

CHAPTER ONE

I woke up. I looked into the mirror. I smoked too much pot, I drank too much beer. My friend the Beef, said he would give me a ride to the airport. I'm flying Pan Am to London today. I just spent a really cool night, right out in the middle of the desert, sleeping in the Beef's trailer. It's a Big trailer, Beef inherited it from his cool grandmother, Grandma Beef. He had it moved from Orange County, way out to his remote property in the desert. Beef's sexy 60-acre parcel is located 130 miles southeast of Los Angeles. Ten miles of dusty dirt road, connect Beef's domain to the nearest country highway. Surrounded by beautiful mountains, big boulders and cactus.

I finally get the Beef to open his eyes, that's not an easy job. He is lost, in a deep meditative trance, called sleep. The Beef says God gave him a body, that looks like the chewed off end of an eraser, on a thick pencil. Equipped with brown hair, a cheap haircut, tattoo's, a beefy belly, brown wild eyes, and a nasty grin. He's a real life cartoon character. The Beef is a genuine, red-hot, Blues Harmonica player. He lives all alone, out in the desert, just the Beef and his five man eating dogs. They all like to howl at the moon and dig in the dirt together. Including Beef. We got ready real quick. We smoke two big joints. Then Jump into his pick up truck. A new white Toyota shot full of holes, for added ventilation. The Beef floors it, pedal to the metal, all the way to L.A. It's another beautiful southern California day.

I met the Beef in a crazy reform school way down in Texas, back in the beginning of December 1967. They called it Devereaux Schools. A private bug joint for crazy students and unusual teachers. They provided perverted opportunities to improve our selves and hone our skills. That's where Beef learned to play Harmonica. The Beef and I have been friends for over 25 years.

I am leaving the Convertible out at Beef's for safekeeping. My 1966 Buick Skylark Convertible. I love my car, it's like my dog.

The Beef's truck arrives at the airport not a moment too soon, the plane departs at noon. Holy Cow, it's 11:30 AM already. I said goodbye to Beef. He grins, gives me the Baby George super soul handshake and wishes me the coolest luck.

Thanks for the ride. My guitar and me jump out of his truck, we run into the terminal. The Beef always says jump instead of jump. Shake a tail feather, I make it to the gate in the nick of time. The last one on the plane. It is January 16th, 1991. I love to fly to London from LA. Cheapest flight to Europe. Visit my friends in London a few days, then enjoy taking the boat/train to Amsterdam. Work up a good thirst over there, smoking like a chimney in the Coffee Shops. Then boat/train my stoned body back to London. From London, I take the boat/train to Dublin. To quench my thirst in the Irish Pubs, drinking pints of Guinness. In Ireland, the pints are always lovely.

It's a weird day to be traveling by airplane, especially to Europe. The President of the United States drew a line in the sand. George Bush gave Saddam Hussein, until January 15th to get out of Kuwait! Two months before this deadline in the sand, I purchased this airplane ticket from Pan Am Airlines. A round trip flight, from Los Angeles to London. Departure date is January 16th. The flight almost got canceled. Except for me, all the civilian passengers have chickened out and canceled their tickets. Only 38 passengers left on board this huge 747. We take off from Los Angeles International Airport, right on time. I look around the almost empty cabin, I'm the only civilian passenger on the airplane. The others are all military, most of them called up from the reserves.

I never saw so many unoccupied seats on a flight before. I felt empty inside, like this huge jet plane.

A sight for sore eyes, I'm delightfully surprised. I recognize one of the stewardesses. A beautiful Afro/American woman. We give each other a smile up the aisle. Pan Am Airlines offers the cheapest flights, flying in-between Los Angeles and San Francisco. I met her before on a number of those short hops. She recognizes me. As usual I'm dressed in black with that big black Tom Mix Stetson, perched on my head. Another constant companion, my trusty 1956, 00-18 Martin. A small acoustic steel string guitar. Perfect for playing folk and blues songs. Lay quietly in its case, stowed up above me in the luggage compartment over head. Patiently waiting. Just in case

A little bit later into the flight. That particular stewardess, the one I know, came walking up the aisle to my lonely seat. She smiled big and asked me if I'd like something to drink. I felt uneasy, the tension is permeating the cabin. It's so thick you could cut it with a knife. A war might start any minute. I can smell violence in the air.

The crew, the military passengers, they all know something. That I don't. I can see it in their eyes. Something is up, besides the plane.

I order a whiskey.

The in flight movie is due to start soon. The title of the film, "Ghost", starring Whoopie Goldberg. I thought the choice appropriate, considering thousands of new Iraqi ghosts will be born any minute.

My stewardess friend returns to my seat. Places a tall glass, from first class, on my little fold out table. She blows my mind. Plops down an unopened fifth of Johnny Walker Red Label. She smiles and asks me if this will do? I look up at her grinned and said "Righteous". Thanks a million, I promise to share it, with all the lucky soldiers sitting near me, naturally. She figured I would do that, flashes me another big smile.

I easily round up the troops seated nearby. Waving them over, with the whiskey bottle in my hand. They responded quickly. We sat together, taking up three rows, in the middle of the giant 747 aircraft. Right in front of the movie screen.

Preparing for battle, soldiers surrounded by over 400 vacant seats. We pass the bottle of booze around. That went quick. Our stewardess friend hands me another bottle. Everyone enjoyed the movie, the free booze went faster than pop corn. We laughed at the funny parts. Half way through the movie, I feel a sharp pain deep in my heart of hearts, tears squirt out of my eyes. It had nothing to do with the movie. Somehow I knew the war had begun, bombs are falling like rain.

I got up from my seat. Found my friend, I ask if she knew anything? She told me they're not permitted to give out that type information. It didn't matter. I could tell by her tone of voice, the look on her face, confirmed the feeling in my gut. The carnage had begun, innocent human beings being killed, the latest victims of war.

After the movie, I return to my seat. Break out the guitar, play a few, for my new drinking buddies. I stood up in front of the blank movie screen, before the smiling audience. First I introduced myself, I tell them my name is Tim O'Connor, the "Hitch Hiking Poet." Highway Jargon for a bargain.

I'm an original Irish American Folksinger / Bluesman. Some of them have seen the movie "Dead Calm", starring Nicole Kidman, Sam Neill, and Billy Zane. A high seas, chiller thriller. Three of my songs are in the film. Billy Zane, the psycho killer, takes his tape player out, places it on the sail boat deck. When he turns it on, it's me, singing and playing three of my original songs. I play those movie tunes first. Then whipped out a few funny songs. I made them all laugh.

I felt a little bit like Bob Hope entertaining the troops.

We land early in the morning, January 16th, at London's Heathrow Airport. I'm busy quietly emerging from customs, I notice it is 15 minutes before seven o'clock in the morning. I walk slowly, like an animated cartoon character, in slow motion. I turtle me through the terminal, sending out a strong mental message. To the numerous British Commando's, stationed all over the joint. Armed to the teeth, flack jackets, and M-16 's, loaded and ready. Their eyes intensely scanning everyone, fingers on the trigger. I find today's climate to be extremely tense. I keep on repeating to myself mentally, over and over, I hope these guys get the message. I'm not an Iraqi, I'm not an Iraqi. Please. Don't Shoot!

I can see clearly through the large windows of the terminal. I notice several tanks and armored vehicles parked outside. Slowly, I make my way over to the Underground. The Tube, I board the very first train into the city. One of the coolest things about London that I like, the train goes to the airport. I don't have to hitchhike into town.

I am the second person to take a seat on this train. I look out the window, the clock on the platform said 7AM. The trains almost empty when we depart the airport. After making a few scheduled stops, it starts to fill up, with people on their way to work. I felt so strange, watching all the different people, carrying their morning newspapers onto the train. As they sat or stood there reading their papers, I can easily read the front page. The HEADLINES sticking out like fifty sore thumbs. All the different newspapers, some read full page, WAR. Or BAGHDAD BOMBED. It is totally quiet, you could hear a pin drop. The mood, forebodingly serious, somber. Weird, for a moment I think I'm in a movie. No, it's real.

My immediate plan, is take the boat train to Amsterdam. I was thinking of stopping in London for a few days. Though I quickly changed my mind, while riding this tube into town. With bombs booming and visions of Armageddon looming. I made a quality decision. Proceed directly to Amsterdam.