

## Preview Chapter: Vol. 4, John Lennon Series *Should Have Known Better*

**9 September 1964**  
**Key West, Florida**

**3.30 a.m.<sup>i</sup>**

The rain was falling in sheets – not droplets or fat splatters but panes of rain, plummeting. And as if that concern weren't enough, Pilot Press Cooper's staccato voice sounded over the loudspeaker: "Buckle your seatbelts! The runway isn't big enough for this plane! We're going to have to go in with full reverse-thrust."<sup>ii</sup>

Gasps. Eyes wide.

The request wasn't soft-soaped, and it didn't need to be repeated. Everyone complied – quickly. And the next few minutes were harrowing.

But when the Electra II's full-speed ahead abruptly jerked into slow roll and then achieved complete stop, the Exciters, the Bill Black Combo, "Frogman" Henry, Jackie DeShannon, the traveling crew of reporters and photographers, the Beatles' entourage, and The Beatles themselves stood and cheered.<sup>iii</sup> They had not only landed safely in wicked weather on a hazardous and short runway,<sup>iv</sup> but the flight had also been – for the most part – fairly enjoyable. John and Paul, in fact, had slept the entire time.<sup>v</sup>

As the plane's heavy Lockheed door opened and the gangway was rolled alongside, heavy-handed winds slung rain into the cabin.

"Where are we?"<sup>vi</sup> Ringo peered out at the smallish airport.

"I haven't a clue,"<sup>vii</sup> Ivor Davis shrugged. "There're a few palm trees here and there...but it might be Neverland for all I know."<sup>viii</sup>

"I'm the Pan, and y'er all miserable Lost Boys!" John looked down his nose.

"*Lost* is the least of our worries." Paul frowned unhappily at the slanting downpour. "We'll be drenched if we go out there!"

"Yes, but," Ivor's eyes shone with mischief, "at least we won't be stricken down tonight, will we? What sort of fans would come out in this? Not even yours, I'm surmising!"

But Ivor had underestimated the devoted. They were there, even at 3.30 a.m. on the periphery of a hurricane. Beatlemania compelled a die-hard group to wave and scream and welcome their boys to Key West, Florida.<sup>ix</sup>

Blinking away rain and waving beneath umbrellas, the lads heedlessly flew to the car. And Paul had been right; they were completely soaked by the time they fell inside. Even their socks and shoes were sodden. But the sheer joy of having survived the perils of flight made them giddy.

"We've an entire day off tomorrow! Yipeeeee!" George shook himself like a dog, flinging water onto everyone beside him.

"And even better news," Derek held a hand up to block the unrequested shower. "Here's your lodging."

"Already?"

"Wait...I can still see the runway!"

"Y'er havin' us on, Taylor!" John snorted.

The Key Wester motel was adjacent to the airport – only a few feet away – right in the noisy path of incoming and outgoing planes.<sup>x</sup> But its seven quaint private villas, traditional two-story motel, immense swimming pool with cabana and umbrella-shaded conversation area, and towering palm trees made it a favourite of tourists.<sup>xi</sup> And no group of visitors had ever been happier than John, Paul, George, and Ringo to find their destination so close and inviting.

When the car stopped in front of the centermost villa and snugged beneath the "Registration"

awning, John dragged himself from the rear seat and stretched his legs. “I’m dead knackered,” he announced to no one in particular.

“*Dead’s* the very word I’ve been concerned about for the last twenty-four hours,” Ringo slowly emerged from the car as well. “First a mad shooter, then a mad hurricane!”

“But here we are, safe and sound.” Paul stretched out his arms and greeted the parking lot.

“Sadder but wiser men are we!” George accepted his scuffed luggage from Mal while Neil fetched the lodging keys.

Moments later, the four boys were directed to the first villa to the right of the main office<sup>xii</sup> while the tour photographers lugged their heavy camera cases and the journalists, their valises, towards the centermost motel tower. Everyone was beat. Fatigued into silence.

“I’ll never make it,” George was truly dragging behind.

“You will,” John pushed on. “There’s no alternative, is there?”

Yawning; they trudged towards rest.<sup>xiii</sup> It was the very incarnation of *A Hard Day’s Night* minus the clean old man, the wiles and woes of parading, and the charming bevy of spaghetti-strapped, leggy dancers. This was reality: the catchy phrase had come home to roost.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **U. S. Naval Hospital Roosevelt Boulevard Key West, Florida**

The Naval Hospital on Roosevelt Boulevard was only one mile from the Key Wester Motel.<sup>xiv</sup> But to the young Naval corpsmen working the day shift, it was a world apart. Taking blood pressures and temperatures, prepping patients for surgery, administering medications, filing documents, and monitoring patient conditions,<sup>xv</sup> young John Trusty was intent on serious matters.

“Hey man,” his friend, Rich Ullerton nudged him as they convened at the orthopedic and surgery ward desk, “have ya heard the scuttlebutt? *The Beatles*’ve just landed in Key West!”

“That right?” Trusty smiled his woman-winning smirk, his thick dark hair and eyebrows crafting a gorgeous grin. “Well, that oughta bring the babes out of the woodwork.”

“Yeah, and guess what else?”

“What?” Trusty – finishing up his next-to-last patient chart and snapping it shut – paused and looked over his shoulder.

“Guess where they’re stayin’?” Ullerton jerked his head in the direction of the Key Wester.

“You’re *shittin’ me!*” Trusty chuckled. His pale blue eyes were bright with instant plans.

“I shit you not, man. The KWester! Right under our noses!”

“You sure?”

“A *hundred per cent*. The news is all over the chow hall!”<sup>xvi</sup>

“Well,” Trusty grabbed the final metal clipboard and began to scribble, “we gotta scrounge up some ‘midway-to-payday’ dough<sup>xvii</sup> then and take a casual, lil stroll over that way, my friend.”

“What? You a Beatles fan?”

“Nah,” Trusty grinned, “I’m more interested in *domestic offerings*...like Budweiser and Florida gals!<sup>xviii</sup> And where The Beatles are, the girls are! Right?”

“Yeah, damn straight. It’ll be you ’n me and a thousand eager fillies! Right over at the ol’ KWester!”<sup>xix</sup>

“Yep,” John glanced at his watch, “if only this damned shift would end.”

\*\*\*\*\*

## The Key Wester Motel Roosevelt Boulevard Key West Florida

John rolled over and patted the rickety, veneered night stand for his glasses. The Key Wester was no palace, but it was quiet, and the bed was soft. He felt better than he'd felt in ages.

*Four fuggin' thirty!* John shook his head. *That can't be! Only a half hour's sleep? Nah, I'm completely, fuggin' rested.*

He got up and padded to the window – edged the curtain aside. And although the day was still dark and soggy, it was clearly afternoon.<sup>xx</sup> There were people up and about. A man in a drenched, short-sleeved, Hawaiian shirt was running with two open Coke bottles from the vending machine. Two frustrated children with a four-square ball were standing under an awning and looking miserable.

“I’ve slept twelve fuggin’ hours!” John exclaimed out loud. “Why the fuggin’ ell didn’t someone wake me?” But feeling twenty-three for the first time in ages, he was honestly grateful they hadn’t. He flew into the bathroom and set the shower to warming.

Fifteen minutes later, John was on the telly to Derek. “When’re y’comin’ over, son? Bring Ivor ’n Schreiber the rest. I’ll ring for food.” He listened. “Yeah, yeah, all right then. We’ll have a few drinks here and then walk over after. I haven’t eaten in a real meal in a real restaurant in ages!”<sup>xxi</sup>

By 5.00 p.m. the usual crowd was assembled in the air-conditioned living area of The Beatles’ villa. They made themselves at home on the round-backed, white wicker chairs and the sleek seafoam sofa while John cracked open a large bottle of whiskey.<sup>xxii</sup> On the telly, an imposing Spanish man in military fatigues was captivating a large crowd.<sup>xxiii</sup>

“Fidel Castro,” John said to Ivor.<sup>xxiv</sup> “The very one!”

“In full oratorical stride, I see,” Ivor grinned.<sup>xxv</sup>

“Right, full of *himself*,” George snarked on his way to the bar.

Smirking, John turned down the sound and began his own imitation of the dictator’s diatribe.<sup>xxvi</sup> “I am *not* a Marxisto!” John bellowed, his eyes scanning the room. “I am merely a simple, government functionary! A Lennonisto!”<sup>xxvii</sup> With flourishes and gestures that were spot-on, it was a hilarious impersonation.<sup>xxviii</sup> The reporters laughed and lifted their drinks to the young Scouse dictator.

“You’ve yet another career, Lennon!” someone yelled out. John swiveled in that direction and scowled a Castro scowl. The room cheered.

With the TV turned down, they could hear a most welcome sound: the rain was subsiding...fading to a welcome hush. The storm was pulling north. Derek drew open the curtains as the late afternoon sun silvered the wet pavement. Everything glistened.

“I’m goin’ for me swimsuit,” Ringo announced, heading to his side room.

“I’m goin’ for me guitar,” George decided.

“I’m just goin’.” Paul slipped on his shoes.

“No, wait.” Neil hurried out to check crowd control and in seconds, Derek and Mal followed. But tonight, the weather was their friend. Thus far, the crowds along Roosevelt Boulevard were sparse, and the cute, bikinied fans<sup>xxix</sup> were well-enough controlled that the boys could be permitted to walk to the restaurant, unencumbered.<sup>xxx</sup>

This was the kind of holiday The Beatles had needed for ages. It was almost sunset in Florida – September cool, rain-washed, and balmy. The end of the storm had issued in a lull, a tranquility that none of them had felt in weeks. Neil took a deep breath and sighed; he inhaled calm.

With guitar case in hand, George scuffed by mumbling, “T’rah!” The Bill Black Combo and “Frogman” Henry had made plans on the plane for an endless jam session. George had been honored to be included as one of the group.

Paul and Ringo walked together, carrying beach towels, while John scuffed behind moodily, taking in the scenery. He tried not to dwell on it, but it was almost impossible not to recall the last trip to Florida when Cyn had been along. *Cyn...*

*It's almost midnight in Kenwood now, he told his nagging conscience. Too late to ring her up, really. I'd be a nuisance.* John hesitated, thinking of going back. But seconding his disinclination, the broken sounds of rock'n'roll – as the door to the Key Wester lounge opened and closed – lured him on.

*Tonight, he thought, someone else could check in; someone else could do the right thing 'n someone else could make the fuggin' music.*

John longed to do nothing whatsoever but eat, drink, sit back, and observe. He wanted to disappear.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 6.00 p.m.

John Trusty was “a usual” at the Key Wester lounge. The waitresses all knew the beefy six-foot-two Naval Corpsman by name. So, when Security strong-armed Trusty, poolside, with a brusque, “Private party tonight, fella!” a pretty motel employee intervened...and John and Rich were swiftly patted down for admittance.<sup>xxxii</sup>

“No cameras and no pictures!” the lantern-jawed officer cautioned.

“Yeah, got it,” Trusty responded, callously – scared stiff that the tiny Kodak 126 Instamatic camera in Rich’s left sock would be discovered.<sup>xxxiii</sup> But luck was with them. With one nod of the head, they were summarily directed to the inner sanctum.

“Drinks, anyone?” Trusty chuckled, leading the way to the indoor lounge where drafts were a full thirty cents cheaper.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Securing a couple, Trusty angled towards the band, manoeuvring between rampant revelers, the Beatles entourage, and a variety of bikini-topped girls in gauzy cover-ups. It was difficult not to gape.

“Oh, sorry!”

“Hey, sorry man, I...” Trusty stopped. Dead still. He’d run smack into Paul McCartney, almost upending both their drinks. “Uhh...’scuse *me*,” Trusty repeated, mortified. “I was...uh well...distracted.” He nodded towards the slew of “babes” all around them. A classic McCartney wink topping a smile gave instant absolution, and without another word, the Beatle moved away, intent on the gorgeous, sun-tanned girls around them.

“Wow! Did ya see that?!” Trusty was star struck.

“Yeah, you almost plowed down Paul McCartney!” Ullerton smacked him on the arm.

And laughing, the Navy regulars peeled off, making their way towards a rickety, white Formica table with a good view of the band – and an excellent vantage point on Paul, who was making the rounds of his fawning female fans.

On the meager, corner-most stage – a single riser at best – the Bill Black Combo was in full cry.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Trusty settled back and slurped the head off his beer, watching Elvis’s famous backing band small-talk and laugh.

“Hey look!” he nudged Ullerton, “There’s Reggie Young!”

“Oh yeah?” Rich’s eyes were blank.

“Yeah man, he’s the talented son-of-a-gun who put the Bill Black Combo together and hooked ’em up with Elvis! He’s a real livin’ legend, if ever there was one!”

“Really? Hmmm.” Ullerton was miles away, watching McCartney work the tables around them – taking notes.

“Yeah, in some circles Young’s pegged as ‘America’s Guitar Player’...I mean, he’s a number one force to be reckoned with...or else Elvis woulda never partnered up with him.”

“Cool.” Rich shrugged. “He seems pretty good.”

“Pffft! There’s your basic understatement.” Trusty shook his head, sat back, and slurped his beer. He didn’t know about Ullerton sometimes. No use trying to school him on music. It was a lost cause.

Watching the band – now enhanced by the genius of “Frogman” Henry, who’d pulled up a chair and joined in<sup>xxxv</sup> – gin out Carl Perkins’s ‘Sure to Fall’ and Arthur Alexander’s “Anna,” Trusty began to relax. And when Young stylized “Don’t Ever Change,” and kicked off “Youngblood,” he grinned, ear-to-ear. This was a concert of the highest caliber. And every single note was completely free of charge...well, except for the cost of the booze.

“Wanna wander out to the pool?” Rich had had enough of the music.

“Only if Jackie DeShannon’s out there.” John had his own priorities, and the animated, good-looking blonde topped that list.

“Ya never know who we’ll meet! Let’s high-tail it!” Rich was ready.

And, as quickly as they stood, their table was usurped by another group of McCartney fans. This was the place to be if you wanted to meet “The Cute Beatle.” Paul was holding court.

Outside, however, it was The Ringo Show. John and Rich stood beneath the dripping tiki shelter and watched the drummer waddle – à la Charlie Chaplin – down the diving board. Then comically holding his nose and lifting a finger above his head, Starr would jump in. Over and over, the drummer repeated his pat antics while the Exciters squealed and cheered him on.

*The Exciters!* Rich nudged John, and both of them gawked. Along the deep end, next to diving board, the Exciters ringed the rim of the pool. They dangled their gorgeous legs in the water and chatted quietly as Ringo held forth.

*Black girls in a white pool...in Florida!* The Navy men were slack-jawed. *It was unreal, unheard of!*

“Holy crap!” Trusty could hardly believe his eyes.

“Yeah man, I wonder if Security’s seen this?”

“Well, from what I heard,” John rubbed the back of his neck, “The Beatles made this big stink sayin’ they wouldn’t play Jacksonville if the concert there was segregated. They went so far as to say that they’d be able ‘to tell’ if ‘token Negroes’ were sorta ‘placed around’ the audience. I mean, from what I understand, these fellas are dead serious about anyone and everyone comin’ bein’ equal.”

“Yeah??” Rich rubbed his hand through his short military crop. “Well, it’s a *first* for me, man! This is pretty damn radical.”

As the Exciters laughed and splashed Starr, the corpsmen watched, fascinated. This was history in the making. For a moment, they were watching the world transform.

When several of The Beatles’ journalists strolled out poolside – seeking a place to chat – the music from the lounge reached out. The Bill Black Combo was ramping up...getting serious.

“Ready for another draft?” Trusty suggested, eager to return to the once-in-a-lifetime jam.

“Yeah, all right, we could head back in,” Ullerton agreed. But over his shoulder, he cast one last glance at The Exciters. They were lovely – dazzling ladies, all. *If the world were only a different place.*

But it was 1964, and South Florida wasn’t Liverpool.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 8.30 p.m.

The crowd inside had almost doubled. There wasn’t a chair or table for the asking. Smoke permeated the buff curtains covering one wall; it sifted across teased, bouffant hairdos, mascaraed eyes, and sweet smiles; it softened the weathered faces of the musicians grinding out rockabilly from the stage.<sup>xxxvi</sup> With fresh drafts in their hands, Ullerton and Trusty stood, while the band paid tribute to Johnny Horton’s “Memphis,” Elvis’s “Let’s Play House,” and Chuck Berry’s “Brown-Eyed Handsome Man.”

“Nother round?” It was Trusty’s turn to pay, and he was happy to oblige; the alcohol was beginning to do its work. He winked at the girls on his right, steadied himself, and swaggered towards the bar.

For the next couple of hours, the corpsmen threw back a few more than a few. Trusty followed the skillful work of George Harrison – standing inconspicuously a step back from The Bill Black Combo. And he smiled to see Harrison – who clearly didn’t know some of the songs the group was covering – staring

intently to his left, aping Reggie Young's chords. Committed to his work, serious, and talented, the Beatle hardly made his presence known.

"Great night, id-in-it!" Rich leaned over, sloshing on the table.

"Yeah, I couldn't hit my ass twice with the same hand if I tried!"<sup>xxxvii</sup> Trusty slurred. They burst into laughter.

"But come to think of it..." Rich's eyes failed to focus, "why the hell would you *want to* anyway?" The Navy men guffawed, amused at almost anything. It was close to 10.30 p.m. Time for another drink.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 10.30 p.m.

There was only one small gap in the insistent crowd ringing the bar, and John Trusty shoved his way into it. Wrangling for position, he waited to be served. He was arm-to-arm with a shorter, slighter man in jeans and a white dress shirt with the sleeves carelessly rolled up<sup>xxxviii</sup> – *a pretty odd get-up*, Trusty mused – far from the standard madras shorts, flip-flops, and bright, printed T-shirts that signaled: "Townee."<sup>xxxix</sup>

On top of that, the guy's hair was long as any of The Beatles'. It was all Trusty could do to suppress a gruff, "Get a haircut!"<sup>xl</sup> But at that exact moment, the bartender glanced in his direction.

"Two drafts!" Trusty raised a fist full of singles. And as he ordered, his eyes inadvertently met the eyes of his unusual neighbor in the well-streaked Key Wester mirror. It was John Lennon.

Unsure of what to say or what to do, Trusty studied the famous rhythm guitarist out of the corner of his eye. The Beatle was alone – talking to no one, gulping an enormous mixed drink in mammoth gulps that shamed even seasoned Navy men.<sup>xli</sup> And despite the thickly mingled aromas from the bar, Trusty could smell the whiskey on Lennon's breath: in his glass, on his skin. John was seriously consuming.<sup>xlii</sup> Yet he seemed perfectly sober.

Even more interesting, the long, filtered cig in Lennon's left hand was set between the first two fingers, the lit end turned palm side. When The Beatle took a drag, he turned his hand over and brought the Lark to his lips.<sup>xliii</sup> It was the third curiosity in as many minutes. Trusty was bowled over. He openly stared.

"Wudja like a fag?" Lennon turned, unable to ignore the eyes on him any longer. His face was sincere, friendly even. John Lennon was initiating conversation.

To a young Naval Corpsman reared in conservative, rural Mississippi in the early 1950s, the unexpected query meant only one thing, and it wasn't, "Do you want a cigarette?" Confused and embarrassed, Trusty stammered, "No thanks, man! I'm just here to pick up the chicks!"

Barely concealed humour filled Lennon's eyes; he struggled to suppress a smile. But with great integrity, the Beatle abandoned the chance to "take the piss out of" the inexperienced military man. Instead, he nodded once and gave Trusty an unearned pass. "Well, good luck to you, then, man!" he smiled.

And in one swift motion, John Lennon picked up his Scotch and Coke, his lighter, and his packet of fags...and strode away, leaving John Trusty speechless. For a moment, the bewildered corpsman stood, chewing his cuticles and frowning. Then comprehension sidled into view, and in blushing error, Trusty hung his head. He got it...and sighed.

Back at the table, Trusty tried to explain the hapless scenario to Rich Ullerton, to describe his sheer humiliation – his disappointment. But Ullerton only waved him off.

"Yeah well, so what? We don't get that Limey double-talk bullshit around here! Who says 'fag' for 'cigarette' anyway? How in the hell were *you* supposed to know?"

Trusty gulped his beer the way Lennon had downed his whiskey drink. "Look, you're not getting' it, Ullerton. I effed up, man! I coulda spent the rest of the night just sittin' there and talkin' with John Beatle Lennon! I mean, as weird as it sounds, it kinda felt like...well, like we coulda been friends somehow. I don't know, man. I can't explain it. Just trust me; I effed up!"

"Ah, to hell with it, Trusty! And to hell with *him*! Look at me, man...there're gorgeous girls *all over* this damn room! And word is Coffee Butler's on his way over as soon as they close the Hukilau!"<sup>xliiv</sup> He's

gonna sit in on piano and jam until 4 a.m. We got one helluva night ahead of us, man! Don't let this kinda junior-mint bullshit get to you!"

But "get to Trusty," it did. For the remainder of the evening, it ate him up.

He stayed until closing time, watching Coffee Butler perform his big hit, "Let Them Talk."<sup>xliv</sup> He sang along when George Harrison, the Bill Black Combo, Butler, and "Frogman" Henry cranked out, "Susie-Q." And then just before closing time, Trusty located Paul McCartney once more so that Rich could whip out his Instamatic and snap a fast, clandestine photo.<sup>xlvi</sup>

Unfortunately, Security was at the ready. They smashed the camera well before anyone saw them coming,<sup>xlvii</sup> and roaring, they shoved the two inebriated corpsmen out into the damp, early morning.<sup>xlviii</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

#### 4.10 a.m.

But to John Trusty, the eviction, the conversations, the laughter – all that followed Lennon's exit – was merely *denouement*. The only thing on his mind was his lost opportunity...the lost conversation.

"We're both John's!" he garbled as Rich and he blundered their way down Roosevelt Boulevard. "We mighta had a lot in common, John and John. We mighta really hit it off."

"Ah hell, no!" Ullerton was soused as well. "You got *nothin'* in common with that damned long-hair! *Nothin'!*"

"You're bass-ackward wrong, Ullerton!" Trusty was getting riled. "I missed a certified Grade-A, golden opportunity back there. I coulda had a story to tell! I coulda had a story about me and The Beatles...a story that coulda ended up in a *book* someday!"

"Oh yeah?" Ullerton stumbled on the broken sidewalk and almost fell. He stopped and took a breath. "Listen Trusty, here's the deal: you got a story. *This* story! Just tell your damn kids and grandkids about the night in Key West and the one who got away, man! Tell 'em about the night with John Lennon that 'almost was'!"

John Trusty stared at Ullerton and swallowed a fiery reply. And those were the last words the two comrades spoke to one another for many evenings to come. Trusty would never be able to make Ullerton understand his loss. And Rich Ullerton could never understand why anyone as smart, good-looking, and popular as John Trusty would give a rat's ass about a long-haired, British musician who called his cigarettes "fags." It just didn't make good sense.

That evening was a benediction on the loose association that had passed for a friendship, but wasn't.<sup>xliv</sup> Not really.

John Trusty felt that he'd missed out on something big and important while Ullerton saw him as having "damned near *everything* everyone could want."

It was a gap neither could cross. And neither tried.

\*\*\*\*\*

John Lennon shambled back to The Beatles' bungalow alone. It had been a peculiar evening.

Paul had been totally preoccupied with the wide assortment of "lovely bairds." George had been serious about fitting in with "Frogman" Henry and the famous Elvis combo he'd admired for almost a decade. And Ringo, as always, had been out for fun and laughs. Only John had sat alone – without a place to fit in.

John had looked forward to a night off for such a long time, but given one, he hadn't known what to do with it. He'd thought he'd wanted to be alone, to sit and think. But once left alone, he was miserable.

So, he'd quaffed and ruminated and – yeah, all right – felt sorry for himself.

For years, people had shouted at John that he was an “ugly drunk,” but in his eyes, there was no reason not to be. Almost every day of his life – as long as he could remember – he’d felt singled out, different. Only Uncle Ge’rge and Stu had tried to set a wobbly plank across the divide that separated him from humanity.

And Cyn, too. Every day she tried.

He was sorry now that he hadn’t rung up her earlier. She was the one person who was never bothered by his “utter nonsense” (as Mim used to say). She was the only living soul who got him.<sup>1</sup>

John wrenched the bungalow door open and mused that even casual acquaintances at the bar tonight misunderstood the things he said. Merely offering a fag to a stranger had been a study in the ways he was generally misunderstood.

John kicked the front door closed and tried to find a path in the dark. He didn’t feel like flipping on the light. It wasn’t his way.

John had learned to struggle in the darkness. He’d learned to expect bruises and sharp, unexpected edges. He’d grown accustomed to being jarred and wounded...for absolutely no reason at all. And if there were a way to be upbeat about all *that*, John hadn’t discovered it.

*If y’ask me*, John thought as he stumbled towards the bar cart, *I should be roundly applauded for merely making it through the fuggin’ night!*

“Anybody home?” It was Paul. Light flooded the room as the bass guitarist fumbled in the doorway, dropping his room key.

“That’s too fuggin’ bright!” John grumbled, shielding his eyes. “Douse it, son!”

“Right then,” Paul flipped the switch again, standing still, letting his vision adjust. “What’re y’ doin’ here alone?”

“Considerin’ the fate of man, as it were.”

“Well, what d’ya say we take the Scotch ’n a coupla glasses out to the pool then?” Paul suggested.

“Yeah, right. Why the fuck not?”

“We’ve an hour or so ’til sun-up, y’know...”

“And nofuggin’ where to go.”

In a matter of minutes, the two were off again. But this time, they were together. And both were in a mood to talk.<sup>li</sup>

## **Notes!**

*At my very first Fest for Beatles Fans in Chicago (2005), I met John Trusty and his lovely wife, Sue. John told me straight away that he had a story to share with me about his time in Key West with The Beatles. However, although Trusty was one heck of a nice guy, I had met so many people who claimed to have “authentic Beatles stories” (stories that turned about to be just a bit exaggerated) that I was skeptical.*

*However, about a year later, a huge packet of information arrived at my home: photos from The Beatles 1964 tour, a wealth of information about the groups who opened for The Beatles with their email addresses and phone numbers, and an article from Beatleology (written by John Trusty) telling the story I have just imparted to you. I was overwhelmed at the amount of meticulous research Trusty had poured into his rewriting of that night’s adventures and the many connections he’d made with others who played key roles on The Beatles’ 1964 North American Tour.*

*Trusty had met and befriended Bettie Birdsall and Eva Van Enk, the stewardesses on the Electra II. He had become friends with the Exciters. He had researched Reggie Young and Coffee Butler. And he had collected rare photos of the Key Wester Motel and the Naval Hospital on Roosevelt Boulevard. All of this information, John shared with me in 2006. And for years, he believed that someday his story would become part of **The John Lennon Series**.*

*In June of 2017, almost eleven years and a deep friendship later, John Trusty’s story has been written. And what a story it is! My sincere thanks to him for the seating chart of the Electra II in the Photos section of this*

book, the rare photos of Key West, and the photo of Eva and Bettie as well. More importantly, I am indebted to John for the introduction to Eva and Bettie. Knowing these two lovely ladies has meant more to me than I can say.

Corpsman John Trusty may have missed out on **one** evening with John Lennon, but in the years that followed, he singlehandedly set out to keep those involved with the 1964 tour reaching out to one another. And he carefully preserved their true stories and memorabilia. Researchers owe this extraordinary man a debt of gratitude. In my eyes, his conversation with John Lennon is still ongoing today.

### **1. Were there fans at the airport to welcome The Beatles to Key West?**

As always, sources disagree.

In *Ticket to Ride*, Larry Kane says, "Not a creature was stirring at 4 a.m. when the plane touched down, other than a few police officers..." (p. 107)

But Barry Miles in *The Beatles' Diary*, Vol. 1 says, "Even in the middle of the night, hundreds of teenagers were waiting to scream a welcome." (p. 168) And A.J.S. Rayl adds, "At 4 A.M., after another delay, this time with Immigration processing, The Beatles finally emerged from the plane. They expected things to be relatively quiet since plans had been literally changed at the last minute. But nearly seven hundred people turned out in the pre-dawn hours to welcome them." (p. 182)

Finally, Mark Lewisohn in *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, states, "The plane touched down at Key West airfield, unannounced, at 3.30 in the morning on 9 September to a reception of hundreds of (seemingly prescient) screaming teenagers." (p. 171)

Ivor Davis doesn't touch upon the subject of the number of fans waiting for the boys in Key West. However, he told me that he did remember some fans being present at the airport when they landed, "though not a tremendously overwhelming number."

### **2. Is this the famous "night we cried" that Paul McCartney refers to in his song, "Here Today"?**

According to Paul, it is indeed. Paul claims that when he returned to The Beatles' bungalow, he and John sat up for hours talking together, and as he put it in a 2004 article for the Guardian: "I remember drinking way too much, and having one of those talking-to-the-toilet bowl evenings. It was during that night, when we'd all stayed up way too late, and we got so pissed that we ended up crying - about, you know, how wonderful we were, and how much we loved each other, even though we'd never said anything. It was a good one: you never say anything like that. Especially if you're a Northern Man." Quote from <https://www.beatlesbible.com/1964/09/10/day-off-key-west-florida/>

### **3. The Beatles had another day off (10 September) in Key West as they waited out the awful presence of Hurricane Dora in Jacksonville. (They were not slated to play The Gator Bowl in Jacksonville until 11 September.) What did they do on their last day off?**

There are **so many** assorted stories about what the boys did with their day off that it would have been physically impossible to accomplish it all. But here are some of the vast possibilities.

Larry Kane says, "John took a drive to Key Largo, the band ate a fried chicken dinner with the Exciters, they went swimming at the home of a local millionaire, and they retreated to their rooms for some genuine private time." (*Ticket to Ride*, 109)

A.J.S. Rayl has John taking the drive to Key Largo (with Derek and Neil) the day before (9 September) although numerous sources say that John slept until 4.00 p.m. on the 9th. On 10 September, she says, "Tony Martinez, local millionaire, offered The Beatles his pool; they accepted and spent the afternoon

splashing around..." Then she adds, "The Beatles spent part of the evening doing press interviews and after members of the Exciters cooked a full-course Southern meal, they had dinner, played cards, listened to music..." (pp. 182-183)

---

<sup>i</sup> Miles, *The Beatles' Diary, Vol. 1*, 168.

<sup>ii</sup> The Beatles, *The Anthology*, 153. This is a direct quote of what the pilot said, according to George Harrison. I verified this quote with Bettie Westmoreland Birdsall, who was the head stewardess on the plane. I said, "Did Press Cooper really say those words?" "Word for word," she confirmed. (Interview on 24 May 2017)

<sup>iii</sup> Davis, 91 and Rayl, 182.

<sup>iv</sup> Trusty, John "No Thanks Man, I'm Just Here to Pick Up the Chicks," *Beatleology*, Vol. 9 November/December 2006, pp. 5-7 and interview with John Trusty via phone, 6 June 2017.

<sup>v</sup> Kane, *Ticket to Ride*, 107.

<sup>vi</sup> Davis, 91. Direct quote from Ringo to Davis.

<sup>vii</sup> Davis, 91. Direct quote from Davis to Ringo.

<sup>viii</sup> Davis, 91. Paraphrased from what Davis has reported.

<sup>ix</sup> Lewisohn, *The Complete Beatles Chronicle*, 171, Miles, *The Beatles' Diary, Vol. 1*, 168, Rayl, 182, and Kane, 107.

<sup>x</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xi</sup> Trusty, 6. There are also excellent photos of The Key Wester in Trusty's thorough article.

<sup>xii</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xiii</sup> Kane, *Ticket to Ride*, 107.

<sup>xiv</sup> Trusty, 5.

<sup>xv</sup> Interview with John Trusty, June 2017.

<sup>xvi</sup> Trusty, 5.

<sup>xvii</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xviii</sup> Trusty, 5. Direct quote from John Trusty.

<sup>xix</sup> Trusty, 5.

<sup>xx</sup> Davis, 92. Davis says the rain was "hammering like machine gun fire on the metal roof" of John's bungalow when he arrived about 30 minutes later. It was still raining in Key West.

<sup>xxi</sup> Davis, 92 and interview with John Trusty, 6 June 2017. Although witnesses saw The Beatles eating at the Key Wester later that night, Ivor Davis says that when he arrived at John's bungalow, Mal brought in a cart loaded with "a pile of toast, poached and fried eggs and a saucer full of tea bags."

<sup>xxii</sup> Davis, 93.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Davis, 92.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Davis, 92.

<sup>xxv</sup> Davis, 92. Direct quote from Ivor Davis.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Davis, 92.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Davis, 92-93. Direct quote from John Lennon.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Davis, 92. Davis calls it "a fairly good imitation."

<sup>xxix</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xxx</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Trusty, 7. A photo of this camera is found in the Photos Section of this book.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Interview with John Trusty, 6 June 2017.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Trusty, 6.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Miles, *The Beatles' Diary, Vol. 1*, 168.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Interview with John Trusty, 6 June 2017 and photo of Key Wester Lounge.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> From interview with John Trusty, June 2017. Direct quote.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Trusty, 7, Davis, 93, and Kane, *Ticket to Ride*, 107. Larry Kane calls John's shirt "a bullfighter's shirt." Davis describes John as wearing white jeans and a T-shirt in the bungalow. Trusty has him wearing jeans (blue Levi type) and a white long-sleeved shirt with the sleeves rolled up at the lounge later. John most likely changed clothes between his time in the bungalow with Ivor Davis and his night in the restaurant.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Trusty, 6 and interview with John Trusty, June 2017.

<sup>xl</sup> Trusty, 7. Direct quote.

---

<sup>xli</sup> Trusty, 7. Trusty says, “This was no ordinary bar glass he was holding. Just as I was amazed at the size of the drink, I want to tell you, he didn’t just politely sip it either. I thought how could this guy, who is a lot smaller than I am, be a bigger hitter with booze than I was.”

<sup>xlii</sup> Trusty, 7.

<sup>xliii</sup> Trusty, 7.

<sup>xliv</sup> Trusty, 6. Coffee Butler was a very popular and talented Key West pianist who performed regularly at Allan Merrill’s Hukilau on North Roosevelt. For more info on Butler, go to:

<http://www.thekeywesttheater.com/event/1412823-coffee-butler-hukilau-nights-key-west/> Note: Some biographers have stated that Butler was playing that night at the “Bamboo Room,” another venue that he frequented in downtown Key West off Duval Street. John Trusty assures me the Butler was performing at the Hukilau that night before coming over to the KeyWester.

<sup>xlv</sup> <http://www.thekeywesttheater.com/event/1412823-coffee-butler-hukilau-nights-key-west/>

<sup>xlvi</sup> Trusty, 7.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Trusty, 7.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Trusty, 7.

<sup>xlix</sup> Interview with John Trusty, June 2017.

<sup>l</sup> Kane, *Lennon Revealed*, 56-57.

<sup>li</sup> This is the night that McCartney says he and John talked and shared deep feelings that became the basis for the line “What about the night we cried/Because there wasn’t any reason/To keep it all inside” in his tribute to John, “Here, Today.”