

Three for the Road, in Light and Shadows

By [Edward Curtin](#)

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Theme: [History](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

"You road I travel and look around! I believe you are not all that is here! I believe that something unseen is also here." – Walt Whitman, Poem of the Road

Fast Eddie

It was getting dark on the street as the young man emerged from his high school on New York's Upper East Side after basketball practice. He had lost track of time as he dreamed his basketball dreams and headed to the subway for the long ride home. It was December, 1961. A man, dressed in a cashmere overcoat and carrying a silver bowl, was walking his dog on the street. The boy asked him for the time. The man told him, adding with a grin that his watch always ran fast. The boy recognized the grin from what seemed like a dream. He pet the man's dog, and the man asked him about the imposing school next to them. He asked the boy his name and the boy said "Eddie." While the dog did its business in the street, they chatted for a few minutes. The man wished him luck with his basketball and said his name was Paul.

As the boy hustled toward the subway, Paul Newman shouted after him, "See you, Fast Eddie."

The next week the boy went to see Paul Newman playing Fast Eddie Felson in "The Hustler." He always remembered Eddie's words:

Fast Eddie: How should I play that one, Bert? Play it safe? That's the way you always told me to play it: safe... play the percentage. Well, here we go: fast and loose. One ball, corner pocket. Yeah, percentage players die broke, too, don't they, Bert?

A Fair World

In 1964/5, New York held a World's Fair. The United States President John Kennedy had been assassinated a few months earlier, but the Fair celebrated the great future that was coming down the road. The new President, Lyndon Johnson, sent a greeting:

"The 1964/5 New York World's Fair is a symbol of our hopes and an instrument of our progress in the most urgent task of our time: the building of 'peace through understanding.' "

The General Motors exhibit, the Fair's central attraction, allowed visitors to be whisked around on moving chairs fitted with loudspeakers to see tomorrow's world. One view was of "the jungle cleared: a modern community rises on the green carpet of the jungle....to clear

the way, trees are felled by beams of laser light; instant turnpikes are laid down by a machine that levels, grades and paves all at once.”

Meanwhile, in the Lowenbrau beer garden exhibit nearby, under a canopy of green trees through which speckled sun sparkled, a group of American teenage boys was getting bombed out of their minds.

And in Vietnam, jungles were being cleared, and General Motors was working hard on how to supply the Pentagon with the 469,217 M16A1 rifles they would provide for the slaughter.

Peace through understanding.

The Doctor

He was an elderly man when the young, newly married intellectual came to see him. The young man rang the bell, and when the doctor, a short man with tufts of unruly white hair, answered it himself, he was shocked.

The young man was suffering from neck and back pain. The doctor, whose street-level office was a bit shabby and dark, had no receptionist or fancy equipment. Although a chiropractor, his skills extended to the mind as well. He examined the young man with his hands. What, he asked in a thick Germanic accent, is bothering you? I see nothing wrong, he told him, nothing I can solve by manipulating you.

The young intellectual explained how the tendons and muscles in his neck were painful and swollen, and he didn't know why. The doctor asked him about his life. They talked about pain, physical and psychic.

Then the doctor took out a small appointment card and punched a hole in it. Today's visit is two dollars, he said. I'll punch a hole whenever you come here, but I really never want to see you again. You're crazy like my son, who is studying for a Ph.D. in chemistry in North Carolina. The both of you are screwed up with all the academic crap you read. Just look around. It doesn't take a genius to see what's happening.

As he ushered the young man out the door, he added, “Let me give you some advice. When you feel these pains in your neck – and they are called spite muscles, by the way – there is only one thing to do, just say fuck it, just say fuck it.”

As he handed him the appointment card, the young man noticed a series of tattooed numbers on the old man's forearm. When he stepped out onto the sidewalk, the sun was so bright he could barely see. So he walked fast to find some shade.

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