

Facing Mecca

by Jack Varnell

I was raised in a big city in the slow South.

I know a little about cross cultural dining and where Delta Blues
collides with Sly Stone, Al Green, and Zeppelin.
Dirty rice in the Dirty South.

Fried chicken, collards, and pintos.
Fried velveeta sandwiches and potato sticks.
Fried Pork Skins and Pork and Beans.

Fried, sometimes baked, to a crackly crunch,
during my High School career as one of the three "majorities",
in a school of "minorities".
Bussed in. When I wasn't in that reform school
on Tobacco Road in Augusta.

Fried past roman god gold, passed out on Quaaludes,
at my pool in suburbia, after a hard night in Buckhead.
Before shopping and dining went from nice, to cool.
Before becoming "trendy", then downright dangerous.
Not that I'm scared, of course.

I've heard white redneck agendas and hatred
while eating in restaurants run by ex governors.
Country gospel music blaring.
The only coloreds worked in the kitchen,
or stocking the counter with Nig knockers
in the souvenir shop next to rebel flags.

I was taken there by a mother with a crush
on Johnny Mathis, and feeling guilty.
My Mom, whose big family secret

was that she had a similar crush
on Little Richard in High School.

I've been inspired by civil rights movements.
Particularly the one founded on non violent change.
Until it's figurehead got murdered.

You know the one, but also the one where women I have known
burned their bras to get equal pay at work,
or freedom from suburban serfdom.

The other cause my Southern Baptist friends opposed so vocally,
as those men in women's clothing, or tight jeans and pink
triangled t-shirts,
waving rainbow flags marched past church on that Sunday
morning.
Parading on those same shopping mall streets.
Inciting a peaceful riot.

The same street where that church was.
The big one, with its newer, larger gymnasium
to teach the Catholics a lesson in basketball,
and their shiny, make a statement, taller steeple
to attract the heathen from the suburbs and the hippies from
downtown.

Because of course, everyone wants a shiny new Benz to get home
faster,
even possibly before the kickoff. Bets had been laid.
If those assholes, and blue hairs in the Holy parking lot
would just get out of the way.
And Church was just the place to get a shiny new Benz.
The only questions were two or four seats? Convertible or not?

Mind you this is the same church where the married with children

choir director, who hated the deviants the loudest, was a little more friendly each time he asked me to stay late to "audition" for a solo.

Until I really didn't want to sing anymore, or my voice changed.

I'm not sure which happened first, or which held the most importance.

I have been the Caucasian reason that federal funding came through

for a state run rehab for indigents.

A program for the Court ordered. Administered by Muslim African Americans

who escaped the projects with their new names, education, and desire to one day go "back to the home of their ancestors".

Who the hell wants to be Leroy when you can be Zakim ?

A name that apparently means something akin to Allah's right hand man.

It was one of the best, and wisest years I've ever spent anywhere.

It kept me out of jail, and I've never been back.

I even got clean for good after only a few more attempts.

The call of the crack houses in Techwood was just too powerful, after the Colombians cut me off. I was safe though because I went to school,

reform or otherwise, with most of those young men in Techwood anyway.

Hey, at least I wasn't jabbing holes in my arms anymore, seeking a hard earned, and well deserved punishment from God.

The punishment from all over TV. The death that originated either in the jungles of the aforementioned Africa.

Or the gay bars of Midtown.

That never could have happened to me with Bambi, Kandi or
Dreama.

The plague didn't touch females apparently. Not in the eighties.
Not with my girlfriends who were - honestly- all only working
to get enough to go to college one day.
Just as soon as they kicked the dilaudid.
Last I heard all three were dead and without academic education.

It's a beautiful, and hopefully inspiring story really.
I now live in the gray areas, never seeing just black or
just white, in people or anything else.
I probably always will reside there,
a little disconnected from it all.
And I'll forever face Mecca when I pray to no matter what.

