

This road has no end: Carnival '83 continued

by Ken Burke

"I'm just a pawn in a chess game everybody's playing" — *Winter Carnival Chair Neal McCarney.*

Dalhousie's "Eye of the Tiger" Winter Carnival faded from view last Thursday as Bryan Adams said goodnight to a packed Super SUB crowd. But it lives on in a quest I set out on last week — a search for school spirit. That cracked quest continues with this article — and rests here.

I don't want to get into too much back-tracking, so I won't. Last week I covered the first three Carnival days and nights after the Thomas Hauser lecture and the movie "Missing." Still to come were several events of no small potential to provide me with school spirit and the chance to experience it. When I left off at Carnival's two-float "Mardi Gras parade" on January 25, the Ronald McDonald Dance Marathon was looming, and I sensed then it might be just what I was looking for.

To be sure, the Ronald McDonald House marathon was the turning point of carnival '83. It featured everything that was very good about things like Winter Carnivals, yet it featured an incident sour enough to leave a bad taste in anyone's mouth. Oh well, onward ho, I'm on the Carnival trail again

Days four and five . . .

Before I arrived at the McInnes room for the 3:00 scheduled start time, I had reservations about the Dance marathon thing. I'm walking on skinny ice when I say this, but this whole Ronald McDonald House thing gives me the creeps.



Jordan/Dal Photo

No, I'm not against a house for parents of sick kids who want to stay near their children for a low price. No, I'm not questioning the motives of the people who work there. And no, I am certainly not sneering at the spirit and will of those who organized the event on people who killed themselves for 24 hours dancing. What I *am* against is McDonald's gaining use of a good charity for advertising value.

Many other corporations — some bigger than McDonald's — donate large sums of corporate windfalls to charities. But these other companies give to charities like the United Way, Muscular Dystrophy telethon, Weekend with the Stars and the like. The vast majority set up no charity bearing the corporate name or symbol — there is no "IBM house for battered women," no "Irving MD research clinic" in the public eye, or no "Magic Burger King Cancer centre." But there is "Ronald McDonald House." Lots of them.

Again, don't get me wrong — they're good, they're needed — they even live up to their slogan, "the house that love build." But when McDonald's thought of donating money for the purchase of these homes, they could have remained behind-the-scenes, appeared at its opening, and soothed their corporate conscience with that good work. Instead, the corporation's clown has his name on the corporation's charity.

McDonald's in fact isn't the main day-to-day contributor to the House, but puts a large sum of money towards it purchase. Most of the funding comes from other, small corporations and great people like forty or so dancers on the 29th and 30th. Of course, when asked by Esther Dyckeman a few weeks ago why the name was retained, House

Manager Eileen Borden said the name was kept because "Children identify with Ronald McDonald." Sad to say, she may be right. And McDonald's is associated with the dedication of a charity this good by osmosis.

I was thinking all this and whipping myself into a self-induced irony frenzy when I walked into the McInnes room twenty minutes before the scheduled start. Strings of three balloons were hung from a few ceiling vents and the "Keg-Brandy's-Old Spaghetti Factory Earth Ball" was lying partially deflated in a corner of the dance floor. There was sound equipment everywhere on the stage, about forty dancers-to-be were milling about, and Beaver Foods had provided a 4x4 winter carnival cake — this time spelled correctly unlike the one used in the opening ceremonies of the carnival. Everything was ready.

Fifteen minutes late, the marathon began — as either a cheer or a groan went up from the crowd when "Eye of the Tiger" came pumping out of the oversize speakers. It was likely a groan. For almost all of the next twenty-four hours, the dancers would be subjected to "Eye of the Tiger" at the beginning of every recorded set. My sources tell me that dancers eventually began sitting down when they played the metal-pop monster, but even then, the deejay would play half the song or so — just to keep continuity running through the marathon.

Neal McCarney, the winter carnival chair, came over and began talking in his customarily defensive/abrasive tone about the event. When asked how long breaks in between hours will be, he blusters, "Ten minutes! I'm trying to raise money, not prove something." He added a parting shot, "This is my Thomas Hauser event." In an earlier Gazette editorial, I had praised the work of Community Affairs secretary Susan McIntyre for organizing a lecture/movie at the beginning of the carnival, and obviously Neal took that compliment to heart.

Before I left (for the first time) the couples, all of them smiling and seemingly content in their life plan were really jumpin' — even bordering on foolhardiness. They'll regret that at 8:00 am tomorrow, I thought, and left on the tail end of a disco version of "House of the Rising Sun." "Oww! That's disgusting!" howled Dal photo photographer, as Phil Dunn, who worked on the carnival committee, pointed out that the song was done by a group called *Santa Esmerelda*.

Sometime after nine, the competent but absolutely uninspiring Bryan Jones band took the stage for live music. The record will show that only 207 humans paid to witness the event, although with dancers, staff, carnival people and others, more than 300 people must have been in the McInnes room. Expected sales were 300 — a third off.

For the rest of my evening at the marathon, my notes became less coherent and more adventurous, bordering on the psychotic in places. I remember Warren and Don — the King and Queen of carnival, dancing alone to Mikey McDonald's "Keep forgettin'." I



Morris/Dal Photo

remember "radio personality" Steve Mitchell slobbering all over Miss Halifax or Nova Scotia or whatever beauty queen representative was there on stage. I remember noting that for someone at times advertised about town as a great rock'n'roll voice, Mr. Jones hides behind covers of godawful but popular AM tunes far too much, without giving them any particular expression. My demonical hatred of "Men at Work" and those who cover "Down Under" was quite apparent at one point in the event as well, I think. And through it all, the marathoners danced. *Hard.*

After a very stage-managed presentation of a cheque of the band (which they refused, and gave to the marathon as had been planned for weeks) and an encore which roused people to yells of approval of the band, the SUB was shut off to all save SUB and carnival staff plus dancers. Despite assurances from Neal that "There are 40 ounces of rum and cases of Carlsberg coming later on tonight, and you're more than welcome to it — if you know what I mean — if you catch my drift," I left for a night's rest to re-visit for the ultimate finale. I'd regret that decision later.

At any rate, when I walked into that room again at a quarter to three, I couldn't believe the tableau before my eyes. The deejay (Bill Chernin, apparently a 24-hour deejay for the event as well) had "Born to Run" on the turntable, and people on the floor were trying to jump, and razzle-dazzle. A quick check showed only two or so drop-out teams. Soon those on the floor formed in a circle, running around joyously.

When "Rock around the Clock" was played, heavy attempts were made at jivin' on the floor. These people had been going at it

like there was no tomorrow through the entire marathon, and now had the strength — spirit — to be partying like fools, congratulating themselves on having gone the distance and raised over four thou for a good cause.

The record will say that "Eye of the Tiger" took them over the barrier (albeit actually ten minutes early), after many kick- and conga-lines were formed. Nobody could have ben in the room at the time and remained cynical. "The feeling is very, very good," I wrote on entering the room, and that feeling was contagious. In a corner of the room, the "Earth Ball" was laying, completely squashed flat. It had been deflated, but not those dancers.

But that wasn't the worst story relating to the dance marathon that filtered out of the event. The next day, Ron Lojek, the SUB's Night auditor, was "suspended pending investigation of the evening's circumstances," according to John Graham, the SUB's business manager. There had been trouble in the SUB overnight.

What actually happened is difficult to piece together, and I wasn't able to contact Lojek for comment, but there does seem to be several things accepted by all parties that night. At one o'clock, Neal McCarney decided to close off the SUB, instead of leaving it open for people to cheer on the dance contestants. There had been SUB staff organized to work during the evening because of the building remaining open. They couldn't be told to go home, as they were told they had to work there, but there was nothing for them to do.

Because of this, McCarney gave the SUB staffers two cases of 24 Carlsberg for the evening. Follow-

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