

# Story Story

by Harry B. Sanderford

It was one of those sweltering afternoons that San Diego endures only several times a summer. I'm riding on El Cajon Boulevard, with my friend John in his old Chevy pickup. John is a lifelong San Diego resident and fanatical Charger backer. He's talking up some pre-season game taking place somewhere in the world, between some team and his beloved Bolts.

The six months between the Super Bowl and the first pre-season games seems interval enough for most Charger fans to forget the bitter humiliation of the preceding season and throw themselves headlong and hopeful into the promise of a new and as yet unsullied season. John's jacked about his beloved team's prospects this year. This off-season the Chargers have acquired a couple of veteran quarterbacks in Jim Harbaugh, and Eric Kramer. B-guys for sure, but any change in this post would seem an improvement over the tandem fiasco that was rookie Ryan Leaf, and veteran bench-warmer Craig Whelihan last year. They have a new coach and a clean slate. It is undoubtedly the best time of the year to be a Charger fan.

Pre-season of course means nothing. Air conditioning however, can only truly be appreciated during temperatures of at least Floridian severity; a situation only rarely encountered in the agreeable climes of San Diego. The idea of luxuriating in the air-conditioned, dimly lit, confines of a local watering hole, drinking ice cold beer and watching football, even just pre-season football, well it's the San Diego adult equivalent of a snow day. John is going on about Junior Seau, the Chargers schedule this season, and so forth. "You had me at air conditioning," I say to John. The sign in front of the Nite-Life tells us all we need to know: NFL, GIANT TV, COLD BEER, AIR CONDITIONED. We pull in.

Stepping from the stark daylight through the heavy curtain that

serves as a door into the cool darkness gives the sensation of entering a cave. After a moment our eyes adjust and we move to a table near the TV. The air conditioning, its nip exaggerated by the sweat drying on our skin, is Frigidaire frosty. The bar itself is practically vacant, our own little oasis. We order up, pour our beer and toast our good fortune. Here we sit, 97 degrees on the street, cool as your mythical cucumbers, happy as your proverbial clams, inside. And this is where we meet Jane.

She approaches us inquiring, "Would you guys like a table dance?" The NiteLife is, to use their terminology, a gentleman's establishment. John and I decline the offer. We're saving our money for more beer during the game. But given the hour and the pace of things in the bar, we're really the only patrons and so are engaged by Jane in conversation. It turns out that this is in fact Jane's first day on the job. She is working part-time as a table dancer but does not intend to dance on stage where she would be required to remove her top. She is also working fulltime as a public librarian. The stereotypical notions regarding either occupation do not escape us and after much joking with Jane concerning the obvious disparity in her chosen career paths, I suggest to her that her experiences might well make for a good story.

Jane sees me coming from a mile away. Suspecting my motives to be less than genuine, she reminds me that she really doesn't have any experiences. "My first day, remember?" she says excusing herself presumably to greener pastures. Her instincts, possibly correct, do not deter my interest. Though suddenly, I have renewed interest in football.

John, being the only one obsessed enough to realize that football is even occurring so early in the year, has dialed in via satellite what he thinks should be an awesome confrontation between some second string, and another. And you know what? He's right. Damned if we don't have the Chargers VS the Broncos. Here are the Super

Bowl champs, squaring off against John's Chargers. Live from down under. That's Australia mate. Pitcher, please.

I am not without sympathy for John and the minions of annually allegiant Bolt Backers. Having served my time as a Bronco fan however, I cannot help but espouse an air of superiority under the circumstances. Elway, god love him, has himself gone on to even greener pastures than Jane. But the machine that Mike Shanahan built can easily be driven by Bubby Brister, or Brian Griese, or in a pinch, me. Give me Terrell Davis, Shannon Sharpe, and Ed McCaffrey, and in the immortal words of Steve Martin, "I don't need nothin' else."

The Chargers look good in the early going. It's preseason, so I'm not worried. But they look pretty good. They're up 17 points. It's preseason. Preseason doesn't count.

"Jane! Where have you been, any new experiences?" Jane has no new experiences to report but has gotten the hang of pretending to be amused. She drains the last two inches of our pitcher equally into our mugs asking, "More beer fellas?"

"Well, yeah!"

The Broncos are coming back, but it doesn't matter, the real game happened in the first quarter. Like I said, it's preseason. It doesn't count.

The Bronco's second and third teams come back to nullify the Charger's 17 point lead. They win by 3 against the Charger's number 2 and 3 guys.

Still, based on the early play of their starters the match is scored as a win among the Charger faithful. And so a new season, full of promise, begins.

John and I retire to the smoking room for victory cigars. Actually, it's a twelve by ten smoke filled closet with tables behind the rear stage at the NiteLife. Across the table from me sits Jane. She is small and slender, delicate really. She is in her mid to late twenties. Her features are Asian though her hair is blondish or light brown. She is on a break and so dutifully smokes a cigarette as we talk. Jane is pleasant but still she's not buying my *story* story. It's getting late and she indulges my attempts at sending the two of us into over-time. But just like preseason, it doesn't count.

