



HANG TEN AT HERBIE K's

By Kenny Miller

COCOA BEACH, FL-I needed a cup of coffee or a nap on this particular Thursday afternoon when I spotted the "diner" sign. Herbie K's diner in Cocoa Beach, Florida to be more specific. But a diner is a diner, right? And diner coffee should be just the ticket to give me a jolt and get me through to nap time.

It was clear on the short walk from my car to the front door of Herbie K's that Herbie wasn't interested in being the owner of just another diner. He wanted to own a piece of history. And, even though he was more than happy to have me stop for a cup of coffee, he was in the memories with a malt business. I went from the current stresses of the late 1990's into the 1950's just by opening a door and walking in.

There is a spotless black and white checker-board tile floor and lots of chrome waiting to greet you. If you have brought your sweetie and the kids, there are plenty of booths on the left.

I headed for a red padded counter stool mounted on one of those chrome bases which allow you to spin in and spin out. The perfect mood music blared from a juke box in the back. "*Yakety Yak, don't talk back...*"

There was a time when music was part of the menu. It still is at Herbie K's. Mounted to the back of the counter was an old friend, a chrome monument to the teenage years of rock and roll. Everyone of my vintage knows you can reach under the front of this space helmet with a mind for great music and flip through the music menu pages behind the glass cover. I fumbled for a quarter to go along with my growing smile but somebody beat me. There is only one drum opening like that. *Wipe Out*. Push buttons S5. The buttons are right below the glass cover and connect to the big juke box in back. This was America's first remote control. Too bad we didn't retain the idea of two choices for a quarter.

"Need a menu?" she asked as she stopped at my place on the other side of the counter. She was dressed in white and her long hair was tied with a piece of red chiffon. She had a white waitress hat pinned to the top of her hair. Her name tag announced that "Bettybop" had walked out of the fifties to take my

order. In a second or two, she was back with a pot of coffee and a white mug. "Cream?"

Hamilton Beach machines owned the back counter. Two machines could do three malts each. A friendly notice is painted above the back counter, "free java for cops in uniform." That's probably illegal today, isn't it?

In the corner stood a machine with a glass top full of little stuffed animals and a mechanical crane dangling over the furry trophies. Young males can still test their skills and prove their love for fifty cents. Behind me was a very familiar two ton Polaroid with the curtain door. My father never understood why anyone would pay anything for those grotesque little picture strips that drop in the outside slot after you and a few friends struck the perfect pose.

I should have been on my way but Herbie succeeded with his concept. Herbie K's had my attention. It was fun to sit, look, listen and flip through the music selection in crome monument in front of me. I started to dig for that quarter. Darn. Beat again. *Hang on Sloopy*. Push buttons K2. I liked that one a lot because it reminded me of Pat Powers and The Barn Party at the fraternity house. Thirty years flashed by in an instant.

A couple of counter cards pushed the blue plate specials. Yes they did have meatloaf. I wondered what else they had. Bettybop was speeding by writing on her order pad as she went by.

"Could I see a menu?"

"Sure hon."

She handed me a four page menu protected from grease or ketchup covered fingers compliments of a clear vinyl protective covers sewn into a black plastic borders. I'm glad I didn't order French fries. They're Murphy baskets. Order a "Murphy Basket" and you will get plain French fries. "Jack it" and they become cheese fries. "Make It Whistle" and your fries come with chili. Ask for a "Crying Murphy Basket" and you'll get a half order of fries and a half order of onion rings. Not into fries? Try "Jacked Up Elbows In The Alley". Macaroni and cheese, of course.

If you're into something healthy and light, try "Drag One Through The Farm." It's a nice big garden salad with plenty of turkey, ham and sliced boiled eggs on top of your garden salad. "Cackle In The Garden" changes the top to blackened chicken.

The menu is adorned with line drawing of old favorites. James Dean. Marilyn. Elvis. Herbie's story is on the front cover. He owned a diner up North and went fishing on a cold February day. The only thing he caught was a cold. He loves to fish so he moved to Florida and opened Herbie K's. Now he catches the "catch of the day" instead of a cold. Snowbird makes good.

Yes they do have burgers to go along with Simon and Garfunkels's *Cecilia*. Push M8. Just ask for "One Blown Up", "One Blown Up And Jack It" gets you a cheese burger, "One Blown Up, With Jack Benny" get you a bacon cheese burger, and if you want some variety of these with chili, you guessed it, "Make It

Whistle."

"Burn A Pup" is a hot-dog. "Sour It" gets a hot dog smothered in kraut. You can also order from a wide variety of other popular sandwich combinations. "Jack Benny With A Dame"-grilled cheese sandwich with tomato. "Bossy On A Raft" is a steak sandwich. "Butter, Liver and Tongue" is, you guessed it, a BLT.

For those with bigger appetites, try "Throw A Bone On" which is the pork chop dinner or "Endless Italian" in case you are a spaghetti and meatballs lover. "Whiskers" is the catfish dinner which the menu promises is a real treat.

I looked up from the dessert menu and treats like "fish eggs" which is tapioca pudding and "fruit with a lid" which is pie and a song jumped right out of the portable juke box at me. We used high tech reel-to-reel tape recorders to record that song at every speed we could think of because we wanted to make out the dirty words we knew it had in it. Finally I found the quarter in my pocket and plugged the machine and punched in Q7, *Louie, Louie*. Nothing happened.

"Sorry hon," Bettybop said as she arrived at my station with the coffee pot. "It doesn't work."

Damn. A high tech failure at Herbie's just when my mind was ready to settle down for the day. I didn't have the heart to ask if all of these memories were just props.

"More coffee?" she asked.

"No thanks. I have to go be a businessman," I told her and I paid my check and headed for the door. I turned and asked her a question before I left the past and opened to the door back to the pressured future.

"Is there a place close by that sells fifties music close by?"