

The Early Convention Years

by Palle Christensen, Denmark

I joined The Four Freshmen Appreciation Society FFAS (today FFS) in 1988 and my first issue of *FreshNews* is dated January 1988. The July-August 1988 issue included this invitation:

"You're invited to our 40th Anniversary Celebration on the 18, 19 and 20th September"
and right away I was hooked.

The next issue, September-October, gave further details about the event. The first annual Get-Together of FFAS with Four Freshmen shows at the Barbary Coast Hotel plus special events and FFAS features at the Hacienda Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada. *FreshNews* included a very detailed schedule of events very similar to today's convention schedules. Through my Freshmen friends, Keith Murray from England and Jorgen Bjorno from Denmark, I learned a bit more about the event. I told my wife that I had to go to Las Vegas. So my family decided to visit friends in Redlands, CA, while I went to Las Vegas.

September 1988

Friday the 18th of September, my family boarded a SAS flight direct to Los Angeles. After a short stop, I continued to Las Vegas by Delta. The Barbary Coast rooms were fully booked, so Bob Flanigan had reserved rooms at the Hacienda Hotel where the hospitality suite and some of the fun would take place. After the taxi trip from the airport, I went to my room to freshen up. I phoned the president, Edd Townsend who told me that a shuttle would be ready in front of the hotel at 9:00pm. I was very excited about the whole thing and I was on time in the lobby. I am sorry to say, that I do not remember those of my fellow conventioners at that time, but you know who you are.

The shuttle let us off at the opposite corner of the Barbary Coast. The sign at the crossing said "Don't walk" so we had to wait for it to say "Walk". Suddenly, I saw a guy standing next to me, tall and with curly hair. It was Mr. Flanigan himself. My heart skipped a beat as I turned to him and said: "Hello Mr. Flanigan, I just travelled half the world to meet you."

Bob answered, "Then your name is Palle."

Edd Townsend had told Bob that there would be some crazy Danish guy for the Get-Together.

Everyone went into the Barbary Coast lounge where the concerts should take place and there I met the Four Freshmen line-up with Bob Flanigan, Autie Goodman, Mike Beisner and Gerry Lee Rosenburg. There were concerts scheduled at 10:00am, 12:00pm and 2:00pm for a duration of one hour each. There was a minimum cover charge of \$4, which included two drinks. I enjoyed all three shows although I was suffering from jetlag due to the 9 hours of time difference. During each break Mike Beisner asked me if I was tired.

For this convention we were a group of Freshmen fans from abroad. The Murrys from England and from Denmark, the Bjornos, the Soborgs and me.

Here I have to add my first personal meeting with Ross. Jorgen Bjorno knew that Ross had some Ampex tapes in his garage with the contents of the Four Freshmen in Sweden. As I worked for Scandinavian Airlines, I had the possibility to get the material shipped to Denmark and there was a contact to the Danish Broadcasting Company

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to inquire if they were interested in converting the tapes to VHS (before DVD). However, the deal was cancelled and instead Ross worked with Wally Heider to release the Stockholm broadcast. At the Barbary Coast, Ross came to me, asked me for my name, put his hands on my shoulders and said that he was sorry to change the agreement, but he felt more secure with Heider as he did not know me.

On the morning of Saturday the 19th, we all met at the pool area. Some people told Freshmen stories while the rest of us listened with very big ears. I especially remember Bob Watts' stories and pictures from the very beginning of the Four Freshmen. Suddenly Bob Flanigan came along just to see how we were. Before leaving to go home and do some vacuum-cleaning, he invited us to Mary and his house for brunch Sunday morning.

A room at the Hacienda Hotel was used as the hospitality suite where there was a little mart with different things, including t-shirts designed by Ross Barbour. And yes, I still have mine. I was assisting Edd with serving beverages and the t-shirt sales. There was no convention fee, so it was all on Edd Townsend, unless someone supported him.

There was a lot of activity in the hospitality suite. Four Freshmen harmonies with current and alumni guys, including Ross Barbour and Bill Comstock. Edd had also supplied a guitar. As Bob Flanigan was busy vacuum-cleaning at his home, Sue Barbour sang the lead.

Saturday night at the Barbary Coast was similar to the day before with three shows and a lot of Freshmen talk. Plus, the Freshmen themselves were there to entertain us during the breaks.

Sunday the 20th was the real anniversary day. Bob Flanigan had arranged transport by a mini bus from the hotel to the Flanigan residence. As a little gift I had bought a bottle of Champagne and it needed some wrapping. I took the elevator down to the hotel lobby shop. While going down, I had company of Sue and Bill Comstock. This was the first time I had been so close to the Comstocks and I must admit, I was a little starstruck.

The transport to Flanigan's was fine and everyone was singing the Freshmen harmonies. We were greeted by Mary and Bob and afterwards we enjoyed a very nice brunch with drinks and the hospitality of the Flanigans. We were all around the house and studied the many trophies from Bob's career. Bob had a cassette copy of the *FRESHMAS* album which had not been released yet. It was fantastic to be there in the Flanigan living room and listen to a not-yet-released Freshmen album. The one-liner came from Keith Murray who said to me with a British accent, "Think Palle, this little boy from Gateshead England sitting in Bob Flanigan's house."

On Monday the 21st, it was time to say goodbye to everyone. I flew to Ontario to join my family. The fantastic super weekend was over.

September 1989

A convention was planned by Edd Townsend by and published in *FreshNews*, but was cancelled last minute. However, I already had plans to go but the word was that the unions in Las Vegas were planning to block the performances. With shaking hands I called Mr. Flanigan, expecting his answering machine, but at the other end of the line, Flanigan picked up the phone, "Flanigan here." Bob told me that he would investigate and if I called back in two hours, he would know more about it. Later I called and the answering machine was cleared of all other messages and said. "Hi Palle. Just come over, we are working." This is why I participated in the 2nd convention in the year of 1989.

I am sure that some of my fellow Freshmen fans were in Las Vegas in 1989 too. I have asked Ross about his opinion of this and he said that Sue and he were there, saw the Four Freshmen at the Barbary Coast and stayed with some friends in Las Vegas. I am sure that other Freshmen fans were there. Were you?

The official 1989 Get-Together was in Toledo. But, neither Flanigan, the Barbours nor the Four Freshmen attended, so I do not count that event.

June 1990

My 3rd convention took place in Springfield, Ohio, on June 16th, 1990. My son, Jesper, and I flew to Dayton and then took a taxi to the Springfield Inn. Dick Hatfield was the convention manager of this event.

On Saturday, the 16th of June, the Four Freshmen concert took place at an outside theatre with a big band. Before the show, the Freshmen went to rehearse and I have to

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