

# My Second Dead Concert

*A personal memoir flashback of 6/25/83*



My second Dead concert (and not a "concert review" per se.) So why don't I write about the superior performance of the previous year, my first Grateful Dead show instead? Because this night was more detailed in memory, its events were more specific. It seems to represent the end of carefree teenage years, as a crazy last fling with acid

before entering my twenties, and starting full-time college. I was already a "dedicated" Deadhead by then, starting to gain insight into their rich legacy of concert recordings and albums, barely even scratching the surface, I was hooked.

Friends were into this too, especially Dhaivyd, who moved on to following the Dead on tour for years.

To begin with, I got tickets with high school friend Joe K. I think it was his first Dead concert. It was established that most of my friends got tickets as well, so I anticipated a good caravan ride on the bus to St Paul ahead, and another fantastic experience! The 1982 experience was so moving and life changing, and I couldn't wait for more.

I was a motivated young budding artist, about to begin my first full-time semester at MCAD. My earlier nascent mode was being a decent *copying* artist, with some originality on occasion. I was inspired to wear some Dead based art, so I took an old pair of well-worn denim bell bottoms, and applied my acrylic painting skills to them. The right leg got a good reproduction of the old skeleton with roses, taking up the entire leg length. The left leg got a cyclops skull from the back cover of *Terrapin Station*, also turning out accurately. And more GD symbols, but no dancing bears. On the butt got a large "Stealie", the lightning bolt was a humorous placement over where the butt crack would be. I was on a roll. Full deadhead regalia, no tie- dye but a simple favorite striped long sleeve button shirt, the outrageously painted bell bottoms, and my old pop-up top hat to top it off! [unfortunately no photos exist of it, and long gone.]

The day before, friends headed to Madison Wisconsin for the Grateful Dead concert there. I should have gone with, it turned out to be one of the best that summer! They stuffed my friend Jacks newly bought used old VW bug, with little room for another passenger anyway.

The concert day in St Paul, I met friends who were going, on Nicollet Island as a good meeting place, which had been our band *Heavy Wave* hq/jam space at Jacks house, an historic crumbling Victorian mansion. Meeting Joe R, Jason E, Scott S, and Jack, which was the band. Bryan G, who was a true enthusiast for the Grateful Dead, Joe R's friend Seth. I think Charlie F, a good friend from near my neighborhood, and probably Dominic, another high school friend. Jamie rode his bicycle. Possibly Jim C? (more prevalent in '82.) Dhaivyd already lived in St Paul, so I believe he wasn't meeting us on the island.

Late afternoon, congregated on the open park space of the island near Jacks house, Joe K gave me the blue microdot of LSD. I think most all of us dropped acid that night (except for Jamie, level headed and health conscious, who bicycled to the concert.)

We load ourselves on the bus to the St Paul Civic Center. A group of acid headed teenagers. I started to feel that familiar frisson, with brain clicking, during the bus ride. Trying not to lose my cool, not bursting out with spontaneous jittery laughter! All okay, we unload at the venue with hot summer solstice week sun still brightly blazing. The circus of colorful freaks were out front, starting to pour in. Climbing the steps up front, Joe K tells me, "*you're being noticed.*" My hand painted Grateful Dead bell bottoms were appreciated. Good! Fun, but wanted to get inside and not miss a beat.

I really don't remember where our seats were exactly. Somewhere in the back of the floor? No matter, I wasn't interested in being in one place only [same with each GD show following. I was a wanderer, enjoying several perspectives.] Everyone in our entourage were in separate locations. I got my tickets with Joe K, so we were together for most of the show. The acid was buzzing, the vibes excited. *Jack Straw* opening the show, an energetic start! Hot, and the temperature too. It was classic Minnesota humidity in full sweaty force.

Another distinction about that time, I was wearing new glasses, for maybe only the second week, and they were constantly fogging up. (earlier, Bryan who wears glasses but for years by then, said he felt sorry for me, getting accustomed to wearing glasses takes time.) I was tripping on acid too, making it even weirder.

The band continues, the crowd of deadheads amped up. I somehow got a twinge of critical thinking of puppet-like fans, interfering with my enjoyment, and moved to the maelstrom of dancers in the hallway. Dhaivyd appears out of the swarming crowd, the consummate dancing deadhead extraordinaire, smiling beams at me in technicolor tie-dye (made by himself), bright curly golden hair, and a grin to quell any doubts about this being anything other than the right place and time to be at! This helped! Wandering upstairs to get different views, Joe and I were commenting on the puppet quality the music has, you can't help but move to the rhythm. *Ha, why resist?* Seems to have been our resolve.

With a better view than the back of the floor, watching some of *Lazy Lightning*, with Weir moving like a rock star, Jerry still as a statue but playing that guitar in that unmistakable tone and style, setting him apart from all other guitarists. New song, must be named "*Shadowboxing the Apocalypse*". I was intrigued. Good one, I thought! By the end of set one, I /everyone were drenched in humidity.

**Set break.** We found some of our friends. Jack and Britty were seated on the side giving a perfect view of the band above the heads on the floor. Jack had a striking tie-dye that read *Hey Now* with the eye of Horus emblazoned, that he got at the show yesterday in

Wisconsin. They were low key on this night, understandably after driving at night back. Joe R and Seth were nearby on the floor. Dhaivyd would appear and disappear like a dream character throughout the night.

Joe K got a t-shirt from an official vendor that made me a bit skeptical about the social direction of this genuinely organic crowd of diehard fans. It was a purple shirt with a psychedelic skeletons hand, and it read "DEADHEADS". I thought it was a strange commodity. I would rather not have a fan shirt about the fans, something exposes us. It struck me as oddly conventional, for what I thought was an unconventional group. [next year I caught a punk band at MCAD, it's lead guitarist was wearing that same shirt design, unpredictably.]

I don't remember who we saw then, it might have been Jamie, Dominic and Charlie? Ran into a few other friends from high school, who couldn't believe how much of a dead freak I'd become, evident in the paintings I did on my pants.

**Set two**, the trip intensifies. Joe K and I had seen Frank Zappa, twice before, but those were sit down and watch the band for every minute, not tripping on acid. This was different. Dead concerts have several levels, and tripping on acid contributes mightily to those impressions.

I remember we were up on stage right for a part of second set. Digging the optimism of the new song, again not knowing the title calling it "*I will survive*." With a crazy speed that jumped the tracks, and a relatively young song.

*Ship of Fools* is played, and that is when I remember really focusing on the band from good seats we found above the stage from the side. A song that was an essential Jerry/GD ballad. I was moved to focus on this. Focusing, ha, through foggy new eyeglasses anyway! I have a strong memory of seeing the band perform this through hazy spectacles. Still I was satisfied to get that song.

Onwards to the dancing hallways. "*The women are smarter*" (ha!, again my title perspective at the time was limited and clueless) got us hoppin' to that beat. *Uncle Johns Band* thrilled! A favorite!

For the **Drums** I had to get a good view. Squeezing up closer on the floor worked, only to a degree. I lost Joe (who might have left early to get home before his parents worried, being slightly younger had that effect) but during the transition out of **Space**, and into another new song we then erroneously called "*Ashes ashes, all fall down*", at that point I found other friends in the center of the floor: Dominic, Charlie, and a young woman acquaintance from Washburn who was with them. Really cool, of either African or South American heritage. She ended up wearing my top hat, looking better on her!

It went into rock & roll dance party in the hall, Dhaivyd sunnily moving naturally through the crowds, beaming. A spiky looking punk rocker raves positively at my painted pants! (he seemed to be tripping too). Scott was hopping and skipping around.. The crowd making the acid trip seem so natural. Hey, this was a Grateful Dead concert in 1983, and I was 19! We were sweating, it was a humidity soaked night in a swarm of freaks. I totally loved it!

After going closer to the stage for the encore, absorbing the calming Dylan cover "*It's all over now baby blue*" (same as last year. Bob Dylan is a Minnesota native)

I find Joe R and Seth. I say something like "*What a peak!*"

His reply, "*Which one?*"

Ha! we grok'd that acidhead comment.

We slowly make our way out into the humid outdoor night. The girl with my top hat was nowhere to be found.

I did find Dhaivyd swimming in the fountain out front, rising out of the water like a merman, to kiss a beautiful young hippie goddess woman. They were from a mythical zone. (The acid trip must have been helping with this effect!)

At some point, friends gathered, with Jack seriously bringing up the question nobody had in mind during the concert. "*Have you seen Bryan?*"

He was nowhere to be found, and that is not like him to disappear like this. We start wandering in separate directions to search, calling "**BRYAN!**" to nothing after most of an hour. It was getting late, Jack made some calls, but he wasn't home either. I heard he took several hits of acid, ever the lysergic enthusiast, and generally with enviable intelligence.

I think Jack and Britty drove back in their new old VW bug, while a group of us, Dhaivyd connected us with tourheads who I didn't know, piled in the back of a truck to take the party to Nicollet Island. (This was after the busses stopped running.) It felt like a dream to be piled with deadhead strangers that late. We gathered to the old train trestle bridge down on the north end of the island (long inactive for years, except for strolling locals). Someone had beer, a keg? And a party went on until the dawn. Swimming, still tripping, while waiting for word about the disappeared Bryan mystery. Interesting group of older deadheads, saying things like "*The Dead are the American Beatles.*", and so forth. In some respects, it was my first contact with its wider culture, when I was in a young, myopic period.

I think Bryans then-girlfriend Erin was there, and I don't remember if she went to the concert with or not? Jack didn't join the party, he was being responsible enough to call

around to help find Bryan. Those guys were close. At some point as the dawns glow descended, we heard from Jack what happened to our friend Bryan. Turning out that once he was inside the civic center, overwhelmed, turned around to leave, having what most of us never considered — a bad trip.

Wandering downtown St Paul in a paranoid state, local police saw fit to bring him in for interrogations, which must have been terrifying. This was sobering to know, and my trip was coming down. A local hippie who lived only a few blocks away in an apartment just north of the island invited just a few of us for omelets and hashbrowns. Great! Really cool, older than us, cranking Jefferson Airplane, from *Crown of Creation*, and turned me on to the live *Bless it's little pointed head* [I bought the LP soon after at the **Electric Fetus**, a good record store near MCAD]

I never saw him again, or remember names of the new characters of that night, adding a semblance of mythos to the whole shebang.

With no change for the bus, I faced a long walk home. 5 miles? Fueled by the generous friendly hippy guys breakfast, I set out, and then one guy from breakfast who I didn't know wanted to join me walking. Probably also coming down from acid, we walked through downtown, on to Lake Street, and the railroad tracks to the lake circuit adding time and distance to the hike. I might have wanted to shake this stranger off, but he went all the way to my house! Too polite then to ward him off, when we arrived my mom made us lunch on the deck. Then I had to say I have work to do, and he was off. Poor dude, possibly from far away? Regardless, I was totally *fried*, the most fried energy I can ever recall. I did mow the lawn, on a heavy dark overcast afternoon, and then slept not remembering when I awoke.

The Grateful Dead didn't play "Feel like a Stranger" at that concert, but the refrain aptly applies "*..., a long long long crazy night.*"

That ended acid trips for a significant length of time. Bryan had a situation of intense concern, that must have influenced this refrain. I had full time college to look forward to, with the intent to grow some brains, not lose any. To compensate, I read more art books than ever that summer, also helping me heal from the confusing split with my sweetheart that May. I gained more love for the Grateful Dead, but never had such a long, strange trip like that show — and the previous year, which excelled more so.

I moved on into more productive modes in the following years. Eventually moving to California where I caught the Dead every few months! This held a more wholesome quality personally, the acid trips were no longer of interest, until 1993-94, when I tripped for my final GD shows. The quality was very different, and good! I never had a

bad trip, only indulging the spring /summer of '82, twice in' 83, then the few times in '93-'94. That was it. With no regrets whatsoever. They were perfect trips as unique experiences, and it turns out it has relatively low toxicity. Still I am glad its not addictive.

Years later in San Francisco, Dhaivyd (who also lived there in the 90s) gave me a tape of that show. I could objectify the performance now, and it proved to be ragged in parts, much like the energy that night.

I know this is just one of a zillion memory impressions surrounding the GD concert experience. This is just my way to dig into the old memory banks while still around — in autobiographical mode more than about making a concert review.

Oh by the way, the girl with my top hat made sure to return it a few days later, via our mutual friend Charlie.

**-Dean Gustafson, July 2024**

*Dedicated to all of my friends who were with, who can now read this.  
but especially dear Joe Ryan who cannot. He is well missed.  
and of course, Jerry Garcia, without whom!*