

Got My Cherry Popped by a Gay Man and a God - Elton John and Eric Clapton, August 21, 1992

by Anson Pope

I was 17 and had never been to a concert. Maybe that's normal, but I'd come to discover from my years working in the music business that that was not normal. Summer was nearly over and I was doing my best to enjoy my last few weeks just sitting around all day, watching TV, playing video games and hanging with my friends. Senior year was right around the corner.

So in the early afternoon when I heard my phone ringing I kept my head under the blanket and pretended I never heard it. It rang four times before the answering machine clicked to life, "This is Anson, I'm not around right now, leave me a message." BEEP!

From the other end the voice of my dad, "hey Ans, a friend at work just gave me two tickets to a concert tonight with Elton John and Eric Clapton at Shea Stadium. Mom thought I should take you. Give me a call when you get this or we'll give the tickets to somebody else." CLICK!

I poked my head from the blankets and gave this a little thought. Elton John and Eric Clapton? Shea Stadium? A concert?

When I was a kid I loved my records. Yes, in the late 70's and early 80's we still listened to records. I'd often steal my parents'. They had the good stuff. Mom was a big Elton John fan. She also had Rod Stewart, Beethoven, Elvis, and a bunch of cassettes—Blondie, The Rolling Stones, and Bruce Springsteen. I owned the Star Wars Soundtrack, and the Disco Star Wars album. You can imagine what a dork I was humming the Star Wars theme

then breaking into "Good-bye Yellow Brick Road," followed up by "Stay With Me." I also had the Go-Go's album and The J Geils Band. So you could throw in a little "Vacation" and "Centerfold."

I pondered the concert idea over an early afternoon piss. Sitting on the toilet (I admit it I sit, it's more relaxing that way) I thought through my plans and didn't think I had any. Then again it didn't matter anyhow if I did this was Elton John and Eric Clapton! Elton John, one of my all time favorites and Eric Clapton the all time master of guitar. My decision was made.

"Dad, sorry I was outside. The concert sounds great, I would love to go."

We made the plans. Dad would be home early since we would have to drive in at rush hour. We'd get something to eat on the way and be there for the start. This was a big event. "The Two" as it was billed were only doing four shows in the United States, two in New York and two in Los Angeles. My concert cherry was about to be popped.

I never imagined I'd walk through the doors behind home plate at Shea stadium. I'd been a Mets fan since the Yankees traded Reggie Jackson and I turned my back on them. My parents believe otherwise, they think I was just always a Mets fan. The three of us went to games with some frequency. Dad's company had season tickets and he often got tickets from people in his line of work. In reality I'd have liked to just catch a foul ball at a game, forget the idea of walking out onto the field..

The show had already started, between traffic finding parking and getting through security we were walking in during the opening number and it hit me as my foot stepped upon the grass just beyond home plate, "don't let the sun go down on me . . ."

I distinctly remember walking over the pitchers mound and remembering that night in 1986 when Jesse Orosco threw his mitt in the air after the last pitch of Game 7 against the Red Sox. That photo immortalized on countless New York area papers, but always associated with the Daily News. That night I sat curled on one of our chairs with my mom next to me as she took a break from

painting our living room. I can remember crying. This was magical. My dad was at the Monday night Giants game and he'd tell me later that they flashed it on the big board, "New York Mets — 1986 World Champions." My uncle a diehard Yankee fan who was at the game with my dad was actually happy too.

And now here I was, six years later walking over this simple lump of dirt about to step into an event that would ultimately shape my life.

Elton sang the hits, Tiny Dancer, Daniel, Candle in the Wind (before the Princess Di redux). I was loving it. I even learned some new songs, one of them now my favorite of his, Funeral for a Friend/Love Lies Bleeding.

Once Elton was done Eric Clapton came on. I didn't know much about Eric Clapton. My dad liked him and I knew he was big in the 60's and 70's. As I listened though and heard Bellbottom Blues, Layla, and I Shot the Sheriff, I got an education in virtuosity. I saw the blues twisted into the foundation of rock and roll and found I knew more Eric Clapton than I thought. Believe me in the days following this concert I found myself looking at Clapton's greatest hits and finding that I heard each one at the concert.

Before we left I bought my first concert tee and a program from the concert. Lucky for me I had a summer job so the \$50 I put out for both didn't give my dad a headache.

As I left I had no clue that this one experience would unlock an interest in me, a true love and appreciation of music above and beyond those early records in the living room. I saw the wonder of a live performance, the response from the crowd, and a true admiration for the talents of the musicians on stage. This was the first step on a long road of concert going experiences and the first time I witnessed something that would move me in a special way. I didn't realize in those hours as I swayed and sang along that music would be my future to a degree. That I would be on the sides watching people like Elton and Eric bound out on stage before thousands and entertain for hours. I would one day stand in the photo pit and tell the newspaper photogs that they'd gotten the two

song minimum and it was time to go. And if they didn't move I would get security. Losing my virginity with a gay man and a god was the greatest way to start a new life.

