

My Almost-Clash with The Rolling Stones (Memoir)

by Rick Rofihe

1960. I was in 5th grade, Bridgewater, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, Canada, when I saw a bicycle leaning against a big old pine tree in my elementary-school's schoolyard. Thinking that that was not good for the bark on the tree (there were plenty of bike-racks) I pushed the bicycle so it fell over onto the ground. Across the street was the Junior High School; grades 7, 8 and 9. From a window of the top floor there came a voice: "Ricky Rofihe, you get up here right now!" I soon found myself standing in front of a class of 9th-graders, who were listening to my being castigated by their teacher, the Junior High School principal, Mrs Ena MacKenzie.

1964. It's September, first day of school, my third year in Junior High, my teacher for 9th grade is—Ena MacKenzie. She steps in front of the class and asks, "Has anyone here ever heard of a British musical group called The Rolling Stones?" Hard to believe now, but no one had. Actually, in the entire North American continent, nearly nobody yet had—but I'd just returned from a trip to Montreal with my mother, where, even though next to no one in Montreal seemed to have heard of the Stones either, I'd purchased their just-released first album. Now, in class, my hand shot up and I waved it wildly. Mrs MacKenzie locked eyes with me and said, "They're DISGUSTING!" She'd been on a plane with them during her European vacation that summer.

1977. I'd been living in Boston, but, on a whim, flew to London, England. Soon I was working as support staff for the actor Alan Bates and his wife, Victoria, on a movie called "The Shout", shooting in Devon. In London I soon got my own place, in Camden Town. On the bus in from the airport, I had asked the driver what song was

coming through the speakers; it turned out to be "Roadrunner" by The Modern Lovers—Jonathan Richman's Boston-based group I'd until then never heard of. In no time I chanced upon someone from a company called Stiff Records who was delivering new-that-day "My Aim Is True" albums by an unknown singer named Elvis Costello; I bought a stack and shipped them immediately to America. More memorably, 1977 was the summer of Punk in London, especially of The Clash: Joe Strummer!

2001: I found myself working for someone living in a 4-unit building in Lower Manhattan; on one of the floors the tenant was Marlon Richards, son of Rolling Stones' guitarist Keith Richards, who, with Mick Jagger, is the co-writer of most of the group's songs. I didn't want to ask Marlon what it was like growing up with such a bad-boy dad—I just wanted to tell him about Ena MacKenzie, my Junior High teacher. Yet, whenever I encountered Marlon in the building's hallway, he ignored my glances. I soon had a jokey line all ready in case he did at some point acknowledge my presence: "Did anyone ever tell you that you look like Charlie Watts," I would say (Charlie Watts is the Stones' drummer), but, probably luckily for me, Marlon and his family suddenly decamped from NYC for rural Connecticut, and my ill-conceived one-liner remained unspoken.

