



THE MERCURY

THE STUDENT ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE OF GETTYSBURG COLLEGE

Year 2008

Article 2

1-1-2008

Kenny G, Danielle and the Curry Closet

Evan M. Crowder

Gettysburg College, crowev01@cnav.gettysburg.edu

Class of 2008

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury>



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Crowder, Evan M. (2015) "Kenny G, Danielle and the Curry Closet," *The Mercury*: Year 2008, Article 2.

Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2008/iss1/2>

This open access nonfiction is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Kenny G, Danielle and the Curry Closet

Keywords

creative writing, non-fiction

Author Bio

Evan Crowder is a Renaissance man; a self-unemployed storyteller, dreamer (until it died), laissez-faire pupil, perspiring writer, corrections officer of humanity and journeyman jackass of all trades, preferring to divide his time equally amongst his vices. A determined follower of feline polo, Evan has had great success on the back of Hodge, his prize Calico. When not competing, he enjoys cooking ethnic food, reading physically deformed 18th century authors and drinking gin while writing non-fiction stories.

Kenny G, Danielle and the Curry Closet

The man driving the car speaks no English. We had found his number on a billboard at the airport, and in need of a ride across the Bay Bridge out of Oakland, we decided to call it. Jenn and I waited on the sidewalk outside of the airport in the crisp Californian air for half an hour before "Bapu" arrived. "Where you go?" he asks us through his thick matted beard.

"17-50 Buena Vista West," Jenn tells him.

"No Oakland?"

"San Francisco." Bapu nods. The cloth seats belch the thick scent of sandalwood into the air. His car smells like an Indian bazaar, and as it flies down the highway, an exhilarating burst of adrenaline begins coursing its way through my veins.

Jenn and I make the pilgrimage in the last week of summer. It is a religious journey for us; Muslims go to Mecca, Rednecks go to Graceland and Potheads like us go to the Haight. We have reserved a flat for ten days in the lower Haight, and Bapu is taking us to get the key. The sun is just beginning to set as we make our way deeper into the concrete canyons of the city.

"Where?" Bapu asks, simply.

"17-50 Buena Vista West."

"Buena Vista?"

"Yes," Jenn replies. A look of fear begins to work its way into her eyes as Bapu gets onto the phone with his wife. A flood of Hindi bursts into the cab, filling it with a melodic sound, unlike the purring motors of the creeping caravan of cars around us.

"Here." Bapu looks at me with the phone in his outstretched hand. Not knowing quite what he wants, I put the phone to my ear.

"Hello?"

"Hi. Where do you want to go?" The woman on the other end asks. She sounds like a female version of Bapu.

"17-50 Buena Vista West."

"Buena Vista West?" she asks.

"Yes."

"Let me talk to the driver." I hand the phone back to Bapu. He goes back to talking in his native tongue. Jenn pulls her long black hair back and ties it up in a ponytail. I can see her pale face start to turn red. Jenn is incredibly patient, but only to a point. I have known this since she became my best friend and, now, roommate. She is taking me to San Francisco for a vacation; one she tells me is much needed since my parents' recent divorce.

"Do you think he knows where we're going?" she asks.

His car smells like an Indian bazaar, and as it flies down the highway, an exhilarating burst of adrenaline begins coursing its way through my veins.

"I hope so." In one quick motion, Babu hangs up the phone and slams on the brakes in the middle of a three-lane street. He throws the Town Car into reverse, and turns the wheels sharply. The inertia throws Jenn toward me in the back seat, and as he puts the car in drive, she is pushed back. I look to the left, and in horror, I see three lanes of speeding traffic barreling towards the car.

"Okay," Babu says, burning his tires on the pavement. The car lurches forward. Babu has just executed a three-point turn in heavy traffic. I look at Jenn, and I can see we are both thinking the same thing: How do we get out of this car?

Over the next hour, I talk to Babu's wife three more times on the phone: once more about the office where we will get the key, and twice more about the location of our flat. We got into Babu's car at six-thirty. It's nine when we get out.. He has finally brought us to 370 Waller (at Fillmore.) He helps us with our bags, placing them on the curb. The ride is a flat rate of fifty dollars. Babu gets a poor tip.

"So what kind of place is this?" I ask Jenn while she puts the key in the door.

"It's like a time-share thing, except they rent it out by the week."

"It's someone's house then?"

"I don't know, I guess. I found it online, it looks like a nice place," she says. The door opens to reveal a steep flight of wooden stairs. At the top, we enter into a new realm. This is no vacation house. This is someone's house. A huge piece of tile greets us, adorned with a hand-painted picture of sandals on it: "MAHALO for removing your slippahs. (But don't take mo bettah ones when you leave.)" Right next to the tile is a large frame full of various pictures. Jenn goes into the living room and turns a light on. I look at the pictures. There's a middle-aged man; a typical white stiff, dressed head to toe in Banana Republic with square framed glasses. His wife is Filipino, her dark hair and amber skin match her wedding dress perfectly. Their daughter looks like a shrunken version of the wife. Even though she's probably five, she looks like she's thirty. She sits unwrapping a toy on Christmas not with the excited face of a child, but with the worn face of an adult.

Jenn goes upstairs. I look around the living room, until I hear her voice from the second floor. "I get the master bedroom. Are you sleeping in Danielle's room or the other bedroom?"

"Who is Danielle?" I ask.

"Their daughter, I guess. There's a little girl's room up here and it says Danielle on the door." Danielle. I am not sure if I will feel comfortable sleeping in a five-year-old girl's room.

"I'll take the other one." Jenn's room is filled with pictures of the husband and wife, and in the master bathroom is a cross-stitched wedding present. It says "Jim and Leni" with the date of their wedding on it. "Enjoy Jim and Leni's wedding bed," I tell her. She laughs as she puts her clothes in the drawers on top of Leni's flowered sun dresses.

The next morning is misty and cool. My window is open, and as I slowly awaken, the sounds of buses and car horns fill the room. We get dressed quickly, and get coffee on our way up Haight street. I look down the road, and seeing the

hills climb into the fog, I feel enchanted. It is unlike any other place I have been before. Everything seems magical in the mist. I have been to many cities, but San Francisco is the first one other than New York that I have visited without my parents.

Walking past Buena Vista Park, we see the road where Bapu made his precise three-point turn. Ahead of us is the fabled intersection of Haight and Ashbury. I feel my heart start to race—I will be standing in the same place as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane and so many others. When I arrive at the intersection, a wave of disappointment washes over me. There is a Ben and Jerry's ice cream stand to my right, a gift shop to my left, and two tourist traps across the street. "Is this what hippies do these days?" Jenn only shakes her head. Teenagers in designer clothing carry shopping bags amongst the bums on the streets, and as I survey the scene, I feel the magic fading. Jenn decides to go into an anarchist book store and I go sit on a bench at the end of Buena Vista Park.

I hear footsteps behind me. Before I turn around, a dark-skinned man with a pencil-thin moustache, dressed in a stained sweatshirt and knit cap is sitting next to me.

"Hey man, where you from?" I can sense he knows I am an outsider.

"Pennsylvania."

"Shit, that's a long way brother. What are you doing out here?"

"Vacation," I tell him.

"I'm from Long Beach myself. Here on a spiritual quest."

"Oh yeah?"

"You ever heard of chakras?" He starts rubbing his hands together, and stares down at the people walking by on the street. I look at him, but he doesn't look me in the eye.

"Yeah, I've heard of that. It's a spiritual thing, right?"

"Yeah man, I'm trying to get my chakras back together. I was all fucked up in Long Beach. I was on drugs, you know, all that shit. But I got this book from a guy about chakras, and it all makes sense man, I've been really into the whole thing." His speech speeds up. "But I'm really here to get away from the dogs."

"Dogs?" I ask.

"You know. People who follow you around. They watch you living, just like that movie. You know, the Truman Show."

"That movie isn't real," I tell him.

"That's what they want you to think," Truman says. I see Jenn coming. "Hey man, you got any money you could spare? I need some food." I hand him a wadded up dollar bill in my pocket.

"Good luck," I say as I walk down the steps in front of the bench to meet Jenn. We walk toward the crosswalk, and across the street is a man in a huge winter coat. He begins to walk toward us. We try to talk to each other so the man doesn't try to speak to us. Having just met Truman, I do not want to deal with another bum.

"Give me twenty million dollars or I'll fucking kill you!" he yells. I freeze. Jenn laughs.

"Will you take a check?" she jokes.

"I'll take anything."

"Here's two bucks, I'll give you an I.O.U for the rest." Jenn extends her arm and the man takes the money. Jenn has been in New York City all of her life. She is the Socrates of street-smart. She has been drinking in city bars since she was fourteen, dodging late night bums, trying to make her train; she knows how to handle these types of situations. I do not.

"Thanks, here's a joke. The Pope and a rabbi are in a bar; then Michael Jackson walks in and says, 'I'm in the wrong fucking joke.'" He shoves the bills in his pocket and pushes past us.

"Thanks for not killing us," I call out.

"Don't mention it," he says.

We go to a hookah bar. Jenn chooses cotton candy tobacco, and we sit at high tables in the lounge. An Asian man is sitting at the table next to us, with a bucket of bubbles and a glass tube. He dips one end of the glass tube in the bubbles while dragging on the cloth-covered hookah hose, and, putting his mouth to the clean end of the tube, blows bubbles of opaque smoke. They ascend slowly, and then drift gently to the floor, where they explode into puffs of smoke and little puddles of soap.

"We need to get some weed."

"I know. What should we do?"

"We could ask a bum," she suggests.

"You think?"

"Sure, I did it all the time back in New York." I take sixty dollars out of the ATM in the hookah bar as Jenn pays for the tobacco. We shuffle back outside. The sun has come out, and dozens of homeless people are asleep on the grass-covered hillside of Buena Vista Park across the street.

"It looks like the bum beaches of Normandy over there," I tell her. Jenn laughs, and we make our way down the Haight, looking for the best vagrant for our job.

We make choosing our bum a serious task—he would be holding our money after all. Anyone who looks like they have a love of liquor is immediately passed upon. Packs of hungry bums are also eliminated, purely out of strength in numbers.

We meet Kenny G in front of the Army-Navy store. He is sitting on the ground in torn corduroys, a hemp hat and ratty hooded sweatshirt, holding a three-week-old puppy. When we see the puppy, Jenn immediately sits down next to Kenny G. She hands him a dollar, and takes the puppy into her arms, holding the shivering ball of black fuzz close to her chest.

We talk to Kenny G for a while. He tells us he has a bum girlfriend, who also has a bum puppy. He says she is on the next block over, begging as well. "Do you know where we can get some bud?" Jenn asks. I am taken aback by this. I have never seen drugs discussed so openly between complete strangers on the street before.

"Sure, I could do that for you," Kenny G says, smiling. Kenny G has one tooth in the front of his mouth. Half of a second is attached to the first one at the bottom, magically held on by months of plaque build-up. "Which one of you wants

to come with me?" I volunteer before Jenn has the chance. "Okay," he says. "Grab my bag and the puppy, and follow me." I put one of his canvas duffle bags on my back and take the squirming puppy into my arms. Jenn goes into the Army-Navy store to buy the puppy a blanket as I follow Kenny G down Haight Street.

"You from around here?" Kenny G asks.

"Nope, just on vacation from Pennsylvania."

"Right on."

"Why do they call you Kenny G?" I ask him.

"They say I look like him. Only I'm more handsome." He smiles, exposing his tooth and a half. He tells me he's twenty, that his mother threw him out of the house three years ago, and that he's been backpacking up the coast ever since. His girlfriend is in the same position, and they love each other. He tells me how hard each day is; showering in a McDonald's bathroom, finding food, finding a safe place to sleep. I see Kenny G is no different than me; we both have eyes, ears, hands, feet, tongues, minds, ideas, hopes, dreams, fears, desires and passions.

He drops his duffle bag on the grass at the end of Golden Gate Park.

"Wait here," he says.

"Do you need the money?" I ask.

"No, it's called pan-handling. I'll bring you the weed, you pay me if you want the bag that I bring back." I nod and Kenny G is off toward a copse of trees across the field from me. I sit with his bags and his puppy in my arms. I have a sweatshirt on, but I look decidedly un-homeless. A tattered man comes up and squats down in front of me.

"You need some H?" he asks quietly.

"No man, I'm just here for some weed."

"You need help with that?"

"No, I'm all set," I tell him.

"You need a pipe to smoke that weed out of?"

"Get out of here," I tell the man. I imagine a head shop and a pharmacy inside of his jacket, all organized and neatly laid out within the velveteen lining. Kenny G emerges from the trees not a moment too soon. He reaches into his sweatshirt pocket and throws a sandwich bag down on the ground in front of me in plain view. I scramble to pick it up, and I shove it in my pocket as fast as I can.

"Forty-five if you like what you see."

"I only have three twenties."

"I can spot you five if you want to break that after we get out of here." I agree and Kenny G takes my money and five of his own dollars and sets off toward the dealer in the trees. When he returns, I hand him twenty dollars and tell him to keep the change. We meet Jenn again in front of the Army-Navy, and she gives him a quilt she has just purchased. Kenny G wraps the puppy in the blanket, and thanks us. I shake his hand and wish him well. We set off toward Jim and Leni's house. We never see Kenny G again.

We rush to the nearest head shop and buy a cheap pipe, so we can go home to get high. It's like being in our parent's house. We take care to smoke only in the bathroom, with the tub full of bath oil and a toilet paper roll stuffed with dryer sheets to kill the smell. We decide to go get dinner at a glorified gay bar. We

are the only straight people there, and the thrill of feeling like a foreigner in my own land is intoxicating.

We smoke a cigarette on the curb while waiting for the taxi. A man in designer jeans and a pink bathrobe rounds the corner. He has green towel wrapped around his head. He isn't wearing shoes. "Hey pal, can I leech a cigarette?" he asks me. I hand him a cigarette, and he tears off the filter. He puts it in his mouth backward, cotton hanging from the end. "Can I get a light?" I light the cotton, hoping he will leave. He takes a huge drag of the filter and nonchalantly blows it into the night air. "How's your brother?" he asks.

"I'm sorry?" I look over at him. He is staring blankly into the street.

"You know, the one who collects all of the different beers and the fancy bags."

"I don't have a brother like that, man," I tell him. He is unconvinced.

"You know, the one in the navy," he says, stepping closer to me. I can see the wrinkles in Jenn's forehead as she lifts her brows at him.

"Nope, I don't have a brother in the navy." He comes even closer.

"Hm. I could have sworn that was you. Thanks for the cigarette." He walks into the street, crossing without looking.

The next night, we decide to go to a nightclub. We take a taxi to Harrison Street. It drops us off in front of a plain white building marked simply "Supperclub." When the doors open, the two-floor main room is flooded in blue light. There are no tables in the club. The wall is lined entirely with beds. The hostess leads us to a king-size bed with a lap table on it, and instructs us to take off our shoes and climb in. Our waitress is dressed up like a groupie from a Cure concert, and when she speaks, we see she is European. The first rule of drinking underage in public, according to Jenn, is finding a foreign server. She does not ask for our licenses, and brings us back our drinks.

In a matter of minutes, our table is littered with empty glasses. We decide to go outside and smoke a cigarette. Jenn's speech is slurred, and she tells me I am completely drunk. A woman walks up to us in a black dress. I look at her. She is good looking. We talk to her for what seems like half an hour. Jenn flips her cigarette into the street and I follow suit. We go back inside. "She wasn't bad looking." I say. Jenn laughs.

"That was a man." I laugh along with her. She suggests hitting on the waitress, since we both know she is a woman.

The next night is our last night in San Francisco. We have tickets to a musical: "Love, Janis." We decide it's the perfect way to end our trip. We have saved some of the weed we bought from Kenny G, and we decide to smoke it when we get home. We go to dinner first, at a Japanese restaurant called Ozumo. We drink a bottle of sake in shots, and we are both drunk when we get to the musical. We stumble through the lobby of the Marines' Memorial Theater, up to the box office. Janis's concert posters from the Fillmore are projected onto the walls of the lobby on top of framed pictures of Marines raising the flag on Mt. Suribachi, landing on beaches and fighting in Vietnam. We overhear a Marine in a military ball cap talking about what a disgrace it is to show a musical about a hippie in their theater. We take our seats, and when the curtain comes up, my soul explodes.

Janis comes on stage and a guitarist in a Nehru jacket with long hair rips into the riff starting "Piece of my Heart;" I feel a chill rush through my body. This is it. This is what I wanted to find in San Francisco. I didn't want the commercialism of the Haight, I didn't want the gift shops. I wanted that feeling that was the Haight in the 1960's. I wanted to feel like we were all one. Now, during the concert, I know our journey is complete. We are both transfixed, and neither of us say a word until we get outside. Drunk with ecstasy, we get into a cab.

We're let off at the corner of Waller and Fillmore, and I go to the head shop on the corner to pick up a cigar we can gut. (There are more head shops in San Francisco than churches in the South.) We race up the stairs, past Jim and Leni's tile. We don't remove our slippers. Jenn breaks up the weed, and I roll it into a blunt.

"Where are we going to do this?" She asks. "The bathroom fan will totally blow this right into the gap where their neighbors live."

"We should smoke it in Danielle's closet," I say. The allure of doing drugs in a five-year-old girl's closet is too much for either of us to resist. We work feverishly, taking Danielle's clothes out and laying them on her bed. Taking everything out that could hold a scent; the closet is threadbare in ten minutes. We sit on the floor inside and shut the door. I light the blunt, and coughing, hand it to Jenn. She takes a hit and coughs too.

"You know, this shit's pretty good," she says.

"And we got it off a bum," I add. We both start cracking up as we pass the blunt back and forth.

"We are retarded," I hear her say in the dark.

"Why is that," I say as the glowing ember is passed back to me.

"This closet has a slotted door."

"So it does." Jenn opens up the door, and the whole room is filled with smoke.

"Nothing we can do about it now," she says. We finish the blunt and put it out. The room is still filled with an illegitimate haze—the stuffed animals on the shelf look at us, expressing their disapproval at our treatment of their master's room. I bring in a fan and cover it with dryer sheets and we go downstairs to smoke a cigarette.

I stand out in the cool air, staring at the stars on our last night. Everything feels right with the world. I had come to the Haight expecting it would be just like it was in 1967. I expected everything to be as I had seen it in pictures and heard about it on television. It was nothing like I expected in a way that pleased me. I feel like I am part of this city. I am Bapu, I am Kenny G, I am Janis, Jenn and Truman.

"We should totally steal this sign," Jenn says, pointing to the plastic fake street sign on Danielle's door. She opens it, and the scent of marijuana pours out of the room like an oven full of cookies being opened for the first time. We panic. "Our flight leaves in five hours," Jenn screams. I run downstairs and start tearing Jim and Leni's house apart, trying to find an air freshener. There is nothing. I run back upstairs, sick with panic.

"There's nothing! Nothing!" I yell. My eyes are massive fireballs, and the

fact that I am incredibly high doesn't help us in solving our dilemma. Jenn is in Danielle's room, hanging the clothes in the closet.

"Here, do this, I will try to figure something out," Jenn says. I take over in Danielle's room as Jenn darts down the stairs. I finish with the closet and rush downstairs to find her. It smells like an Indian feast is being prepared. "They had curry powder," Jenn says as she works a wooden spoon around the edge of a skillet. "This will cover up anything." The scent of the curry drifts up from the stove, quickly filling the house. She grabs a trivet and leaps up the stairs with the hot pan. She brings it into the room, sets it on the desk and shuts the door. "Let's hope that works."

In one hour, curry magic has taken effect. Danielle's room smells like a Tandoor instead of a Hendrix concert. At ease, we finally go to sleep.

The next morning, we stand on the curb in front of 370 Waller St., the home of Jim and Leni; the home of Danielle and her curry closet.

"What a vacation," I say as the taxi pulls up.

"You're telling me." The trunk pops open, and a man in a turban with a thick beard gets out to help us with our luggage.

"Where you want to go?" The man asks in a thick Indian accent.