

Ramblin' Jack Elliott – Film Star

7/20/2000

Folk music icon Ramblin' Jack Elliott blew back into Park City over the weekend. This trip was actually planned. He just didn't end up here as part of his never-ending ramblin' around the globe. His daughter's film *The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack* was premiering at the Sundance Film Festival, so he stopped by to see it. He was on his way somewhere else, however.

Jack first partook of Park City during a very brief sojourn back in 1973. He was hanging around the bunkhouse up at John Barlow's ranch out of Cora, Wyoming when a couple of Park City folks drug him down our way. He spent a week or so hunkered down on their couch up on Sand Ridge and spent much of his idle time spinning yarns and pickin' on that famous Martin D-28 guitar.

During that stay he tasted many a local delight as he rambled up and down Main Street singing for his "supper." Ol' Jack was appetite-rich back in them days. He even strapped on a pair of boards and made it out Park West way for a vegetable-enhanced skiing experience.

Jack has always been punctuality-challenged. One evening he wandered in to hastily scheduled show at "Utah Coal and Lumber" restaurant a good hour or so late. He had gotten high-centered on some of Virginia's enchiladas and saw no reason to break away. He never seems to remember me but he never forgets the enchiladas.

Another evening saw him mosey into "The Handlebar" on upper Main Street. Before long the old galoot was on-stage astride a stool and taking requests. He was in his element. He was Ramblin' Jack Elliott and he was a-ramblin'. On and on he rambled.

His nickname, you see, didn't come from criss-crossing the planet. The mother of famed folkster Odetta planted it on him due to his inability to ever truly conclude a thought. It's not his fault that his mind is just too crammed full of information profoundly associated with the original thread, whatever it was.

This mannerism would be a burr under our collective saddle blanket if his "ramblings" weren't such a treasure-trove of our oral traditions of cowboys, truck drivers, square rigged sailors, merchant mariners, road bums, and minstrels like himself. He may never answer your question but, no matter, you'll wandering away believing you're better for it.

You stand in awe of the obviously bizarre neuron activity buzzin' in his brain and the colloquial banter that follows. You could care less that you ended up afar from your desired destination. It doesn't take much time in Jack's company to realize you can't get there from here. Where you do end up, however, is usually a much more interesting place than where you originally wanted to go. I'm glad I don't have that problem.

Now where was I? Oh yeah, Jack was astride that stool in The Handlebar and he was pickin', ramblin' and singin' about Danville girls and Peterbuilt trucks and banana trees and Flo's petunias and mule skinnners. He was just getting started. Later on he would find his way down to Salt Lake City where he would continue his musical musings throughout the night on a radio show of the time.

A few years later saw Jack scrambling off a private jet with John Prine in tow for a couple of shows that same evening at the Egyptian Theater. The Ramblin' man was returning to Park City's Main Street. Consensus among those present soon had Jack holding court in the airport bar. His ramblin's evolved into discourse, of course, and before we knew it Jack was at the wheel of my car careening up Parley's Canyon.

At that time we were only 45 minutes late for the first show. Prine loved it. He was touring the Rockies with the legendary Ramblin' Jack Elliott and he wasn't about to let a pissed-off Austin, Texas promoter ruin his rodeo. The powers that be decided the answer to their predicament was to pack two-pounds of crowd into a one-pound house. We even got a pre-Gabby Gourmet Fred Wix in with us. Well, a pre-gourmet, anyway.

From what I've heard this weekend went as scheduled. As far as I know Jack wasn't late for the premier of his daughter's film on Friday night or for the various parties that grace these activities. I do know that he did arrive before the house lights dimmed prior to the showing of *The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack* at the Yarrow Hotel on Sunday morning.

Ramblin' Jack's daughter Aiyana Elliott has put together a beautiful film that, through archival footage and interviews, spins the fascinating story of his career while at the same time telling her own, a poignant search for self and father. It is a two-edged coin being the daughter of a famed troubadour. Neither during her early years nor those that would follow was there time for much one-on-one.

Although the film is finished, the search continues. The experience they had together, he as subject and her as filmmaker, has, no doubt, brought them a better understanding of one another. To those who saw them together during the Q and A which followed the film there is an obvious love which should get them through her yearning and his ramblin'. In fact, from their case, I think you can get there from here.

Where was Ramblin' Jack headed after Park City? Why, the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, of course.