

The Escape Artist

Repair your Mind, Body & Soul from Inside



Anthony Morrocco

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Anthony Morrocco

Published by Morrocco Method Int'l
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The Escape Artist

Introduction

The Escape Artist: Repair your Mind, Body & Soul from Inside is more than just a book about hair. It's a book about developing a balanced, holistic lifestyle and a positive attitude using hair as the path to realizing both. The message is that looking great and feeling great are mutually dependent. Follow the recommendations in this book, use Morrocco Method International Five Elements Hair and Body Care products, and not only will you have a luxurious head of hair, but you'll feel great too!

Anthony Morrocco, founder and CEO of Morrocco Method International Five Elements Hair Care, knows the hair care business better than almost anyone in the world. To prove this point, *Awaken Your Roots* begins with Anthony sharing his journey. From a boy inspired by nature and the magic of hair, through his world travels and time at Kenneth's of New York, he becomes a world-renowned stylist and one of the foremost hair colorists. His mysterious path even leads to becoming a "hair shaman." He also reveals tales of his encounters and successes with supermodels, movie stars and the financial and political elite.

Anthony's knowledge and ability to treat any hair and scalp condition are legendary. When he was actively treating clients, the rich and famous would fly in from all parts of the world for hair thinning and loss consultations and treatments. Clients such as Martin Sheen's wife and daughter would travel to Anthony from Los Angeles for years, to consult and receive assistance. Clients would drive from Santa Barbara, Montecito, Los Angeles and as far away as San Diego to Anthony's salon in Laguna Beach. Clients regularly flew in from France, England, Australia, Canada and throughout the U.S. for blunt-snip haircutting sessions.

Anthony's star-studded following led the media to seek him out in his own right. He has been written about in *People* and *In Style* Magazines, featured on CBS Prime Time News and cited as having the only truly natural hair care product line by the *New York Times*. Anthony has himself written articles for numerous international magazines and created several websites devoted to his products and knowledge.

Chapter 1: The Universe Spoke - I Listened



I'm Antonio and I want to share my story with you about becoming a Hair Shaman and my adventures of Hair Mastery for the past 75 years of Mystery and Magic. Together we will share our journey on the Road Less Traveled experiencing Freedom from the Known to the Challenge of Change. In my first story we start with my memory of around three or four years old, having my very first FLOW Experience and calling in the Law of Attraction along with the Power of Intention. The Law of Attraction clearly shows us at a very young age what we are Truly Desiring: It's a TIMELESS element that allows us to Follow Our Bliss. Clearly at three years of age one does not truly understand what the words CHI / PRANA / LIFE FORCE are and it was not until my early 20's that I came into contact with the SECRET of the Law of Attraction, which started spelling out those meanings in an adult dimension.

A Mystical Discovery

I can recall the first time my soul awakened. I was maybe three or four years old. Certainly, long before going to kindergarten. On that day, I somehow walked out of my 3rd floor apartment and I went down the street and across the road—I don't know

how I got there all by myself—to a field very far from my house (at least far from a three- or four-year-old perspective). In the middle of this field was a raised mound, covered with grass, violets, lilies-of-the-valley, grasshoppers and praying mantises crawling or hopping all around. I walked up the mound and sat down right in the middle of it. Then the Universe revealed itself to me through the microcosm of this little mound of Earth and through the megacosm in a timeless FLOW STATE thus experiencing the Universal Energies in a timeless state of BEING ONE with the Universe. As time stood still, CHI Energies instilled in me that All Life is ONE and Everything that Lives is HOLY. Plants, Animals, and Humanity all must Live in Harmony Consciously.

It would be years before I could find the language to describe exactly what I'd experienced. Even then, I was discovering that "Chi," the vital life force of our universe according to Chinese tradition, the energy that comes down to us from the mysteries of the universe, does not initially touch the body, it touches the hair! Although I didn't know then that there are five types of hair on the body, the idea occurred to

me that grass and bushes were the hair of nature. I could see their Chi in colored auras of the grass, in shades of green pulsing vibrant and alive, bushes with their brilliant greens shooting five to ten feet beyond their branches, and flowers vibrating with colors I'd never seen nor imagined before. Violets particularly captivated me with their intense shades of undulating purple and emerald green.

I witnessed the life force exuding out of each praying mantis and grasshopper. It was an otherworldly experience. Whatever was happening with all this energy, I was beginning to formulate my earliest understanding that the Chi Energies were first touching the plants' leaves, insects, and flowers transforming into radiant colors, entering the branches and trunks, flowing down into roots and the earth and finally getting grounded.

When I went home that day, and for some time afterwards, when I was with my parents, I would say things like: "Look at the color! Look at the energy coming out of you." And they would answer: "Stop that Antonio! You're just dreaming. You must stop. It's very naughty to say those things because people don't want to hear them. It's not real, only your dream telling you these things."

So, then I shut down and went inward and created a world where I could live with these Chi Energies, thus creating an inner world that would grow and blossom. I later came in contact with these forces again but by then I would be getting confirmation from Masters and Teachers on how to formulate these Chi Energies into healthy, healing living energies to heal oneself and everything around oneself, echoing the great phrase "Physician heal Thyself". That would become my Mantra again and again as each shocking experience revealed itself as I met REMARKABLE men and women who would grow my awareness, both inner and outward, thus creating The Third World.

Now I wish to share this with you as we journey together into the Mystery and Magic of the Hair Shaman through fairy tales and biblical stories, dialoguing together to ponder and unravel these mysteries for healing oneself naturally through nature and natural energies, free for all to partake in them.

When my first Spiritual Master, George I Gurdjieff, was asked the question: "Mr. Gurdjieff, you are so enlightened that you can see the past and the future, tell me why I am here and what am I supposed to be doing in order to earn a living or to make a difference. What is my purpose?"

Mr. Gurdjieff would reply with mind boggling answers like: "We all have an Inner Talent and our purpose is to find out what this is and to use it to our advantage. Our inner talent is not something that we like or dislike, it is simply what we do best, whether we like it or not. Simply do what you do best and you will always be successful and be of service to humanity."

We all have an inner talent, a gift that we bring with us upon being born here in this lifetime, a memory from our past stored in our DNA. A very individual and a very valuable vehicle which allows us to be of service to others. This is something that comes to us like a second nature, something that is easily



done, with great enthusiasm like art, music, a trade, or a craft. Some do business well, while others succeed with art, and others are great at fixing things and working with their hands. By using our inner talent, one is freed to grow into one's true Nature, growing into what makes us all want to live life and experience our lives to the fullest.

Anthony at 4 years old with his brother Virgil at 5 years old

For me, hair was my first awakening when I was just three years old. I discovered the timeless Universe showing me this world and all its mystery and magic. At that time, I had my first experience with time standing still, seeing and experiencing different energies, like seeing higher states of awareness. It was the leaves, the grasses, and the branches that intrigued me, I then realized they were ethereal energies and not physical. This led me to look at hair as the 5th element, Ether, where Chi enters the body through our hair, which acts as our antenna to the

Universal Energies.

A few years later, my brother, Raymond, who was eleven years older than me, went on to become a barber. When I was about eight, I started going down to his barber shop. I would sweep the floor, clean up and just listen to the guys—his customers—talking. And I'd say, "You know, I could grow your hair back for you." I meant it. And these guys, who were cool and driving around in their Chevys, would pat me on the head and say, "Okay, little boy, you have some imagination. My bald head just needs a rug." And my brother told me not to say that again, that it wasn't true and he didn't want me telling stories. So, once again, I was silenced and felt even more repressed.

At that time, did I understand that my inner talent was hair? Not at all. I just had these experiences that kept me growing into my newfound inner world of energies which no one around me seemed to notice or want any part of. That was until my Venetian maternal grandmother, Lena, introduced me to her world of mystery and magic.

Lena, my Maternal Grandmother & Spiritual Goddess



We were raised in my paternal grandparent's home with Angelina, my Grandmother, and Virgilio, my Grandfather, who were from Naples, Italy. They lived together on the second floor. My aunt and uncle also lived there but on the first floor. My Mom, Anita, my Dad, Carmino, my Brother, Virgil, and me, Antonio, lived in the third-floor attic.

My whole family on my father's side was Roman Catholic with all the shame and blame that came with the 1940s, during and after WWII. But my maternal family lived 42 miles away in Torrington, Connecticut on 2 separate ½ acre lots, one lot with a four-story house and the other lot was the Green Thumb gardens of Lena, my Grandmother, and her Father, Angelo Zucco, my Great-grandfather who had immigrated from Venice, Italy.

Grandma Lena was not a practicing Catholic, she was a free soul and part of the Theosophical Movement, which was started by Madame Blavatsky in the early 1900s. The Theosophical movement was very progressive for women at the time, allowing them to take on a bigger role in spiritual leadership, treating them as equals to men.

Lena had all the good examples for me to see, smell, taste, hear, and feel, but most importantly, she taught me the 6th sense, universal intelligence, freedom from the known. Lena would have seances, candles, and incense burning everywhere. She would reach out to the other dimensions through meditation and always questioning the unknown. In her outer world was Polly the parrot, Chi Chi the monkey, and the most beautiful rose gardens in all of town. In addition, Lena's inner world glowed with mystery, magic, and the universal Intelligence she always searching for with her 6th sense.

My great-grandfather, Angelo Zucco, was born in 1863 in Venice, Italy and was part of an Alpine Battalion in WWI. The Alpini were elite Italian soldiers who fought on skis in the mountains to protect Italy's northern border with France and Austria. He was a decorated soldier in WWI and was honored by having the main street of Fonzaso, Italy, our small village outside of Venice, named after him, VIA A. ZUCCO.

Angelo was a master gardener and carpenter. He moved to the USA in 1929 with his daughter, Lena, and landed in Torrington, Connecticut where there was rich soil and plenty of land to grow food. There was also an abundance of work available. That's why the Europeans came over in droves in search of work, food, and the chance to feed and house their families as they fled the destruction of the

European War. At that time, there was no welfare, no free handouts, and everyone came to the Promised Land wanting to work and to be of service to their community.

Angelo would say things like, "See these hands," while holding out his hands for us to see and say "If they were metal, one would have to replace them 100 times, like a tool; but Goddess Earth rebuilds our hands daily along with all the mystery and magic of Mother Nature."

Both my Great-grandfather Angelo, and my Grandmother Lena had two green thumbs and whatever they touched flourished and grew in abundance. Angelo could take one tree and graft branches onto it from another tree. He grew one with apples, pears, apricots, and plums and these fruits would grow on this one tree. Even in those days, folks would come marvel from miles away at seeing such farming techniques.

I have very fond memories of their secret garden. It had a frog pond with water lilies, a garden with roses and different flowers, and a vegetable garden, too. The romaine lettuce that they grew would be a standard for our meals with hand-made vinegar, oil, and Celtic sea salt. This is still my favorite salad today, always reminding me of the taste of my childhood and my Venetian ancestors.

Lena was very sophisticated. She was always coifed and well-dressed, wearing jewelry and makeup even when working in the gardens, painting the house, or tending to the chickens and rabbits. She always wore rouge on her cheeks, had beautiful blue eyes, blonde hair, and cameo white skin. Lena was a true Venetian beauty who married Johnny. They had a son named Aldo and a daughter named Anita, my Mom. Her husband, Johnny, worked in a factory and after 3 years of marriage decided not to return home from work one day, leaving my Grandmother to fend for herself and raise her two children alone.

After her Father, Angelo, died, Lena took the lead raising her children along with her rabbits, chickens, and gardens, feeding anyone who was in need. She turned her four-story home into apartments, living on the first floor and renting out the second and third floors which had been turned into apartments. Lena, like many self-reliant Europeans, worked hard and smart, living a life of self-respect for all to follow. She worked long hours, 7 days a week with great relish for simply being alive in the free country of America.

My Venetian family showed me examples of how to be in many ways. They gave me lessons at a very early age on how to grow and become an individual. A lesson that we will hear more on in the upcoming adventures of becoming The Hair Shaman.

Chapter 2: Rock, Navy, Rock!



Even as a kid, I was a willful little firecracker just waiting to explode out of my boring small town and see the world. The Mediterranean Sea and Italy were calling my name, loud and clear.

There was rebellion in the air... and all of a sudden, a frustrated young voice could be heard: “Nothing will stop me, Antonio, from escaping Connecticut to become a true Venetian!”

“It’s so BORING around here!” My words and actions declared to everyone that I was about to run away. I was ready to do anything to escape and my destination would be Italy, where I’d enjoy a free-spirited and bohemian lifestyle as a Venetian; where I’d search for adventures alongside the Mediterranean. Who was this little vivacious scrappy fire-cracker, anyway?

It was me, Antonio, willing to smash Connecticut’s stifling grip and see the world at just eleven years old. I got the first real chance when I ran away from home in 6th grade and went as far as Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. It was over 500 miles from my home in Connecticut and I had been hitchhiking for 3 weeks when the police caught me and sent me back to my Father’s angry fists. My father, Carmino, aka Daddy-O, punished me by throwing my entire pile of fun clothes in the open fireplace outside our home. I remember him saying that the next time it happened, he would throw me in the fire instead of my fun clothes. Now, Antonio was scorched and half baked.

When I turned 13, still scorched and half baked, I was in the 8th grade and it was time to make my second attempt. Again the escape artist fled the scene but this time the destination was New York City!

Again, it turned into yet another full blown failure. While I was escaping on the NYC bound train from Connecticut, bad timing foiled the plan. The police surged on me for the second time and again sent me back to my father’s now inflamed furious fists of fire. So I cooled my jets for a while, never giving up on the dream of breaking free.

“Shave his head!” my father ordered. This was a horrifying punishment at the time as this was during the age of ‘Rock and Roll’ (1957) when young men imitated their idols: Elvis Presley, Sal Mineo, Frankie

Avalon. The list was endless! All these men had a head full of hair, making it the ultimate punishment to have your head shaved, this showed who the real boss was: it was Daddy-O, still ruling the roost.

Three Strikes and You're Out!

The third attempt to escape was one that James, my best friend and partner in crime, came up with: a lightning Streak of Genius.

"Ahoy There! Anchors aweigh! Avast and Avant, me hearties! GI Joe, eat your heart out. Sheesh, why didn't we think of this before!"

Join the Navy and See the World

Hence, two 17-year old boys barreled into the local U.S. Navy recruiting office. Though our bags were already mentally packed, there was just one issue: we were still not 18 and could not travel without a written permission from both our Mom and Dad! No sweat. My raging alcoholic father couldn't scratch his name on the paper fast enough. Mom assented when her "baby" threatened not to talk to her if she made me wait until I turned 18. The pressure worked! Mom signed.

However, the problem now was James; or rather, his clingy girlfriend. She snarled that if he joined the Navy, they were done. Ole Jimmy knuckled under the pressure and I was now sailing solo. I walked away from senior year of high school, never looking back.

I took the oath, "JOIN the NAVY and see the WORLD". After signing the papers, I was sworn in with 100 other 17-year-olds, all of whom were escaping something from back home. I could feel the thrill of the rumbling engines beneath my butt being on board a prop plane for the first time. I was thrilled as I flew to the Great Lakes Boot Camp in Chicago. When I arrived, my feelings were like a pop song of the time:

"... Rock N Roll is here to stay it will never fade away Rock NAVY Rock..."

BAM! Right away, the wind was knocked out of my sails: "Hey sailor boy, you're U.S. government property now, so do what you're told or get slammed into the brig." Whoa! This was a deal that I'd signed. No option! No way out! And the "brig" (military jail) sounded terrible! So, I put on my game face and struggled through the dregs of hell, graduating boot camp and then was sent to Norfolk, VA as a Seaman Apprentice. I earned \$5.50 a day (don't forget this was the 1960's!) but had no expenses and at last I got my ticket to "*Join The Navy and See the World.*" BAM again! We received an announcement that we were heading into WAR, the Bay of Pigs missile crisis in Cuba, and JFK wasn't fiddling with Fidel or Kowtowing to Khrushchev.

For thirteen renowned days, the entire world held its breath to see if we'd all sink Cuba into the sea or turn to ashes. Life in the barracks was a stressful one, waiting for the dreaded words: "WAR IS DECLARED."

It was 3:00 am when the sirens screamed, and the loud speakers boomed over the Norfolk Virginia Military Base, "Pack up and stand by to leave immediately! War has been declared! Get into ranks and load on busses for the U.S. NAVY Air Terminal; destination Unknown".

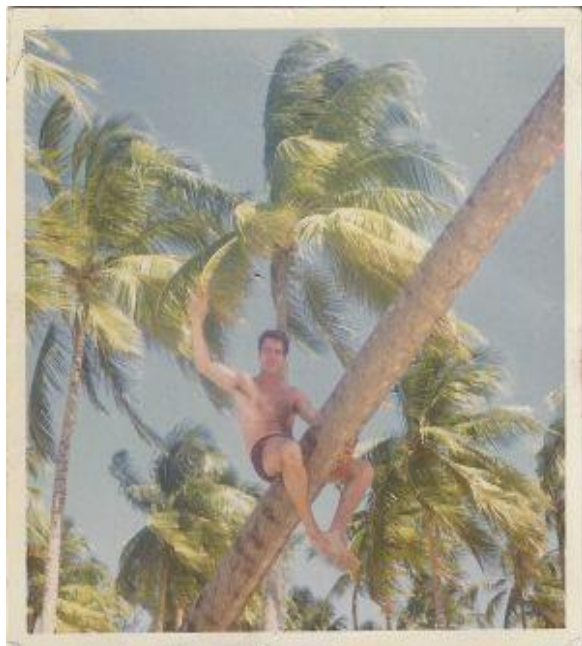
"Goodbye, America." Ten thousand of us just had a few hours to spend on U.S. soil prior to boarding B-22 props for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Then ten thousand, newly recruited, U.S. NAVY boys who were freshly passed out of boot camp lined the tarmac. Every sailor's name was called, and each would salute the Officer, receive his papers, salute again and board one of the many planes roaring off into oblivion. Then the next, next, next.... They were all threatened, "Lose your papers, or disobey any orders, and you'll go to the brig!" Next - next - next...BAM once more! My name was never called. *What the hell?* After all the others had boarded, I was left there standing alone. The last of my whole division was now airborne on the last plane out.

I stood watching in disbelief. The Lieutenant Officer was the only one who remained, lighting up a cigar and cursing under his breath. I approached him and saluted with a shaky hand. "Sir, my name wasn't called. Where do I go? What do I do?" With no effort to obscure his irritation, he yelled back: "What's your name, sailor?" I wanted to seem more confident than my inexperienced 17 years while saluting again. "Sir, A. Morrocco," screaming out my serial number and rank, "U.S. Navy, Sir." This only augmented his wrath, "No stupid. Stop! I didn't ask WHERE you're going. I asked what's your NAME." Totally worried, all I could do was say again, "Sir, A. Morrocco-----" interrupted by gusts of his laughter and chaotic gasping on his cigar. As he caught his breath, he flipped the stogie and ironically added, "Oh, so *you're* the one Morrocco!" before walking off to frighten his next prey.

In my current state of isolation, I realized it was time to retreat to the barracks. I collected my papers and duffel bag and sat on a bus to return to the barracks, which was now a military ghost town. But that barely deterred me as I threw down my stuff and collapsed face-down on the nearest bunk bed, wandering into a worn out, puzzled and dream-clouded sleep. *Join the Navy and See the World...*

Chapter 3: Freeze! You're Under Arrest!



Finally, I got my duffle bag containing all my worldly belongings and walked to the bus depot to ride up to my now deserted barracks. I was so exhausted that once I got there, I went to my bunk and dropped my gear and my personnel papers. That's right! The very ones that if I lost would land me in jail/Brig! At this point, I was just so tired of what was happening, so throwing them onto the bunk next to me didn't worry me at all. All I knew was that I was completely exhausted, physically and emotionally, so, as soon as I lay down I passed out.

After some hours, I woke up still trying to assimilate everything that had happened. All this craziness had made me HUNGRY, so I decided to go to the chow hall and get some dinner. So, off I went and made it

back in a short time.

Casablanca, Morrocco in 1962 in the US Navy

It wasn't too long after I got back that I fell back into slumber.

My routine was ready to begin the next day. I was ready to start the day. I would usually wake up, get ready to eat some breakfast at the chow hall, then ready to go swimming in the pool or to the gym. Or, maybe a movie? Sure! I just couldn't stand still! I was always walking around in amazement thinking, "This is HUGE! It's like a city in and of itself!" I didn't have to leave the Military base to do anything! There was just enough there to keep me entertained and amused, while at the same time, available and ready for action whenever someone showed up to tell me what to do. I remember myself saying: "I am an adult now! I'm 18 years old, graduated from boot camp, my first assigned duty to Norfolk Navy Base. I can handle ANYTHING!" I was simply awaiting orders, ready for action. Little did I know what was waiting for me.

"Hair-raising Adventure"

Days were going by quickly; 10 days seem to go by like a flash! Soon enough it was already 3 months after starting boot camp, 3 more months of living in my new home base Norfolk, Virginia. I was simply blissed out! I had no chores, no one to yell at me for no reason... Just eat, swim, hang out and sleep. I was living the dream, enjoying my new-found freedom. But this wasn't for long... One night I heard a voice that woke me up: "Freeze, you are under Arrest!" Suddenly, something yanked me out of my

bunk and threw me on the floor. The military police were yelling with rifles pointed at my head. They forcefully asked: "Who are you and what are you doing off limits?" This was madness! I was confused in all this mess, but I somehow got to blurt out "Sir, A. Morrocco (SA) US Navy, Sir!" However, this didn't stop the mass chaos. I was grabbed and thrown into a US Navy Police Jeep and driven to the "Brig" –The place we were threatened with if we didn't do as we were told was now finally appearing.

Once I got there, the interrogation session started. There were all sorts of questions getting thrown at me: "Who was I?", "What was I doing in an off-limits barrack?", "Who...?", "What...?", "Where...?", "Why...?". At that point, in their view, I was a would-be spy/deserter and was under arrest for so many unknown reasons. It was at this point that I realized I was in serious trouble. So, I remembered what I had done with my papers and repeated again and again "My papers! My Navy folder is on the bunk next to where you found me, Sir!" But no one listened. I was then tossed into solitary confinement. I had been locked up for possibly being a terrorist. This somehow made sense because after all we were at war, and, I was the unknown person found off limits.

Join The Navy, See The World—right?

After a few hours and more questions, the military police finally listened to what I was saying and went to look for my Military papers. After they found them, they went through them and saw all my military information, including the notice that I was being sent to MOROCCO. This kept everyone laughing at my expense, because, what a coincidence, right?

The Joke's On Me

When the lieutenant noticed my real name, and saw my papers said "Morocco" and not "Cuba", he broke up laughing when he suddenly realized the obvious name/destination coincidence. So, this is what they discovered after going through all my papers: A. Morrocco (SA) US Navy was not AWOL, but simply a victim of a very practical joke: "MORROCCO was being shipped to MOROCCO!" Here's the story behind that joke: It turned out that, since my last name was Morrocco, someone processing our papers in Washington, D.C. at the Bureau of Personnel, must have just seen my last name and, in a bored moment, decided to lighten up his day by stamping "Port Lyautey Kenitra, Morrocco" all over my personnel papers and folder!

Lo and behold, all the confusion and interrogation had happened because what I had to do was to go to a different air terminal and catch my next flight to Port Lyautey, North Africa. The only problem was that no one had explained any of this to me while I was watching my entire division fly off to Gitmo Bay, Cuba!

Next Stop: Port Lyautey Kenitra, Morocco, North Africa. Comnavacts Mediterranean Station for Defending the Mediterranean from the Russians!

After not being shipped to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, I was sent instead to Morocco to secure the entire Mediterranean from Russian invaders. After an 18-hour flight in a crowded, jam-packed military prop plane, I made my official arrival to Port Lyautey Kenitra, Morocco in North Africa at the US Navy Station

in August, 1961. The hatch opened and we got off the plane. The first thing that happened? The air temperature hit me at 120 degrees. I felt like this was hell on earth! North Africa was home to the Sahara Desert, this meant that winds and heat were waiting for me! These would be nothing more than my daily routine and more adventures.

Join the Navy and Feel the Heat

My new assigned home was the barracks. They had no air conditioning and no fans (but really, who'd want to blow hot air around, anyway?). I soon discovered that the showers were where I would hang out most of my time. It was just so nice to stand under cool water for hours! After all, it was 120 degrees in the shade and, as a New England native, this was to me something from another planet.

After one week, I was assigned to my new position: washing pots and pans. After all, I had just graduated boot camp and spent 3 months in a US military base, so I actually had not learned much else, and as I was US Government property, I just did what I was told, discovering quickly that I had given up all my rights as a tax-paying citizen. All I had to do was listen, obey, act and not think.

After about one week of settling into hot Morocco Navy Base, one afternoon there was an announcement from The Brass at the Admiral's office: "Can anyone type?" Interestingly enough, in 1961 it wasn't uncommon to find men who couldn't type. Thanks to the fact that I had taken a business course and thanks to Mrs. Johnson, who taught my class how to type (I honestly feel like this was the only thing I had learned how to do in my 3.5 years of high school!), I was then a so-called "speed typist" at around 30 WPM (words per minute). The typewriters in 1961 were very different to what we have today. Back then, they all had a ribbon and a pound key board. NO electrical anything. It was the newfangled gadget of the time.

After announcing to my immediate supervisor of pots and pans that I, indeed, knew how to type, I was immediately assigned to a new barracks/division and an air-conditioned office that was the main headquarters to Admiral Peoples North Africa Comnavacts. I was working for Lieutenant Commander Gearheart and my new assignment was to type, type and type all kinds of papers that were all high SECURITY, which required that I receive a top Security Clearance. By doing this I would also be allowed to become a senior sailor with all the privileges that only officers had on base! Once I was cleared, I was moved up to Top Brass Office as a "Personal Aide and Typist" to work directly under Admiral Peoples' direction, with my new top security clearance status, all base privileges and my very own Jeep. WOW! I was living the dream!

Washing pots and pans was over. It was time to welcome the privileged few at the admiral's private offices: Life in Morocco from 1961 to 1963!

This new stage started off with a 30-day introduction to a new culture: No one was allowed off base by themselves, there had to be three or more sailors together at all times, or they'd go straight to the "Brig Danger Zone"! It made sense because, after all, we were at war with Cuba and Russia, so wandering off solo was dangerous.

Being in Morocco for those years made me feel like my whole world had been turned upside down and backwards finding myself living in an Arabic-speaking country under monarch rule, whereas my upbringing was quite different: white, American, Roman-Catholic, country bumpkin from Small Town, New England, and democracy under President Kennedy. Now, what did I have here? The complete opposite: Brown, African, Muslim, monarchy under tyrannical rule of King Mulla Hass Sang V. You always had to follow the new rules or regulations or risk to be killed in a foreign land. Now, don't get me wrong, there are wonderful things about Morocco, too. It is mystical, magical, with the romantic Atlas Mountains, exotic cities, desert oasis, camels and couscous!

And See The World!

We privileged few from the TOP BRASS office could and were encouraged to travel throughout Morocco with our "top-security pass" and had more time to travel than the regular base personnel. So, we took advantage of these perks and got to see Tangiers, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakesh and the Atlas Mountains. It was time to discover another culture living in a strange land with new found friends: Hello, Morocco/Morrocco!

Around this time, I had graduated to fill my new position as Journalist Petty Officer 3rd Class: This was truly a big deal going from mere enlisted Sailor to a now new Petty Officer. I was pretty much entering the elite status of US Government property. *Join the Navy – See the World!*

After discovering we could simply fly to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany and the UK, we soon learned that during our days off, as top security personnel with privileges, we could just simply go to the air terminal, find out when the next flight to Europe was, get aboard a cargo plane and fly off to the UK, Germany, Italy, France, Spain or Portugal. At our arrival, we could just hop on a free military bus to be taken to the US Military Base, where there would be FREE US military barracks and chow halls. Free Chow Halls was the main ticket; after all being a growing teenager, one was hungry all the time.

And that wasn't all folks! We were discovering exciting European cities—almost practically for free, compliments of the US Navy. We would go for two, three or even up to four days having \$1 or as much as \$5 American dollars to spend per day for a beer, a bottle of vino, a great gourmet meal and then tour the city. It was truly a whirlwind adventure—an all-expenses paid, 18-month tour of North Africa and now included Europe! Being an 18, then 19 and then 20-year-old country bumpkin from New England, I was now growing up fast among exotic cultures in Europe and North Africa, all compliments of the US Navy. Being paid \$5.50 a day—what a deal! I was having the times of my lives! At last: Join the Navy and see the World!

Chapter 4: The Art of Staying ALIVE



Marrakesh was going to be bursting with music and color, even beyond the gorgeous contrast of white architecture against the famously purple Atlas Mountain Range. The one-time capital city would be alive with the lights, colors and sounds of the mythic Fantasia ritual, that continued to be performed there annually after thousands of years.

Morocco, Marrakech: Fantasia

Berber Horsemen

A fellow sailor, my good friend Gil, and I put in our request to take one week off. Once we secured it, the countdown to paradise began. It was going to be a big journey, more than what it appeared on the surface.

I felt like we were leaving our childhoods behind: No more lights out at ten, No more homework— total freedom! We'd be drinking and laughing. Our plan was to rent a car and drive across the Sahara Desert, staying at air force bases such as Benguiro. For a couple of nineteen-year-olds, it was an amazing adventure, dangerous and thrilling, and the reward would be a sight I'd been looking forward to my whole life. One I'd never forget.

Things got off to a rough start. Sailors are required to travel three at a time or risk the brig, but our third didn't show up and we weren't about to wait or blow the trip altogether.

We tore through the Sahara at about eighty-five miles an hour, sun baking down, the highway seemingly abandoned for miles ahead and behind us. Despite our loss of a third travel companion, things were looking good for an incredible weekend.

Then a small dot appeared on the horizon, small and hard to discern. Neither Gil nor I gave it very much thought. As it got closer it was clear to us both it was another car on the road coming at us in the opposite direction.

Gil guessed, "Must be one of us?" I could only shake my head. As the car got closer, I had a bad feeling. A little shape poked out of the driver's side window, my fears echoed with shame. "It is," Gil said, "see, he's waving."

He wasn't one of us, and he wasn't waving. And it was only as we raced up to the other car, a red pickup truck, that I realized what the driver was really doing.

The brick flew out of the driver's hand before I had a chance to swerve, the rectangular projectile flew into our windshield with all the speed and momentum of the passing car colliding with the opposing trajectory of our own.

The combination was more than enough to shatter the windshield.

I swerved, unable to see. We almost sped over the shoulder and into a ditch, tires skidding beneath us as I wrestled the car to a blind stop. We pulled over to the side of the road and got out, ready for an altercation, but our attackers drove on behind us, content to have struck a blow against the occupying forces.

There was still the car to deal with, which was now going to be almost impossible to drive. Gil and I tried to kick in and then push out the shattered windshield, held together by a film over the glass to prevent it from shattering.

Gil asked, "Now what?"

"Dunno," I said, glancing up and down the road. "But I'm not missing that festival, I can tell you that."

We finally managed to dislodge the useless, shattered glass and drive the rest of the way with an open windshield, catching more than our share of bugs in our teeth before finally arriving at the nearest Air Force base. We'd spend the night there and push on to Marrakesh the next day.

Fantasia

The biggest event of the year had drawn tourists from all corners of the globe; innumerable people of Asian extractions and Europeans looked blankly around as if deliberately unimpressed. Gil and I braced ourselves as we parked and pushed into the crowd on foot. The air was thick with the smells of fine hash, foul body odor, the hot juicy scent of grilled lamb. The clamor of a thousand conversations buzzed in my ears, dizzying.

Hundreds of Moroccan horsemen rode with grim faces, postures stiff and rigid, their procession filling a wide, flat area. Gil and I jostled to keep up and not lose each other while still getting a good spot to take in the action to come.

Fantasia, also known as *lab Al baroud* or *the gunpowder play*, celebrated the bond between man and horse and, strangely, was and remains often performed at weddings among the Berber people and in the Maghreb. Often thought of as a military exercise, the Fantasia featured a group of riders, or *serba*, dressed in their elaborate garb and carrying old-world rifles called *moukahla*. They rode in stately procession to the tapping of drums, bathed in light.

The horses, a breed called *barb*, were known for their speed and courage, though this ritual required them to carry their riders with control and discipline. The horses themselves seemed to know their role, after generations of ritualistic performance ingrained in their muscles, their tissues, and down to their very bones.

Tensions rose, intensity gathered, until the horsemen all raised their rifles and executed what sounded like a single, incredible shot ringing out over Marrakesh. Their timing was perfect, not a single man even a fraction off of the others. Coming from the chaotic, individualistic United States but trained in the disciplined ways of the armed services, I couldn't help but be impressed at their sense of unity and tradition, honoring the generations who had come before them and knowing that future generations would do the same. It was so like the ethos which drew us together as that one percent who serve in the military, who were and will always be ready to lay down that last measure of devotion to duty and honor to their country. That seemingly single shot rang in my gut, heart, and soul, making my whole body tremble.

It was more than just the idea of reconnecting with my fellow sailors, with the men and women in any branch of service. Watching this ceremony, available in its authenticity nowhere else in the world, was an honor, a reward afforded to me by my risk, by my ambition. We'd broken rules to attend the ceremony, but the rules of the base no longer seemed to apply. It was as if I was no longer in their service, in their world or in my own. I felt as if I'd stepped into the past, into a storybook, a page straight out of *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. This was why I had joined the armed services; to see parts of the world I could never see otherwise, do things I'd never be able to do.

And Fantasia had been at the top of the list.

Gil and I weaved through the thinning crowd to one of the many sidewalk cafes along the streets of Marrakesh.

"Why'd you come to Morocco?" I asked. Gil gave it a little thought as we arrived under a promising sign reading *The Blue Parrot*. "I guess the sand is always browner on the other side."

The Blue Parrot was packed, but we managed to find a spot in the corner. The beers were cold, fast and cheap; and they went down with a bit too much vigor.

"Y'know, we're here to help these people," I said. "It's our job, our duty, our mission!"

"No," Gil said with a drunken sway in his voice, "it's our mission to secure the liberty of the United States of America —"

"No, Gil. As sailors, as soldiers, as any member of the armed services, we have two jobs: to obey, and to fight."

Gil finished his beer. "Sounds like the Boy Scout pledge. And I get it, I really do. And I admire it ... sort of. But you gotta let go of those schoolboy thoughts and open up your eyes; wars are good for one thing only, and that's to make money. Big scale and little, from the billions in arms contracts to the thousands of people who skim off the black market, it's all just a big scam." He glanced around. "But I don't wanna get killed out here just so some Washington dick can get rich." I raised my beer and tried to smile. "God bless America."

"You're damn right!"

SOS: Two Sailors on the Streets of Marrakesh

After a few too many more, we staggered out of *The Blue Parrot* onto the streets of Marrakesh. We shambled up to the first hotel we found, not even bothering to read the sign.

Once at the reception, the hotelier told us that he didn't have a room, a bed, or even a staircase we could rent. The way he smiled as we stepped out to our next disappointment, I knew things weren't going to get much better.

I asked Gil, "Why didn't you book us a room?"

"Me? This whole Fantasia thing is your deal, not mine. Where was Mickey Mouse, anyway?"

"I got the car, Gil. It was your job to get us a room."

"Who needs a room? We just stay up and party, then sleep on the bus on the way home."

"We don't leave for another two days! We'll never get a room now, forget it."

"So we'll camp out! There must be a public park around here somewhere." Gil glanced around, but he began to swerve and teeter, barely able to remain on his feet.

"Excuse me, gentlemen?" We turned to see a local, identifiable as Moroccan by his colorful garment known as a jellaba, stepped toward us with a broad smile, arms extended, hands empty. "Did I take it that you have no place to stay for the night?"

Gil took a step back and looked the man up and down.

I was quick to say, "We didn't make reservations in time, that's correct."

"My house is not far," he said in that thick Moroccan accent. "My family would be honored to have you as our guests."

Gil turned his head as if to get a better view of the man. "Why?" he said frankly.

The Moroccan just glanced at our uniforms, which we'd forgotten still won us some modicum of respect. Gil and I shared a suspicious glance, and I knew what would be best for us all. I wasn't sure what Gil was capable of, but even more so I wasn't sure who this man was or where he could be leading us.

Not everybody respected the good ol' Stars & Stripes, after all.

"That's very kind of you," I said, "but we don't want to be a bother. We'll find something out here."

"No, no, no, sir, please," the Moroccan said, "I couldn't live with myself to abandon you to the streets of Marrakesh. You have helped us in so many ways, I insist you offer my family the chance to properly thank you."

“Damn right,” Gil said with a bad tone, carrying him away and me along with him.

“Gil?”

“What? He's right, they owe us!”

I couldn't help but roll my eyes and shake my head, our would-be host smiling at my discomfort.

“Can you still drive?”

“I can,” I said, looking Gil up and down. “I’m not sure about my friend here.”

The Moroccan nodded. “I’ll take you to your car and you can follow me to my house.”

With that, both Gil and I knew that each step was taking us closer and closer to a future that was both mysterious and very likely to be beyond our control.

We pulled up to a little square building, much like those on either side. The Moroccan pulled up with his buddy and Gil and I pulled up to park behind them. Our new host and his friend consulted in quiet, one running quietly into the house while our guest approached us in a hushed voice.

“I'll let my wife know you'll be staying,” he said, as he turned to my car window. We were deep into what's known as the Jewish Media, and we were restricted from being there, but with no room at the inn, as they say, we figured any port in a storm was better than none at all.

The Moroccan followed his friend into the house and Gil and I could only share a glance and shrug. We looked around, the desert night becoming suddenly chilly. We sat back in the seats of the Renault to await our welcoming host, both of us looking forward to a cozy night indoors.

I woke up behind the wheel of the Renault, shocked, my senses all bursting to life at once. *What happened, what's going on?* But there was no time. The Renault was being jostled, Gil and I looking around to see a group of six or seven Arab men, wrapping and kicking the car, sabers out.

“Start the car,” Gil said, “get us outta here!”

I cranked the key, the ignition failing to turn the engine over. “I’m trying, it won’t start!”

The engine finally turned over and the car jumped forward, nearly smashing into the parked car in front of us. The Arabs jumped back as one finally pulled Gil’s door open. Gil pulled his foot back and kicked the guy away from the door just as the Renault jumped forward, rubber peeling on the road.

The car sped off, wiggling on the road just a bit before I could get a bite on the asphalt. In the rearview mirror, the other Arabs had gotten dangerously close, to within a few yards, but they were disappearing fast as I sped off, back toward the Air Force base and to safety.

“Hey,” I said to him once we were clear, “easy on the slurs, right?”

Gil gave it some thought, then nodded, glancing back once more at the murderous band vanishing behind us. "Sure thing, boy scout," chucking and panting with his relief just to be alive, "whatever you say."

We were excited to share our near-death experience with the other sailors once we got back to our base, admonishing them never to go out with less than three troops.

"Sounds like they almost got 'cha," one sailor said back in the barracks.

I shrugged, keeping it casual. "It wasn't great," I said, downplaying it, "it wasn't quite as bad as that chemical truck fire when I was sixteen." I have to admit, I enjoyed their shocked, impressed expressions; eyes wide, mouths low and hanging open. "Oh yeah," I added, "then there was that time with my kid brother ... " But all bragging rights aside, the true horrors of my past came back to me with blood-curdling clarity, as they did so often in my dreams. I didn't want to go into the episode that happened in the desert back home, when I was just eleven, or the out-of-body experience I had six years before that. It was too complicated, too ugly, and there was too much to think about besides all that. I was in my youthful prime, living an adventure most people wouldn't dare dream about.

It was too hard not to be excited about how thrilling it all was, about how colorful and enthralling the Fantasia had been. I had to admit, it lived up to my every expectation and much more, and though it nearly cost me my life, I have to say that I would do it all again in an instant. There would be other adventures, hopefully not so dangerous but just as thrilling.

I was just getting started, and things were really about to heat up.

Chapter 5: Europe on One Dollar a Day

Join the Navy and see the world.

They weren't kidding.

Munich, Gibraltar, all European points were open to me and my fellow sailors. Back in the halcyon days of 1962, Uncle Sam was still walking tall and proud. He'd sent me and my fellow sailors under no less a figure than Admiral Peoples to protect the Mediterranean from the Russians. From the Mediterranean, Europe was our playground and our military passes were our tickets to paradise.



"There he is," a buddy of mine smiled as he stepped into the cantina, "the Escape Artist. How's it hangin', Houdini?"

"S'all right," I said, taking a cool sip of Budweiser. "Just makin' tracks, matter of fact."

"Now you see him, now you don't." My burly Irish buddy, Terrance Mac McLennon, ordered up a beer of his own and sat down on the stool next to mine. "Where you off to this time?"

"Oktoberfest in Munich," I said, glancing down at my half-filled glass. "Real beer, not this."

"Come along," I said, raising my glass. "You know the brass wants us to go out and toss around a few bucks, put some of those *ugly American* rumors to rest. On top of that, the dollar here is through the roof. They say you can't buy happiness, but out here I think it's actually pretty affordable."

"Not to mention readily available, but Munich? Why not Paris or London, or some other ... *allied* city?"

I shook my head. "It's been almost twenty years, Mac. Kennedy's taking us into the future, no reason not to go along for the ride."

Mac shook his head and raised his can. "Never forget, that's all I'm saying."

"Then you can remember over a beer and nice, juicy bratwurst."

In an exaggerated accent, Mac said, "*Macht schnell!*" German for *make it quick*, and that's just what we did.

Getting around was easy and cheap. They used to say you could live in Europe on a dollar a day, and in a way, that was true. Keep in mind that we were only earning \$5.50 a day, but travel was free. The air

terminal at Ft. Lyautey had flights going out to all manner of destinations and all we had to do was show up, flash a pass, check the roster, and go. Generally, I'd show up without knowing where the flights were heading out to. Oftentimes that was half the fun! However, not this time, I was Munich bound. Mac by my side only added an element of adventure, and danger.

"Switzerland," Mac said, glancing at the roster, "tomorrow at oh-eight-hundred."

"Next time," I said. "We're on the cargo to Naples, we'll connect from there." Mac nodded, ready to follow my lead. I was the Escape Artist, after all, he knew he was traveling with the right guy.

We swapped our uniforms for civvies and took the bus into Naples. The pasta meals there rolled out covered in rich cream sauces and hearty meats, while heavy Italian wines washed it all down. The restaurants and cafes were alive with that beautiful Italian language, the passion of the Med overflowing in their contentious conversations, hands gesticulating, chests and chins thrust forward over the tables.

Bella Italia!

The night crawled into morning, the purple of dusk rising out of the midnight black. Mac and I took the free bus back to the barracks and slept it off, recovering our strength for the next leg of our journey. More free chow and the next day set off to Munich, where the real party was happening. Naples had been a nice warm up, of course, a welcome break from life on ship, but I was determined to go to Munich, and nothing was going to stop me.

"So why Munich?" Mac asked me, "Who is she?"

I chuckled. "Don't know a soul there. Oktoberfest is one of the biggest parties in Europe, Mac, and these are Germans! Drinking beer is their national pastime. How can you pass that up?"

Oktoberfest was renowned even then, and Munich's beer gardens lived up to their reputation. Block after block of long tables and wooden benches were draped with tarps and tents, protecting celebrants from that Bavarian autumn. The sausages were juicy and flavorful, their array staggering. Mac didn't seem able or interested in telling one greasy meat stick from the other, the currywurst from the brats.

German beer is more than just a beverage, more than just a way to get drunk (though it certainly does the trick). The Germans are well-known *brewmeisters* and they craft their beer with love and respect, with countless generations of tradition evident in the hoppy heads and robust colors. The beers in Germany were (and still are) much more robust than their American counterparts.

Mac leaned over. "Munich," he said, draining his glass. "I gotta say, Houdini ... when you're right, you're right."

I was on a real winning streak. Of course, that was thanks mostly to the Navy and their incredible travel connections. Europe was our playground, and why not? We'd earned it. We'd saved it, preserved it and now we were going to enjoy it.

Live, Laugh, Love

The meals in Portugal were huge, and though we had to pay for our bread and olives, the portions were gigantic, the food colorful, flavorful and cooked to perfection. The grilled sardines were out of season, but devotees weren't about to wait until the spring. The salty little devils were crispy off the grill, the meat tender and succulent. A lot of the locals just gobbled them up, bones, head and all, but neither Mac nor I were that enthusiastic about it. A very tasty snack though, and not one you find anywhere in the States.

The better *tascas*, or family-owned restaurants, in Lisbon closed their kitchens between three in the afternoon and seven in the evening, which was something I had to get used to. The Latins took their leisure in the afternoons, ramping up for late nights of revelry and banter. I was used to the American way of doing things; working industriously through the day and then playing hard at night. Still, a few hours in the middle of the day with nothing to do but relax was pretty hard to refuse, and frankly it still is (even more so now, to be honest). Also, they did serve sandwiches and meat croquettes in those hours, and those were pretty great, too.

Portuguese bullfighting was different from what I'd expected. In Spain, which popularized the sport, the animals were almost always killed in the ring. The Portuguese bulls had it a little better, rounded up and tired out. Instead of stabbing the beast, a crew of men faced the creature in the ring and let it charge at them. It seemed suicidal as the bull rammed into one of them, while the crowd cheered. I could hardly breathe. Nevertheless, the four or five guys really knew how to roll with a punch, because they eventually did succeed in physically catching and capturing the bull.

The amazing rock formations of the coast offered crevices to explore, and arches to boat or swim under. It was like a living masterpiece of natural artwork; rustic orange and pale, mossy green against the marine blue of the ocean waters.

Byzantine architecture, cobblestone mosaics, waves of color and fanciful designs, on the streets gave urban Portugal a similar artistic flare.

The endless Spanish horizon stretched out on all sides of us; those famous windmills of La Mancha standing in their silent, eternal vigil. It was hotter than I expected. The hundred-degree heat wasn't more than what I was used to coming from Connecticut. Luckily the country's amazing beaches provided plenty of ocean breeze.

The Spanish took their siestas even more seriously than the Portuguese, but Mac and I were ready to sit back and drink through a few afternoon hours, preparing for the monstrous parties to come. The Spanish loved to celebrate, their Latin blood was hot, percolating with a love of life and a lust for living. The Latin's passion for music and dance, food and drink, romance and dialogue are known throughout the world, and not without reason. Although all that fun required strength and stamina, and even if a few hours of inconvenience in the afternoon were what it took to make it through one of those astounding Spanish fiestas, neither of us was going to argue the point. We were too busy napping anyway.

Spain felt like a little Europe of its own, a compendium of different cultures, from city to city. Madrid was as alien to Catalonia as Barcelona was to Galicia. The diversity was dizzying, and the natural beauty of the country followed suit. The plains were flat, of course, but the Pou Clar natural springs were exotic and lush, craggy rocks jutting out of the refreshing, revitalizing, glistening and clean waters which trickled down the stone walls.

It was true, what they said: *España es diferente*. Spain is different ... even from itself.

The April Fair, the running of the bulls at Pamplona... Spain offered year-around indulgences and distractions. She kept calling us back and making it harder and harder to leave with every visit.

Even Spain could not hold us for long, and the allure of Paris and the rest of France called to us, too. What a time to be a young man, with purpose, skills and drive. My whole life laid out in front of me, as did all the time in the world to savor the greatest cities in the world.

Accordion music wafted through the streets, men standing at the cafe counters smoking cigarettes, drinking little cups of espresso, and shouting at each other. The lights of Paris could not fail to live up to their legend, the streets of the *Champs-Élysées* glittering in a golden array of the world's finest comforts and luxuries.

There wasn't much you could buy there and still get away with living on a dollar a day. Of course, this was one of the great shopping districts in the world. The smells, sights and sounds were all free, and they were the very best parts of the experience as far as I was concerned.

Foggy London stood proud, resilient with the rest of Europe, survivors of that terrible political storm of just a few decades before. The bell known as Big Ben hanging in the Elizabeth Tower rang out over the Thames, a chime that reverberated with ancient history.

On the streets, it was a different matter. The pubs rang out with the drunken singing of men and women, young and old, slurring their maritime odes to love and loss on the high seas, warm beers upraised, swaying them back and forth like the waves of the Atlantic herself. Bacon buddies, platefuls of bangers and mash were hot and bracing against the cold weather, comfort food that was as rich and rustic as the thick wooden beams and dark oak. It was this same food that marked every public house on nearly every street corner.

England had a lot more to offer than London, and it wasn't long before Yvonne, a woman from Paris, and I ferried on across the Channel. We took a canal boat through beautiful rural England and met some charming locals who took us for a married couple, some even seeming a bit put-off that we weren't married.

There was little time to reflect on the friendly folks of the Great White North, as Austria beckoned, and the Escape Artist was ready to answer the call.

Yvonne and I skied St. Anton am Arlberg, with an elevation so rarefied that I felt as if I was on another planet, a white world of heaving, icy breezes, steep slopes, endless crags and crevices. This was a world

that seemed unfit for man or beast, a hostile and alien place that was as deadly as it was beautiful. Yet there I was, tearing down those powdered cliff faces, nearly vertical drops. Every muscle in my body tensing and flexing to keep my speed in check and the momentum in control. I was in the Navy, after all, and some of the most valuable things service teaches you are discipline, training, sharpened instincts, readiness to risk, and an inability to allow yourself to be intimidated.

The mountain seemed to respect that. It rewarded us with panoramic views, a rush of speed and motion so great that I recalled it in my sleep for years afterward. Even to this day, I can remember the torrent of icy powder around me, hands clenched around the poles, heart pounding, blood racing, nerves at the very surface, my instincts honed and sharp, and my senses at the ready. We were firing on all pistons, living life to the absolute maximum.

Almost everything we did cost me virtually nothing. Don't they say that the best things in life are free?

The Homburg Imperial Palace and the Schoenbrunn Palace delighted Yvonne, who responded to their regal aspect. I had to admit even then that this was a lifestyle to boggle the mind: Every luxury, every fine food and drink, the best of the best from every corner of the world, paintings by the hands of legendary masters, furniture which was hand carved and included tiny renderings of angels and fruit baskets so intricate they didn't seem like they could have been created by hand at all.

It was all very different from life back in Connecticut, or any of the states I'd visited. I loved my home, of course, I still do and always will. You'd have to scour Connecticut pretty good to find a place like the Homburg Imperial Palace, and even then, you'd come up a little short.

Yvonne and I eventually met up again in Italy for an extended tour of the country Italian Americans like to call *the boot*. Like Spain, Italy was expansive and presented a patchwork of different cultures. To the north there were the Alps, the same mountain chain that ran through Switzerland and much of Europe.

To the south lay Rome, the famed city of seven hills, a place so steeped in history that I felt as if I was going back in time. The ruins stood in the very center of the modern city, built around its past to accommodate it, to revere it, to remember it and repeat its example or not, depending on their perspective. For me it was an outdoor museum. Past and present seemed to collide, making each one all the sharper and dearer.

As with all the major European cities, there was the food. Europeans didn't (and I believe still don't) eat the way we did in America. At the time hamburger restaurants were introducing drive-through windows in America, everything was getting faster, more hurried. But in Rome, or Paris, or any of these magnificent places, the meals were served slowly, letting hours pass as the culinary experience progressed. It wasn't a matter of feeding one's body, but rather one's spirit, one's soul.

And with a flash of that military pass, it was often a European delight to treat me and my guest, a measure of gratitude and fraternity. On just \$5.50 a day, I was always more than ready to humbly accept.

Further south lay Sicily, notorious as the cradle of organized crime, *omertà*, but for me and Yvonne it was a pastoral place of medieval cliffside villages, old men and red wine, shepherds and students with backpacks and guitars, all smiling, waving and journeying through their youth.

Chapter 6: The Enchantments of Morocco



I always considered a fellow traveler, civilian or military, as a kindred spirit; somebody who knew, as I did, that there were some things you just couldn't find at home.

Among those things were the wonders of Morocco, the Atlas Mountains, sights and experiences which changed my life forever.

Morocco is the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Arabia, and has some of the most diverse geography in the world. Fifteen miles in any direction was like traveling

to a different country— from a desert to the mountains, then to the big city. Each local culture was just as diverse as well.

The second largest city in Morocco, Fez was founded in the ninth century and was, still at that time, the cultural and spiritual center of Morocco, with outdoor markets and exotic meats that were too much for a lot of visitors. The honey cake was sweet and gave us a real rush of energy.

Africa's Sahara Desert, the size of the United States, remains the largest collection of sand in the world. Camels and headscarves were everywhere, and for good reason. Life in the desert would be next to impossible without either one.

Drums and singing leaked out from the camel wool tents, calls of celebration created by women waggling their tongues, only suggesting the dancing going on unseen within.

The sun rose in the east over a sky that was as bright with stars as any I'd ever seen.

Horse drawn carriages took us through the streets of Marrakesh, the center of Moroccan commerce. Asphalt, wide city streets, modern buildings all made Marrakesh feel a bit more like home, and of course everything there was as exotic and inexpensive as the rest of the stops on my European pleasure tour.

Thanks again, Uncle Sam!

Life in the Atlas Mountains, which run through Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, went on as it had for centuries. Tiny villages were untouched by modern life, and unscathed traditions survived without wear and tear. Bargaining for grain and livestock crackled at the markets, little more than gatherings of nomadic tribes, trading and bantering. Flatbread was as common and as satisfying as it had always been; soups and stews of lamb meat both rich and delicious.



Incredible waterfalls, rare birds, mammals and reptiles were as beautiful as they can be. The Atlas Mountain range was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever seen; lush and mossy, both inviting and foreboding. The Atlas range seemed to hide secrets from the rest of the world. The secrets of its people, its creatures, its beauty, and it remains one of the most pristine and ancient corners of the world.

I hope it stays that way.

I could go on about my travels through Europe, not to mention Asia, Australia, and South America, but those tales will have to wait for another occasion. My memory keeps bringing me back to Europe, to my time in the Navy back in the '60s, and the incredible opportunities my time in the service afforded me. The Navy opened up the whole world, presented it to me on a silver platter and at virtually no expense at all. I'll always be grateful for those opportunities to travel, and to serve the great country which is and will always be my home, the United States of America. I would be heading home soon enough.

Chapter 7: From Government Property to Freedom

Port Lyautey Kenitra, Morocco, 1963



In my mind, I was already packed. I was practically back home in Bristol, Connecticut, drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon with my buds at The Rustic Cameo Inn, checking out the new talents fresh from their high school graduations.

However, I wasn't there yet. Even the famed Escape Artist had to wait in line and go through the protocols in order to get home.

After all, Uncle Sam had gone to some lengths to get me to the Mediterranean, so he wasn't going to just let me wander off.

During the wait, I was seeing out my last few weeks in Morocco, doing my duty, having the last bit of free fun I was going to get on the Navy's dime. I enjoyed my last tastes of the exotic foods and drink, savoring a chicken *tagine*, a steamy bowl of harira soup, and an iced-cold Casablanca at the Blue Parrot Cafe.

"Hey, short timer," a buddy said as he swaggered up beside me. Barry *Goldwater*, "Gold," a petty officer, required me to stand and salute. Instead, he smiled and waved me off, "At ease, Anthony. Enjoy it while you can. If you start doing that that back home all you will wind up with is a mouthful of Chicklets."

We shared a little chuckle. Goldwater turned to the beer and raised his hand, snapping his fingers. "Two more beers here!" He turned back to me.

"Not hungry?" I asked.

"Nah," he said with a little sneer, "had chow back at the mess. I still don't see why you pay to eat this slop."

"I love it, and you know I'll never get grub like this back home." I answered.

"That's for sure, just about the best reason to go back." Goldwater replied.

A crowd shuffled into the cafe, looking around in wonder as if they'd just stepped into a movie set. They took pictures of everything and everyone, pointing and clicking and muttering to one another. By their Bermuda shorts and flowered shirts, both Goldwater and I took them to be tourists. He said, "One of the few reasons, maybe."

We ended up finding out they were Scots. They showered us with that heavy brogue and the best cocktails in the place, flattering us and thanking us for our service. There was a lot of talk about the Big One, World War II, although neither Goldwater nor myself had served. Back then, we had been playing with plastic toys and chewing on our picture books, but we were still part of a proud and noble tradition, one which had changed the course of history and helped to save the world from the clutches of tyranny. It was no small thing, even twenty years later and with the Cold War looming, and danger continuing to prowl the corners of the free world. However, not all faith was lost since the pieces on the Cold War board were already moving.

After all the free fun, food and drink that we could handle, Goldwater and I made it back to the base.

“Still on your way out?” Goldwater asked.

“Pretty sure,” I answered. “I mean, it’s a big step, y’know?”

“Sure do, s’why I re-upped myself. Too sweet a deal to walk away from, far as I’m concerned.”

Goldwater looked around and gulped down a few hearty swallows. “I mean, it’s like a ... an amusement park for adults. You can do and see things here, up north, even down south, that you just can’t do or see anywhere back home, man.”

“Hey, you don’t have to tell me,” I said. “They don’t call me the Escape Artist for nothing. I’ve been all over this part of the world ... and back again.”

“Back again, that’s the rub.” After a few drunken hiccups, Goldwater blurted out, “You really ready to give all this up?”

“What, Morocco?” I answered sarcastically.

“Morocco, Europe, the whole thing. I tell ya, Shorty, you’re walking away from a gold mine and a great time.” Goldwater said with conviction.

I knew Goldwater was up to more than just free trips and good times. He’d been known to pull a shady deal or two, skim a buck and then pass another, getting away with more than just the occasional thrill. But I’d kept out of anything like that, black markets and back doors, and in fact it was just one more reason I was ready to get home.

“Maybe this time,” he went on, “you won’t want to escape.”

“It’s been great,” I said, as the Jeep bumped down the road beneath us. “Don’t get me wrong.”

I knew what I was walking away from, though it became less and less important the closer I got to my discharge. Nevertheless, when my mind wandered back to my recent adventures, it was



hard to deny a certain doubt lingering in the back of my mind. I was at a crossroads in my life and once I made my decision, I knew I could only go forward.

Making a decision wasn't an easy task, especially since three weeks before I'd been offered a re-enlistment; to re-enlist for another two years with a promotion to petty officer, a pay raise and two more years of gallivanting around Europe. They wanted to move me to the base at Rota, Spain. I'd been issued the very high security clearance known as *Crypto Clearance*. That made my pay raise even higher, my benefits even more far-reaching, and the experience ultimately profitable. All in all, it would make my additional two years more exciting and worth doing. It also made my future in the Navy more promising. As far as my employers go, if I hadn't made this clear by now, the U.S. Armed Services benefits, respect, measure of fairness, and opportunity for advancement had no comparison.

In the Armed Services, if you worked hard and showed courage you would be rewarded. Progress was merit-based. It was in its way a true democracy—I knew that no corporation back home was going to be as forthright, as even handed, as righteous a business partner than the Navy. I could trust the Navy. From what I knew of the corporate world back home, or the entertainment business for that matter, trust was a premium that wasn't easy to find.

Staying another two years was a tempting offer.

I paused a moment to reminisce... The Alps and points all over Italy, France, Spain, and Germany were gorgeous. Europe had been my playground and their women my playmates. It had all come as courtesy of the United States Navy while we were there to protect democracy all over the world and to curb the scourge of communism. We'd earned our rest and recreation, we'd earned the generosity of the people and of the Navy itself, always nearby with free air travel, free lodgings, free chow, free civilian clothes... Free just about everything!

However, it wasn't just that. I was a sailor in the United States Navy. That meant something. I wasn't some student backpacking across Europe on his daddy's dime or rebelling against society on some existential journey. I was representing freedom and democracy in foreign lands, keeping the peace, doing what my country promised it would do, and standing up for those who couldn't stand up for themselves. There was a real satisfaction in that, a pride that I can't describe, a pride which you may not ever truly know unless you've been there or felt it.

I was also concerned about moving backward. The United States Armed Forces, whatever the branch, weren't (and still are not) trained nor accustomed to moving backward. We move forward, with unstoppable force. That's why something in the back of my mind told me that my destiny lay ahead of me and not behind.

There were reasons I'd left Connecticut. I wanted to have a more fulfilling life, to reach out beyond the small-town borders of where I'd grown up. I made friends that I might not ever see again, I was in a corner of the world I might not be able to make it back to. I was still very young, with a lot of future ahead of me. I wanted to make the most of it. I could still hear the call of the wild, and feel the allure

of distant lands, exotic foods, beautiful women. I wanted to stretch out my wings and fly, but I knew that if I walked out of the Navy, in a lot of ways, my wings would be clipped anyway.

The Navy, like any of the armed forces, is like being a priest or a cop. It was no less important and held a position of no less respect. Society couldn't function without any of us and it probably wouldn't want to. But everybody who commits their life to such service knows this: once you're done, you're done. There was no revolving door. So, if I chose to walk away, I knew there was no going back. All I knew for sure was that, besides my choice of who to marry and the decision to join the Navy in the first place, this was the biggest decision of my life!

Furthermore, the choice of simply taking an extended vacation wasn't going to fly with the brass either. It was either stay put or go home, sit down or shut up, shit or get off the pot. Plus, there was a lot to be said about the timing of leaving the Navy and going home when I did. Two years later, or even two months later, would make a significant difference.

Then, there was the allure of going home too. My brother Virgil's wedding was coming up and I was slated to be the best man, a once-in-a-lifetime event I didn't want to miss. Thinking of my brother put me in mind of my other old friends. My mind kept drifting back to Marion, whether she was still single, whether she missed or even gave me a passing thought. I began to hope that she had and only then did I realize that I'd given her more than a few passing thoughts myself since I'd been away.

There was also the pull of civilian life, all my time once again my own. I could choose a different trade, to live in any state I chose, or to go back home to Bristol, Connecticut. I couldn't clear my mind of images from our glory days; kissing Betty Ann in the backseat of my father's Studebaker, drinking beer with my buddies.

Time was moving quickly. President John F. Kennedy was leading the United States into an incredible new era and I wanted to be a part of it. The two years between '63 and '65 were going to be big ones, we could all feel it. I didn't want to sit it out in some base in the Mediterranean, where in a lot of ways things were as they'd been for centuries. In the U.S. there was change, there was novelty. The Mediterranean held on to the past, but America could be my future.

Illustrating the point, Elvis himself had joined the services too. But everybody was already done talking about how he'd left active duty at Fort Dix, New Jersey, back in 1960, and if the U.S. was even good enough for The King.

I slept on it that night and on it again over several more nights with no answer coming to me. Goldwater had already re-upped and so had Mac and a few other guys, but every time I thought about pulling the trigger I just couldn't do it.

Finally, that made my decision for me. "If I have that much doubt about staying," I told myself, "then I should listen to myself, pay attention to my instincts. Maybe I've been the Escape Artist long enough, or maybe it's time for just one last escape. Who knows what kind of thing may happen if I stay too

long? What if somebody back home needs me? Whatever I've come here for, haven't I found it? How much more do I need? What am I missing out on back home? I wonder how Marion is doing..."

Arrivederci, Morocco and Europa! Hello, America!

One morning that week I woke up determined to fill out my papers and move ahead with my discharge. It had been great, but all good things must come to an end. The more I thought about it, the more excited I became and the more certain I was that it was the right choice.

I flew out on the same B-59 that brought me in, making the circle complete in my mind more clearly than ever. At the Norfolk, Virginia Naval command station, I got my thirty-day pass and grabbed a round-trip Amtrak train ticket to and from Bristol, Connecticut, back home.

I glowed with a nostalgic warmth and an urgency to see my old friends, and revisit my old haunts. I sensed an encroaching *deja vu*, a sense that I was stepping back in time to a place I knew well and yet felt somehow separated from, as if I'd never been there at all.

My family was overjoyed to see me, even more than I'd expected. Virgil was especially excited that I'd returned. I couldn't count how many times he told me his wedding just wouldn't have been the same without me.

As much as I'd enjoyed all the attention and fine treatment I'd gotten overseas, I was getting just as much at home. Every old person wanted to pinch my cheeks, every girl wanted to pinch my ass! Old men came up and shook my hand, thanking me for my service. Men I'd known my whole life, who'd watched me grow up, treated me with a new respect, slapping my upper arm and preventing me from buying even a single round of drinks.

I wore my uniform with pride for a few days, enjoying the elevated status it granted me. I looked good: dapper, professional, a man with a past and a future. Everybody sensed it, too!

"Anthony!" I turned to see my old girlfriend Marion, arms stretched out as she threw herself into my arms. All the unpleasantness of our parting, of the little fights which had prevented us from walking down the altar years before, seemed wiped away. Her lithe arms wrapped around my broad shoulders as she buried her face in my neck. I leaned back, lifting her up off the ground, her legs kicking up behind her.

It was good to be home.

We talked about what was going on at home and abroad. Nobody else had showed that much interest in my adventures overseas and I almost got the feeling that they were a little jealous. Like they'd wished they'd done what I had done, seen what I had seen, gone where I had gone. Meanwhile, I sensed they felt trapped in Bristol and locked in their dreary lives.

I could see it. Life was smaller back home somehow and less exciting by a long shot. There weren't any bullfights or Fantasia festivals in Bristol, no exotic foods, even imported beer was hard to find. It was charming and beautiful as ever, but to call it the hub of civilization would be a stretch, to say the least.

But thanks to the changing times, things couldn't possibly be too dreary! It was the dawn of 1963 and everybody was waiting for the next big thing. Elvis still hadn't come back and the old rock'n'rollers of his era were long gone. Everybody was talking about music coming from Great Britain, how it was going to be the next big thing, but I just couldn't see it. I'd been to the clubs in Germany and seen a popular band of British kids some of the sailors liked. However, they were basically just playing American rock'n'roll songs, years after they'd faded from popularity in the States.

"They were called the Beatniks ..." I said, giving it some thought, "no, the Beatles. Can you believe that, the Beatles? Like *that's* ever gonna be a hit in the States!"

Well, I'd been wrong before and I'd be wrong again.

Those Little Town Blues

The days went on and the conversations turned upon themselves. We retold the same old stories we'd told hundreds of times. Marion filled me in on what she'd been doing, that she was single and that she was glad I was back.

We all fell back into the small-town rhythms of life, unchanged after all that time; work all day, home for dinner, the bar on the weekends. They had the same fights with their parents and coworkers they'd always had and always will have. They had the same financial concerns, same passions for the football team and the bowling league.

Ah, Bristol! Called "the land of the great white oaks" by the local indigenous population at the time of its founding. That bucolic little town was warming and refreshing. Streams, ponds and parks, the little town hall, the Veteran's Memorial Park... It all brought me back to small-town America, the life I was fighting to defend, protect and preserve. I knew upon coming home that I would go out and fight for her again if I had to, but, of course, we all hope to never have to do that.

Virgil, Marion, a few of the others in our crew, and I took a hike up to Short Mountain with a few bottles of beer and wine. It was cluttered with oak and hickory trees and dotted with glades. It was like reliving our high school years, but not necessarily in a good way.

"I got a novel in me," Roger said, staggering around with half a bottle of Thunderbird. "It's gonna be great!"

He'd been talking about that novel for years, since he was a kid.

Marion leaned over my shoulder, wrapping her arms around me. "Why not write a kid's book? We'll buy two copies, one for each." She gave me a little kiss on the cheek. I knew what she was hinting at.

Virgil was gushing about getting married as he always had. "That's what's important," he said, swaying and chugging from his own bottle, "Family! Children, love, heart and hearth!" He pointed a drunken finger at me. "That's what you gotta do, bro, I'm ... I'm tellin' ya."

I was almost afraid he was going to illustrate the point by throwing up all over me.

Transformation Time

I couldn't help but take a drink from my own bottle and wonder, "Is this what I really want for my life? I spent the first seventeen years of my life with these guys, and they're great. But ..."

It was true! After a flight out of Chicago, time in Europe, everything I had done and seen, the people I had met, it just seemed disappointing to be back home.

Then it hit me! Even though they hadn't changed, *I* had. I had changed in ways that I couldn't explain to any of them. It was then that I realized I had left Bristol for a reason: because I didn't want to spend the rest of my life reliving the same week over and over again. I'd craved adventure and I'd gotten it. I'd wanted to see the world and I'd seen a good deal of it. I'd risked my life, I'd served with men who'd lost comrades in battle. I'd had near-death experiences on the streets of Morocco and Pamplona, I'd seen men gutted and women cowering with their children.

I realized the old saying was true: Service changes you. I'd evolved above the petty concerns of their small-town life, their dreary little lives. I'd seen things most of them would never see. I'd been to the far corners of the globe and a lot of my old crew would live and die in the same little town.

Bristol, Connecticut.

Looking at my old friends, who I loved and had missed, revisiting my old haunts, I knew them to be just that—old.

They were like dogs chasing their own tails, locked up in cycles of wasted energy, running faster and faster and simply getting nowhere. Johnny was going to take over his dad's coin-operated laundromat, Sally was well on her way to becoming an alcoholic, Marty was still trying to get her to fall in love with him and still failing miserably.

They hadn't changed, they hadn't grown or developed or evolved at all. They hadn't done so in the previous three years and not really in most of their lives before that. It seemed clear to me that they'd never change, not two years from then, not twenty, not ever. Marty was going to die chasing Sally's heart and she would die at the bottom of a bottle. Both of them were perfectly decent, loving people, like millions of other worthy people all over the world. They would have unhappy fates. They would live and die, be happy at times, sad at others.

They just would never change.

Although I still loved them, I felt more and more that they were not my destiny. I already knew that I'd have to keep moving forward and that sooner or later I'd be moving on.

Marion wanted me to settle down in Bristol, marry her and raise a brood just like the rest of our friends. I knew I wasn't ready to settle down, certainly not in Bristol, Connecticut. I wasn't sure if it was Bristol itself, or if it was just a fact of the small-town American life, that could pull you down into a rut that would wear you down, hold you back and crush your soul.

I just wasn't about to suffer that fate. I knew two things above any other; one, if I stayed in Bristol, I was going to be doomed to the same fate and, two, I wasn't going to let that happen. I couldn't. The man I'd become wouldn't let it happen.

Honestly, why should it? The United States had New York, where the sophisticates romped, the bluesy swank of Chicago, where deals were made and secrets kept. There was Las Vegas, quickly becoming popular not only as a vacation spot, but as an actual city where people lived full-time. The casino business was a guaranteed success, one way in which the United States was lagging behind Europe. I could make a future there, I could make one anywhere ... anywhere but Bristol, Connecticut.

There were greener pastures, there were higher climbs. I knew that because I'd been there, I'd seen that rarefied view; and while I didn't feel the need to go back to Morocco, back to the Navy, I knew I'd have to move forward ... or die.

My brother's wedding went off without a hitch (except his to her, I suppose). I gave a speech I can't recall and drank too much wine, like a lot of people at a lot of weddings. Still, I was very glad to be there and wouldn't have missed it for anything. My thirty days in Bristol passed and I went back to Norfolk, Virginia, to serve out the rest of my time in the Navy. I'd been to Paris, I'd been to Rome, I'd been to the highest peaks of the Western World and seen things that would make grown men cower and women swoon, but nothing I'd seen or experienced could have prepared me for Norfolk, Virginia.

Norfolk, Virginia, was (and likely remains) the most boring town on the face of the Earth. There was no possibility of any real romance anywhere! In fact, the entire notion of *possibility* seemed to be an illusion in Norfolk.

So, it was just a matter of whiling away the time, of waiting out the clock until I could end this chapter of my life and move on to my next adventures: new places, new experiences. I had been so spoiled to end up settling down in little hometowns. I deserved more. I needed more and was going to have more.

Finally, the day came and I got my discharge papers. It was autumn in 1963, almost the entire year had passed. The Beatles, as I learned they were properly called, had a minor hit with a redundant song called, *Love Me Do*. President Kennedy was on a tour in the United States, uniting an increasingly divided country. He'd made amazing strides against organized crime and communism. We all knew he had an incredible future in store and I was eager to get to my part of it.

They released me with an honorable discharge, some civilian clothes, and a check for \$286 dollars. Then, they put me on a bus from the base to the Norfolk YMCA, where I'd register as a taxpaying citizen, no longer property of the United States government.

I didn't know where I'd be headed after that. All I knew was that the Navy had well prepared me for anything I might come across. It was then time to turn all that energy experience loose on the United States, the land of my birth. My country was the reason I went away, the reason I was there, and the reason I came back. I couldn't wait to get reacquainted, to reignite our love affair, to give all I had to give and take all it had to offer.

I was home, I was free, I was young. Europe had been my playground and now all the United States was my backyard. It was mine for the taking. The only real question, though it was no mere trifle, was this: *Where do I begin?*

Chapter 8: New York, New York... Waking Up in a City That Never Sleeps



In Norfolk, Virginia, November 1963, I was living in limbo. I'd been honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy, after serving three years in the Mediterranean during the Cuban crisis. I had full four-year credits as a kitty cruiser, which meant I'd enlisted at just seventeen with my parents' written permission. It had been three great

years in Europe and Africa, really phenomenal! However, I'd decided to come back to the States and begin a new chapter in my life.

I was waiting—just for those few days at least—for Uncle Sam to turn the page.

The Pabst Blue Ribbons were good, tasted like home. Memories of my brother's wedding were still fresh in my brain, flashes of seeing my friends again after so long still resonating. It had been refreshing to see them, but also disappointing and enlightening. I realized that my hometown of Bristol, Connecticut just wasn't the place for me anymore. It hadn't been for a long time.

Which place *was* the place for me was a question I had no answer for. I'd been so embroiled in my adventures as the Escape Artist in the Med, bouncing around from one incredible place and adventure to the next, festivals and fights: a young man's paradise! Now the United States itself was open to me. I could go anywhere. I was completely free.

Having served honorably, I had benefits to go to any school I wanted. I'd be able to get a home loan more easily and more economically than people who hadn't served as I had. Service had its benefits and these were two big ones. I had little to do but think about it. The Navy was (and remains) like any huge system. There's bureaucracy, there's paperwork, there's protocol. So, it would take a few Norfolk days to be processed so I could be returned to civilian life.

"What about California?" asked Bobby, another discharged sailor, like me and like just about everybody around us.

I took a sip of my own beer, cold and crisp, "I'm open to just about anything, I guess. Something in business. You?" He stared off, taking another slow, deep pull of his beer and icing his lips. "I don't think there's much call for fighting the red blight back here. I hope not, anyway."

“Better not be.” I answered.

“Amen to that, brother.” Bobby said confidently

We toasted our beers and shared a sip.

“I should probably go to college,” I said, my mind circling the idea like a shark around a stranded swimmer. “Seems a shame to let all those benefits go to waste.”

Bobby nodded. “My old man used to say, ‘Never leave money on the table.’”

“Damn right! And it’s not just tuition. They pay for rent, books, a stipend for grub, it’s a pretty great deal.”

“We earned it,” Bobby said, rising his mug again and clinking it against mine before draining it dry.

I’d heard about the college experience, but I’d made another choice, to serve my country overseas, and I didn’t regret it, not for a minute. Now I had a chance to do both: to go to college and get the education I would need. I would be doing it as a vet. There wouldn’t be much competition. So, visions of being the big man on campus were suddenly the focus of my mind’s eye, a tempting scenario for any young man with his future spread out ahead of him.

“They have universities in every city in the nation,” I went on, gesturing to the bartender for two more PBRs on my tab. “Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco... It’s wide open!”

“Yeah, that’s a helluva buffet,” Bobby said, swapping his empty mug for a freshly filled one.

“How about you, Bobby? What’s your plan?” I asked.

He took a swallow and wiped his lips of the white foam. “I’m from Miami Beach, F-L-A.”

“But...,” Bobby went on, “I don’t see myself going back to Florida. Nothing there for me.” I nodded. “Like you said, the whole place is ours for the taking, right?”

“More or less.” I answered.

“I wanna get out there,” Bobby said, “really do some damage, y’know? I ain’t even twenty-one, man, I’m feelin’ my oats!”

I knew just what he meant. We were both flush with the strength of youth, the momentum of our Navy adventures pushing us forward in life, and I knew what he meant about going back, about the hometown, about the notion of falling into old ruts, old relationships, letting the world go on without us. We’d learned too much, experienced too much, to let that happen. We were free, young and strong, with the benefits of service under our belts and in our pockets. Neither of us was interested in looking back.

However, when we turned to look ahead, we were both still a bit dazzled by our breadth of choices, so many and varied opportunities that made picking one almost impossible. “I got a sister in Washington,” Bobby said.

“Lotta rain,” I said, disinterested in the gloomy climbs of the Northwest. “Washington DC,” Bobby said. That was a different story. He went on, “I got an open door there. We could both hunker down a while ‘til we come up with a plan.”

D.C. – A Wash

“Washington DC? Hunker down?” Living in the nation’s capital for a while as a freshly discharged sailor was a lot more than just hunkering down as far as I was concerned. This was the center of what amounted to a revolutionary presidential term. It was late October, and as 1963 wound down, Kennedy and his wife were touring the United States, but they’d be back in Washington soon enough. *Could I ever manage to meet the great man? I dared to ask myself, maybe RFK too? Maybe I could get some work on the Hill? A career in politics, maybe?* Bobby asked, “Whaddaya think?”

I shook it off and raised my beer for a long, refreshing pull. “Wouldn’t want to disappoint your sister.” Bobby nodded. “Yeah, well, she just got married, so don’t think too much about my sister.”

Bobby’s sister Margaret was happy to see us and we were happy to be there. Her new husband was another story, but we didn’t give him too much of a thought. For the first day or so it was a hero’s welcome: fresh-off-the-grill steaks, good ol’ macaroni and cheese, freshly tossed salads, all that delicious American beer that just made it feel like home.

They were eager to hear our stories and I was gratified to tell a few. What good’s a story if nobody wants to hear it, right?

Bobby’s sister and her husband, whom I won’t name for the sake of his privacy, were more sophisticated. That actually made sense because they lived in the nation’s capital, the seat of power. This was no towny couple, no pair of hayseeds from the sticks. We were there among the power brokers, the big wigs, the fat cats.

In Washington being sailors was like currency. I’d served the government no less than any senator or congressman, even more so than most; I’d offered my life in combat if necessary, after all. Most interestingly the people—not just the politicians but the average people—seemed more aware than most how important the military was to peace on Earth, abroad and at home.

Washington had its own subculture of glad-handing too. Everybody was a potential friend, a potential favor, a vote waiting to be cast, a possible hat to be tossed into the ring. So, I was treated with fondness and respect, and so was Bobby by his sister, her husband, her friends and the people we mingled with at parties.

We ended up crashing in Bobby's sister's living room, Bobby on the couch and me in an easy chair. After a few days we started to get looks from Bobby's new brother-in-law. So, neither of us was surprised about what happened when his sister brought us each a cup of coffee and we sat down at the breakfast table.

"So," she said, blowing on her coffee in a conspicuously casual manner, "what's next for you boys?"

Bobby and I glanced at each other, both knowing what was coming next. It was unfortunate because I'd been led to believe we'd be welcome for an extended period. Granted, it wasn't the best circumstance for anyone, but we'd come a long way and to be turned out after just a few days seemed a little cold.

I understood. She wasn't my sister and it *was* their first six months as a married couple, so I pretty much couldn't complain either. Hey, I was in Washington DC, I was a young man of some means and I was grateful for having been welcomed there at all. After giving it a thought, I realized I didn't really have an answer to her question.

So, Bobby and I cut out to a little bar around the corner for a few racks of pool and a couple beers. Between the two of us, we were confident that we'd come up with something and fast. We didn't really have a choice. "We could get an apartment," I said. "Ever thought about a career in politics?" He shot at the one ball, just missing the far corner shot. "Bunch of hypocrite liars. If I wanted that, I'd have gone to Hollywood," Bobby answered.

I lined up a shot at the fifteen, sending it careening into the corner and sinking it hard. "Hollywood sounds kinda fun," I said. Another shot at the ten missed the side pocket, the ball rolled into a cluster of others and settled in the middle of the table.

"If it's the glitz and glamour you want, what about New York?" He sank the five ball and the cue ball right along with it. "Damnit!" Bobby said with an angry tone.

"What *about* New York?" I repeated. "It's America's Paris."

"Don't badmouth New York," he said with a knowing grin. "I know a guy there, Freddie, actor. He's not big time, but it is New York. He told me I could give him a call if I was ever in town."

I tried to be delicate. "Well, that's great, Bob, but, um... You said your sister gave you an open door too. This one turned out to be a bit more of a revolving door, if you know what I'm saying."

"We had to go somewhere, right?" He looked around the little bar, newspapers framed and hung on the walls. "You wanted to see the monuments?"

"You're damn right I did. We served to protect the things those monuments stand for, for the principles the men who those monuments honor. Jefferson, Lincoln, nowhere else in the world can you find a more... A more American city."

“Well, there you go,” Bobby said, missing a shot at the eight ball. “So, let’s give Freddie a call and take a bite of the Big Apple, shall we?”

New York and New York

The Greyhound bus rolled us into New York City, with that fabled skyline rising in the distance. Seeing it up close for the first time in my life was more of a thrill than I was prepared for. I’d seen Rome, Paris, London, all the great hubs, but this was New York, the city that never sleeps, the most exciting and vibrant city in the United States, perhaps the entire world.

We pulled into Penn Station, the art deco look of the place took me to a bygone era that still echoed in our national consciousness and probably always would. Travelers from every corner of the world hustled by in every direction, exits funneling us all out into the streets with our luggage, our hopes and our dreams.

Freddie was just the way Bobby had described him. He was thin, a slick hustler in a Stetson and loose-fitting blazer, a swagger, a snap and a lean gangsta. He seemed to be constantly bobbing to music that only he could hear. “All right,” he said, part of a stream of consciousness jabber that I had to get used to, “great to have you boys Stateside! Manhattan, the place to be, see, be seen and be part of the scene.”

The streets on Manhattan were more crowded than any I’d ever been to. I’d flown out of Chicago after enlisting, so it wasn’t my first walk around a big city block, not by any stretch. But Manhattan had its own feel, a power that resonates out of the sidewalk and not always in a very pleasant fashion.

But I wasn’t alone, and I wasn’t some kid fresh off the farm. I was as dangerous as any thug on the streets, as smart as any young hustler, with a future as bright as any corporate young lion. *Bring it on, New York! Hit me with your best shot and be ready for one in return. I served in the U.S. Navy, we don’t back down, we don’t retreat. We don’t fail, we prevail.*

Freddie clapped and looked around the scurrying sidewalk, the skyscrapers rising around him as if they were his own. “What’s yer poison, gents? What can I do you out of? What’s it gonna be?”

Bobby and I shared a glance. *First things first*, we both realized. Bobby asked him, “How about a place to stay?” He turned with a start. “A place? Of course! I got a place fer ya’s! I’m your man with the plan, my brothers, your guy in the know.”

“Okay,” I said, “maybe you can put *us* in the know.” He chuckled and clapped his hands, pointing at me as if his hands were pistols. “Right to the point, I like that. My gram’s in Europe for another four months, takin’ a little R and R...” He raised his brows, as if using military jargon somehow would bind us together. I wasn’t unamused, to tell you the truth. “Anyway,” he went on, “the place is yours for as long as you need it.”

Bobby said, "Yeah? Free? We don't have a lot of dough, Freddie." I looked around the bustling city. I felt like it was costing me a fortune just standing there. "Two hundred and eighty bucks won't go far in *this* town."

"Amen to that," Freddie said. "But there's work for a couple able-bodied seamen such as yourselves. We'll dig something up. Let's hit the subway." I'd heard of the famous New York subway system, and not everything had been very flattering. Almost all of it turned out to be true. The place smelled like a toilet, that acidic smell of urine hanging in the poorly circulated air. A rat scurried across down the stairs ahead of us, paying little mind to the throngs of passengers walking up or down and giving the hairy little wretch as much room as they could.

Those trains came fast and shot us through the city, rattling and rolling and bypassing all the traffic and exhaust fumes above. I couldn't help but think what an accomplishment it was, a marvel of engineering. Trains were common in Europe, but I knew they didn't have anything like the subway in Los Angeles or other so-called hubs. That was a car town, everybody knew. However, the East coast, the Tri-state area, New England, they were still subway cities and they will probably always be.

I wasn't prepared for the sights that awaited me after walking up the stairs of the subway station in Brooklyn. I'd never heard or thought much about the boroughs outside of Manhattan, which for me *was* New York. I'd forgotten about all the movies from my youth. Stepping into Brooklyn was a bracing reminder of the cost a city like New York carries: for all the glamor and success, the sleekness of its skyscrapers, the grandeur of Central Park, there were the slums, the alleys strewn with garbage, laundry lines hung from building to building, children screaming and parents screaming even louder, dogs barking, police sirens leaking in and out of the distance at a steady clip. The apartment was four flights up, the staircase tilted and creaking, always threatening to give way beneath our feet yet managing to survive, year in and year out. Every step was a leap of faith.

Freddie toured us around the little apartment, a one-bedroom that would be more than enough for the two of us. "There's just that one bed," Freddie said, "you'll have to work that out among yourselves... But you got lights, heat, there's even a TV. Not bad, right?"

"No, Freddie," Bobby said, tapping his shoulder, "thanks again!"

"You got it." He checked his watch. "Gotta split, fellas. Got a meeting with my agent. Take a break, get the lay of the land. I'll give you a ring back in a day or two."

I said, "Got a gig lined up?"

Freddie clapped his hands, head bobbing on his shoulders. "We shall see, m'man, we shall see."

Bobby and I took a load off and unwound from our trip into town. We each showered, cleaned up a bit and decided to take a look around Brooklyn; maybe find a decent bar with some cold beer and a few pretty girls to look at, talk to and maybe get some phone numbers. There was

nothing of any interest in Brooklyn and none of the other boroughs had much to offer either. Queens was a suburb, the Bronx was a war zone, the others were just... The others. For us, Manhattan was calling, and that subway was nothing if not reliable, cheap, and convenient.

Plus, Manhattan was where the action was, there just wasn't any doubt. The island was a dense patchwork of different cultures and the very best foods from different regions of the world. Little Italy smelled of oregano and garlic, Chinatown was alive with exotic butcher shops and vendors peddling fish, chickens and vegetables.

We chowed down on a real American buffet with fried chicken, Salisbury steak, mashed, scalloped and baked potatoes, salads, soups, breads and desserts. It was the kind of food the Navy served, but I have say it tasted a lot better.

After a few trips back and forth, both Bobby and I agreed that the thing to do was get out of Brooklyn and find a place in the city. It was Manhattan or bust as far as I was concerned. The free place in Brooklyn was great, but getting stabbed was going to make it a lot less of a bargain. We were both young men, recently and honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy and we appreciated the help, but we didn't need the freebie. We needed a job.

Bobby and I spent the day looking for a place and wound up in a bar, Kelly's, in Times Square, sat down to refresh ourselves and talk over the places we'd seen, all of them overpriced and underserved. However, as vets, we did have our choice of apartments, so that was something. Paying for it was something else again.

The service in the bar wasn't great and we had plenty of time to reflect while waiting to be served. Once we were, the waitress asked in a very courteous way, "What kind of work you're lookin' for?" She asked.

I looked around and thought fast. "Bartender, matter of fact."

"That so?" She skeptically asked.

"Sure is," I said. "Bobby here is my assistant."

"Is he now?" The waitress asked in surprise

Bobby caught on fast, nodding. "Sure am."

"Isn't that something," our waitress said. "We happen to be a little short-staffed at the moment, our regular guy called in sick."

"Fancy that," I said with a wink.

We started work that day, slinging beer and mixing a few cocktails for Kelly's best patrons. Bobby kept glaring at me, but I'd thought of it first and he was stuck with the job of assistant, changing the beer kegs and getting fresh whiskey bottles.

We worked for tips and meals and took a room at the famous St. James Hotel just across the street. It wasn't much and it wasn't permanent, but it would do for a while. We moved out of the place in Brooklyn and started working full time. We were both bartending at Kelly's and I took another job waiting tables at the lunch place around the corner. That led to a job at a catering company. The three jobs were bringing in enough food and tips to get us by, which was no small feat in New York City.

We settled into the rhythms of big city life, working at one job or another, eating free and saving what we could, and coming across some of the most beautiful women we'd ever seen. New York was the hub of a lot of glamorous professions, so there were fashion models, actresses and dancers; and they were all impressed with a handsome young sailor, fresh from his service in Europe.

We got a two-bedroom apartment with two other discharged vets, the only way to live affordably in New York for young men like us. We were getting the feel of the city, learning the different areas, where to go and where not to go. The subway was an amazing benefit, zipping us from one borough to another, from end of the island to the other and to all points in between. Twenty-five cents would take us anywhere we wanted to go, quickly and easily not exactly in style. We were young, so we didn't need style.

The food service industry had been a lucky break, but I didn't intend to be waiter or bartender for the rest of my life. I needed more money, a better opportunity and more privacy at home.

Newsflash! The World Holds Its Breath

On the twenty-third of November, 1963, I was on a job interview for Official Films. Freddie had gotten me a shot at a junior executive position and I was very excited to get it. A job in the film industry was just the kind of thing I was looking for: glamour, money, power, women and lots of travel at every opportunity. I'd be able to go anywhere and do whatever I wanted. I'd have all the benefits of the Navy and none of the obligations!

The interviewer, Jack Burke, asked me, "And where do you see yourself in five years?"

"Right here," I said with a casual smile, "racking up the Academy Awards." He chuckled. "I'm not sure you understand," he said. "We don't make those kinds of movies, we make junk."

I said, "That's what you make now, but in five years..." He nodded and smiled, but his secretary burst into the office without even knocking.

Jack said, "Delores, what's the...?"

"It's the president, sir!" Her voice was cracking, her makeup running down her cheeks.

I mumbled, "The president of the company is here ... now?" I buttoned up my jacket and sat up in my chair. Jack asked Delores, "Harrison Newman is here?"

"No, sir," Delores said through her tears, "the president of the United States! He ... he's been shot!"

I could feel the blood drain from my face. Jack stood up from behind his desk and turned on the TV on his bookshelf, the black and white screen flickering. Walter Cronkite was sitting behind his familiar news desk.

"...President Kennedy was shot as he drove from Dallas Airport to downtown Dallas; Governor Connally of Texas, in the car with him, was also shot. It is reported that three bullets rang out.

A Secret Service man was heard shouting from the car, 'He's dead.'

Whether he referred to President Kennedy or not is not yet known.

The President, cradled in the arms of his wife Mrs. Kennedy, was carried to an ambulance and the car rushed to Parkland Hospital outside Dallas. The President was taken to an emergency room in the hospital. Other White House officials were in doubt in the corridors of the hospital as to the condition of President Kennedy. Repeating this bulletin: President Kennedy shot while driving in an open car from the airport in Dallas, Texas, to downtown Dallas..."

We both stood in that office, stunned. My legs felt like rubber, my stomach turning with a quick, cold nausea. Delores and other members of the staff drifted into the office, the door left open, the TV attracting everybody's attention. On the little TV screen, Cronkite was handed a fresh news bulletin. He looked it over, took off his glasses and looked straight into the camera.

"From Dallas, Texas, the flash, apparently official: President Kennedy died at 1 p.m. Central Standard Time." He glanced at the clock and added, "Two o'clock Eastern Standard Time, some 38 minutes ago." Cronkite put his glasses back on. He swallowed, obviously wrestling to maintain his professional demeanor. His voice quivered with emotion and went on with his report, "Vice President Johnson has left the hospital in Dallas, but we do not know to where he has proceeded; presumably he will be taking the oath of office shortly and become the thirty-sixth President of the United States."

Around me, the girls were howling and crying into their hankies, Jack's expression pale, shocked, his mouth a tiny, open slot through which no words could pass. Because there *were* no words. It was unspeakable, unthinkable, impossible. John Kennedy was our president, he was the future of America, a new Camelot! The idea that he'd been struck down, a man so young and vital, a man so central to world events, our protector and our servant, a man both humble and exalted... It was simply stunning!

We didn't even finish the interview. I just turned and wandered off through the crowd filling the office. I suddenly found myself wandering down the busy boulevard, every conversation centered around the same tragic subject. I couldn't ignore the words that wafted around as I walked, not headed anywhere in particular: *dead, shot, Dallas*. Other than that, there was an

eerie silence over the city, probably for the first and last time in New York City. Everyone was sharing the same stunned quiet, disbelief, horror: the American dream shattered right before our eyes.

For a serviceman like me, the loss was even worse than for civilians, I say with all due respect. He was ours, he was our generation's president and we all suffered from his loss, but those of us in the service had served under him. As the Commander-in-Chief, he was our boss. As the president, we were his bosses. So, we had the kind of respect and sense of duty to him that most civilians just couldn't have. We'd lost one of our own. Not only was he one of us, he was the best of us. A rich kid from a powerful family, he could have avoided service, stayed home with his silver spoon; but instead he put himself out there and almost paid as his older brother did, with his life.

Kennedy had also served in the military and in the Navy no less! As a Lieutenant Junior Grade, he'd captained a PT-109 into combat and survived a collision with a Japanese destroyer. Kennedy collected the five surviving seamen and kept them alive, clinging to the floating wreckage of the PT109. So, every Naval officer and sailor felt the loss to our very core.

I'd started around 63rd Street and wound up at Greenwich Village. I wandered into a bar and ordered a beer, only half aware of who I was and what I was doing. The TV was on, as was every TV in every window I'd passed on the way with the same news broadcasting on every screen. There was no denying it, no ignoring it, no explaining it.

There were already rumors, gossip, questions and theories of all sorts. Nobody knew yet who had done it, no gunman had been captured, everybody had questions about the First Lady's health or well-being; it was chaotic and confusing, everybody trying just to make sense of the senseless.

It was all we would talk or think about for days, weeks, months. There was the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald, his later murder at the hands of Jack Ruby. There were the rumors of organized crime and communist involvement in a conspiracy to kill Kennedy, but it all sprang from that one terrible moment in Dallas. Those of us who lived through it will never forget where we were the moment we heard about the incident.

The Dance of Being ALIVE!

December came and we were making the most of life in New York: four discharged Naval seamen sharing a two-bedroom, one-bath place on the Upper East Side. We were all working at different times, so we'd go for days without seeing one another. Whoever happened to be off duty was probably hosting a party, with girls, buds and beer... Plenty of good times! We were enjoying our youth, working hard and playing harder, spending our money and not regretting a penny of it. Life was short, life was precious, life was ours to enjoy.

There was nobody to tell us what to do or where to go, when to sleep or when to wake up. It was the first time in our lives that we were truly free, unencumbered, with all the strength and youth to rise to the task of conquering the Big Apple, one juicy bite at a time.

A new year was dawning, 1964. America was anxious to leave the tragic year of '63 behind her, to look forward to new challenges and new rewards. My own life was changing fast. I'd be attending the Pratt Institute of Architecture in Brooklyn, paid for by the U.S. Navy, of course. The Beatles were about to become the biggest stars in the world. Vietnam, the drug revolution, hippies, flower power, psychedelia, were all just around the corner and they'd leave their mark on the United States and everybody in her. Nobody was sure whether it would be for better or worse, but change was coming for us all, calling the tune we all would dance to and what a dance it would be!

Chapter 9: The Universe vs. The University

In January of 1964, the Escape Artist had made his last great escape and cut loose of the United States Navy forever. Even after leaving, I always remained grateful and always a member of the Navy at heart. I would always carry the lessons and experiences I'd picked up in the Mediterranean and places beyond it. Not re-enlisting meant I was a private citizen once again.

I'd made an initial go of it back home in Bristol, Connecticut and found it miserable—a dead end. Washington had promise, but it fizzled with our invitation. Then, a friend of a friend brought me to New York City, Manhattan and surrounding boroughs.

I'd witnessed firsthand the bustle of midtown, the grime and crime of the battery, the highs and the lows of one of the greatest cities on Earth, and I'd done it during one of the most tumultuous years in modern history. The heights of a political promise which collapsed with the new decade, all dashed along with the young life of our president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, at the end of 1963: a new and terrible low in American history.

So, I felt like in just the few short months I'd been back in the United States (not counting those boring few months in Norfolk, New Jersey), it was like I'd already endured the best and worst of the American Century, the wonder and the worry of the Atomic age. I was twenty-one years old.

I turned my attention to my future and, just as crucial, my present. I'd been pulling down three jobs in the food service industry, including bartending and catering, but I knew that wasn't where my future was. With bad tippers, abusive customers and shrewish broads, I didn't think it was going to be my present for very much longer.

I'd had a shot at a movie studio job the day Kennedy was assassinated. I reached back out to the producer, but nobody was making any big business decisions that month, especially since the following month was Christmas. Once the year rolled over, life went on in show business without me and my calls were never returned. I'd no other choice than to look elsewhere.

I cast a pretty wide net. I knew the U.S. Navy would be true to its word and put me through college on the GI bill just about anywhere I wanted to go. There'd be some limits, but I wasn't really thinking about Harvard anyway. I knew I needed some real-world skills to build a valuable career. I couldn't go on spending the rest of my life being the Escape Artist, popping from one exotic location to the next... Unfortunately, I couldn't become a professional tourist and make a living out of it.

I could have hit Boston University, University of California, Los Angeles, known even then as UCLA, or its rival, University of Southern California (USC). There were almost too many choices, so I started looking for other things to consider. Southern California would be best for weather, but the people were known to be a bit unstable. I wanted stability. Washington had been interesting, but it was more a political town than a college experience. Texas had several good universities, but I wasn't interested in moving to Dallas.

I decided to take geography into account: The Northwest was gloomy; the Southwest too hot; the Midwest too flat and severe; the South too hot and humid; and the East coast prone to the worst of every season. It never failed to amaze me that this was where the Pilgrims managed to establish the original thirteen colonies. Los Angeles had earthquakes, the Midwest had tornadoes, Florida had alligators and mosquitoes that I heard were as big as your hand.

So I turned my attention away from *where* to study to *what* to study. I knew I had artistic impulses, but I also had commercial aspirations. I knew I wanted to be around people who were a little more colorful than I'd found in the Navy, less disciplined and more free-wheeling. That was the tenor of the changing times, after all. Even though I was fresh from the service, I was still young and ready to adapt back to civilian life. I was no lifer swabbie, just a free-spirited young man with the world at his feet and every opportunity within his grasp.

More and more, it was probably because I was in New York, I began to think about the fashion industry, clothes, hair and photography. There was money there, freedom, women, celebrities, good times and room for untold advancement. However, as far as fashion, I didn't even need to check a mirror to know I didn't have a stellar future as a model. Not that I was a bad-looking guy, but I wasn't about to pass myself off as professionally gorgeous.

Then, maybe I thought photography or something similar would be better. I could draw and I always had a fairly good sense of framing and perspective. What was hair and makeup but a way to frame the face? A way to create a deliberate perspective despite whatever light or other distractions there may be?

I couldn't deny that this was a world far different than the Navy. A lot of the men in the fashion industry would not have passed military muster. At least not at that time. At the end, what I wanted was something new, a different kind of community and those people weren't the ones I was most interested in spending time with anyway.

New York was the American center of the fashion industry and could be closely compared to the European fashion hubs of London, Paris and Milan. By realizing this, my quest to finding my *where* fell right into place. The only decision I still had to make was to choose a school.

The Pratt Institute



The Pratt Institute's Brooklyn Campus was easy to get to. It was not exactly in the center of the best part of the city, but it had a leading faculty, a national reputation, and it could provide untold local contacts and opportunities. Plus, it was on the Navy's dime. I enrolled and bought my books, some new clothes and got down to business.

Pratt had a reasonably pretty campus, especially considering how urban the environment was. There were sizable patches of grassy, tree covered lawns, which became rarer the farther away you were from Central Park. Since it was basically an art institute, there were a great deal of statues around the campus. Some of them were of naked, crouching men and women staring thoughtfully into some imagined distance, while others were comprised of long and welded poles. There were astonishing monuments scattered throughout the campus. One of those monuments I can vividly remember was a patch of grass that housed beautiful, colorful pinwheels spinning idly in the breeze.

It felt so much like an outdoor museum and public garden that the campus attracted more than just the students and faculty. In the spring, I'd see some mothers sitting with their toddlers and some others pushing baby strollers; there were also people throwing tennis balls for their eager dogs to retrieve. It was almost like being back in a small town; all the comforting sights and sounds of bucolic Middle America, but without the endless drab, repetitive conversations, and faces every day, getting older and older as the years rolled on.

Yes, it was still New York, with the vibrancy, excitement and sophistication that it provided, but there was also the crime, the grit, the flat ugliness of the streets which made their way even onto that lovely little campus. Concrete walkways led students from one big red brick building to another.

These squarely, unadorned and utilitarian structures could have been dorms, a high school, or even a federal prison when seen in the right light. Sadly, it would come to look more and more that way as my time there went on.

The University "System"

I took the basic freshman classes, Pratt's version of general education: Design and Architecture, Art and Design, Illustration, Drawing, Graphic Design, Painting and Drawing. Suffice it to say, I did a fair amount of drawing. I felt like I was just doing what everybody else was doing: working the system. If being in the Navy had taught me anything, and it had taught me a lot, one thing was that the system has its method and it cannot be questioned. One does as one is told and serves the system to have the system prevail.

Universities seemed to work pretty much the same way. Young people came in, slightly older people came out, all transformed into a slightly different thing which is of greater value to a society. The football jock would become a capable advertising executive. The young poet would be molded into something more useful, perhaps into an English teacher. The wanna-be Hollywood star would be a news anchor on some local channel.

So I didn't question it. I simply worked as hard as I could, learned as much as I could, strove to do as best as I was physically able to. That was the training you get from the Navy: to refuse surrender and to work as hard as necessary to get the job done. For me that meant an endless parade of chapters to read, sketches to do, paintings to study; and then again, more books,

more sketches, until my eyes burned and fingers bled; and until my fingers burned and my eyes bled.

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed that I was working myself too hard. I was there to enjoy my youth as much as to make something of my future. After all, I wasn't about to get any younger. I took into account something else that my time in the Navy had taught me: one was never sure what was going to happen. I decided that a more strategic approach would be to focus less and let things just sort out on their own.

For all the time I spent seeming to float around Europe, I had always traveled with a goal, with purpose. I had applied myself to the best of my abilities at every turn, risking my life for the greater good where necessary. I wasn't about to just start drifting through life, not after being where I'd been and seeing what I'd seen.

It was true that one couldn't question the system, but it was also true that the system was made by the man to serve mankind. Every individual within that system had to know their place, their purpose, to take up that mantle to the very best of their ability, and to the very last of their resources. The system couldn't function if the parts didn't function properly on their own or if they failed to inter-work with the parts immediately around them. The system cannot allow confusion, variety or choice.

So, after a few months at Pratt, I became frustrated. It felt a lot like an additional year of high school. I'd always been an overachiever, but my teachers had discouraged me because that didn't serve the system best. So they stifled me at an early age just to make their jobs easier, not realizing that they'd been overlooking the very central reason for their jobs to begin with! It discouraged me to see that things at Pratt were pretty similar. It was that same "keep your head down, do as you're told, loose lips sink ships" mentality.

But this was an art school, where creative impulses should have been nurtured and encouraged, where a little bit of chaos should have been considered a good thing. I was an artist searching for my own voice, trying to see and present the world in my own way, but they just wanted to teach me to see the world the way they saw it, the way their clients saw it. Again, I was an artist, but they wanted me to be merely a practitioner, carrying on the same notions of form and function which had gone on for centuries before and would endure for centuries long after. If the human race managed to live that long, of course.

Learning wasn't what had attracted me to the arts, to New York, to the United States. It was the land of the free and the home of the brave, but somehow at Pratt I felt like neither one. I felt like a caged dog, a rat in a maze or a cog on a wheel.

While being kept that way served the system well; in most cases, it could stifle the individual, their process of living and discovering things for themselves. How ironic, wasn't that just what I'd left the Navy to do? Then it hit me: I'd simply traded serving one system for serving another

and my quest to fulfill the individual that I was, live the life that I wanted to lead, was still frustratingly beyond my grasp. I was heading down the wrong path.

Yet I knew I hadn't chosen poorly either. New York was the land of opportunity and I knew I had a future in one of its many glamor professions. My only wonder was whether or not Pratt was the way to go or if there wasn't some other route to the same glorious destination.

Once the notion of leaving Pratt behind crept into my head, it was hard to ignore. I kept thinking about it more and more until I was no longer considering whether to leave, but where to go, how to get there and what to do thereafter.

These were the big questions of life for a young man of my age; in that city, in that year, or any man in any city on any year, really. As the six-month mark came up, I knew it was time for a change and I was beginning to have a pretty good idea of what shape that change might take.

I lost more than a few nights trying to sleep on it, getting cranky and irritated the more it plagued me. I asked myself, Why should I let this send me around the bend? Why do I need to go to an art school anyway? A college to learn how to draw the human hand? I can already do that! The more I thought about it, the more I was convinced...

Why should I even be going to a college or university at all? I've done three years in the United States Navy, I've traveled the world—that's the best education a young man could ask for. If I need to read *The Great Gatsby*, I'll just go ahead and read *The Great Gatsby*. I don't need some snooty college professor to explain it to me and then grade me on how well I regurgitate his own opinions back to him! I sure don't need some fraternity. After risking my life, the idea of kneeling before some punk so he could slap me on the ass with a wooden paddle and have to say, "Thank you, sir, may I have another?" just isn't going to happen.

The word university is derived from the word universe, meaning that when you go to a university, you study all that there is to study, everything in the universe. Your education should really be, in a sense, universal, a student learns a little about everything and everything about a little, but I could already teach myself anything I needed to know. The knowledge of the universe was already mine for the taking with nothing more than a free public library card and a bit of time to do some reading.

Forget these professors, their systems and their preconceived notions of who I am, what I should think and feel, what I should do or create, what my life should be. They don't know me and they never will.

They can do things their way, but I'll be damned if I'm going to let them stop me from doing my own things, living my own life, my own way.

The term wasn't over yet and the Navy was still paying my way, so I decided to stick it out until the end of the semester and make my next move then. I was anxious, imagining where I'd go

and what I'd do, and as the timing got closer I couldn't escape the nervous curl in my gut. The future was wide open, but so is a great jaw about to swallow its prey.

The days crept on, my future making its way toward me with patient mercilessness, but I kept working, did my best at Pratt. *"Just get through it, don't back down."* *"Yeah, I know,"* my own voice answered back, *"but I hate being told what to do! After three years in the Navy, it's enough!"* *"Just a little while longer,"* I told myself, *"something big is waiting just around the corner."* I found it hard to believe, but I thought I'd give myself the benefit of the doubt. I'd been wrong before.

TO BE CONTINUED ...