

Brian Moriarty | Lectures & Presentations | Whispering Pines

Whispering Pines (1998)

Whispering Pines has been presented more often, and in more different versions, than any of my other lectures. It's undoubtedly my most "important" presentation, if importance is measured by the impact it has had on the lives of myself and others. Perhaps I will write more about this someday.

The first mix was 41 minutes long, and decidedly X-rated. It was played in public only once, on Friday, 16 October 1998, at [Project Bar-B-Q](#) in Boerne, Texas at the kind invitation of George Sanger, [The Fat Man](#). After a brief "live" prelude, the Bar-B-Q audience heard a playback of the *Whispering Pines* audio, accompanied by a projection of synchronized subtitles. This was followed by a "live" postlude.

About 13 minutes were subsequently cut to produce a G-rated *Whispering Pines* deemed more suitable for presentation by the co-founder of a soon-to-be public corporation. This was presented at several venues in the

fall of 1998, including the CGDC Roadtrip conferences in Seattle (9 November), South San Francisco (23 November) and Boston (12 December). Later versions of varying length, some as short as ninety seconds(!), have been presented at conferences and gatherings too numerous to list.

Click on the link below to download a 37-minute .mp4 video of the original, uncensored mix of *Whispering Pines*, accompanied by synchronized subtitles. The soundtrack has been downmixed to monaural for better compatibility with classroom playback systems.

- [Whispering Pines](#) (50MB .mp4 video)

The second link offers the same mix as an .mp3 audio file, vividly encoded for Dolby Surround.

- [Whispering Pines](#) (14MB .mp3 audio)

You can following along with the soundtrack by reading the transcript below.

Tiresome disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed in *Whispering Pines* are those of the participants.

The soundtrack and accompanying transcript contain explicit, violent and hateful language, and are intended for consideration by consenting adults.

The songs performed in *Whispering Pines* are the copyrighted property of their respective composers and publishers. Excerpts are quoted here for educational purposes.

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Prelude

Quoting from the conference brochure:

"Professor Brian Moriarty spent a weekend this summer at a Zen retreat in the mountains. He sat in meditation for long hours, ate cold rice and listened to the coyotes bay in the pre-dawn light. The winter stars twinkled with fierce splendor. A large bottle of Advil was emptied. And a cat emerged from the forest with a live bird in its mouth. No one under 18 permitted."

The reason you get these purple descriptions is that the people who put on these conferences need to have something to put in their promotional literature several weeks or even months before the event.

It's often impossible for me to know exactly what I'll be talking about that far ahead.

It just so happens that this description matches my presentation rather well, in a purple kind of way.

Last year, at the Computer Game Developer's Conference in Santa Clara, I delivered a lecture called *Listen: The*

Potential of Shared Hallucinations. Did anyone here see that? It was the one with the Twinkie.

The premise of *Listen* was that people have a basic need to express themselves. That the Internet offers wonderful new opportunities for them to do so. And that we can provide a valuable service by offering people online venues and tools for creative self-expression.

At the time, most of what I was saying was theory, based on anecdotal evidence and observations from other media. It was intended to suggest new directions, to inspire and encourage exploration.

That was a year and a half ago. At the time, the multiplayer game community I co-founded, Mplayer.com, had approximately 100,000 registered members.

Examples of the kind of self-expression I talked about in *Listen* were evident then. But the behavior was sporadic, difficult to categorize or document.

This past September, Mplayer.com passed the 1.5 million member mark. Now it's easy to find people expressing themselves. In fact, it's nearly impossible to avoid it.

All you have to do ... is Listen.

When we launched the service in October of 1996, it included a feature that was unique among multiplayer game services: Real-time voice chat.

Users could send voice messages to one another using a simple, push-to-talk interface model.

For the first year or so of Mplayer's existence, only a few members took advantage of voice chat. Most people didn't have microphones, or didn't have Windows configured properly. A typical chat room would have maybe one or two people using voice, while everybody else chatted with text.

But about eleven months ago, as we passed the 750,000 member mark, some kind of critical mass was achieved.

More and more members started to buy the inexpensive headset microphones which were being heavily advertised on the service.

In certain chat areas, the number of talkers began to equal the number of typers, and then to outnumber them. Members began to add the label "Mics Only" to the names they gave to their chat rooms.

Social pressure began to be felt by those who didn't use microphones.

And from this slow evolution, there is emerging a large and curious new community. A community that expresses itself in the medium of interactive sound.

In some ways, Mplayer's voice chat is similar to CB radio. The service is free once you buy the equipment. The

interface allows only one person to speak at a time. The sound quality ranges from okay to bad. It depends on the make and position of the user's microphone, and the ambient noise level of their room, as well as the characteristics of their Internet connection.

But unlike CB, the range of Mplayer isn't limited to a few dozen miles. Its reach is international. The number of channels, or chat rooms, is also unlimited. Members can create their own rooms and name them anything they want. They can protect their rooms with a password so only their friends can come in. The creator of a room maintains a degree of control over who gets to speak. And they can eject anybody they don't like.

Most important of all, voice chat has no history. It did not emerge from a legacy culture of truckers, hobbyists and emergency service providers. It isn't saddled with any baggage about how long messages ought to be, or what it's appropriate to talk about.

It is developing from a much broader audience, ordinary people who like to play games, fool around, flirt, brag and gossip.

People who like to express themselves.

I find the phenomenon of voice chat fascinating. I thought you would, too.

So early last August, I bought myself a couple cases of

blank tape, plugged a cassette deck into my PC's sound card, hit the Record button and started cruising around on Mplayer.com.

Whispering Pines is the notebook of what I found there.

The material you are about to hear was logged in public chat rooms that were open to any member of Mplayer.com.

I appeared to other members as a normal user, under a variety of anonymous identities.

To preserve the spontaneity of the interactions, no indication was given that I was affiliated with Mpath, or that anything was being recorded. My contact with other members was kept to a minimum. I said hello and goodbye when appropriate, and answered questions when asked. Otherwise I did my best to remain silent.

No solicitation, other than the obvious fact of my presence, was used to evoke anything anybody said or did. These "performances," if you will, were freely offered in front of a total stranger. And, although I possess the technical ability to wander around Mplayer invisibly, and to enter private rooms uninvited, I did not do so in order to gather these recordings.

Many of the sound clips you will hear have been digitally enhanced to improve their intelligibility and correct technical problems. In general, however, no special effects

have been added to any of the voices. The reverbs, echoes and other modifications you will hear were provided by the members themselves, using their own equipment. There are two places on the tape where I added some reverb for dramatic effect. These instances should be fairly obvious.

Mplayer's voice chat does not currently support real-time sound mixing. The crossfades and overlays you will hear in a few sections were added by me to improve the pace of the program.

Whispering Pines was condensed from about 25 hours of raw material. However, it is not a representative sample of what's happening in the public chat rooms of Mplayer.com. Sound bites were selected and arranged to present an introduction to the emerging community of voice chat which you will hopefully find interesting, entertaining, and maybe even thought-provoking.

If what you hear in the next 41 minutes intrigues you, I invite you to visit Mplayer.com, drop in to the public chat areas and discover for yourself what happens when you put a live microphone in the hands of one and a half million pioneers.

§

"10-4. Breaker, breaker."

"Hi, everybody!"

"Hullo?"

"Can y'all hear me?"

"No, Blondie hun, you're still breaking up."

"Yeah, you're breaking up there. I can't hear you."

"Blondie, I heard you loud and clear."

"Didn't understand a word you said. Did you understand me?"

"You can't hear me very well?"

"I did that time."

"This is the first time I've been able to get my mic to work. Can you hear me clearly?"

"I just hooked up, like, two days ago, and people yesterday were saying that they couldn't hear me, couldn't hear me."

"Well, is anyone gonna talk?"

"Why don't *you* talk?"

"Somebody asked, 'How do you talk?' Up in the left-hand corner, where it says Hold To Talk, you just press that button."

"It looks like we got some people in our room now."

"Hey listen, wait a sec, 'cause I never really pay attention. Where's everybody from? I know Scotty and I are both from Massachusetts."

"Canada."

"West Virginia."

"San Francisco. You sound real clear here tonight, you're coming in real good."

"You know where I'm from."

"I'm from Ohio, Al."

"I'm from Michigan."

"Wow, Michigan! Anywhere near Lillytree?"

"I'm from Galveston, Texas."

"Apparently I'm Mr. London, England."

"Yeah, Bunderburg and I are from Ottawa."

"I'm in southern Indiana."

"North Dakota."

"Colorado."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"Chicago."

"I am from ... Chicago."

"And I'm from New Jersey."

"Wow! This room's filling up."

"Ah, Rusty, one time I had twenty-two people in here."

"Wow! I bet that was fun."

"It was quite busy. It was hard to get onto the mic, too."

"Yeah, that's the trouble."

"Yeah, but that's better than when you get in a room and it's so quiet that no one's talking."

"What are we chatting about today? Anything important?
Like UFOs?"

"Singing."

"*Not* singing."

"Yup. We're talking about the ability to, or not to, sing."

"I'm definitely lacking in that department."

"Me too, I'm afraid."

"Me too. I can't sing at all."

"Well, I haven't been singing. At least not over my microphone."

"I don't know why. You have a pretty voice."

"Thanks. That's so sweet."

"Go ahead and sing! I'm gonna get me a shot of that moonshine here. I might sing here in a minute."

"Hell, I get to thinking I can sing, and ... You ever recorded your own self and played it back? Damn, it's rough."

"Yeah, isn't it awful? I did that for my boyfriend once. And I thought I was doing something really great. And I sent it to him, and oh, my gosh. He played it, and oh, God, that was awful."

"You don't realize how you sound, do you? Think you're coming across one way, and you're going the other way."

"I'm gonna have to get somebody out there to record my voice and send me a .WAV file so I can hear it."

"Actually, I done it one time and I didn't think it sounded

that bad when I played it back. But it didn't sound that good, either!"

"Hell, you was still drunk, Gambler. That's the reason."

"Well, I think we all think we can sing once we get a few drinks in us."

"We're just waiting for the right person to come in and start singing."

"Betty, you'd like to sing next?"

"Yeah, but you can go ahead, because I wanna practice before I go, make sure I don't mess up."

"Okay. Gator, would you like to sing?"

"Darling, yours is so good a voice. This old Gator don't sing. We just love to listen, though."

"God, it's boring in here! Get some music going."

"Hey, Al! Do 'Whispering Pines!'"

"Well, I just told the people I was gonna do that."

"C'mon, Al! Do 'Whispering Pines!' Hurrah!"

"Well, I will if you just leave me alone and get the song started."

"Okay, c'mon! You can do it, boy!"

"This is a song that Count Vlad, Dracula, my friend, used to sing all the time, and I learned it on the guitar, so I'm gonna give it another shot here today.

*"Snowflakes fall as Winter comes
And time just seems to fly
Is it the loneliness in me
That makes me want to cry?"*

*"My heart is sad, like a mourning dove
That lost its mate in flight
Hear the cooing of his lonely heart
Through the stillness of the night*

*"Whispering pines, whispering pines
Tell me, is it so?
Whispering pines, whispering pines
You're the one who knows
My darling's gone oh so long
And I need your company
Whispering pines, send my baby back to me"*

"Hey, everyone, I'll be back here in just a little bit. I'm gonna go over here and get my cousin over here on this Redneck's Room. Be back here in a little bit."

"Okay, you go get him."

[Room change]

"Hey, Coolchick21. Welcome to The Hot Tub! Strip it and

dip it!"

"Hey, Kindbud, what do you dip it in?"

"Ahhh!"

"You'll notice with Mplayer that there are different rooms that have different subject matter, and we like to keep the subject matter within the subject. Thus, this room is Truth Or Dare. So hopefully you will join in and play."

"Is there, like, an age requirement for this room?"

"Everyone's welcome here. As long as they're over eighteen."

"You can ask anybody in the room a question. Tell 'em who you're asking the question, and you have to ask it about their body."

"All right. Tia Lee, you want a Truth or a Dare?"

"Truth"

"All right, Tia Lee. How often do you masturbate?"

"Never experimented with it yet."

"Could you say that again?"

"Never tried it yet."

[Room change]

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, oh yeah ..."

"Well now, put your hands together and give that mysterious guest in the studio there today a round of applause. I think he did a pretty good job. It sort of sounded a little bit like ... Elvis!"

"Woo hoo! We know who it was, and he's great!"

"Well, I heard that! Well, he's got ... He said, could he do one more, and I told him, you know, a guy sings as good as he does, I said, yes sir, you just do another one. So he figured he was gonna do a hunk-a hunk-a 'Burning Love!'"

*"Lord almighty
I feel my temperature rising
Higher and higher
Burning through to my soul"*

[Room change]

"All right, that's enough music. That's enough, man. This is a fight room, let's do this shit. That's enough of that fucking music."

"You sound like a goddamn nigger. Oh my God, don't tell me we got a nigger in the room here now. Get the fuck off, bro! I know you stole that goddamn computer, but give it back, now. Get the fuck out of this room, all right? No niggers, Jews, spics allowed, goddammit."

"Hey, Stormtrooper! You stupid little newbie Navy dick

sucker, let me tell you something, boy! You don't come into my motherfucking room giving lip to nobody unless you got fucking permission! Do you understand that, you little crack-headed trailer park backward-ass country fuck slow-neck no-pussy-getting faggot? You know what Navy boys do, don't you? They suck each other's dicks, you stupid little fuck boy! Let me tell you something, bitch. I own this room. I own Mplayer. I own the world! Take a look outside, bitch! I own that, motherfucker! You see that? I own the world, and you're just living in my motherfucking world. Don't make me take you out of it, you little bitch!"

[Room change]

"The power is mine

The power is mine

The power today is mine

I don't know Satan, get thee behind

The salvation today is mine"

"That was great!"

"That was so nice. Beautiful song. Beautiful kid."

"How old is that child with you? That is probably the greatest I have ... Six? Ah, praise God! Amen, hallelujah! God is shedding a tear 'cause he loved that music. You tell that little girl that she has made God so happy! Oh, amen!"

"Thank you."

"And she sings a lot of songs, too. She's had a lot of them that she sings with me in the car, so Mom's been teaching her and trying to exercise her voice to get it to get up there. I want her on stage one of these days, so ... She's blessed. She loves God, she loves Jesus. She's got Him in her heart. She accepted Him about a year ago."

"Well, I tell you, praise God. To hear that a six-year-old girl, a year ago would make her five, actually accepting Jesus, I think is absolutely amazing, and obviously I have to answer the phone. I know it's my mother 'cause she's the only one who would bug me now!"

"Shame on you, George! Be nice. She's your Mom!"

"I don't have to be nice. They hung up on me."

[Room change]

*"Hop around, hop around
Get up, get up and hop around"*

[Room change]

"Where's Buba? ... I can't hear Buba! ... Buba?"

[Room change]

"So Stone, did you say you were a fireman?"

"Yeah, I'm a firefighter."

"Wow, we've got the cream of America in this room. We've got a guy in the Army, in the fire brigade, and an ex-Sheriff. Wow!"

"You are easily impressed, dear."

"Yeah, we just had a fire, matter of fact yesterday, and ... Had six children trapped in a house. Entrapment. And we got five of them out, and the one hid in a closet and ended up being a fatality."

"Well, five's still better than none. So take heart, my man! That was a good save."

"Yeah. You know, wish we could've got all six of them out, but, you know, things like that happen. Can't blame it on us."

"Hey Stone, the main thing to remember is, you did your job to the best of your ability. That's all you can ever ask for."

"Yeah, a lot of people ask if you take them things home with you, and I'm married and everything, and you know, I usually come home and try to talk to my wife about things and deal with them. It's kind of still hard to deal with."

"Yeah, it is. I was pretty well messed up when I came back from Bosnia, but ..."

[Room change]

*"Oh say can you see
By the dawn's early light"*

"Ba-ba-ba ..."

*"Ah-ah-ah-ah
Staying alive, staying alive"*

[Room change]

"Never put oil on a waterbed mattress. Trust me, you can never get that stuff all the way off."

"Oh God, my waterbed would be atrocious with all that on it. Ewww! I paid a lot of money for my waterbed. The last thing I'm going to put on it is oil. How would you even be that stupid? It's a plastic. It's rubber, the mattress!"

"I know, Kimmy, and you like rubber."

"Depends on what it is for!"

"Goddamn, we talking rubber? Oh, wowsers! Ha ha! Goody-goody!"

[Room change]

"Hey, Vern! Where did Vern ... Oh, there he is. Vern! How about getting that old guitar out of yours? I got mine downstairs, she's packed and all tucked in. Why don't you pull that old guitar out, son? Click in here, and show these people just what you're made of."

"I don't know if I can do it or not. I work third shift, and I haven't been to sleep yet."

"You'll do it for your old buddy Joe, though, won't you?"

"And for little old Fallen Star, Vern? C'mon!"

"Vern, she got that cute little wiggle when she walks and giggles when she talks. You better click in here and please this gal."

"Okay, let me go get it."

"Okay, buddy."

[Room change]

"Oh, shit. Slimnigger's here. Oh, fuck. There goes the fucking room, right down the fucking toilet."

"Hey, shut the fuck up. I don't wanna hear nobody's goddamn mouth or I'll slap the fuck out of somebody. Sit y'all's bitches ass down and let me talk, all right? Check this out."

"Icky-sticky-tricky-witchy bitch

You want my dick

Hanging on my nut sacks an' shit

Talk about my dick all the time

You want my dick

You got my dick on your motherfucking mind

What's wrong with my rhyme?

*What's wrong with your rhythm?
I got my motherfucking dick and I'm giving him
The best that I can give
You barely can live
Because you stupid ass 'ho
You're not no positive
You're negative
You're like type O
You're like a big ass pussy nasty ass 'ho"*

[Room change]

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no! Do your *positive* thinking. Not your *devilish* thinking."

[Room change]

"It's a relationship. You love God, right? You walk with him, you talk with him. Walk and talk with him, you're probably thinking wait a sec, you can't walk with God. He's, you know, he's a spirit. No, you can take walks, and you can be praying to him. You can talk to him like you and I are talking. Just go like, yo, what's up? How you doing, God? I do! I say that all the time to God. Ho, what's up God, how're you doing? It's tight. That's the kind of relationship ... Okay, now I'm blushing. But I'm a preacher at heart."

[Room change]

*"And-a-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo!
And-a-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo!"*

No-a-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo-mo! Mo!"

[Room change]

"Louise, I suggest you play *Quake*, like, twenty-four hours for the next week, and believe me, you will, like, constantly kick people! I walk around, and if I don't like something, I kick someone! It feels so good. Play *Quake* for, like, the next week, and don't stop, and you ... You will kick people! You'll walk around kicking people! You can go find friends and just kick them! It'll feel good, and you won't feel bad. *Quake, Quake! Yeah! Quake, Quake! Yeah, yeah! Har, ha ha! Har, ha ha! Har!*"

[Room change]

"Okay. Just imagine you walk into my bedroom, and I am having a very, very erotic dream, and I'm laying there naked, and you see me moving and squirming around. What would you do?"

[Room change]

"Buba, can I talk with you, please? ... Buba!"

"The entire time I was gone to get something to drink, all I heard was, 'Buba! Buba!'"

"Oh, we heard it too."

"Oh, that was funny. That was really funny."

"What did I do to deserve being a good bud with the Germans all of a sudden?"

"You were nice, for some ungodly reason."

"*Big* mistake."

"Enough of *that*."

[Room change]

"Well, I wonder if old Vern's got that guitar pick in his hand, and he's ready to play down on that fine-looking guitar he's got?"

"I think I can handle it right now. I got it in my hands."

*"It's late in the evening
She's wondering what clothes to wear
She puts on her makeup
And brushes her long blonde hair
And then she asks me
Do I look all right?
And I think, yes
You look wonderful tonight"*

[Room change]

"I tell people off for a living, so don't eject them. Let me tell them off. I like doing that. Let me bite their heads off first. Then you can boot them."

"No. Because that's not the way Christians act. Christians do not tell people off."

[Room change]

"Oh, go ahead! Don't be a chicken."

"Okay. Jill, this is for you."

"Did you say Jill?"

"Yes, I did. I'm gonna ask this one for you. I want to know if you shave yourself, or trim yourself, and if you do, what kind of shapes do you shave?"

"Oh, my God!"

"Wow! Actually, that's a good question."

"Well, give us a good answer, darling."

"Not shaved now. Trimmed."

"Okay. Now, what is the shape? Is it like a Hitler, or a diamond, or just what is it?"

"Kind of like a heart."

"Isn't that sweet? Thank you, baby."

"Damn, I'm so red right now! I'm glad you can't see."

[Room change]

*"Put your sweet lips a little closer to the mic
Put your hands around it, darling, oh so tight."*

[Room change]

"I'm a truck driver. I guess you know that. I drive for ABF Freight Company out of Albuquerque here."

"Yeah! And trucker, when I pull you over, I'm gonna take a look at your log, so keep your log clean."

"I'll tell you what there, buddy. I been driving nineteen years, and I ain't never had a ticket. For nothing. For nothing. That's why I got a real good- paying union job at a real young age, 'cause I kept my nose clean, kept my nose to the grindstone, yeah."

"Did you ever have your truck weighed? You ever have state police weigh your truck?"

"Well, I did everything! I used to pull up on top of the portables, slam my brakes on and bust the springs out of the portables. Trucking those coal buckets out of West Virginia. Christ, this was twenty years ago, when they used to ... The scales wasn't even all over the place like they are now, you know? They'd be pulling us over, we'd have, we'd be ... We'd have a hundred and thirty thousand payload! That's when you was only allowed to haul seventy thousand! Sheesh, we'd pull up on those little portable scales, tap the brakes, slam our weight down, and springs would fly everywhere. Them cops would be

standing there, they didn't know whether to pick their nose or wind their watch!"

[Room change]

*"Oh and I was made to love you
And I was made to worship at your feet"*

[Room change]

"And no, I don't fuck guys. Until a couple years. Now, I make love to them about a week after I meet them, though."

"Oh! So you make love instead of fucking them. So, what's the difference? One's, like, sweatier and wetter than the other?"

"Well, you see, I can't bring out the whips and the chains and the whipped cream and the hot fudge and the hot wax until after a couple years, because they ... It kind of starts to trip them out if you bring it out on the first date type shit, you know?"

"Oh, yeah! Like the bullwhips. Those things leave marks, I'm telling you."

[Room change]

"Take a look at my picture on my profile, and don't you tell me that I'm a handsome son of a gun?"

"Is that you for real, Conway?"

"No. That's Glenn Ford, the actor."

"Yeah, I kind of thought so. It's a nice picture, though."

"Yeah. Say, I'm so ugly I had to put a good-looking actor up there, to make everybody think it was me, but I can't tell a lie."

[Room change]

"Hey, Blake. You're a guy, right?"

"What?"

"That Blake kid, is he a guy?"

"Yeah, I'm a guy."

"Then why the hell do you have a picture of a rose? Are you from San Francisco or something?"

"No. It was just ... something. I don't know."

"Maybe he's just sensitive."

[Room change]

"Have you ever drank some Spanish fly? I have. Gosh! Makes you drunker than hell."

"Actually, there's no such thing as Spanish fly. It's like a

make-believe thing. Kind of like a jellybean that dissolves. There's actually such thing as, called, it's ... Rohibinol? And that's like the date rape drug? Slip one of those in somebody's drink, and you're definitely going to get laid."

[Room change]

*"We tell our kids to just say no
Then some panty-waist judge
Lets the drug dealer go
He slaps him on the wrist
And he turns him back out on the town
But if I had my way with people selling dope
I'd have a big tall tree and a short piece of rope
I'd hand 'em up high and let 'em swing
Until the sun goes down"*

[Room change]

"I gotta use my Viagra, 'cause I'm impotent and stuff. You know what I'm saying?"

[Room change]

"... and, uh, pretended that they were friends, but now they're living together, it's a bad number. And this person was a very close friend of mine. As a matter of fact, I was gonna go down and meet her one time. And then I found out that she had a boyfriend, she'd moved in with him, and it got really nasty, and I just didn't appreciate being used. And I just wanted to wish them all luck, and they just

told me to F off. So ... I'm just having a hard time here. Maybe you and Hobbit can go in a room with me and have a talk? I need to get this off my chest. If y'all can do that for me?"

"Aw. No problem here, Songman."

"We're friends. And friends should be able to talk, you know what I mean? Like, anytime you got a problem, I got a shoulder and I got ears. And baby, you can use them. Anytime you want to. That's what a friend's for. And that's from the heart."

*"Sometimes in our lives
We all have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow
Lean on me ..."*

[Room change]

"Sing a song, nigger! Okay, here you go, Cracker. Cracker! Polly wanna cracker? Polly wanna cracker? Cracker! Awk! Awk! Now how you like that, bitch? Is that enough singing for you, you Western country square-dancing shit-kicking hillbilly bitch?"

[Room change]

"Do something nice, something positive, because ...

Momma is monitoring."

[Room change]

"I just wanted to say a quick prayer. Father God, in the name of Jesus. We thank you, Father God, for all that you've done for us, Lord. Even those things, dear Lord, that we don't even understand. We know that there are some things you do for us, Father God, that we don't know. And we just thank you for those things, dear Lord. We know that you ... We are on the winning side! We are on the battling side! We are on the warring side! We just praise your name. We praise you, we worship you, and we just ask for your forgiveness. If there's any deed, or something that we've done, dear Lord, or something that we've done against our wives, or anything that's ill-gotten against you, we pray that you wipe it from us, right now, in the name of Jesus! To forgive us, and cleanse us of all unrighteousness."

[Room change]

"Are you God? No. Ha! I'm sorry, whatever the heck your name is, but you're not God. I'm sorry. If you were God, you know, like, you wouldn't, like, be talking to us now. So don't even act like that. 'Cause that's treason. You can't say you're God when you're not God."

[Room change]

"Well, I'll put it to you this way. I'm not a devil worshipper.

Your devil worshippers are the people that go out here and slay people, and babies, and all that kind of crap. Yes, I am a Satanist. I'm a realist. You show me something and I'll believe it, you know? I'm a spiritualist and a psychic. Devil worshipper? No."

"I think people have rather demonized the devil."

[Room change]

"See? I'm psycho. I mean psychic. Damn! I'm having a physical change."

[Room change]

*"See the squirrel up in the tree
His mate there on the ground
Hear the barking call of love
For the happiness they've found"*

[Room change]

"Hey, Lady Vampire. What games do you play?"

"I play *Quake*. *Quake II*. Um, I don't have a rank in it, because nobody will play me because I don't have a rank. But I just like to run around in my crack whore outfit, and watch everyone turn their heads and watch me run by while I shoot them, 'cause they can't shoot a girl in her fucking lingerie and a little nurse's outfit with half her ass showing. I love my little crack whore outfit."

"Yeah, I like that crack whore suit. I sometimes use that when I'm all alone and I need some companionship."

[Room change]

"Are you a guy or a girl?"

"I'm a girl."

"What the hell was that?"

"Sounds like a girl to me."

"Sounds like a he-man she-man."

"Sounded like a fag to me."

[Room change]

"I've been, going out with a guy, D.C. Skazambo, a.k.a. Mr. Big Stuff. Anyway, we need to ... I need to tell him, I need to set things straight, okay? My job comes before his meat."

[Room change]

"I wouldn't mind if I had, like, a nice warm woman to sleep beside. But when you're sleeping alone, it's not very nice."

"Yeah, I've never seen a girl naked. I've screwed one, though, yeah. But I haven't seen one naked. That .. That would be bad."

"Who let the fucking kid in the room? You stupid little fucking kid. Fuck off back to teen chat!"

"It's just little kids trying to get attention when they're on their Twinkie highs."

"Hey, man. You can get high from eating Twinkies, man? Cool!"

[Room change]

*"As I walk through the valley
Of the shadow of death
I take a look at my life
And realize there's nothing left"*

*"Take a look at myself
And realize there's nothing left"*

*"We've been spending most our lives
Living in the Amish paradise"*

[Room change]

"All the guys gang up on a girl, 'cause they figure, 'Oh look! Lady Vampire! Let's shoot her because she's a girl!' Taking out all their fucking aggressions out on me just because all the girls fucking turn them down, and ... Oh, they live their lives fucking being rejected by every other woman in their lives, so they have to kill the woman in *Quake*. Ah!"

[Room change]

"She met somebody on the Net, said she wanted to go on vacation with the kids without me, so she could spend some time with them, and I found out she's meeting him."

[Typed] "Where did they meet online?"

"Playing Cribbage on Yahoo."

[Room change]

*"Thunder rolls and the lightning strikes
Another love grows cold on a sleepless night
As the storm blows on, out of control
Deep in her heart the thunder rolls"*

[Room change]

"And then she said she's never cybered, cybersexed anybody. And I figured out her password and went into her email, and found out how many guys she has cybered."

[Typed] "How many?"

"So far, of the emails she had, she had at least four guys that she was cybering."

"Hey, man. Whose wife cheated on him in here?"

"What the fuck's your problem, buddy?"

"I don't like gay guys, that's my problem. I just figured you

was gay 'cause your wife cheated on you."

[Room change]

"I'm just a hunk-a hunk-a burning love

I'm just a hunk-a hunk-a burning love"

"That was great. Whew! We're all dancing and drinking and having a good old time, Conway."

"Ha ha! I heard that! Well, your special request line is still open, B-R-5-4-9, your friendly radio station, WKORN. And y'all give us a call, there, everybody, and ... We have some special guests, which y'all done heard before. One of 'em. But you know what? I'm gonna make you wait. 'Cause this Elvis guy just don't want to hush! And he's gonna do one for all the ladies in the room, and he says give him a call. He'll autograph his picture for you!"

"It's now or never ..."

[Room change]

"Hey, Tiff. What's going on?"

"You can call me Tiffany. It's easier to pronounce."

[Room change]

"We're arguing whether blondes give good head or not."

"I give great head, honey."

"Okay, come on over. You gotta prove it."

"Do you spit or swallow, Blondie?"

"Swallow!"

"No fucking kidding she swallows."

"How about you, Callie?"

"We went through this before. I'm a very strict vegetarian, and meat-eater's cum is salty. Vegetarian eaters, their cum is sweet. So my boyfriend's a vegetarian."

"Damn, baby, I'm a Sagittarian. Mmm! Maybe that's why they all like to eat my cum, 'cause it's so fuckin' sweet."

"Oh my God! I'm a vegetarian because the bitch likes it! Yeah, shut the fuck up! Be your own goddamn man! You all know you fucking like steak and potatoes and goddamn pizza and fucking drink beer and get naked and howl at the fucking moon!"

[Room change]

"Oh, I love steak! Medium rare."

"That ain't nothing but an animal. Shit, somebody had to kill that."

"But see, it wasn't me. That's all that matters. I wasn't the one to do it. Heh!"

[Room change]

"See, when people get to ... Well, I'm getting to the point when people say, what would Jesus do, I'm almost saying, well, the opposite of what you do. You look at what He does every time He deals with somebody. It's always on a positive note. Your something has done this. Not, in the future, by changing your self, I have done this. He didn't wait for them to be perfected, didn't wait for them to be completed. He took them at that second, with what they were feeling at that second, and dealt with them."

[Room change]

"The KKK think they're doing God's will by enforcing all this crap, 'cause I used to have a couple uncles that are into that stuff, so they think they're obeying God's will, as far as, like, hanging black people and all that stuff, so, I don't know."

[Room change]

"I tell you what, partner. California is a place that I've been wanting to go for a long, long time, but I've never made it out of this boil on the butt hole of the world yet, I'm still stuck here. Might be getting closer, though. The wife left me today, so I don't know what my plans are gonna be, but ..."

[Room change]

*"If tomorrow never comes
And she must face this world without me
Is the love I gave her in the past
Gonna be enough to last
If tomorrow never comes?"*

[Room change]

"We separated and divorced here almost two years ago, and tried to make a go again, and we been together almost two years, but ... Well, we just come to a close. Just don't work out too well. But we tried. Been together sixteen years now, so ..."

[Room change]

"Just the two of us"

*"Building castles in the sky
Just the two of us"*

"Just the two of us"

[Room change]

"Have any of you ever walked in on your parents when they were having sex?"

"No! That's a nasty thought!"

"Dear God, no! No, no, no!"

"I had my kids walk in on me, though!"

"The worse thing that ever happened to me was, my brother walked in on me when I was with his girlfriend. He almost killed me."

[Room change]

"I told him he'd know he has a redneck if he had curtains in his pickup but none in his house, and he says his vans is full of curtains, so I must have hit it on the head."

"Oh my God. In a van, even."

"Oh, but they're nice vans, you know. Now, my pickup trucks look like shit, but I got a couple of nice conversion vans. So I ... Beats me. I guess I'm a redneck. Mississippi redneck, at that."

[Room change]

"I just hope that I don't see any more spiders tonight. That was a very traumatic experience for me. I couldn't go to sleep for an entire hour."

[Room change]

"Yeah, we just this past Sunday, had ... It was out in the county, and, had four teenager kids killed in a truck accident."

[Room change]

"Life. I chose not to choose life. I chose to choose fucking heroin."

[Room change]

"Did anyone ever find the bathroom in this place? I don't know where the bathroom is. Someone please point me out to the bathroom!"

[Room change]

"Oh my gosh, I'm so lost."

"Oh my honeys! I would be lost no matter where I was."

"You sound like my kind of girl."

[Room change]

"Did everyone lose their microphones in this room?"

"I have a vibrator strapped to my mic, and it plays havoc on my talking ability."

[Room change]

"You know, when the video gets really good is when she starts coming. Then she gets nice and ... audible. Do you guys like to get audible when you get going?"

[Room change]

"You see this two-by-four? Take *that*, you little bitch! Take

that, you little crack-headed bitch! You want some more?"

[Room change]

"Well, I didn't even hear your neighbors screaming! C'mon! You didn't leave the mic on or nothing!"

[Room change]

"Yeah, this Mplayer's getting weirder and weirder!"

"It's just a positive thing."

[Room change]

"Hey, Ducky! Have you ever heard the little story about the fence? Can I read it to you, Ducky? ... There was a little boy with a bad temper, and his father gave him a bag of nails and told him, every time he lost his temper, to hammer a nail in the fence, in the back fence."

"What the fuck do you care about? And what is your fucking story, you stupid asshole?"

"The first day, the boy had driven thirty-seven nails into that fence."

"And you're annoying, too! Your stupid voice and your little kitty cat."

"Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the

fence."

"Not all white people are crackers. Just the ignorant motherfuckers, okay?"

"Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it, and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper."

"Buba, can I talk with you, please?"

"The days passed. And the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand, and led him to the fence. He said, 'You have done well, my son. But look at the holes in the fence.'"

[Room change]

"You know, people use this chat service sometimes to curse at each other, and to be nasty to each other. And think of all the ugly things that they can do. Spread viruses on the chat service so your computer doesn't work tomorrow, and ... But just think about what we can do with these type of services to serve the Lord. Just think about what good we can do to serve the Lord. And this is one of the brilliant opportunities that the Lord has given us to serve Him, and to do right by Him. We should just thank him for all the goodness and love that He has bestowed upon us."

"Amen!"

"Well it shows, you know, we're all bad. Some of us do some good things once in a while, that's all."

*"Now the time has come to fall
Upon my waking eyes
Inviting and inciting me to rise
And through the window in the wall
Come streaming through on sunlight wings
A million bright ambassadors of morning
And no one sings me lullabies
And no one makes me close my eyes
And so I throw the windows wide
And call to you across the sky"*

"That's about the limit of my profoundness for today."

"Well, I'll tell you what. You people can be in this room all night. But, unfortunately, I've got to be able to breathe and think tomorrow. So, therefore, I know I won't be here all night, because if I stay here all day and all night, I'm gonna be a puddle on the floor!"

"Got children to feed, and dinner to cook, and I can't stay. Wish I could."

"I know, sweetie. We all have things to do. And I'll be logging off here probably in about two hours myself, so I understand."

"Okay, I'm out of here. See y'all. Nice meeting everybody."

"Well, bye, everybody. I have to go too, there. Love y'all!
Y'all go ahead and carry on. That was a very good night,
there, everybody. Bye, everyone!"

"Are you gonna take off too? Everyone else kind of left. I
guess my singing scared them off."

*"Whispering pines, whispering pines
Tell me if it's true
Whispering pines, whispering pines
You're the one who knows
My darling's gone oh so long
And I need your sympathy
Whispering pines, send my baby back to me
Whispering pines, send my baby back to me"*

"If you love me, type a question mark ... Do you love me?
... Say you love me ... Thank you! ... You all love me! ... I
love you all! ... Will you be my friend? ... Please?"

"Buba? ... Buba! ... Where's Buba? ... Buba, can I talk with
you, please? ... Buba?"

§

Postlude

My parents are still alive. They live in Massachusetts.

A few weeks ago, they flew out to San Francisco to visit

me and my wife. It was the first time they had travelled together more than 200 miles from home since their honeymoon in Cuba back in 1954.

We drove them all over the Bay Area and showed them the usual sights. Golden Gate Bridge. Palace of Fine Arts. Fisherman's Wharf. Alcatraz. Wine Country.

On the second weekend of their visit, we took them to the North Beach entertainment district to catch one of the city's most popular tourist magnets. It's a musical comedy revue that's been playing continuously for over 25 sold-out seasons.

Over the decades, this show has become such a definitive San Francisco attraction, such a local institution, that they actually changed the name of the street outside. The block in front of Club Fugazi is now officially known as Beach Blanket Babylon Way.

Beach Blanket Babylon is the story of lonely Snow White and her search for a prince. Her fairy godmother takes her on a trip around the world, Rome, Paris, London, where she encounters expert impersonations of celebrities like the Barbra Streisand, Michael Jackson, Tina Turner, James Brown, the inevitable tango with Bill and Monika, and an especially cruel send-up of Janet Reno.

Near the end of the show, the actress playing Snow White transforms herself into Madonna for a spectacular gospel performance of the song "Like A Prayer." But even this

desperate strategy fails to attract a prince.

Convinced that she will never find a lover, poor little Snow White/Madonna begins to cry. Her fairy godmother chooses this poignant moment to suggest that Snow White doesn't really need a prince anyway. She declares that what Snow White ought to be looking for ... is a King.

Now up to this point, I'd been watching this show with a certain degree of bemused detachment. But what happened next was an epiphany.

The audience for *Beach Blanket Babylon* is composed of a broad cross-section of people, ranging from young slackers in their 20s wearing jeans, to elderly folks in full evening attire, like my parents. Tourists of every color and social class, from all over the world.

Yet despite these differences, nobody seemed to have any trouble recognizing the celebrity impersonations offered by the cast. Each one was greeted with varying degrees of enthusiasm, depending on the panache of the performers and the outrageousness of the costumes.

But when the gold lamee curtain slowly opened to reveal the King that Snow White had been looking for, the entire theater leapt to its feet and roared.

This old album cover comes from the wall of my office. I keep it there to remind me of a great truth I learned that night. A truth about one of the fundamental things that

people care about.

What people am I talking about? I'm not talking about the hundreds of thousands of hobbyists who buy *Quake* clones or *Command and Conquer* clones. I'm not even talking about the three or four million adventurous types who made *Myst* the biggest selling PC game of all time.

No. The truth I learned when that curtain opened is about *most* people. *Ordinary* people. *Mass market* people. People like the tourists who go to see *Beach Blanket Babylon*. People like my parents.

This deep truth manifests itself every night in the chat areas of Mplayer.com. And it's all over the documentary you just heard.

This classic album cover sums it up perfectly. It shows His Highness in all his royal finery. But not just one Highness. We're talking hundreds and thousands and millions of Highnesses, some near, some far away, stretching off into infinity.

And across the top of the album are seven words.
Mythical words. Apocalyptic words. Words of power, that
you designers of tomorrow's interactive experiences
should never, ever forget.

. . .