



## BOOK EXTRACT

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## CHAPTER TEN MY CAREER BEGINS TO CHANGE

We were still resident at the Twenty Club in Mouscron, and still packed the place out every Sunday. It was then that I met Marie Paul Vancanagen. She was 17 and I had just turned 20. Her sister Monique was crazy about Steve Barton our second singer, but he was already spoken for and was engaged to Patsy, a girl back in England. Steve was in an emotional dilemma and just didn't know what to do. Steve and I had been friends since he was 14 and we had always been like brothers. I could see that he liked Monique and it would have been more convenient for me if Steve were with Monique. At least then we could have travelled to see them together. Eventually I managed to persuade Steve to get it together with Monique, and he decided to finish with Patsy on an extremely long telephone conversation the following day. In 1968 both sisters were pregnant. Marie Paul's English was not too good, but she was extremely volatile and I quickly got the gist of her displeasure. That was it as far as the relationship was concerned, and before we had begun our final tour it reached its natural conclusion and we went our separate ways.

The friction in the band was reaching incredible heights and everyone was arguing. Steve's growing dislike of John was affecting their singing. They were forever disagreeing over who was going to sing what. Although I tried desperately to stay neutral, I seemed to be forever in the middle. The arguments became more and more aggressive, and it was clear that we could not go on this way. It was around this time that Jean Vanlou announced that he had handed our management over to Ricki Stein from Spectre Promotions. He was a brash and very arrogant Londoner and was immediately disliked by the band. At this point we were staying in Comines in the refurbished hotel, and during the day we rehearsed in the club downstairs. Ricki Stein appointed a guy called Pier as our minder, and basically to ensure that we did not lie in bed all day. He was crazy, and his way of getting us out of bed was to fire a high powered air rifle at the bedclothes. This was extremely dangerous, but at least it got us out of bed!

Pier was quite menacing and had a sadistic temperament. We disliked him immensely, and pleaded with Jean Vanlou to get rid of him. 'It's no longer my responsibility!' he mumbled in broken English, puffing on

his big cigar. 'Take your complaints to Ricki!'

Then, one morning it seemed that our luck had changed. Paul popped his head into my bedroom. 'Do you know what time it is?' He grinned. '10.30 and there's no sign of Pier.' No sooner had he said this than the police came to search Pier's room. His girlfriend was with them and she was crying. After they had left she told us that her boyfriend had attempted to rob a bank but had been caught in the act. She couldn't understand why we were all so pleased.

Our time was divided between Brussels and Paris, and we were becoming well known all over Europe with a huge following. We played with the Kinks and the Small Faces, and really felt as though we were at long last getting somewhere.

We had completed a mini tour with our last gig at Liege Football Club, and had finally sadly decided to disband and go our separate ways. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that instead of returning to our base in Comines, that we would make our way back to the UK. We had completed a tour of seven venues and been paid cash at each one. This meant that we had Ricki Stein's commission and were expected to deliver this to his office on the following Monday. This did not happen – we divided the money and returned home to England. First thing Monday morning Ricki Stein phoned me at my mother's house and went ballistic down the phone. He threatened that we would never work on the Continent ever again, and that he would do all in his power to make sure that we would pay for what we had done to him. I personally had no intention of returning to France or Belgium so it really did not matter.

In 1969 Marie Paul gave birth to a baby boy but vowed that I would never see him. At that point in my life I was too preoccupied with other things, and although I was pleased that I had a French son I had no intention of ever trying to see him. However, this all changed some years later.

When we lived on the continent there was always a never-ending line of girls waiting to be with us. We had women all over France, Belgium and Germany. They would often travel great distances just to be with us and stay in our hotel for a while. I know it sounds quite awful now, but I often got their names mixed up and sometimes even forgot their names completely. Although there were parts of the sixties I can't remember, I can recall most of it, and I can honestly say I would not have changed one thing.

After being out of the UK for so long, I did find it difficult to settle. Although I needed desperately to reform a new band, until I did I found myself 'between bands', as they say in the music business. My father made it clear to me that he did not want me lying in bed all day, and even suggested that I should get a 'real' job to get some money to pay for my keep. My father was a friend of the caretaker of Lawrence Road School just at the back of our house. Jimmy Rigby told my father he could get me the job as junior porter, and that the work would not be too hard. As I had never done a proper job in my life, I jumped at the opportunity. After all, it would only be for a couple of months. The job was great fun, and when I had swept the playgrounds in the morning at 9am, Jimmy allowed me to go home for my breakfast, where I would remain until just before mid-day. Mid afternoon Jimmy and I would be in the pub, where we would stay until just after 3pm, and then we would make our way back to put in a final appearance. I kept that job on and off for two years, and every time I returned from the continent I would work in the school.