut bait. “Tim,” I said with some resignation. “As much as I’d like to go, I can’t. I have a job here. And a wife and 2 kids. They’re expecting me to be home tonight.”

I watched Tim’s face for anger or disappointment. There was neither. Instead, he seemed to smile and said, “Do you have pictures of your kids? Do you think the kids would like my autograph?”

I reached for my wallet and showed him pictures of Jennifer and Matthew. I don’t remember what he said, but he signed the back of my ticket envelope with both their names. And added a note saying how much he enjoyed meeting their Dad.

Tim’s flight was called. “Walk down to the gate with me, Ed,” he said.

We collected our bags and walked out, turning down the corridor to his gate. When we got to the gate, Tim set his bag down, turned to me and reached out his hand. He took my hand in his, looked at me and said, “Are you sure you can’t come with me?”

I smiled and said, “Tim, this is one of the most amazing things that’s happened to me….but I have things I have to do.”

He held my hand for what seemed like a minute….looked me in the eye. Still no innuendo. Just sincerity and friendship. Then he squeezed my hand, smiled at me and said, “Take care, Ed. Maybe we’ll meet again someday.” He released his grip on my hand, turned to board his flight, and was gone.

Tim still performs, and is just as popular as ever. I’ve been to events where Tim has been featured, but I’ve never made my presence known to him. Never tried to get his attention.

Nothing ever came of my song writing. In fact, I haven’t written a song in years. Not since The Night Ol’ Willy Sang the Same Damn Song for Three Hours.