



## Whence Come Song Ideas

*With apologies to John Carnes and Tom Paxton and others who have had similar experiences, the following is a transcription of the recorded response by Furman Voss, the nonexistent and prolific songwriter of Duluth, Minnesota, to my question, "Where do you get your song ideas?"*

"My first real finished song was **Cocktails with Lady**, written thirty years ago, approximately. To make a long story short, I was looking out the kitchen window because Lady -- I didn't name her by the way -- had been barking at something. The sofa was right by the window in the living room -- still is -- and Lady always sat on the back of the sofa, like a drooling throw pillow. Usually quietly, but this time she was barking at something; hair standing up on her back...

"The kitchen window and the living room window -- the one by the sofa -- both face north. So anyway I looked out and saw something odd out there that didn't register. It was late afternoon and the sun was starting to go toward setting, off to the left. It was almost September. Something was oscillating left to right, right to left, about five feet above the sidewalk, I guess fifteen feet from the house...

"We have big leafy maples on the boulevard, and it moved in and out of the shadows [which] made it hard to see; hard to analyze. It was the shape of, like, a hamburger, or just hamburger buns more like, I would have to say, or two bowls face to face. You know, a big lima bean. But all white in color; completely smooth and satiny, like a thick mint, five, six inches across...

"I knew it was not a bird or anything, unless it was a precocious egg [laughs]. No, it was a thing. Metal? Plastic? A non-living object, I still do believe. But did you ever have a feeling that you're looking right at something, and looking harder and harder at it, and you still can't tell what it is? Happens to me usually at night. It's like you find you're asking yourself very deliberately: 'What. Exactly. Am I. Looking. At.'

"At some point I remember deciding it was a toy probably, a radio control toy I hadn't heard about. There was no little engine sound I could hear, but maybe it was like a blimp toy. But it was still odd because there was nobody around. No kids or anything. Maybe one off behind the fence or something. We used to have quite a fence.

"But then this mint-burger stopped dead in the air for a second, and started moving toward me. I thought what in the WORLD. It kept coming and coming, and it's gonna hit the window, but it was coming so slowly, like drifting, I thought if it kept coming it would just bump into the window and bounce off. Incidentally, the dog had gone very quiet...

"I thought for a second I should grab the camera, but I didn't want to take my eyes off it. So I stood there. And it kept coming, and then: *It came right through the glass!* It blended through, as if the glass was water, like this thing was passing through a pane of water, but with no disturbances or ripples. I ducked, crouched right down to the floor. I'd had panic attacks before (though they didn't call them that back then) and I felt like well maybe this is it, I have lost my mind. This is a psychotic episode. I had talked myself down before, so I was saying, okay, okay, you are hallucinating, you'll go to the doctor, there's something wrong with your brain but they can fix you up. Don't worry; remember to breathe, etc...

"I stayed crouching down. And the little nightmare floated over my head, over to the table. We had the same kitchen table we do now, all full of stuff, crap piled all over. Towels, books, mail, door hinges, dog toys, the list goes on. We haven't sat down to eat at that table for twenty five years. Anyway, it went over, stopped, and landed down onto an apple! Balanced on an apple in a basket. Gala apple. All with no noise at all, not a peep, or a beep; nothing. Completely soundless.

"If it had come through, like, an open door, or up from the heating duct, I could have convinced myself I wasn't going nuts but just hadn't figured it out yet. But the way it went through the glass. It was exactly like the glass was NOT there. So the first thing I did, after unfreezing myself from crouching, was slowly stand up, never taking my eyes off the thing for one second, as it

sat stock still on the apple, and took my left hand and felt over to the window. I remember distinctly to this day it was my left hand. And I felt the glass. Tapped it. I had hoped that maybe for some bizarre reason there was no glass in the window, though I knew there was of course. And sure enough, 'tap, tap.'

"So now this gave me a real flush of yes, this is it, the brain has failed. You reach a point, and I've only reached it again once since then but I won't go into that, when you really feel that, yep, this is it. Funny to say but a sense of peacefulness comes over you. At least it did me. When you finally decide you have reached that point...

"This whole thing, from the time it came through the window until it left the apple was maybe four minutes. Maybe it was twenty minutes, maybe it was one minute. But I would say four, five minutes. I stayed there standing, and staring at it as you might imagine. Then: -- fffff -- up it bobs, and there I was between it and the window. So I inched over away from the window; it occurred to me that if it could mesh through glass it could mesh through ME, and I didn't think I wanted that. I let it have a clear shot to the window. And sure enough, same thing in reverse, I watched it go back, over the sink, right through the glass again. When I finally leaned over and looked out, it was gone. I didn't know what to do. Shirley was down at the lake, no phone. Should I call Ripley's? Call my sister? Call my other sister? Pour a drink?

"But the first thing I did, after looking real hard through the window a good while, was make myself tiptoe over and look at the apple. It was a Gala, did I say that, and they're mottled, yellowish and reddish. And right on the top, where the thing had perched, there were brown squiggles, like the color of a bruise, like the apple had been bruised, or burned. I took off my glasses -- I could always see great close up without my glasses -- and got up near, and it was a tiny sentence, in a pretty decent cursive: *'Write a song about unwinding with your dog.'*

"That was thirty years ago and since then, I always have Gala apples in a basket on the table. It's where all my song ideas have come from. No luck with Fuji or Viking, though once I did get a video idea on a Braeburn, and yesterday I found a haiku on a banana."