

## Staying Out of Trouble?

By George Underhill

Frequently, people will say, as a kind of greeting, "Keeping out of trouble, are you?" I used to be able to get into all kinds of trouble when I was younger, but damned if I want to do it now that I'm old. When I could, and did, get into trouble I didn't like that greeting either. When I have done something really stupid, as I am prone to do, I do not like to be reminded of it, nor do I go around telling people. Once thirty years have passed I might mention it, but not until then.

The one roommate that I managed to keep for more than one year at University made me look like a choir boy. We had an agreement. We would not mention what happened the night before as in "Do you know what you did last night?", unless it had to be mentioned to avoid getting beat up or arrested. This was not a tacit agreement. It was laid down in shared accommodation law.

This roomie was a bad, bad boy. Shortly after graduation he had to marry a Montreal girl. I was a Montreal resident then, living in a squalid basement apartment. The night before the wedding the groom and I went on a bender downtown, and sometime during the night got separated. The next morning he called me from somewhere, asking if I had cab fare to get him to my place because what little money he had he'd squandered. When he arrived, he informed me he was going to have to borrow a suit from me because he didn't have one and hadn't arranged to get one. He was a good deal bigger than me, but managed to squeeze into my best suit. He was forced to wear my too small shoes as well, assuming that sneakers wouldn't be appropriate. They squeezed and pinched his feet. At the wedding he limped up to the altar in an imposing cathedral in the Town of Mount Royal, the vent in the jacket making a wide "V" over his rump, the pants well above his shoes, and his hairy arms sticking out of the jacket. He looked like a gorilla in a suit.

His new in-laws were quite wealthy, and were humiliated when, at the reception, he arose to thank me for lending him a suit. On second thought, maybe they were relieved that such ill-fitting attire didn't belong to him. I didn't know anyone there, but enjoyed myself anyway, drinking with the priest who conducted the affair. I haven't made the

acquaintance of a priest before or since, but if he was representative of that branch of clergy, they're a fun-loving bunch.

Not surprisingly, his marriage didn't last very long. I've long since lost track of him, but I'd be surprised if any subsequent marriages of his lasted very long either. In fact, I'd be shocked if he was still alive.

I remember attending a wedding in Chipman, New Brunswick, where a very bad actor on the University football team was marrying a really nice Baptist girl. Two or three of us gathered around the corner of the Baptist church nipping from pints of rum, steeling ourselves for entry into the church, fearing we would cause lightning to blast it and us off the face of the earth. During the ceremony, the videographer who was a brother of the groom and had joined us outside the church, staggered about taking pictures until he leaned forward too far and fell in a dead faint onto the carpet. When people asked him if he was keeping out of trouble, I hope that he owned up to that indiscretion.

I once attended a sports celebrity dinner at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, the kind where notable members of the Montreal Canadiens and the Expos made speeches for the crowd. One man, having left the room briefly, returned in the midst of a presentation. Not wanting to interrupt it by squeezing through tables to his seat, he decided to wait it out. He may have had a touch too much to drink, for as he went to lean against the wall, he badly misjudged the distance. The wall was a few feet further away from him than he thought. The audience heard a cry, followed by a loud thump, and we turned to see this fellow ignominiously slide to the floor. When asked, "Are you keeping out of trouble?" it's unlikely he could have responded in the negative. I hasten to add it was not me.

I enjoy it greatly when something like that happens because it isn't me.

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