

## Oh God, it's Fred!

September 1999

Joe,

About 4 weeks ago I was climbing with TM in Tuolumne. We had gotten a late 10:30 AM start and people were already on South Crack, so I insisted that we race up the Eunuch. We did. Back at the base in less than an hour and a half and seeing that the South Crack route was still jammed up with helmeted climbers with huge racks and brand new chalk bags, I convinced Herbert to run up that route just left of West Country. Before I could get TM moving from the car, a young climber with Asian features approached me and asked if I was looking for a climbing partner. I responded, Not really, despite appearances, I had a climbing partner ... see, there he is ... the one with the stupid looking hat. I added that he was not only my climbing partner, but that on occasion he passed as my father. The kid was looking askance at my 20 year old swami belt whose knot no longer had the appropriate length to gird my expanding waistline, and at my distinct lack of a chalk bag. Then I mentioned that HE, my partner, was the famous TM Herbert.

The kid was aghast and agape ... not THE TM Herbert! Yes, I replied, none other. He wanted to be introduced immediately and just casually remarked that he, too, was climbing with a legend. Fred Beckey! I said, Fred Beckey, where? Right there. In that car. I looked back and there, not more than ten feet away, seated in his car and absorbed in some written material in his lap, was Fred Beckey.

Fred, you old fart! How the hell are you?, as I approached the car, not knowing whether old Fred would even know who I was.

Lauria, what the hell are you doing here?

He recognized me. I was flattered. I'm climbing you old fucker, I'm climbing with TM.

TM? Is he still coming up here?

Well, things settled down. TM came up. Fred got out of the car. We all shook hands. Fred was stooped and looked every year of his 80-some-odd. He had an injured foot and was limping which only added to the impression of his advancing age. We learned that, true to form, he had somehow convinced this young Asian to drive him down from Seattle to the Sierra so that they might go into the Palisades area to do some new secret Beckey route. But now, because of his injured foot, they had detoured to Tuolumne so that the kid might at least get in some climbing.

TM and I pried ourselves away from the ever loquacious Beckey and ran up our proposed route. We returned to the base to find South Crack open and again had to pull away from Fred to be next on the route. By 3:00 PM we were back at the car with Fred. Herbert was still insisting that Fred get an X-ray and Fred, who is more deaf than I am, was either ignoring the suggestion or the message was not getting through his faulty ear canals. In fact, the two of them, although apparently talking to each other, were by outward appearances carrying on two separate conversations. Neither of them was listening or maybe just not hearing the other.

TM and I finally excused ourselves and headed back to the Tuolumne store for a six pack which was subsequently downed in back of the Chevron station. After listening to Herbert expound on the necessity of x-rays in diagnostic medicine for over an hour, I managed to slip away and back to Bishop by 5:30 PM. So old Fred is still out there, but man, he's starting to look like a dirt bag.

Don