

**Between the Devil and the Deep...a Memoire of a
Maverick Priest**

CHAPTER ONE

The boat lifts to the ten-foot wave, hesitates at the top with a flap of the mainsail, then dips as it slides down its back side into the trough. A shudder...water washing down the lee side from the foredeck, and then she lifts again. The movement is hypnotizing. I lie back and watch the stars swirl through the clouds in the night sky. Fifteen knots of wind from the southwest is on our starboard quarter. Things are going great. The Gulf Stream is just ahead and it looks as if we will have a gentle trip across this fickle river of water that lies off the East coast.

Just a few hours ago we were in the safety of the bay at Beaufort, North Carolina. Close to a hundred boats lay at anchor with us, all cruisers preparing for their voyages to the Virgins, Bermuda, Antigua, and all points south to escape the cold of winter. We had joined them in late October after traveling down the Chesapeake and the Intercoastal Waterway. The major topic of discussion among the captains on the docks was the weather.

“What do you think?” asks one.

“Dunno. The wind's to the north,” suggests another. “Might change soon,” hopes a third.

Our problems centered around crossing the Gulf Stream. It can kick up a mighty fuss if the wind blows hard from the north. None of us wanted to face a “fuss” so early in our cruise.

“I think Sunday will be a good day,” one skipper forecasts.

“Dunno, Monday might be better. Give the stream time to die down.”

“I’ve made this trip 18 times,” said another. “It’s always bad and you’re always on a port tack.”

“Maybe Monday,” I mentioned tentatively to Judy to see what her reaction would be. “Any time you think is good.”

That was not very helpful, because I did not know what would be a good time. What I really wanted was to have someone, a “Wizard,” tell me to go on such a date at such a time and to guarantee me a calm and safe voyage.

There were some- who paid for such a wizard. They contracted a private weather service. We would gather around to look over their shoulders and ask them what the situation was. Waving their fax, they would say that today is definitely not a good day. We would all heave a sigh of relief

“What does it say about Monday?” I asked.

“Monday looks OK, but they recommend Sunday.” I felt disheartened because we could not leave on Sunday. We had yet to provision, so Monday would have to be the day.

The motion of the boat makes me drowsy and my head keeps dropping to my chest. The auto pilot is doing all the work. My mind drifts in rhythm with the motion of the boat.

OOO

I first got interested in boats, especially sailboats, as a method of escape from the situation in which I lived. My father was an Episcopal priest and we had recently moved to a parish in the Mission District of San Francisco. Now the Mission District, to put it in theological terms, was a “white-washed tomb full of dead men's bones.” It looked nice in comparison to other slums, but it was just as bad. Up to this time I had lived a very sheltered life ~ in relatively good neighborhoods in Texas. I had fist fights and arguments with other kids but this did not prepare me for what I faced the first day I went to school at Everett Junior High in the Mission.

I was 12 years old and in the seventh grade. The first day I walked to school and when I got there I was sure it must be the wrong place. It looked like a prison. My last school was a two story building with a large grass athletic field. Maybe there were 300 students, but I doubt it. What I saw at Everett were 16 foot high fences enclosing a cement recreation yard. The entrance to the yard had a barred gate. I thought then about running away. I sure did not want to go to a school like this. If I had known the Hell I was about to enter, I do not think I could have walked through that gate.

The noise in the hallways, the hall monitors, and the strangeness of the “black” kids overshadowed everything. In Texas there had been strict segregation, although I was not really aware of it. I never even thought of it. Sure I played with some black kids who lived near us, but I never stopped to think where they went to school. I was very curious to see not only the black kids but also Navahos, Filipinos, Mexicans, Japanese, and kids from other

strange places who looked different and spoke different assorted languages.

There were two negative experiences that first day. First, my lunch was stolen. The second experience was more than anything else was embarrassing. I was trying to find my way to the gymnasium. I had to ask one of the hall monitors where the gym was and he gave me directions. By this time, I was late and ran down the hall muttering, “Left turn at room 103, right turn at room 110, halfway down the hall, first door on left.” I went busting in through the door amid screams, squeals and laughter. The monitor had directed me to the girls' gym.

The most serious event at school came the following week. After lunch a bell rang and we all had to line up to go inside. I got in line as usual and was waiting to go in, when the guy in back of me pulled a knife and told me he did not want any prejudiced whitey going to his school. He was African American and was reacting to my southern accent. (In the South, I had gotten into fights because I had a Yankee accent.)

I was terrified. I had been in fights before but no one used weapons. I was angry. It was too much! I hauled off and smashed him in the face. He fell. I grabbed his arm and twisted it hard. He dropped the knife and a friend of his grabbed it and ran. A teacher came and hauled me into the principal's office. I did not have a chance to explain what had happened. It was obvious to the principal that I was at fault because,

“It's clear from your accent you are prejudiced against blacks.” My parents were called and my father came to school. He did not

believe my story about the knife either. That afternoon received a note.

*“Because you hurt one of our gang, we are
going to beat the shit out of you!”*

Black Beauties.”

If I was attacked with a knife on the school grounds, what would they use if they caught me on the way home? After detention, I ran home.

Friday was a strange day at school. No one stole my lunch and I made my first friend, Milo. I received a second threatening note and had to make a mad dash for home again. This time I was chased by about ten members of the Black Beauties but I was too fast for them and made it safe behind the gate to our house.

Saturday Milo came over. He wore his hair in a “DA” style and was dressed in black pegged pants, striped shirt and an imitation leather jacket. His face had a ruddy complexion and his mouth sported a friendly grin. We went out and bought a pack of Phillip Morris cigarettes. I lit up, successfully suppressed a cough, and related my problem. Milo lit his cigarette by flipping open the match book cover and lighting the match and his cigarette with one hand. I was very impressed. He took a deep drag, let the cigarette hang from his lips, and shoved his hands deeper into his pockets as he listened. He frowned as I finished.

“Hell, you have three choices. One, you can continue to run every day. Two, you can face them and probably get killed, or three, you can join a gang who will protect you.”

“I’ve heard about those gangs. You have to be initiated don’t you?”

“Yeah, and its generally hard and painful.” Milo took a drag on his cigarette, inhaled, and blew the smoke out his nostrils.

“You belong to a gang?” I asked, attempting to inhale like Milo, but ending up in a fit of coughing. Milo ignored my coughing and I was thankful.

“No, not yet. But if I do I’ll join the White Shoe Gang that uses 22nd Street as their turf.”

“I don’t want to join a gang. There has to be another way. Maybe I could talk to them.”

“Ha! That’s a sure way to get killed. They have sent you a warning. They can’t back down now. They’ll lose face. Bad for their rep, ya know.”

We smoked in silence.

“I got an idea,” Milo said, flicking his cigarette toward the gutter. “Let’s explore and map out an escape route. If you can get away from them long enough, maybe they’ll forget.”

We spent the rest of the day exploring service entrances and alleys between my house on Julian Avenue and the school. I used this escape route with great success most of the time. Once or twice guys who were pursuing would catch at our gate, but I could hold my own against them one at a time.

As we were exploring, Milo asked me in knew how to French kiss. I did not have any idea what he was talking about.

“What’s a French kiss?” I felt my face flush with embarrassment.

“It's a very special kind of kiss.” Milo winked and smiled craftily. “Hell yes. Let's go,” I replied with more confidence than I really felt.

We walked up a street and Milo rang the bell and waited the answering buzz, that unlocked the door. Rosie lived on the third floor. As we climbed the stairs to her flat, the smell of stale cabbage and urine assaulted me. I could hardly breathe and was ready to turn and run. However, by then we were at the open door and Rosie was looking at me.

“Hi guys. Whatcha want?” Rosie stood with her hand on her hip and a wad of gum in her mouth. She was wearing a pleated blue skirt and a very tight beige sweater. She was older than we were, maybe thirteen, stacked. She had dark hair and was somewhat plump, but pretty. Her mother yelled from the back of the house.

“Don't just stand there. Get out and don't come back until five!”{

“Mom's got company,” she said, straightening her raven dark hair with her hand. “Business as usual.”

“What kind of business does she run?”

Rosie and Milo started to laugh.

“What's so funny?”

“My mother's business is f--king. She f--ks for money. What rock did you find this cat under, Milo? Don't he know nothing?”

“Ah, he just moved here. He's a country kid, Rose. He don't even know how to French kiss. In fact, that's what we came here for. Thought you might teach him.”

I turned a bright red and wanted to run. But I knew if I ran I would lose Milo as a friend.

Besides, I really did want to learn to French kiss, whatever that was, might come in handy later.

“I thought so. Treat me to ice cream and a coke and I’ll think about it.”

We went to a little cafe on the corner of 20th and Mission and had ice cream and cokes. Rosie said we needed to find a quiet place for the lessons.

“Can’t you just explain it to me?”

“Jesus Christ, this kid is a real clod. You can’t explain a French kiss. You have to do it.”

“I have to kiss you?”

“I don’t think you’ll find it all that bad. Come on, let’s go.”

“Where?” asked Milo.

I took a deep breath. “Come to my house. Got lots of places with privacy there.”

At home, we went into the basement of the Parish House of the church and I proceeded to learn how to French kiss. At first, I did not like it but it grew on me...in more ways than one.

Under Milo’s tutelage, I became a firecracker dealer at school. We would go down to Chinatown and buy cherry bombs, and other good things, selling them at school for twice what we paid.

Later we branched out into the pornography business. We wrote pornographic stories, even though we had no idea about real sex. I would type them on the church’s typewriter and run them off on the mimeograph. The stories sold for five dollars each. “The Teacher and the Well-Endowed Student” was our best seller.

At the Marina Green, I saw sailboats for the first time. They were so beautiful and full of promised adventures. *They look like they're straining at their docklines ready to leave to seek adventure in the South Pacific*, I thought. I would watch for hours as some of the boats sailed past the park toward the Golden Gate Bridge.

I tried to visit the boats every Sunday. I had a fantasy that the captain of one would see me and call out, "Son, you want to be a sailor?"

"Yes sir," I would reply.

"Well, we're heading for Tahiti and are short a cabin boy. We leave in five minutes. Are ya game, boy?"

I would say "Yes, sir," and jump aboard as the lines were thrown off.

I eventually had to join a gang for self-protection. The White Shoe gang, turf was at Twenty-Second Street and Valencia. The initiation was bad, but it was something I had to endure in order to become a member.

I had to beat up on a kid they pointed out. At least they did not make me use a knife. I had to crawl through the tunnel of fire. That is where you have to crawl between the gang members' legs while they beat you with their belts. It was almost a week before I could sit down again. Then I had to steal a carton of cigarettes from a store and something off a car, preferably the whole car, and be on

the front row of the next gang fight. I did it all. I knew my father would kill me if the police caught me and I went to jail.

The guys in the gang took pity on me, knowing that my father was a minister. They let me get away with stealing the hubcaps from a '53 Ford. Nevertheless, in the gang fight I got a bad cut on the leg. I told my parents I had fallen and cut it on the sidewalk. I am not sure the doctor who sewed it up bought that story.

So here I was, at the age of thirteen, a streetwise gang member. I did not like it and was terribly angry with my father for placing me in this situation. The only out was escape. In addition, the only escape I could see was the sea. Someday I knew I would be needed on a ship leaving for Tahiti.

Someday ...

CHAPTER TWO

I awoke with a start! The sails were complaining mightily by flogging about. Struggling for wakefulness, I checked the horizon for ships and then jibed the mizzen and main. The wind had gone around from southwest to northwest. It was also beginning to strengthen.

My mind began to go over for the umpteenth time emergency actions. *If the bowstay parts, head downwind and use the jib halyard for the stay. If it is the back stay that goes, then head up wind. Use the topping lift for a back stay. If the mizzen goes, cut the triadic immediately and...*

OOO

I could hardly contain myself. We were kissing and she actually was letting me put my hand inside her bra.

“Oh yeah. This is great,” I moaned.

“Mmrnmrnm,” was the response. She took my hand firmly out of her bra.

Oh no, I thought, *I knew it wouldn't last*. However, she did not let go of my hand. She was moving it lower. She put it under her skirt and placed it right between her thighs.

“Oh yeah,” I mumbled. I'm in heaven.

“Oh, ah, oh,” she said. We French kissed.

“Yeah, oh, ah.” She shuddered. Then to my surprise, she pushed away.

That is not fair. I wanted more.

She said, “Good night,” and turned and went inside her flat.

I stood there looking at the empty space where she had stood. I hadn't dreamed it. In fact I was beginning to wonder how I was going to walk down the stairs and get home. My legs were weak. Although we had walked from the church dance where I met her to her flat on Army Street, I took a bus home.

Joining the White Shoe Gang made life easier for me. Anyone wanting to beat me up would have to face the whole gang. This gave me time to explore the possibilities of the opposite sex. The girls of the Mission District were very advanced sexually. Why not? Many of them lived with mothers who, if not prostitutes, were very free and open with their favors.

Their father, stepfather, uncle, or mother's boyfriend had raped some of the girls I knew. Some of them had been sexually abused

by all of them. They saw sex as a method of escape. It was not unusual for a sixteen-year-old girl to get pregnant and married. If you were married, you had to live somewhere else. The worst part was that these girls and their young husbands played out the same roles as their own mothers and fathers. It seemed a never-ending cycle.

This intolerable situation had its effect on me. I was in the Mission District, but not of it. My personality became confused. At home or at church, I was an “angel:” helpful, polite, a little gentleman. With the gang, I spoke the language of the streets. Every other word was a swear word, or some four

letter word, appropriate for the occasion.

My dress was that of a Pachucho. I wore pegged (rather full at the waist, but narrowing at the ankles) grey slacks and fighting shoes, that were black shoes with inch thick sales. In the toe of the shoes, holes were drilled and sharpened eight-penny nails were inserted when a fight was imminent. A wide, thick leather belt, with a large stainless steel buckle, was also worn. One would keep the edges of the buckle razor sharp. You could cut yourself getting dressed! I do not think my parents knew their son was a walking arsenal. Most of the guys also sported “DA” (Duck's Ass) haircuts. I did not feel I could get away with that, but I did get the shuffle-swagger walk down pretty good.

I had been going to church since I could remember and loved the pomp and ceremony of the mass. I could swing incense with the best and knew the service so well I could recite it by memory. Yet now confusion set in. Even society and its laws seemed to not only permit but encourage the pain and degradation in the Mission. God

did not make it, but He permitted it? If so, I did not want any part of Him.

On Mission Street, there were a few fruit and vegetable stores. They all had bins of fruit on the sidewalk. Many times, we filched an apple or an orange. One Saturday afternoon Tim, a friend of mine, and I were on the way to the movies, and sometimes, we filched an apple or an orange. As Tim passed the stand, he took an apple.

“Hey there, you!” a voice shouted.

Tim looked around and saw two cops running toward him. He was frightened so he ran. Now Tim was overweight so he could not run fast enough. The cops caught him and took him into an alley.

I hid in a doorway and watched, shaking all over.

“We’ll teach you not to steal, you little bastard!” said the big officer.

“Joe,” he said, “get a carrot.” The second cop went off around the corner.

“I won’t do it again, See, here’s the apple. You can have it.” Tim had no idea what was happening. Were they going to take him into the station and put him in jail? He could not escape; the officer had an arm lock on him and a fistful of his hair.

“You greasy son of a bitch. We’ll teach you, you little f-ker.” The second officer returned with a carrot from the stand.

“Pull his pants down,” the big one said.

The second officer unbuckled Tim’s pants. Then they forced him over and shoved the carrot up his ass, laughing all the time.

Tim was screaming and crying, but they covered his mouth. When they had finished, the big one said, "Next time we catch you stealing an apple, we'll shove that up there!" And they left him lying there with that carrot up his rear.

I was thankful they had not caught me, but my knees were weak just the same.

The police did not give a shit for law and order. Why should we bow to that tin god of society? Tim never did get over that and he ended up committing suicide a few years later.

I went to church to keep up the front with my parents and to meet girls. But my belief in God had gone by the boards. He did not exist! Religion was just a way for society to hook me into its moral path. Nevertheless, as a place for meeting girls, it was tops. We had a dance every Sunday night after evensong. You had to attend the service in order to go to the dance. It was the only meeting ground for the gangs where they could talk without a fight, so it was here that the time and place for the rumbles were set.

I managed to survive Junior High and was happy to be accepted at Lowell High School, a magnet school for the college bound. I got my first car, a 1938 Oldsmobile, at the age of sixteen. Having a car made it even more risky to take a girl, especially those from the Mission District, on a date alone. Those of us who were planning to finish high school had to take strict measures. *Never, never, never be alone in a car with one of these girls.* Always double date. Pick up the other guy first and leave him off last. We did a lot of necking and petting in between, but we were safe.

There is not enough room in this memoir to make a full account of these two years in the Mission District of San Francisco. Perhaps someday I will explore it in more depth. Suffice it to say they had a great influence on my life physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The physical part was the least of my problems, though I had a real fear for my life. I was beaten in fights (lost five teeth and suffered a few cuts), and my father also beat me “discipline”, mainly because he was having difficulty dealing with the Mission District himself. Through this, I did learn self-defense and an awareness of danger.

Estranged from my beliefs about family and society, I was emotionally devastated. I learned that I could not trust the authorities, such as the police, to be law abiding. Social constraints meant nothing, because those who made the rules did not abide them. During this time, I attempted to be two persons: the nice gentle “preacher’s kid” and the streetwise gang “pachucho.” Depression was the result this conflict in my emotional makeup, and I tried to compensate with illicit drugs.

Lastly, I lost my spiritual foundation. I had gone to church ever since I could remember, attending Sunday school and performing the ministry of acolyte (altar boy). The basis of my faith was a simplistic “God is love” education, with no depth. My surroundings in the Mission brought questions about God, His love, and his caring for his creation. I felt that adults were using religion as another way to control my life, and none of it was true. All I saw around me was poverty, drugs, uncaring parents, and violence.

How could a loving God permit this? He would not, and therefore God could not exist.

These years were the dark hole—the belly of the whale—that I had to claw my way out of, or go crazy. For the remainder of my life, I feared of sliding back down into the black maw of the whale.

When I graduated from junior high, I was able to transfer to Lowell High School. Lowell was then strictly college prep – No shops, no trades. To get there you had to have excellent grades, and in junior high, I did. However, Lowell turned out to be another shock to my system.

All the kids there were honor students, and most were from very wealthy or at least upper middle-class families. In my class, there were about ten of us from the Mission. I found myself met with disdain by those who were not from the Mission. We Missionites were considered the lowest of the low.

I entered a physiology class and found I was the only sophomore and the only Missionite in the class. There were titters and giggles. My peggers were shabby next to the flannel slacks and cashmere sweaters. A very pretty girl sat at my lab table. She was a junior and looked luscious in her tight sweater. She looked at me and called out,

“Anyone want to trade? I don't think I can stand sitting next to this uncouth, smelly baby.”

I turned beat red. I had taken a bath that morning and I was not smelly! Uncouth I may be, whatever that meant, but not smelly!

All of us from the Mission District had similar Experiences. It's funny, but all of us were also attempting to be musicians. The “Band Shack”, a block away from the school, became our hang out. The rich kids there seemed to accept us for our talents, so we stayed there as much as we could. I think our music teacher understood our situation.

I was kept back a semester because I had flunked Spanish and advanced algebra, although my parents never realized it. I went to summer school to make it up. I felt so bad about this failure that I went to see a girl I had met a few weeks before. I needed some TLC and she, being half Mexican, had the most beautiful dark eyes and a great figure. I knocked on the door and her father opened it.

“I would like to talk to Maria,” I said.

“Oh. Well she's on the roof sunbathing in the nude. I'll get her for you.”

What fantasies galloped through my head. I wanted to offer to go up and get her myself! Would she come down through the door nude? I was already becoming excited.

The father returned. “She'll be right down,” he said with a smile. “I have to go out for awhile,” and he left.

There I was alone in a flat with Maria coming down from sunbathing naked on the roof. Wow! I was a little disappointed when she walked in with a bikini on. She looked great. Her waist long, glistening black hair framed her dark eyes. I knew I was in love.

“Hi ya.” She pushed a strand of hair back from her eyes. “I was hoping you’d drop by sometime.”

“Yeah,” I croaked.

“What’s happening?”

By this time, I got myself under some control.

“I wanted to talk to somebody. I really feel miserable.”

“You can talk to me, honey. Anytime. Come and sit here beside me.” I sat down next to her and it felt like I was sitting next to a furnace.

“What have you been doing?” The question was stupid as the heat of her body was transferring itself to heat in my loins.

“I was taking a sunbath. The allover kind, you know.”

“Look. No strap marks.” With that, she took off the bikini top. Her breasts were beautiful, full but not droopy. I longed to put my hands on them ... to kiss them ... to suck them.

She scooted closer, pressed against me, and gave me a kiss. “Lie down and put your head in my lap. Now, tell me what the trouble is and I’ll fix it for you, baby.”

She kissed me again and all of a sudden, a red flag began to wave and alarm bells went off. I knew what she wanted. I knew what I wanted. I also knew what I did not want. I had no business being alone with her. I cut and ran as fast as I could in the condition I was in.

I dated and felt safe with many real nice girls, but I felt that I was missing out on sex. I thought I might even die before having real sex, and that would make me very depressed.

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