

Drunk and Disorderly

by David James

Growing up in Mississippi meant growing up in a “dry” State which it was until 1966. Dry State meant selling alcoholic beverages, except for beer, is illegal. Period. By period I mean there was no distinction between selling whiskey and stuff to adults and selling it to those of us who were under age. I was 17. We drank. I guess “contributing to the delinquency of minors” could have been a potential infraction, but I never heard of it being invoked for selling alcohol. How did the honky-tonks stay open in my dry state? All the honky-tonks? Black folks places, white folks places, it didn't matter. Payoffs. Pay th' man and it'll make everything cool.

As I said, I drank but I never got mean, wanting to fight, sloppy, falling down, passing out and hurling drunk— so hung over the next morning that I grabbed the wrong tube and brushed my teeth with “Preparation H” drunk. But often I did get “mouthing off”, slightly drunk.

I was an occasional visitor, well, frequent visitor, to a honky-tonk, Skyview, which like most honky-tonks would get raided by the law. The part owner/manager, Robert Earl XXXXX would get “pre-raid”, tip-off, phone calls from Deputy Sheriff, Larry XXXXX, calling to tell Robert Earl that he was coming out in about 30 minutes. This gave Robert Earl and his bouncer, Wayne XXXXXXX, time hide the liquor and then mosey over to the snooker pool table, rack the balls and grab a couple of cues.

Ol' Lar would swagger in, walk over to the pool table where the bouncer, Wayne XXXXX was standing, holding his cue straight up, chalking, as players will. The bouncer would say something like, “Great fuckin' shot, Robert Earl! ” Larry would slouch around for about 5 minutes or so and leave, telling Robert Earl, as he left, to “keep it clean”. Whatever that meant. Robert Earl would walk outside and hand ol' Larry \$50. Th' payoff. There were other “John

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Law” types to payoff as well. Robert Earl told me he spent about \$150 a week to stay open.

One night I was arrested because I was in my full mouth-off, slightly drunk mode. I was outside, leaning up against my friend, John's red Chevy. As Larry walked by me, he mumbled something to me. The way I recall it now, I didn't even understand what he said, but I told “ol' Lar” he could go do to himself that which was anatomically impossible.

About twenty minutes later, I was in the XXXXXXXXXXXX County Jail, arrested for being drunk and disorderly. I'm glad I wasn't driving that night because I'm sure he would have nailed me for a D.U.I, too.

Now it gets interesting. The XXXXXXXXXXXX County Sheriff was Alton XXXXX.

Alton XXXXX was also something else. He was our neighbor, one house down in XXXXXX. His family and mine were close friends, had been for years. Good news and bad news, right? Right. He sat me down on a bench while ol' Lar filled out some paper work. Alton went back into his office where he must have called my Dad. It was late, around 12:30 a.m. By this time Alton had become Mr. XXXXX for me.

He came out to the bench, got me, took me into his office and told me to call my Dad. And I did. I told my Dad the Reader's Digest version of how I got where I was. I'll never forget what he said to me. He said, “Son, what have I or your mother ever done that would lead you to where you are now?” I, of course, said, “Nothing”. He then said, “you mean you got where you are on your own?” “Yes sir”. He then said, “Well you got in, you get out.”

Until then, I had not been, but at that moment, I became, really scared. “Never been in any real trouble before” scared. Mr. XXXXX

took me back out to the bench and told me that the only cell available was down on the end with another man arrested for being drunk and fighting. Even more scared then. I'd heard stories. I did not want to be my cellmate's girlfriend. I remember Mr. XXXXX telling me breakfast was at 6 a.m. and he said the meal was a hamburger soup or something like that and it sounded disgusting.

I sat on the bench for what must have been about 2 hours. My Dad walked in, thanked Mr. XXXXX, took me by the arm out to his car and drove me home. He and Alton (back to "Alton" again) had planned the scenario.

I didn't get to drive for about 6 weeks and I apologized and apologized and apologized some more to Alton for putting him to such trouble. Dad made me cut the XXXXX's grass for the rest of the summer. And, I did.

Dad never spoke of the incident again.

