

***Midnite's***  
***Journey***

**One Man's Improbable  
Voyage Through America's Reality**

*by* Dana Silkiss

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TXu2-055-722

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg, Germany

ISBN

978-3-7439-9296-2 (Paperback)

978-3-7439-9297-9 (Hardcover)

978-3-7439-9298-6 (e-Book)

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When slavery was legally abolished, a new set of laws called the Black Codes emerged to criminalize legal activity for African Americans. Through the enforcement of these laws, acts such as standing in one area of town or walking at night, for example, became the criminal acts of “loitering” or “breaking curfew,” for which African Americans were imprisoned. A system of convict leasing was developed to allow white “owners” in the South to literally purchase prisoners to live on their property and work under their control. Through this system, bidders paid an average \$25,000 a year to the state, in exchange for control over the lives of all of the prisoners. The system provided revenue for the state and profits for the owners.

Just a few decades later, we are witnessing the return of all of these systems of prison labor exploitation. Private corporations are able to lease factories in prisons, as well as lease prisoners out to their factories. Private corporations are running prisons-for-profit. Government-run prison factories operate as multibillion dollar industries in every state, and throughout the federal prison system. In the most punitive and racist prison systems, we are even witnessing the return of the chain gang.

**Amendment XIII. Section 1:**

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

*-December 6, 1865*

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## Prologue

(Midnite's Epiphany)

Actually, I was eight years old when I first realized something was wrong. I mean, I had my share of fights in the neighborhood, due to my being half-Jewish. (What the other half was didn't seem to matter, I suppose, as long as it wasn't Quaker or some other "different" religion.)

Anyway, what made the impression on me started in a local Catholic church. I had gone to Sunday mass with my best friend and had particularly enjoyed a sermon, spoken quite eloquently, by the monsignor, relating the message of how one should "love thy neighbor" & "do unto others" etc. . . .

That night I was playin' at my friend David's house and, lo & behold, there was the monsignor talkin' to David's parents. The three of them had obviously had a few too many. As I had always been too curious for my own good, I snuck into the room and hid behind the sofa, figuring they were so drunk they would never notice me. I got myself situated just in time to hear the (very proper) monsignor saying "The gall of some people! I was in *my* pulpit, giving my morning

sermon, when two niggers tried to get into *my* church. Of course, they were politely ushered out, as quickly as possible, and that was that! Why do they have to make trouble and come to *my* church? I mean why can't they stay with their own kind?" he very indignantly (and drunkenly) proclaimed.

I felt as tho' I had been hit over the head with a baseball bat. Yeah, the bat from heaven. Here was somebody highly revered in our community. This religious, prestigious and influential man, who, as I reluctantly, admitted to myself, had had a profound influence on my life, now became a devil to me. I had heard beautiful ideas and lessons coming out of his mouth in the church but the exact opposite spewed forth now. In my naiveté, I was dumbstruck. How could people have such a dichotomy of actions and thoughts, not to mention false preachings? Why say what you don't believe? Merely to mouth something you didn't believe in, or was it to uphold other people's beliefs and views in you and/or your religion?

As the days passed, I pondered the events I had witnessed. Why? Are people *really* different? I was in turmoil. Were all those things everybody said about "other

people” really true? (It seemed like everybody was “them.”) And then it hit me! People I hung out with, or knew, said things about my father, for being Jewish, which I definitely knew had no bearing in reality. At that point in time I realized I had just found one of my callings: to investigate the great paradox of mankind and life itself.

# Chapter I

## (Avenging Angel)

Florida was hot! So was the lady I wasn't with. It had been a good week, up to that point. I had flown down to Miami to check out some friends & play some music. Political, musical and free lovin' All the ingredients of a superb formula. What I hadn't expected in Miami was the reactionary atmosphere blowin' around. I had figured it would be filled with old, retired liberal New Yorkers. Wrong again! There didn't seem to be anybody in view who wasn't spewing the ignorant rhetoric of the times (no, not the *N.Y. Times*) Hippie! Nigger! Pinko-queer! Subversive Russian! Dirty Commie! The commentaries of our modern age. The ruling class. Uh, probably the elite of our country.

Anyway, I finished my musical obligation in a hurry, left Miami and worked my way up to Daytona Beach, figuring I'd catch some rays and just relax for a while. I got into town April 14, 1976. around 7:30 a.m., a Wednesday morning. I hitched across one of the bridges to the beachfront areas, walked down the strip and looked for a decent place to grab something to eat. Well, I was so

hungry; I ended up at the first place I went to. Good ol' Hojo's. Land of the orange roof. As soon as I got inside, I headed straight for the bathroom, pissed for what seemed like twenty minutes, washed up and tried to make myself presentable. Feelin' refreshed, I walked out to a table, sat down & waited for a waitress to take my order. Meanwhile I was daydreaming, trying to figure out what the hell my next move was going to be, when through a (very thick) haze, I heard someone saying

“Excuse me sir! May I take your order, or do you need a menu?”

Comin' out of my daze, probably due to no sleep for the last 36 hours, I slowly looked up at the speaker and was momentarily stunned. This lady was a waitress? She was true perfection, classic art come to life. In other words, my type of beauty.

“Uh, give me two eggs over easy, toast, coffee and tomato juice”

I not too intelligently said for lack of any better verbiage.

*“God damn, she's fine! I've got to think of something fast. -Southern rap #forty-two, yeah right!”* I thought.

“Excuse me, miss,” I half-assed spit out, “I'm new around here. Are there any

good music clubs, or any like spots to hang out? I've only been here for a couple of hours and need to find some music contacts, so I can make some money," I grinned.

She laughed, "I'm not gonna be much help to you, my man, I'm from Jersey."

Trying to quickly regroup my shit, I said, in the vernacular of the times, "Why don't we hang together and find something to do?"

The rest of my meal was great, as we got to know each other, with a little small talk, and then she agreed; we set a time & place and I left.

*"Good lord, hot steamin'! I'm a lucky man," I thought. "Lucky! Lucky! Lucky! Daytona's gonna be alright! Enough free-wheelin', time for me to get clean. Um, let's see, I have about six hours before ... before I'm to meet...., shit! I forget to get her name. Oh well, if &/or when I see her again, I'll find out soon enough."*

As I walked along the beautiful beachfront area of Daytona, I checked out the local populace. People were loose and carefree, there was an almost California -type atmosphere. That I liked. What I didn't like were all the police cars everywhere. Not cruising, just sitting...waiting... "Waiting for

what,” I wondered. Ever get that feeling, that small knot in the pit of your stomach? That first twinge of paranoia. *“Oh! Come on,”* I chided myself. *“The most illegal thing I’d done lately was hitchhike. Cool-out,”* I told myself.

With a sudden change of mood, I walked briskly towards my unknown destination. I wanted a place to rest, but not some Ramada Inn or Hilton. Something just a little quainter. I wanted to be among the people. I stayed away from the tourist areas. I wasn’t in the mood for that scene. Day dreamin’, walkin’, searchin’, hmm, always searchin’!

*“Guess I’ll hang here for a week, or so, I did leave Miami in kind of a hurry. Gotta get back to school soon. Well, fairly soon, anyway. But then again, I’ll see what happens with this fine young lady. As usual, play it by ear. There! That looks perfect!”*

A summer cottage with a sign; For rent-daily-weekly-monthly (with a phone number). I slowly walked around the cottage, really inspecting it. Nice yard, pretty shutters. I peered through the windows. Wow! Absolutely gorgeous. I went directly to the nearest phone booth and called the number. The landlady gave me her address and told me to stop by right away. Twenty-two

minutes later, I had made all the arrangements and paid for a week in advance, quickly walked back to “my” cottage and opened the front door. Whew. No hassles. Solitude at last. I inspected the entire house and was relieved to see the rest of it was as quaint and immaculate as the part of the house I had seen from the outside. The freakin’ house had everything you could possibly expect. Out of habit I opened the fridge door and was surprised to see one beer.

“*What the hell,*” I thought, as I opened the can and silently toasted the landlady for being so thoughtful. By now it was all of 10:00 a.m. I’d been in town for 2 1/2 hours, had a nice little place to stay and had met a beautiful lady.

“*Damn!*” I was thinking, “*I’d definitely been down worse roads before.*”

Wanting to keep my “roads” open, I deduced that I’d better take a nice hot-steamin’ shower, as I always found I ran across fewer detours when I was clean and smellin’ good. Twenty minutes later I felt like a new man. Calculating that I had about four hours before I had to meet Miss X, I decided to leave my humble abode and further check out my surroundings. Walking directly to the beach, I was pleasantly surprised to see cars, dune buggies and motorcycles actually riding

on the sand! They weren't even sinking! Strange, but true.

I walked for about two hours. Fresh air, sun, sea, dunes and scrub grass. Man, this was a different world. Clear, pollution-free skies & everything. Shit! New York (my home town) was still 30 degrees, not to mention in Colorado, where I had come from, before my journey to Miami. Here it musta been close to 90 degrees. "*Was I nuts to think about goin' back to the Apple, or Colorado?*" I wondered.

Suddenly my attention was ripped from my thoughts by an occurrence directly across the street. I saw three cops throw this black man onto his back, slam a billy club directly into his testicles and repeatedly smash his head into the sidewalk. Not being able to just stand by and be a witness, I ran to the other side of the street, and as innocently as I could, I asked, "Excuse me officer, but what exactly has this man done?"

"What has he done?" He mocked me, "Well, let me see, he was born a nigger."

He looked me in the eye and spat out, "And I had nothing else to do this fine morning. Why you asking?" he snarled at me. "You're not one of them commie nigger-lovers, are you?"

“Well,” I said, “you got one outta two right. Listen, please give me your badge number, and when I speak to your captain, let’s see who loves who, o.k., Mr. Super cop?”

At this moment the other two cops stopped hitting the man, who I determined was about my age, and picked him up by his hair. Either they looked slightly worried, or angry, I couldn’t get a clear vibe on them right away.

The cop I had directed my questions at put his gun to my neck and “whispered” in my ear, “Listen to me, you’re lucky there’s a crowd, or I’d let you join your buddy over there! You have twenty-four hours to get the hell out of Daytona or no one will ever hear from you again.”

“Fuck you!” I screamed, as loud as I could, tearing myself away from him and towards the crowd that was gathering at a fast rate. “Where do you think this is, fucking Germany, this is supposed to be Amerika, you asshole, you fucking asshole!” I screamed repeatedly.

The three cops dropped the man and jumped into their prowl cars, put their sirens on and screeched out of there. I was shaking, angry and scared.

*“Whew! Either I was nuts or just plain stupid,”* I couldn’t decide which. But what the hell was I doing? Worrying about myself?” I leaned down and took a careful look at the man I had just saved. He was dressed in ivy league clothes, had expensive jewelry and two diamond earrings in his left ear. I slowly turned him over. Wow! The cops had really done a number on him. His shirt was ripped open and his chest was bleeding from the midpoint and along his entire left side to his waist. His scalp was bleeding, but I couldn’t tell from where, cause his afro was about ten inches long. He was moaning and incoherent. I looked around and shouted at the onlookers to call an ambulance. One by one they drifted away, without saying anything. It was fuckin’ incredible. What the hell was wrong with people? I wasn’t asking them to get involved. Seeing that I would have to take things into my own hands, I said, “Listen buddy, I’m gonna help you, I’m picking you up and bringing you to that bench over there. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

He mumbled something and nodded his head in the affirmative. I slung his arm over my head and around my neck. I grabbed his waist with my other hand and, as gently as I could, hoisted him up. We limped over to

the bench, where, luckily, there was also a pay phone. I put him back down and walked over to the phone booth, called a cab, (luckily, the Taxi company's number was on the wall of the booth!) told the dispatcher to hurry and making a quick decision, gave him my "home" address. I figured the black dude's injuries weren't life threatening and didn't want to go through all the inevitable red tape that the hospital would make him and me go through. I ran over to my new friend. He was looking around with eyes that appeared much clearer than before.

He looked at me and just studied my face.

"Why did you do it, why'd you help me?" He asked.

"Why?" I foolishly repeated. "Because I saw you gettin' hurt and unless you had robbed or murdered someone, I couldn't see anyone gettin' done to them what I saw back there. And seeing where we are, I highly doubted that."

"Man, I have never had a white dude help me, or many black people, for that matter," he dubiously said. "What do you want, white boy?"

In spite of the circumstances, I started laughing and said, "Direct your paranoia to where it belongs. I just stuck my neck out for

you, which should tell you something. And as far as what I want, I want to take you to my house and fix up your wounds, get you something to eat, and then you can do whatever you want. Well, here's our cab, what do you want to do? I've got things to accomplish today."

"Listen, I'm sorry," he said, as he extended his hand.

I grasped his hand and said "Let's forget all the bullshit; you've been through a lot. My name's Midnite."

Still grasping my hand, he stared at me and said "Wait a minute! Midnite, fucking Midnite the guitar genius? I don't fuckin' believe this. Holy shit! Man. Uh, my name's Marc, Marc Johnson."

"What the fuck you love birds doin'?" The cabby shouted. "Are youse guys comin' or what?"

"Yeah, yeah," I said, "we're with yah."

We were lost in our own thoughts on the ride back to my house. When we arrived, Marc said, "I'm paying the fare." I thanked him; we got out and went into the house. "Nice place," Marc said.

"I'm just passing through," I replied, "here for a little R&R in between gigs."

“Well, it sure looks like heaven to me right now,” Marc wearily replied.

As I watched him painfully go into the living room, I said “Marc, listen, man. I want you to feel at home here. There’s a phone in the kitchen, there’s a clean bathroom and I think you should take a hot shower, clean up those wounds, and, maybe you’ll start feeling a little better. While you’re doing all that, I’m gonna do some food shopping. Is there anything in particular you need, besides bandages and shit like that?”

Marc looked at me and said, “You know, I don’t understand you. I mean you don’t even fuckin’ know me and you practically save my life, bring me to your house, let me do whatever I want, go to get me supplies, and now you’re gonna leave me alone in your house. What the fuck!!?”

“Yah, man,” I said, “I’ll see you later, dude.”

“Wait a minute!” he yelled, here, take some money, don’t fuckin’ argue, get us some steaks, champagne, cognac, lots of food, lots of ointments and bandages, and whatever else you want. Now here, just take this and I’ll see you when you get back.”

I went outside, smiling. “This dude seems to be alright. At least I didn’t save some asshole from those country cops.” As I