



Child with mask

Dan

# HELLO THE WORLD

By David Gahr

At the end, half mad,  
Ibsen  
was found  
scribbling in the air

I must have shouted while sliding down the womb into a family of four brothers and sisters and my Ma and Pa on Galena Street. Galena Street, heart of Milwaukee's 6th Ward: Galena Street whose sights and sounds have rarely left me. Morning and kids scrambling, playing, running in the dirty streets and cluttered alleys, mothers pregnant with child and some pregnant with the scrapes of hard living, dragging their youngest with them while carrying bundles of food or clothing back to their small flats: afternoon and

junk peddlers with horses and wagons working their way down the street calling out their coming; black folks and white ones lounging in front of the structures or dumps called homes, talking and talking and talking, while the kids just out from school, play baseball, kick-the-stick, or any game which didn't cost money out in the streets, vying with the cars for the right of way: dusk and sweaty, tired men coming home to burning soup and fresh rye bread; and the streets unburden quietly with the dark.

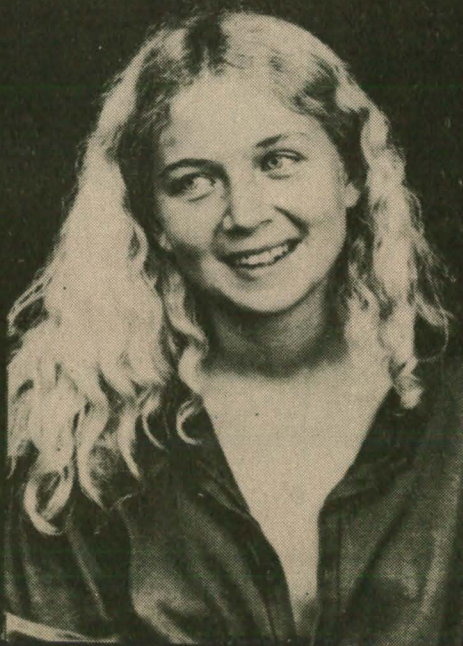








Janis Joplin



Young girl

The world depression hit Galena Street hard. Men were without work for years at a time. Everyone was on the county. Hopelessness was in the air, but it was a feeling lessened by the commonality of it all. But the young rarely suffer the penetrating damage felt by the old and I found myself enthralled by total days of competitive games held in community social centers and playgrounds, those vestiges of Milwaukee's socialist past. And the Lapham Park library where at eleven and twelve I discovered a myriad of fairy tales, 15 or so books on the Blackfoot Indians, and oddly enough, the works of Dostoevsky.

I could understand the familial clashes in *The Brothers Karamazov*, for weren't there family fights, humiliations, epileptics and poverty on my street? Later, later I would understand the immense political and ideaic interplay and the marvelous inlets of humor in Fyodor D. But not then, for I was engulfed by the emotional upheavals of his people.

Time passed, a few schools attended and many libraries rummaged. Then one Sunday night World War II arrived with a surrealistic shock. When I came of war age, my old man urged me to avenge our European family, so I went. Scared and not too willing, but I loved my father and understood he was right.

I remember the frozen nights and feet in France, Belgium and Luxembourg; the blazing towns, the phosphorous-burnt soldiers from a sudden attack of 'screaming mimis', the fearsome whine of 88's flat overhead; a stone hut full of dead soldiers piled like a cord of wood with arms and legs akimbo (all I recognized and identified with were the uniforms—mine); weeks on the Siegfried Line, amazed by the Fourth of July fire-







works stunning the dark pillboxed valleys, fireworks of fear and death, Canadian aviators splattered against a hill, Germans in the forest with half their heads ripped out by M-1 bullets; a reduction in wanting to feel, a weariness the foot soldier knows of walking all day, fighting to take a town and then standing guard all night, full of Moselle wine and fright; peeing in the Rhine River while crossing—a boy's gesture of contempt for a Nazi-stained world; liberating a factory full of Jewish-Hungarian girls overcome with emotion that American soldiers had arrived (the Galahads of their time) to give them love and all kinds of German marks from a bank broken into just nights before.

Oh, those were other times! No shame to be a soldier then. Until Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The return to the States, two or three universities where I skirted the determined courses of study to plunge into Theodore Dreiser, the extraordinary Proust, Ezra Pound, Sean O'Casey and Shakespeare and Shaw and a hundred others. Those were the days, a book a night and the hell with my eyes or exams—all but Proust. Couldn't rush Proust.

I flushed the GI Bill for every day and degree I could, but fell shy of money and found myself broke in New York, so on to the world of time clocks.

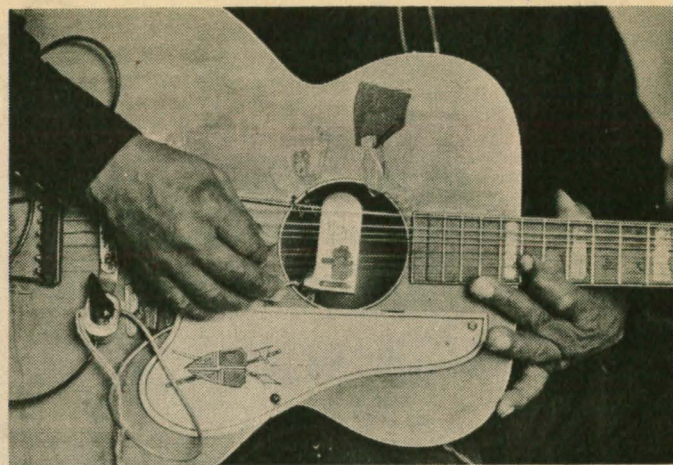
Moses Asch found me working 12 hours a day at Sam Goody's record store photographing everyone and everything around, blending into the streets in all kinds of weather—whenever Sam, yes, he exists—let me escape. Asch, that splendid, cantankerous guru of our time, spun me loose time

and time again to photograph Big Bill Broonzy, Brownie McGhee and the great Sonny Terry, the Seegers—all of them, every last blessed one of them, the deeply missed Indian cowboy poet, Peter La Farge, and on and on, surely over a hundred Folkways covers: and all for a few bowls of rice, but oh the training Moe gave, the flaws he pounced on, the flecks of artiness he demolished in me, the constant strengthening of my natural bent.

I saw whatever man or woman touches, makes or mars is important; whatever he does awake or asleep must be documented. To this day the most exquisite natural panorama can hardly move my eye to a lens. But every face, I mean every face, has drama for me. How a person reacts to a camera is crucial and should be photographed.

I found communication between photographer and the photographed is emotional and rarely verbal, although I often ask a probing question to elicit a moment of thought in a person's eye. What an individual selects to surround himself with or hangs on his walls is revealing: the dichotomies can be devastating and/or enlightening.

Moe then turned me on to *Sing Out! Magazine* which couldn't afford a bowl of rice, but it was worth it to meet and secure the friendship of the fine singer, Ethel Raim, the beautifully talented Southerner, Jean Hammons, the cool cheroot-smoking intellectual, Paul Nelson and the finest writer and thinker in all of Chelsea, Julius Lester. Not to forget Israel Young who contains within him the courage of Don Quixote and the peasant sagacity of Sancho Panza. What plea-



Hands of  
Big Joe Williams

sure we took blasting the granite surface of the editor, Irwin Silber.

I discovered a young and beautiful woman, Ruth, some years ago and on the first night of our meeting, I tried reading to her from Virginia Woolf's *A Room Of One's Own*. Laughing, she threw me out, for she had a room of her own and didn't want to share it with a nut. Long after I loved her, she came to love me and we have continued to confirm the alliance with Carla, a poetic 7, and Seth, a great 11.

Ezra Pound, in his eloquent Canto LXXXI, I think said it all:

"What thou lovest well remains  
the rest is dross  
What thou lov'st well shall not  
be reft from thee  
What thou lov'st well is thy true  
heritage

.....  
To have, with decency, knocked  
That a Blunt should open

To have gathered from the  
air a live tradition  
or from a fine old eye the  
unconquered flame  
This is not vanity.

Here error is all in the not  
done  
all in the diffidence that faltered.

\*The CANTOS OF EZRA POUND, Ezra Pound, A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK, 1948.

David Gahr has been photographing since 1959. His works are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and he is considered without peer in photographing the contemporary music scene. He recently received the newspaper guild's Page One award for the best magazine photography of the year for his *Time Magazine* series on Powder Ridge. His newest book, in collaboration with Julius Lester, and dealing with music and people will be published by Dial Press in the spring of 1972.