

Richie Havens - Blues Stories

by Michael "Hawkeye" Herman
(memoir written on 4/23/13)

In the early 1980s I regularly performed and hosted jams at Your Place, in Oakland, CA. On the night of Weds., Nov. 3rd, 1982, I was very excited about the fact that Richie Havens was booked to perform, solo, at the club.

Louis Keesee, the owner, told me to come early and he'd make sure I got a good seat, for free (!), down front, and that I could stay for both the 9 PM & 11 PM shows. I got to the venue at 8 PM, an hour before show time. I parked my car across the street from the club, on Telegraph Avenue.

To my amazement, Richie Havens was standing out in front of the club, alone, leaning against the wall smoking a cigarette. I walked right up to him, introduced myself (as a musician who plays at the club regularly), and we shook hands. He immediately gave me a big grin and he asked me questions about my music, the club, life in the East Bay Area, good food to be had nearby, and we chatted as if we'd known each other for years. I couldn't believe how open, warm, and friendly he was to a complete stranger.

After about 20 minutes of chat in front of the club, we entered together, and proceeded to the stage area; Richie getting on stage to prepare/tune for the show, and me sitting at a small table right down front.

Of course, I stayed for both the 9 PM & 11 PM shows. In between shows, after greeting his fans and signing autographs for folks, Richie came over and sat with me, like we were old friends, until it was time for the 2nd show. We chatted about music, guitar playing, and Life. I asked him about his guitar playing style and he explained the open tunings he used and that he always fretted his open tuned guitar over the top of the fingerboard, with his thumb, because he could never quite learn to play chords on a guitar in standard tuning. I told him he that he certainly needn't worry about fretting standard chords on the guitar ... and that his music is/was soulful, powerfully rhythmic, very dynamic, and highly original in approach. He was so gracious and thanked me for 'my kinds words' to him.

After Richie's second show, I took down one of the posters from the wall of the club that publicized the gig, and asked him to please sign it for me. He responded with another big, warm smile, and said something like, "Of course, my good friend."

As you can see, he wrote:

"A friend forever & ever.

Health Peace Love

Richie Havens"

I thanked him profusely for the autograph, for his music, and for taking the time to hang out with a fan and admiring fellow musician.

He said, "Thank YOU for being here with me tonight. It was a pleasure hanging out with you. I hope our paths cross again."

We shook hands, wished each other well, and I left with a wonderful autographed memento of the evening, a full heart of great feelings for Richie Havens, his Spirit, and his talent and music.

I'm sorry to say, we never crossed paths again.

The autographed poster hangs in the music room of my home.

Fond memories of a great musician and true gentle man.

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