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We check in at the recommended hotel. East is a diner where we eat. Oh boy, small town cafe, it's got to be good--or very bad--serving frozen pizza in the 90-second oven. It is good. But very heavy, bread potatoes corn to fatten you. Nerves rattle as I watch a farmer watch us. I saw Easy Rider. I know what happens next.

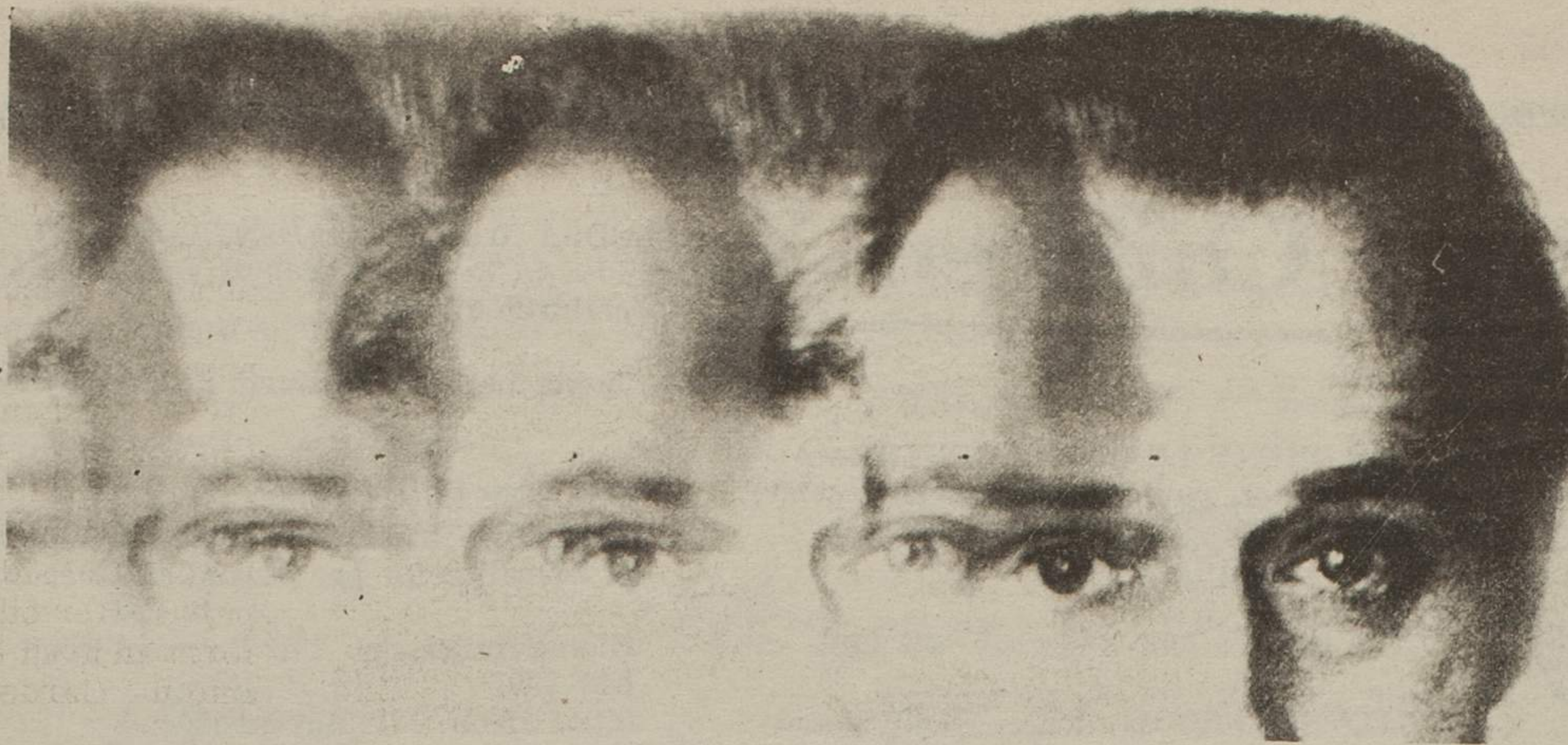
Cliche is wrong again. After dinner I call Dale Sumper (another bogus), the department head. I'm here Dale. He asks the wife and I over for a coke. A coke. Nobody has invited me over for a coke since the demise of the coke date in 1952.

We're in front of the Sumpers' house and rapping the clacker on the door. Jerri Sumper answers the knock. Little boy in his birthday suit flashes out of the hallway behind Jerri while we exchange amenities. He is caught, swatted, apologized for. Apologizing for naked children seems to me like apologizing for taking a pee. Its an act of God, that's all. I look at the walls and notice a Woolworth cardboard nature print. No conversation in that, unless I lie like a pig.

I intuit the rathskellar, our next stop, immediately. Nondescript tile floor, a leather recliner, Dale down there, smiling at us, pipe gripped in the teeth. Shaking my hand. Not shaking my wife's hand. I'm right, on all counts.

Conversation begins with work. You clock in and out at the department, 40 hours a week if you please. Exactly what I was running so hard from by choosing the academic life in the first place. I'm a lazy jerk. Ledo hates lazy bastards like me. John Calvin would be welcome here. Part of the teaching load is driving out one night a week to a nearby town, to teach farmers, housewives and other strangers the tricks of composition, or Milton. I'm staggering under my imagined work. The question comes: What am I willing to join? (Haven't they heard of the Lone Ranger here?) Our courses are student centered (at last a relief, that means easy.) But you will find papers piling up on your desk like corn cobs at a shucking bee (chuckle). Oh yes--and you should expect 75 to 100 dollars to be sucked out of your wallet every year, for this project, for that service club.

Talk turns personal. (Real danger here. On policy, we can fake agreement. Differences in experience are dangerous.) Jerri Sumper whines about the



It Never Stops, Does It?

department's image problem. A year ago Bill Rambeau and his wife and kids moved out from a Montana juco. Looked great on paper, strong interview, Rambeau was hired. In Ledo, the family, the whole bunch of them, go sour. It won't socialize or return uninvited drops by the Sumpers and others. Jerri complains that Rambeau finally wound up sitting in a dark room wearing dark glasses, the high-fi turned up to 8. At semester's end, he draws complaints. In his first class, unhappily, he has told everyone that his name is God. They can him.

By now my cliche detector is rattling and running out of control. Outwardly they deplore this story, and still sprinkle the acid of its truth on themselves, each other, and whoever else gets in range. Inwardly they love it, as it gets them in their Christian guilt glands, they failed with Bill Rambeau. The following day I am told by another faculty member, Larry Herbert, that Bill's wife didn't even leave the house after being in Ledo awhile. Poor Bill shopped and cooked for the family. The worst of it--a sorry faculty party scene, Rambeau arriving drunk, chumming it up in a way no one expected, smooching on the department members' wives. Next day at work he is cold as a pickle.

The Sumpers are less sympathetic. Wolf Rambeau is rejected at school because of his unusual name, short for Wolfgang. Jerri blurts, "Can you imagine naming an innocent child Wolfgang?"

We leave the house. Hearing Rambeau's story was like seeing myself in a peculiar mirror. I felt my mind had been read, that they'd whiffed my Rambeau madness and were trying to scare me off. The story is absurd--a stranger from far off

comes to town claiming he is God, then is cast out by the citizenry. The cliches again. My wife and I giggle over it. As a writer I am a voyeur and love peeping into the bowels of confession. But I am also horrified and pissed over what happened to the Rambeaus. My impulse is to call Dale Sumper, cancel the interview and wail back down the interstate.

I don't follow the impulse. I am still desperate for a job. Ann and I arrive at the hotel. We pass a plaque in the hallway with the words "God don't make no junk" written on it. In our room, under a picture of majestic mountains and a brook threading through a stand of timber, we fall asleep.

I wake at 7:30. We give our key to a man who sits in the hotel office, listening to a religious broadcast. We eat at the same diner as the night before.

Dale Sumper greets me in the administration building of the college. A butterfly of a bow tie hovers at the throat, his white shoes shine in the fluorescence, a slick cracker he is. In the president's office we wait on a leather couch. I feel sick and small, like a poorboy.

The president addresses us in his office, his topic, the attractions of Ledo. The town is growing, a new industrial park planned south. No one fails at Ledo Juco, no F's are given. No courses required. Ledo is for the student, not the teacher or administrator, so students drop courses any time in the semester. This pandering liberalism, based on the pragmatics of swelling enrollment (to keep the student or his money give him an F in your mind only) disgusts me. The president is happy, progressive-thinking, and intellectually terminated.

I meet other department members. Larry Herbert, ex-salesman, greets me at the threshold of his office. Over his desk is displayed a black light poster. A girl interrupts our conversation. She stands in the doorway, which is always open. Larry smiles over his shoulder at her and asks if she needs help. She says she just stopped by to say hello. After she's gone, Larry tells me the staff must often function as quasi-counselors. Positive-thinking signs hang everywhere. Orange-colored, have-a-happy-day faces smile at you. The joy is too much.

I remember nothing of the third department member but his brown suit and his arms folded over his chest.

Last year, to boost interest in the English department, these three men posed around a pool table in gangster suits for a departmental brochure with a Bonnie and Clyde theme. Everyone agreed it was real cute.

The three department members interview me in a large room in the student union. Respectability is the theme of the interview. I ask how I can be respectable and teach a course on the Sixties. Rude Mick Jagger, faggoty Allen Ginsberg, caustic Leroi Jones--60's shouters--these people ain't respectable or nice. Wouldn't these horrify, cause anger, raise ghosts of Rambeau? I get no satisfactory answer to that question. I am told that "discretion" will guide me.

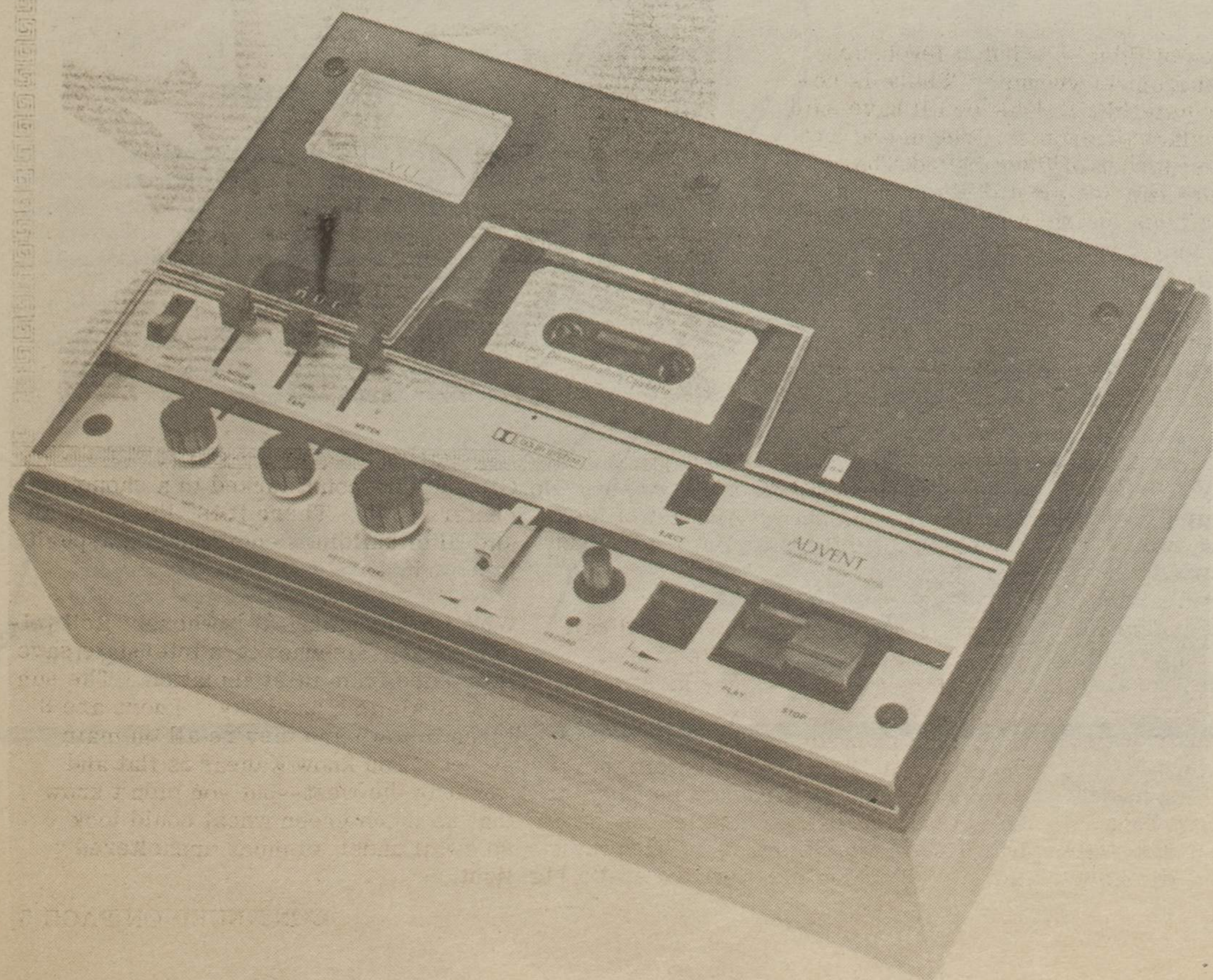
The Sixties I know did not happen in Ledo. Neither Woodstock nor Gimme Shelter ever played there.

I am brought back to the president. He reminds me that the work week is, indeed, a long one. My starting salary: \$9000. Leaving his office, I know him as little as when I arrived.

Ann and I stop at a Dairy Queen before leaving town. It is run by an old man with skin the color of baby powder, liver spots on the backs of his hands. He wears a chocolate smudged apron and sunglasses. He serves us sundaes in little cups. Ann and I step outside. We drown in the scorching sun. We drive to the interstate. A mile east, I spot a dead snake on the road's shoulder.

It makes you sorry to find people and stereotyped situations meshing so comfortably. It's downright scary when you find people's attitudes about personal differences in style to be rigid as dry mud. I didn't get the job. Big deal. I probably wouldn't have taken it anyway. It would have been a stupid grave to jump into.

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