

## **Another Job in Brooklyn** - by Jim Crozier

It was the middle of the money-making part of a busy Saturday Night, and I was dead-heading back to the City in the drizzling rain from a trip to Coney Island: "Damn! Almost made it." After a great run down Flatbush Avenue, I had to stop at the last light before the Manhattan Bridge.

I guess he had been leaning against the building to keep out of the rain, when he dashed out of the shadows, got in, and said, "OK, turn Right." I start the meter and grumble, "Oh shit, another job in Brooklyn."

A little background: I was a Manhattan fleet driver, one of the thousands of kids from the Midwest that had come to the City to do some theater, make music, take pictures, and play at being "hip". We drove cab because, once you had your hack license, it was pretty much a "no commitment" type job. It also meant that in Brooklyn, Queens, or the Bronx, we were essentially "lost" and would head back to Manhattan as fast as possible whenever we got a job out of "the City". The year is 1973; Harlem, the South Bronx, and Bed-Stuy were still reeling from from the race riots only five years earlier, the city was heading toward bankruptcy, and "Blue Magic", that Burmese heroin, ruled the street and tore at the social fabric.

As we headed up Flushing Avenue past the Naval Yard he says, "Turn right under the El".

Welcome to Bedford-Stuyvesant. Although I did not know that's where I was at the time, I did know that I had never been there before, and that I was the only white guy. We continued on for several blocks when I hollered back, "Then what?", no answer, "Hey! What am I 'sposed to do?", no answer. At the light, I look around and see why.

I pull over when I come to the first well lighted neighborhood and start yelling at the large, well dressed black man who is sleeping in the back of my taxi. I am mad, and I am scared. Stopping the meter, I get out, walk around to the other side, open the back door, and order him to, "Pay up, and get out!"

He wakes slowly and climbs out of the cab. "Relax, buddy. Let me show you around. Go ahead and park that thing. I'll buy you a drink." He heads across Broadway and into a bar, I could only follow. As we walk in and sit at the bar, the bar tender hollers, "Scotch and Milk?".

"Yea, make that a double, I got a white boy to carry me home tonight," and looking at me, "What will you have?" I order a beer. The room is well lighted and clean, and the patrons appear to be fairly prosperous. I even seem to recall new paint on the walls - a pale green.

This guy clearly knows everyone here and they are carrying on. I don't remember at all what they were talking about, other than his stomach ulcer, and how that's why he's drinking "Scotch and Milk". While I no longer feared for my personal safety, I did wonder if I was actually going to get paid for this trip. I was done with my beer, I was ready to go, and I definitely had a bad attitude when he finally got up to leave.

It was the music that I noticed first, two doors down as we left the bar.

Now, I was leading as we headed through the open door of the storefront, some kind of Pentecostal church - the sign was hand scrawled on a piece of plywood. It was a bare room with a couple dozen folding chairs - the same color green as the bar, but here the paint was chipping. In the corner a guy played a tattered trap set with a broken cymbal, a kid played a Silvertone bass guitar, and a five string guitar was being played by an older man, who might have been the bass player's dad. The preacher hollered over all of this with a tambourine in her hand. The entire congregation danced in a circle with arms linked, except for a few old folks in the chairs.

I was completely entranced. The song was simple, and it spoke truth. I sang along - picked up and joined in the chorus. The people testified in tongues, ecstatic dancing even more intensified. They sang: "Glory, Hallelujah. Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!"

Time passed, I took it all in - there was no reference for any of this in my Calvinist background. I tried to join in the circle but was rebuffed. Somewhat deflated, I listened respectfully for a few minutes more, met my host at the door, and headed back across the street to the cab.

I dropped him off on East New York Avenue in front of a neat little white and blue house with a picket fence. He paid up, never did say much - don't remember what kind of tip - I was still hearing that music.

It was really only about an hour after it all began that I was back in the Village, working the night scene. I may as well have been around the world, but it was only another job in Brooklyn.