

This is the prelude to the prologue of "In An Insane Society,..." My life led me to that insane society that most would never even care to dream about,.... Dream about!? More like a nightmare; but it was my nightmare and I loved it.

I took my first bus ride into NYC when I was 16. You might say I was driven. When I first heard Tom Waits sing "*The Ghost of Saturday Night*", my curiosity was piqued. A year later he released "*Nighthawks at the Diner*" and I heard, "*Well I think it's about time I took you on an improvisational adventure into the bowels of the metropolitan region.*" And then that sweet sonofabitch sealed it with, "*Eggs and Sausage*". Ever since I was a skinny little runt (ornery, the old man would say, God rest his soul) of 5 years old I rarely got to sleep before 3 a.m. so when I heard about "*There's a rendezvous of strangers around the coffee urn tonight*". Although I've yet to ever have a cup of that stench, I wanted to be among 'All the gypsy hacks and the insomniacs.' A few months later "Taxi Driver" was released and I got my first real look at the 'bowels of the metropolitan' which would become my home off and on for more than four years. Later that summer I was on a bus heading north on the Jersey turnpike.

So, there I was, Greyhound bound for the big apple. A three hour ride; more than enough time to reflect. I had already been involved in dozens of street fights; my first at the age of six. Although technically, it wasn't in the streets. Loyle Lanes is the local bowling alley and was the only place in which to hang out at that time. So, I'm hanging out with a couple of my brothers. Over by the pinball machines was "Boulder" another six year old, and a couple of his brothers. I had no idea who he was and vice-versa. It was the first and last fight without reason I ever had. There was no winner, we both cried, and years later I met Farside and at that time had no idea he was once known as "Boulder". We've been the best of friends even to this day. That was my first, unless you count the time at St. Mary Magdalene when I smashed the class bully's face into the water fountain for cutting in line. Amazingly, a split second after I busted his lip, Sister Bernadine had me by the ear hauling me down to the office. I never understood why I couldn't convince her or the principal that I did nothing wrong; if the bully never cut in front of me on the hottest day of a Jersey September when it was MY turn to get MY drink,... well, I just didn't understand how they couldn't see the whole cause and effect thing. I suppose that was my start of fighting the good fight for justice. Years later, some of my six older brothers became drug dealers. I'm probably lucky that I would rather fight than do anything else. So, when my brothers or their friends would try to get me to 'experiment', it just gave me a reason to fight. The reflecting continued when the bus pulled into Port Authority; I was thinking about the time at Rattletrap, a local river, where I busted up an Angel Dust "factory". Now I was about to exit onto 42nd Street in the greatest city in the world. I had no real idea what to expect; the sun was going down, I looked out of the window of the bus, and within 30 feet of a cop I saw my first hooker and a drug deal going down. Sweeeeeet!!!

Walking down the aisle exiting the bus, my eyes darted back and forth from the drug deal to the cops who were apparently nothing more than spectators. Even though this appeared somewhat strange, I didn't give it another thought; at least not at that moment. Maybe it was the stench that hit me first off the bus that cleared my mind. An aromatic combination of vomit, diesel fumes, and a ripe scented bouquet of urine, both the old and freshly added stream from the bum relieving himself on the back tire of the greyhound. Hmmm, I was living, or about to live, a Tom Waits' song. Hell, who knows, at that time it could have been ol' Tom pissing on that tire.

42nd street and heading east. On the first corner I positioned myself right behind the three cops to get their point of view. Yeah, they were watching, just watching, the drug deal on the opposite corner. Not into the politics at that time, with a shrug and a shake of my head, I crossed the corner and headed toward Times Square. On the way I noticed that as I approached obvious scumbags leaning against the graffiti, they started mumbling. About the fourth one, the mumbling became clear; I immediately flashed back to the gun dealer who sold to Robert DeNiro in "Taxi Driver"; it was a shopping list: "Tar, China White, Mexican Mud". 42nd street was a flea market of drug dealers. At that moment, I fell in love with New York City.

Don't know why I didn't fight right then and there; maybe I wanted to see more than two blocks of the city before taking a chance on being killed. Hell, I hadn't even been on a subway yet. As I got closer to Times Square, I did see something that looked peculiar; a good sized billboard advertising "EVITA". It was among a veritable plethora of words including, but not limited to: TOPLESS, TRIPLE XXX, NUDE, GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS, 25 CENTS. I figured this EVITA woman must have been a hundred dollar hooker

or something; she was the only one who had an actual billboard. Obviously I was not as cultured then as I am now. I was like a kid in a candy store. Every form of debauchery, every dreg, lowlife, worthless piece of filth that could have been scraped off the walls of hell was here.... and I was a part of it! To top it off, the raconteurs and roustabouts, said, "Buddy, come on in." I WAS living a Tom Waits' song. I smiled and told the doorman I was only 16. Without skipping a beat, the next words out of his mouth, "You need ID? Ten bucks, across the street, my cousin Philly. Tell'im I sentcha over. I asked who he was; you know, just to make it clear to cousin Philly. "Who am I?" he asked, all of a sudden belligerent, "Who the frig are you? Get the hell outta here!" No need to go visit cousin Philly: whatever was inside, couldn't compare to the freak show I was watching all around me.

It was time to leave the limelight of Times Square. For the last two hours I had been propositioned with every drug, pharmaceutical or otherwise, and any sex act one could imagine with a variety of lovely young ladies, some actually void of track marks running the entire length of their arms. Not far from the 'theater district' on my way uptown I came across a game of Three Card Monte. Now, I was not unprepared for what was about to happen. My favorite uncle, Pete, was a machine-gunner on a support landing craft during World War II in the South Pacific. When ol' Pete, who at this point in his life, was a year younger than I at this moment in my life, wasn't blasting 'Nips' with his .30 caliber, he was on one of those Pacific Islands getting some ink; he had a hula dancer on his left biceps that would dance when he flexed. Outside the tattoo parlor he came across a game of Three Card Monte. I suppose he studied that little con game so one day he'd be able to share such valuable knowledge with his skinny little nephew. The moment I walked up to that table, I had the players pegged. Words like "outside man", "inside man", and "shills" filled my head as though Pete were whispering them in my ear. I watched as the dealer tossed the cards around the felt. When he stopped, the man to my right pointed at the card on the left. I bit, "Not even close. It's in the middle." The dealer turns over the card on the left, shakes his head, and snatches the money out of his partner's hand. Next move, he flips the center card. 'WHO WOULD'VE GUESSED, IT'S THE QUEEN!!!'

You shoulda bet, woulda won." the shill advises, just like Pete said he would. "Got any money?" the dealer asked'

I pulled out a ten-dollar bill from my pocket. My only ten-dollar bill, my only money. The dealer snagged it out of my hand. Damn, he was quick! I told him I didn't want to bet.

He started, with attitude, "Just pick a,..." before he got the word 'card' out, I punched him in the throat, had my money back, and was heading uptown, double-time. I figured if I walked quick enough, I'd hear if those shills were running up behind me. Either way, didn't matter to me. I had a taste of my first fight in NYC and was ready for more; what a rush! I slowed my pace when I reached the trees of Central Park and made my way over to a bench at one of the softball fields. The half moon provided enough light to see most of the activities taking place in the immediate vicinity. It had everything you'd expect in this situation except the quarter slot for the coin. What the moon didn't make clear was remedied by an auditory explanation of rhythmic moans from who knows what kind of subhuman. Some could've easily been mistaken for a wounded dog far off in the distance. Not too far off I heard a retching from behind a shrub. I tried to focus, and made out the flicker of an open flame down low. Adrenalin still pumping from getting my sawbuck back from Mr. Monte, I eased myself, quietly as could be, over to the 'burning bush'. I was pretty sure I wasn't going to see Moses talking to God or anything like that, and I was right. What I did see was three guys gathered around a soda can heroin cooker and one guy doubled over puking his guts out. 'Yeah, boy, that was living!' I thought to myself as I watched in absolute amazement while these guys booted, 'Black Tar, China White, Mexican Mud', who knows what they were cooking up; didn't really care as they 'melted' and seemingly drifted away. There was one more of the three who lost his lunch; very acrid smelling, the vomit that comes out of a junkie. I just watched; figured they were already dead, what more could I do? That thinking changed soon enough. Ironically, a year later, it was this very spot I got the scar that lies at the corner of my right eye. That little bit of insanity is covered in the first chapter of, "In An Insane Society,..."

I like to think there is some justification for my '*insanity*'. At the age of 10, my grandfather, the bastard son of the royal family in Prussia, was sent on his way so not to confuse the order of heirs awaiting their throne. The only advice given to him, 'When the wolves come, lie down in the snow and play dead.' Advice taken and wisely followed on that first night on a trip that started from Bratislava. The wolves came. The lone little boy lie in the snow, deathly silent. Sniffed at, prodded, then finally marked as territory with urine. I can only imagine the nerves of steel it must have taken to not move. One might want to write

it off as being petrified, but once the wolves were on their way, the journey continued immediately and only ended when the boy in exile smuggled himself onto a ship in a port in Italy.

In 1898, while unloading the cattle from the haul of that ship at Ellis Island, a wide-eyed, brown haired boy was discovered. Things were a little different back then. The authorities did not bend over backwards to present to you every social program they could lay at your feet; if you didn't have a sponsor, you had nothing. He was lucky not to be sent back from where he came. Instead, as part of his welcome to America, Petr Jurichik was put on a train heading to Southwestern Pennsylvania to work the coal mines. Again, I can only imagine what was going through his mind as he stared out the window of that train: trees, rivers, mountains passing by. The rhythm of the rails as memories of such a short life must have begged for any kind of reason why this was happening. What could possibly be going through anyone's mind, let alone that of a little boy. Forced away from his family, alone in a new country, and soon to be an indentured servant, i.e., slave. After all, that pretty much was the life of a miner in the 18th century. No need in asking how it came to be, it just was,... and he would deal with it. .

Andro Valko, one of the founders of Beavertdale, Pa., ran a boarding house and soon this was Petr's new home. Still a little young to head down into the mines, his first job found him hovering over conveyor belts picking out the boney coal. This inhalation, even outside of the mine, was the start of the Black Lung that would eventually kill him. But, my God, the life he would live and things he would do before he coughed out his last breath would be worthy of any king.

That first year in the boarding house, Susan Valko was born. 15 years later, she became Mrs. Petr Jurichik and would bear 15 children. They instilled in these children the work ethic and integrity that made our country great. One of the most important life lessons he taught his children was to always fight the good fight. Fight for what's right, fight for justice, no matter what the cost or consequences. This was proven by example when he teamed up with John L. Lewis to fight for a decent wage and a fair treatment of the miners. He would walk for miles over the mountains to buy supplies from a non-'company' store rather than patronize those he considered slave owners. His children would sit at the top of the alley and watch as, eventually and inevitably, a fight would break out at the Polish National Club as arguments got heated.

Those lessons were well learned. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and 'awoke the giant', my uncles were part of that giant. Joe enlisted and ended up on a destroyer in some of the fiercest battles in the South Pacific. He received a medal for taking out a Kamikaze wrapped in explosives swimming toward his ship while they were docked at an enemy island. Andy was a medic with the Screaming Eagles, 101st Airborne. Four hours before the D-Day invasion started, he parachuted behind enemy lines and ended up in St. Mere Eglise. At the Battle of the Bulge for its entirety, he was not one of the more than 19,000 killed in less than six weeks but some think it better if he were. Nightmares of having to saw the limbs off his fellow soldiers to save their lives haunted him till the day he died. Morphine ran out way before the battle was over. Pete, 15 years old, we learned about earlier. John, much too young for WWII, was counter intelligence during the early 1950s. He led the team that broke the Russian codes. One of his jobs was to help political prisoners escape from behind the Iron Curtain. On one mission his best friend was killed while they ran through the streets of Czechoslovakia. It was six weeks until his next contact could get him out. All the while he was hunted like an animal. I like to think the stories my grandfather told him of his trek from Bratislava to America put things into perspective and gave him the will to prevail, and he did.

I tell you these stories not to impress you, but to impress upon you that I come by my 'insanity' honestly. For all those years in New York City, these were the thoughts, the kindred spirits, and the energy, that kept me grounded. Who knows, maybe it was just some of that royal blood coursing through my veins. I know I left enough of it in those streets.