

Fear and Funk on the Overseas Highway



'The Gonz' Sammie Mays

As the sun began to ascend over the Everglades, Florida's southbound Turnpike gave way to Highway U.S. 1. Exhausted from my travels and tired of my pushy road-companion's voice, I silenced the GPS and slid open the sunroof. Tuning the FM radio to 103.1, as familiar as the call-of-nature after that first cup of morning coffee, radio personality Mark Mills was reciting his commentary and sucking more than his share of oxygen from the room. That voice (synonymous with the Florida Keys) tells me I can breathe a sigh-of-relief. I am on the Stretch.

Oh, but not so fast! Smoke signals up ahead reveal a family in crisis -- standing 'round an old, dinged-up Oldsmobile was a young boy with his mother and father. The car's hood was raised and it was suffering from black-lung, coughing up toxic fumes.

The sad sight tugged at my heart strings. I couldn't help thinking to myself, "Now what if that were me and my child? I'd sure as hell hope someone would stop and offer us a ride."

Though far away, but just as if she were sitting there, my mother yelled at me, "Sammie Lynn! Have you taken leave of your senses? Good God, girl, don't you know better than to pick up hitchhikers?"

But it's a little boy of not more than 10 years old, I

rationalized. And it's practically a death sentence standing there on side of the Overseas Highway during tourist season and how dangerous can a family with a small child possibly be anyway? And besides, my stranger-danger alert mechanism did not go off this time.

Choosing to ignore my mother's warning, I slowed to a crawl. With horns blowing, I eased off onto the crushed-coral roadside. Cars whizzed past as if they were going to a fire or Key West, while passengers rudely rubber-necked at the scene.

The grateful family began running toward me. I came to a complete halt. For a moment there I was feeling pretty darn good about myself until the approaching images came into focus. My reflexes had me scream out but just like in a recurring nightmare, my voice was rendered speechless by the hideous sight. Unable to utter a single sound or shut my mouth, I covered the gaping hole with my hand and from the thoughts I was having, why, I must have slipped into a state of shock.

Immediately I tried to abort the rescue mission but the heavy traffic prevented me from getting back onto the highway. I contemplated a hit-and-run but before I could react, the nomads had climbed into the Poon Tang Cruiser. I tried not to make eye contact with the hybrids as I stole glances of them in the rearview mirror. My mother's voice rang loud and clear: "You dumb-ass!"

The expired Hillsborough County license plate reiterated that this was not the poor pitiful family that I thought I was rescuing, oh but just the opposite. It was a menagerie of colossal proportions. I had me a carload of vacationing circus freaks!

Hurry! Hurry! Step right up and meet the living oddities of nature! Sitting in the front seat next to the scared sh*tless Gonzo Girl, is the seven-foot tall, double-jointed rubber-man! His skin so thick and drooping that it resembled the hide of a rhinoceros. Wrapping his legs around his neck to show off his talents - phew, he smelled like one too!

In the backseat behind the rubber-rhino is the crude, rude, highly aggressive full-bearded lady! Who I'd bet my last dollar that she is a "freak"-quent user of steroids. And directly behind me, standing on the backseat with his head poked through the sun-roof and waving at oncoming traffic is the fifty-something year old midget-man, known among his freaky friends as Semi Sam!

At that moment, I had a premonition - a tombstone that read: "Gonzo Girl single-handedly brought the Greatest Show on Earth to the Florida Keys! Too bad she missed it."

"Better a witty fool than a foolish wit." William Shakespeare said. So attempting to give off the air of a cool, calm, collected fool, I decided that I should probably try to befriend the freaks with a little small talk, "So, uh, where ya from and, uh, where ya headed?" I stammered.

Truthfully, I could have cared less and before the anomalies could formulate a believable story, I volunteered to share with them the cash that I had taken off the last guy I had killed. But to get it they were going to have to come home with me first!

Understandably there is many an innocent person in prison, so before a warrant is issued for my arrest, let me say, I didn't actually kill anyone and there was no money. I only said it trying to stay alive while

biding some time and I damn sure wasn't thinking of taking those freaks to my house. Oh contraire, they were going to Gilbert's Resort at MM107 in Key Largo -- the temporary weekend home of (Mississippi-certified-crazy) Cujo! If you don't know Cujo by now you might like to visit the website: www.saminthekeys.com. Open articles and there's pictures too!

Caged and cornered and runnin' out of small talk and patience, I had had enough of the menacing midget act, so when Semi Sam leaned in to lick my face for the third time, without even hittin' the brake, the rollin' asylum made an illegal U turn in the middle of the Overseas Highway, slammin' the garish gargoyles against the passenger doors and sending the midget flying into the lap of the cursing bearded lady.

Testing the engine's torque, I drove like a daredevil shot out of a cannon hoping to attract the attention of state troopers. For once I got away with speeding in the Keys.

Finally there it was...Jewfish Creek and Gilbert's and not a moment too soon either. Trying to stay alive, well hell, I friggin' nearly killed the whole bunch of us.

Never in all my life was I so glad to see Cujo-the-clown who was checked into room 111. His door was slightly ajar and with the freaks in tow, I tapped on it. When no one answered, I tapped harder and then cautiously stuck my head inside. The assh@le (reeking of alcohol) jumped out from behind it and scared the bejesus out of me. I did not feel bad for what I was about to do.

Yep, just as suspected, a quick introduction over a cheap fifth of vodka and all were like long lost pals, siblings

separated at birth, kindred spirits, Siamese quadruplets, the four stooges.

Guzzlin' booze straight from the bottle and laughin' at 'em instead of with them, the circus was now complete. Maneuvering myself toward the door, I ceased the opportunity to pull a disappearing act -- taking the perverted midget with me.

I now know what P.T. Barnum meant when he said there's a sucker born every minute.

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