

Impressions of Wellington

Steve, a 16-year-old, said he'd show me the streets of Wellington. A city in which I've lived for 19 years and it seemed, a city I really didn't know too much about.

His dreadlocked hair was shorter than the norm set by those rastafarian's seen on T.V. and on the front of album covers. Although his clothing was the usual outfit one expects when the name 'street-kids', is mentioned.

A blue swanee, well worn blue jeans and a light coloured shirt kept him warm physically.

He'd told me of Jah and the peace of reggae music, then he told me some of the excitement he'd experienced on the street both the good times and the bad.

The other, a guy I had known for some time came along just to watch out and introduce me to the night scene many Wellingtonian's don't see.

Joe was dressed in his usual overalls and t-shirt, his well known jandals replaced by basketball boots. He also warned me of previous happenings he'd been involved in.

"Look," he said. "It may not happen eh, but if it does...."

With that I was kept alert and uneasy.

It's only a few minutes before midnight. Earlier hordes of Friday night shoppers had kept the streets alive. Now only the dulling rain and shop night lights seemed to be awake.

It was decided to go to a nightclub, not the one's where everyone is trendy and fashionable, where alcohol is served till the wee hours and all have cars or taxi's to go home in. No, not the one's I knew.

Inside the music's loud, no more than thirty people are there.

Joe used to come here quite often — he knew the regulars and the one's in charge of the place.

"Hey," he says to me. "You see those queens over there".

"Yeah," I reply.

"They say you look like a 'D'." He laughed.

I didn't think it was a compliment to be mistaken for a cop, so I gave them a weak smile.

"Oh, who are these nice strong young men," I turned to where the deep voice had come. She wore a bright flimsy dress, hardly appropriate for rainy weather, I thought.

Joe began to talk to her, we were introduced.

"This is Sam, he's straight as a fish," he told her.

About 1.30am we're sitting with Joe's mates from the coast, he gave me some money and told me to go to the bar and

buy some drinks.

"Coke or lemonade," I said.

"Just say it's for Joe," he told me.

I came back with three glasses, I had a drink. The alcoholic flavour was quite strong.

"Sam," Joe said to me. "Look behind you," he pointed, whispering.

I turned round to see three men who seemed to have quite honest reasons for being in the place.

"They're 'D's," he told me. I saw the people at the bar running round trying to straighten everything up.

At 2 o'clock the band had stopped playing and were beginning to pack up. A guy on the table across from me was pulling out a plastic bag from his jacket pocket.

"You want to try a 'barb'," Joe asked me. I took barb as meaning barbituate.

"No thanks," I answered.

Two girls walked in, they waved at Joe and walked straight to the man with the plastic bag.

"You see those two," Joe asked.

"Yeah."

"They're pro's." I just gave him a surprised look.

I watched the man pour some pills into a smaller plastic bag. The two girls sat beside him and began to talk to the other's at the table. When he had finished they handed him some money and left, waving to Joe as they went.

We decided to leave not long after, Joe and Steve returning to their flat, planning to return to the streets the following night.

Saturday night I decided I would go on my own, walking the streets.

About 11pm and I hear some heavy footsteps running towards me, I sit down and wait to see what happens.

"Hey, hey stop, stop," a guy wearing only trousers runs out in front of a taxi. The taxi carries on. Five guys inside a white Holden shout abuse at him as they drive past.

"Up ya bastards," he yells after them. Patting himself to keep warm he walks up and down the road waiting for another car to pass.

"Got the time, mate," he asks me.

"bout 12 I think."

"Thanks mate."

Two other guys walk up the street. Laughing and talking they head for their car. The first guy approaches them.

"Hey look mate I need a ride to Karori." They just look at him. "Here I'll pay you, I got some money eh," he pulls out some 5's and 10's.

"Waddaya think," the driver asks his friend.

"Yeah might as well."

"Thanks mate, getting bloody cold out here eh." He hops into the mini.

I continue walking.

A scream. I stop and walk towards the women's voice. Two guys come out from Plimmers Steps. One says, "them's the breaks". The other laughs and they carry on down the road. The woman still screams.

When I get there, a guy is lying half-way down the steps. Eyes almost shut. Blood from his nose dried up, his hair resting in a pool of red. The step stained from the blood that trickles from his head. Four other are around him, one calming the girlfriend. Another kneeling beside the guy trying to wake him. Two more helping.

"What happened," they ask still panting.

The girlfriend cries, "eight Maori guys... the big one... he asked Bob for some money... they beat him up... then pushed him down the stairs." Her screams become louder.

Police and ambulance arrive. The police ask the girlfriend about the incident as the ambulancemen attend to Bob. A friend of Bob's takes off his jersey to keep him warm, another asks if he can help. He replies sharply, "no. No you can't and anyway you're a honky, piss off."

The ambulance man bandages his head and lifts him into their vehicle.

Everyone starts to move away. I continue walking up the steps.

At the top of the steps three guys are being questioned by the Police. I walk around them.

"Excuse me, sir." It's one of the policeman. "Where have you just come from?"

"Around town," I reply.

"Are you sure you weren't in Nite-site."

"No, I wasn't."

"You see there's been some trouble down Plimmers Steps and we're looking for some Samoans, you seem to be Samoan."

"Well do you mind if I take your name," he was already pulling out his notebook.

"Yeah as a matter of fact, I do."

"Can you tell me why."

"Because it's my right not to."

"You might be a suspect if you don't."

"Well then you'll have to find me" I begin to walk away, "see you later."

"Do you smoke dope?" I stop.

"No do you?" I ask.

"What's in your bag?" I was wearing a small shoulder strapped army bag.

"Nothing."

"Can I see."