

My Date with Amy

My daughter Amy is a folk music aficionado. She's also a computer "expert" and frequents a number of message boards and chat sites. One of those sites is the web home of the singer/songwriter Janis Ian, who had a number of hits in the 60's and 70's, and has continued to write, record and perform concerts here and abroad.

Chat rooms and message boards such as this tend to draw like minded individuals who have more than just the artists' music in common. Janis's site, in particular, has developed into a true global community, with friendships forming both electronically and in "real-time" all over the world.

Amy lives 5 hours away from Cambridge in Vermont, and Janis doesn't get there often on her tours. So when ever Janis is near the Boston area, and her schedule allows it, Amy combines a visit to me and my wife Helen with an opportunity to hear Janis, whose music she has followed for the last 40 years. In 2004 we saw Janis at Passim, in Harvard Square. This year in 2006 we journeyed out to Natick for the concert.

Those of you who are not familiar with Janis and her music may think back to the 60's, when a controversial song called Society's Child was banned in some places because it talked about inter-racial dating. That was Janis's break into the music industry. With support from the likes of Leonard Bernstein and Johnny Carson, her message was heard, and her long career launched. Several years later she recorded the song "At Seventeen", which won her a Grammy award. Janis was also the guest performer on the inaugural episode of Saturday Night Live!



Janis has written over 400 songs, some of which have been recorded and performed by the likes of Roberta Flack and Joan Baez. Her song "Here Comes the Night" was written for the movie "The Bell Jar" and her "Fly Too High" was included in the soundtrack of the Jodie Foster movie "Foxes". She is also considered by her peers to be among the top guitarists in the business today.

So, when the tour schedule posted in January showed that Janis was going to be in the Boston area in March, 2006, Amy got it in her head that she would attend. Unfortunately,

several days later she broke her shoulder, which required surgical repair and a period of rehabilitation. There was a question as to whether or not she could make the 5 hour drive. At the last minute, she was feeling good enough, so she called me to say she was coming down, and offered to take me along to the concert.

In the mean time, a number of Janis fans in the area had been communicating on the message board about getting together before the concert for dinner. (Janis's fans, by the way, are known as "Rudies", after the name of Janis's company "Rude Girl Records".) It is not uncommon these days for "Rudies", some of whom had never met in person, to gather for dinner before concerts. A reservation was made for a group of 8-10 at Vinny T's on Rte 9 in Natick, just around the corner from the concert venue at the Wilson Middle School.

I had second thoughts about going. Meeting seven younger strangers in an unknown place and staying out late was not my cup of tea. Well, I was with Amy, not alone. All I can say is I am glad I went. With friends like these, I'll go anywhere with Amy!

The seven young men and women I met were all in their 40's and 50's, bright, pleasant and fun to talk to. It felt as though we had all known each other for a long time. We had a marvelous dinner at Vinny T's, with far too much to eat, and chatted, laughed and took lots of pictures. By 7:30, when we left for the concert, I felt like I was one of the gang.

The concert itself was great. Forty plus years into her career, Janis still commands the audience's attention, with a voice that still rings as true as her lyrics. Everyone in the audience was friendly and chatty as we waited for the lights to go down. After the show, we reconvened the "Rudie" group for a photo op with Janis herself.



The next morning, Sunday, Amy signed on to the message board. Attendees had already posted their reviews and pictures from the night before. Not only were the reviews of the concert there, but reviews of the dinner gathering as well. Apparently, I was a big hit! Here's what they wrote about me:

(Matthew) "The New England Rudies got together for dinner at Vinny T's before the show: thanks to AceOn6 for reserving the table and making this happen. AceOn6 brought her friend Linda, Denise drove down from Maine, Amy in Vermont brought her dad Abe (at 90, bright and charming and sharp as you please), Lin and her Earl, and me and my Tony."



(Dee) "Everyone in the group is REALLY SMART!!! Everyone looks much younger than they actually are. All are people I'd spend time with even when Janis isn't in town. Other than the show, the highlight of the night for me was meeting Amy's dad Abe. The man is incredible... so with it, so sure, so witty, and quite handsome. How many of you can divide by 9 without a calculator? Abe figured our dinner check to the pennies in only a couple of minutes."



(Matthew) "You are so right about Abe. 90 years old, swims, takes classes at Harvard, helps take care of his wife, an INCREDIBLE person. And just as impressive was the warm relationship between Amy and Dad---their love for each other shone clearly. Someone said, "I wanna take Abe home with me!" To which Amy replied, "Sorry, I've got dibs on him!""

(Denise) "Amy - what a sweetheart and your dad!!!! Wow!! We all wanted to take him home! He gives good hugs! He was just pure pleasure! You are lucky to have such a special dad!"



(Lin) "Dinner was like getting together with a bunch of old friends. It was wonderful. We ate great food, and talked and talked, sometimes it was hard getting a word in, and sometimes there was 3 different conversations going!! Tony was a little quiet at first, and was amazed that we had never met before. But he quickly got caught up in our excitement! And Abe, what a wonderful man! So charming and

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gives great hugs!"

