

Shoe business

In Athens I thawed out at a local youth hostel.

I am amazed today by Greece's ability to pull off their recent Olympic games with a minimum of disruption, because, back in 1963, the Athens police seemed intent on creating their own disruption, at my expense.

My alleged crime prompted a local newspaper cartoonist to draw a picture of me taking money from the prime minister of Greece.

At my hostel I met up with a British guitar player and, just for kicks, we strolled down to Constitution Square one day to strum a few folk songs. It just seemed like the thing to do, since Greece is the cradle of democracy. Maybe freedom of speech wasn't included.

We were enjoying ourselves immensely, when suddenly a crowd began forming. To our amazement, people began throwing money at our feet. "We need a can or something," I said, removing one of my Converse canvas shoes. Soon it was full of cash!

As the crowd grew bigger, a photographer emerged, took our picture, and disappeared. We surmised later that he probably had reported us to police, to enhance the value of his photos.

A uniformed officer arrived and began spouting something that seemed to anger the crowd. A little old Greek lady started banging the policeman over the head with a bouquet of flowers.

I used to joke that I knew every song except Greek ones. When somebody would ask me to then play something I didn't know, I'd simply shrug and say, "That's Greek to me!"

The lady with the bouquet could have been yelling, "We don't have enough toilet paper or infrastructure to ever be able to host the Olympics!" It was all Greek to me.

Undaunted, the policemen nudged us in the direction of the local

police department.

Catch and release

Then, in a burst of inspiration, one of our British girlfriends whipped out her harmonica and began blowing the “Colonel Bogey March.”

If you’ve experienced the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, you’ve heard this tune, which the British prisoners whistled to annoy their Japanese captors as they marched defiantly to their forced labor.

The crowd picked up on this instantly and began whistling, marching defiantly behind us all the way to, and into, the police station—causing the constabulary great consternation. Reluctantly, the dejected officers let us go without pressing charges.

That was the end of that, we thought. However, our paparazzi “pal” had been busy. We were astounded the next day to find ourselves on the front page of every newspaper in Athens.

There we were, a *cause celebre* captured in black and white, with various people putting money in my shoe. A political cartoonist depicted the prime minister of Greece making a contribution.

It seems that a few hippies were beginning to make an incursion into Greece and police thought we might have been part of the vanguard, even though we had short hair.

Almost as an apology to us, a few restaurant owners tracked us down and invited us to come and play for free food. We ate like kings for about three days.

When the gigs and the glory gave out, we gave up “Shoe Business,” took our “groupies,” and hitchhiked north to Thessalonica, where I waved goodbye to my British chums and headed off alone towards Istanbul and the great beyond.