

After two years of studying acting at a conservatory following graduation from high school in his hometown of Houston, Texas, Rick Bollinger decided it was time to move west to pursue his dreams. His path eventually led to San Diego State University, where he continued to develop his stagecraft and complete a degree in Film and Television Production in 1992. Along the way, he directed a one-man show, Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* - a play centered entirely on the story of a man who commits the telling of his life to a tape recorder. It was an experience that would come into play as art began to graphically imitate life within Bollinger's life - and in a dramatic fashion that brings us to today.

After completing the production, Bollinger had a chance meeting that further changed his own life. On a visit with a friend to Ocean Beach, Bollinger was introduced to Clint Cary, who most would agree was extraordinary as an artist, alcoholic, psychotic and promoter of a story that he had twice been contacted by aliens from the planet Rillispore in the galaxy of Rigel. His recounting of the stories, along with his penchant for giving a "number" to those he met led to his moniker as "The Spaceman of Ocean Beach." If few Ocean Beach residents and visitors during the 60's and 70's could tell you who Clint Cary was, most could tell you who the "Spaceman" was, often with a story that involved receiving a number that

was spoken to them or printed on a card. It represented their place in line when two spaceships would arrive from Rillispore to save Cary's chosen ones upon the demise of earth and transport them to the safety of the distant planet. Ask a long-time OB'er what their number is and nearly all will immediately know what you are talking about, with some pulling a tattered and worn from their wallet, well you know, just in case.

One of the most compelling aspects of Cary's life as an artist is that his experience traveling to and from Rillispore eventually and understandably lead to a dramatic change in the focus of his art. His work on portraits, often commissioned by the studios or the artists themselves gave way to incredible "space- influenced" art that conveyed both the conscious, sub-conscious and at times nearly unconscious images prolifically produced by a highly fertile and imaginative mind.

Cary's story was so fascinating and well known, that he appeared on television with local icon Bob Dale and another time with an ambitious but unpolished young man by the name of Regis Philbin who was just breaking into the business. The colorful banter about space travel between Cary and his interviewers was further enhanced by the fanciful and even more colorful fluorescent paintings appearing behind them. The art was rising in value and so intriguing, that it was widely featured in gallery showings and

live appearances from San Diego to Paris.

If those were the penthouse days for Cary, it is fair to say that he was soon on his way to the outhouse as a result of the consequences of behavior fueled by alcohol and troubled mind of a man who did pretty well with the first few steps of a 12-step program, but not so well on the rest.

Predictably, public intoxication lead to multiple brushes with the law, allegations and citizen complaints associated with Carey's hand-to-mouth existence on the streets and in the alleys of Ocean Beach. Derelict, unpredictable, cantankerous and notably unpleasant when drunk, the Cary who at one time seemed destined to become one of the most interesting, enduring and colorful threads in the fabric of Ocean Beach history and life became a persona non grata. Legal troubles and a competency hearing lead to Patton State Mental Hospital, an unsurprising diagnosis of psychosis and banishment from Ocean Beach for a period of seven years. Much of his time away was spent living mostly clean, producing art and working at a North Dakota fish camp where he managed to generally stay out of trouble.

Supported by a handful of loyalists, OB's Spaceman returned, but he did not arrive alone. Despite counseling, stints of sobriety and the help of well-intended supporters, the alcoholism and psychosis brewed not far beneath the surface. Tragically, but predictably they lead to more trouble

following a brutal attack by a man who did not take kindly to a drunk's comments about his female companion. The visionary artist was left beaten, broken and totally blind.

By the time Bollinger met and listened to Cary's story, the artist was confined to a wheelchair and had switched from painting extraordinarily precise pictures with brushes to vague and less colorful designs painted with his fingers. Dazzling and original works by Clint Cary that had shown and been sold in widespread galleries had been replaced by finger painted shadows sold from a dilapidated wheelchair by the blind artist himself for whatever the buyer was willing to pay - all in the effort of a struggling and mostly homeless man trying to get by for another day.

Clearly in awe by the story and fresh from his production and direction of Krapp's Last Tape, Bollinger was floored by the story, convinced that it could be compellingly told thru film or a theatrical production. When he made that comment to Cary, the Spaceman said, "If you think I've got a story to tell, you should go see Bob Oaks. He's a terrific sax playing jazz musician who lives in the last cottage above the pier and hosts visiting jazz musicians - some of them coming down from studio work in LA, for all night jams every Sunday evening."

Intrigued by the story, but also a fan of jazz, Bollinger preceded as

directed to the cottage, knocked on the door and was met with a gruff, “come on in,” by a man he’d never met. A well worn drum set sat in one corner and a piano in another, but it was the walls that mesmerized Bollinger. A virtual museum display of one man’s history of jazz hung from walls covered with music posters, photos of musicians and bands, numerous images of Oaks’ hero and friend Louie Armstrong, and a stuffed pheasant that had seen much better days, presumably none of them in OB.

After learning that Oaks was perhaps the Spaceman’s last friend, had long promoted him as an artist and worked to develop a Spaceman “brand” for his artwork, Bollinger revealed his newly hatched interest in learning more, enough to write a screenplay about the Spaceman, including Oaks’ loyal and devoted support. Wishing aloud that there were tapes of interviews pertaining to the two men and their relationship, Bollinger got more than he had bargained for as Oaks led him to a large chest.

“Open that,” said Oaks. Bollinger complied by lifting the lid, revealing yet another box. “Take that out,” said Oaks” Again Bollinger obliged. “You want tapes of interviews and conversations,” growled Oaks, “open that box and take them.”

Now 22 years later, Bollinger is not sure if opening that final box and accepting its contents was a curse or a blessing. Inside were 62 reel to reel

tapes - 93 hours of recordings that included many of the Sunday jazz jams and quite a few in which Cary and Oaks, much like Beckett's Krapp's offered up the details of their lives to the microphone of a tape recorder.

Bollinger was awed, but overwhelmed. Within 30 minutes of meeting the musician, Oaks had handed over a large chunk of his life to Bollinger, beginning a close friendship between the two men. Bollinger and his wife married in the front yard of Oaks rented cottage overlooking a Pacific Ocean that pounded at cliffs below them. The two men remained so close that Oaks signed over to Bollinger any rights to his own story along with a number of his own treasured mementos and art work. They met regularly during that time with Bollinger doing what he could to help his slowly dying friend. By the time of Oaks death in 1997, Bollinger had begun to wonder if the treasure of tapes found in the chest and the promise to tell the story of the two men had actually become more of an albatross that weighed heavily around his neck.

Offered a job in Hollywood working on the Matlock television series, Bollinger and his wife moved north.;.Downtime and nights allowed him to begin the tedious task of listening to, cataloging and transcribing the tapes. It was then that Bollinger had an epiphany of sorts, deciding that the real story was about the kindly Oaks, and what he meant to the communities of

jazz and Ocean Beach, along with his unwavering dedication to the largely fruitless and thankless effort of doing what he could to keep the Spaceman grounded and out of trouble. Yes, thought Bollinger, the Spaceman was more colorful and far more widely known than Oaks, but it was Oaks who was the far better person and whose story needed to be told. Spaceman would become the vehicle driven at often reckless speeds that would lead audiences to Bob Oaks, and with that the albatross became a little bit lighter, but not so much that it is not still an ominous burden for a man with a story to tell.

In 2003, Bollinger rented Dizzy's, a Gaslamp Quarter jazz club and took his first stab at telling the story publicly and with mixed results.

“At the time,” said Bollinger, “I was driven to tell the story. It had been six years since Bob had died and I needed to do something. I had plenty of experience and an education in theatre. Armed with all of the information I could ask for, I thought I could write a good script, but the fact is it wasn't good enough and didn't tell the story with the passion I had for telling the story as I wanted to.”

Raising two young daughters with his wife and accepting a position managing the City of San Diego's cable television station took precedence. The Spaceman project went on the shelf, but it was low one as Bollinger

used every bit of spare time to hone his writing skills under the guidance of a professional writing instructor. As a member of an advanced writing group, he opened himself and his work to criticism that at times was merciless, all needed he says for a man honing his craft to better tell his story.

And says Bollinger, “Now’s the time. We are presenting a staged reading of my screenplay; performed by ten actors , with six top flight jazz musicians on board to play jazz as it was played by Oaks and his friends in their Sunday Jams. Many of the actors and musicians are well known to local audiences. The Ocean Beach Playhouse has been rented for our opening night on Friday August 9, and two shows including a matinee on Saturday August 10. The walls of the theatre and entry way will be covered with original paintings by the Spaceman and illuminated with blacklights as they were created to be shown. As the audience begins to arrive - and for the small admission price of \$15, they will hear great live jazz, meet many others with Space Numbers, be dazzled by the paintings and exposed to a unique multimedia stage production. “We are going to do everything we can to pull audience members into the vibe and take them back in time which is going to be great in its portrayal of two iconic characters from OB’s past.

And where Bollinger was asked, will his story go from there? “I want to accomplish three things that will help to determine the trajectory from this point on. The first is to get this thing that has been with me for over 20 years out to a wider audience, because in addition to being a true labor of love, the obligation I have to the story and a truly wonderful and great man like Bob Oaks has been humbling. Secondly, I have the obligation **to not** only entertain, but to enthrall our audience, Thirdly, I hope to get this script in front of Woody Harrelson who I identified as the perfect actor to portray the Spaceman of Ocean Beach from day one, Woody doesn’t know that he has the job, but I’m hoping by some miracle he or his agent will find time to look at my script. Of course I’m also hoping someone else from the film or theatre world will see or hear about the production, see the same story that I see and want to tell it to a larger audience.”

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