

Zeineldé Jordan, Marjorie Elfers (1988)

Helping hands are better far than praying lips.

-Agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll

Lips or Hands? is an autobiographical account of a young atheist recovering from a years-long methamphetamine addiction (1987). By deceitful reason, he happened along a ward-of-the-state nursing home resident, Marjorie. Contrary to his intent to make his point against churches then never return, he returned. She became his adopted "Granny." Her years-long prayers for a visitor fulfilled via a profane, chain-smoking, beer-drinking, Christian-bashing atheist while unknowingly setting the stage for him (years after her passing) to meet her Lord, The Lord!

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U. C. C. 1-207, U. C. C. 1-103.6
Published in the Georgia Republic
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Blog: jordanconvertbooks.blogspot.com
e-Mail: jordanconvertbooks@gmail.com

Religion / Christian Life / Spiritual Growth / Non-Fiction
/ Biography / Autobiography

Lips or Hands? text is presented as composed by the author.

Lips or Hands? originated in APA writing style yet the author slightly modified items and sections to better accommodate contemporary general readership.

Unless otherwise specified, all opening chapter lyrical verse, scripture, vocabulary is G. Zeineldé Jordan, Se.
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Introduction

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I would rather be absolutely honest and have the whole world believe in my dishonesty, than to be dishonest and have the whole world believe in my honesty.

-Agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll

Hi! I am G. Zeineldé Jordan, Se., “Jordan,” to anyone who knows me.

I seemingly met Marjorie dishonestly yet I honestly met her. Weird, huh? She remains one of my fondest characters in my book trilogy *Shiny Hats or Rugged Cross? (An Atheist’s Libertarian Trek to Christ)*. The story challenges whether your true faith in practice is in established, worldly, governmental, etc. (corporeal) authorities, or in Christ’s Cross. The three-volume series is available for order via my website:

jordanconvertbooks.blogspot.com

Marjorie appeared in *Shiny Hats Volume Two: The Resurrections* as a mere ward-of-the-state societal nobody. Her only existence outside of her nursing facility remained merely a printed name on a prayer list of a local huge Baptist church among countless other individuals on the prayer list.

Here is some background:

Shiny Hats or Rugged Cross? Volume One: f.k.a. George Medeiros ends after my boyhood family escape from the North’s uniformed authorities intending to place my brothers and me into St. Mary’s orphanage. My seven year-old memory haunted my relationships for many years. We hid in rural South seclusion on Roanoke Island, North Carolina. At age nine, I wholesomely accepted Christ in the woods of Wancheese at an Assembly of God congregation. My “Ma” remarries. My stepfather relocates the family to San Jose, California (1972). I simultaneously

hook up with a teen ministry while also discovering beer and speed.

The teen ministry falls short of its aims. I become an atheist, and I wind up a speed hype (an intravenous drug addict) in 1979. After a year, I relocate to Phoenix, Arizona, with my parents to escape my addiction. I entered travel school, became an astounding travel agent. Then the speed addiction resurfaced. I ruined my name in my field. I deteriorated to near death. The Lord reclaims me on a slab of cement in California (1987). I remained a steadfast atheist despite my seemingly *Divine Intervention* delivery from my meth addiction. I began bringing my twenty-seven year-old self back to life and acclimating to a new world of meth-free living.

This story opens with chapter excerpts from *Shiny Hats or Rugged Cross? Volume Two: The Resurrections* introducing Marjorie. *Volume One* interjects throughout memory flashbacks. Then the story wraps up with the ending *Volume Two* chapters of Marjorie's aftermath.

Although these chapter excerpts do not present the whole *Shiny Hats or Rugged Cross?* story, they present enough for you to experience the nursing home residents' need for an individual in their lives. Equally, it presents the blessing aftermath to the visitor. You may not follow all flashback scenes. You will just have to purchase the rest of the story.

I assured Marjorie in her *rigor mortis* state on her nursing home deathbed (1989) that I would keep her character alive somehow, someday. This is now, and this is how. Today, two and a half decades later, I am in late fifties and poor health. My own days are numbered now.

I present one of my life's favorite memories--a memory born by mishap and arrogant deceit. Meet Marjorie. . .

Part One

The Story

I hope to have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky.
-U. S. Civil War President, Abraham Lincoln
American Presidents, The History Channel

Marjorie knew God was on her side. She really corporeally needed though, a human being too.

The *Shiny Hats or Rugged Cross?* excerpts begin in 1987 at my age twenty-seven:

Z. Atheist

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*With pride highlighting each day,
Arrogance knowing no bound,
I harbored no use for a God. . .*

“Bear with Me, Oh Lord!”

“Ma, I’m heading out. The dogs are walked. I’ll be back.”

“Where you going?”

“I don’t know, somewhere.”

“Well, be careful.”

“I will, Ma,” I assured her with a kiss to her head.

I checked my coinage and bills. *I can handle some beer at Nick’s tonight if I save this fare.* I exposed my hitchhiking thumb to Camelback Road motorists, thinking I’d be visiting Mark. My thumb channeled me elsewhere. A motorist pulled to the roadside, parking distant enough for me to not perceive him as accommodating my thumb. Eventually, my curiosity walked me to his car. His head bowed to his steering wheel. He raised it, noticing me. I asked through his cracked window, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, just praying.”

“Oh, okay, so long as you’re okay. I didn’t know if you were accommodating my thumb, so to speak.”

“You’re hitchhiking, right?”

Seemed a silly question to me considering I stood at the edge of Camelback Road with a thumb protruding. Nonetheless, I respectfully replied, “Ah, yeah, that’s why I had my thumb out.”

“I’m afraid of hitchhikers, but, well, I prayed maybe you’d come to church with me tonight. I’m on my way.”

I remembered an evangelist’s sermon once that the opposite of love is fear, not hate.

“You’re afraid of hitchhikers, but you wanna risk

putting me in your car in hopes of me going to church?”

“I think Jesus would love you and reach out to you like He has me. I have to trust His example. Care to come with me?”

“My, now that’s a loving gesture,” I sincerely assured, despite my heartfelt sarcasm.

I thought a minute.

I can’t throw my atheism at him. Man, “Bless his heart,” as they’d say in the South. Hell, with all my bad character, I might could begin the appearance of a reformed druggie criminal. A church affiliation could help appearances. Hell, if I get in the car, God, for once, answered someone’s prayers, and this guy’s surely prayed.

“Hey, why not? Okay, I’ll go.”

He replied, “Really, you’re not gonna rob me or anything, right?”

“No, relax, I’d be the victim in a hitchhiking mishap if there were one. Besides, if I would, I’d lie in telling you to relax. Better trust your Jesus on this trip.”

“Ah, yeah, right, well, praise the Lord!”

He depressed the auto’s clutch, shifted into first gear, then steered us to North Phoenix Baptist Church.

“This is Wednesday, so it’s a prayer meeting, not a service. I can get you on Sunday if you’d like to visit a service.”

“I’m not churched or religious. I’ll trust you on this run. Okay?”

“Oh, yeah, sure! We’re just blessed to have you.”

“Blessing to be here, I’m sure,” I replied with sarcasm still in my heart yet withheld from my tone.

I figured the guy felt pleased his God answered his prayer and provided him a safe arrival.

I experienced disgust as the huge congregation held their prayer list in hand as a pulpit orator prayed for the list. As they prayed, I examined the massive list of hospitalized, nursing home inhabitants, and others listed.

Man, there are a hundred times more praying folk than this list of the prayed for. Hell, if a smallest fraction

of them would get off their asses and plant them in those late-model autos in the parking lot, then visit, perhaps the prayed for could enjoy answered prayers. Then, these asses could see their prayers being answered.

In self-righteous, judgmental disgust, I folded the prayer list into my sack. I figured, *Man, just out of curiosity, I'd love to visit one of these to see how much church care they get. Well, I gotta leave it to them. Hell, they have the Cadillac cars and the supposed God, not I.*

My church host returned me home, offering, "Can I get you Sunday? You'll learn a lot in Sunday School class, and the service is a blessing."

"I'll be okay. It's a close walk. Hey, thanks for your trust tonight. It proved a blessing."

I lied because he seemed a sweet, sincere churchgoer. I chose to not insult, criticize, or otherwise pose him a challenge. Sweet of me, huh?

Lips or Hands?

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Helping hands are better far than praying lips.

-Agnostic, Robert G. Ingersoll

I had begun a telemarketing job for a shady firm around one of Ma's corners selling magazines to people who neither desired nor needed them. I took on a job of convincing them otherwise. Not an appropriate job for a "good, honest" person, so I fit right in. I could go to work at night with beer on my breath and cigarettes and coffee in hand, then affix my headset for the night.

I felt healthily active by being in a work force. Ma's income remained secure enough that she never intended any use for my earnings. My better health and financial independence already began serving her some ease in managing my freeloading. With a little steady cash in my pockets, I afforded ventures further than the cost-free library. The Phoenix Transit offered excellent service to The Phoenix Zoo. With reading material, I visited it often and sat in the shade near a different animal exhibit each time.

I made a scorching Transit return home that left me missing the connecting bus. My bus' arrival arrived just in time for me to see my connection already blowing its exhaust, confirming, almost with a flipped-up middle finger, I missed out.

"Damn it! Damn it! Ah, damn it! And up yours, too!" I offered back with my own middle finger as I viewed it barely still in sight.

There's not another for an hour.

"Damn it!" I hollered on the street.

Hell, I need a beer, I figured as I scanned the area for a tavern.

No such luck, but there stood a Circle K-caliber convenience store. I bought myself a single beer. I used a

straw to discreetly sip it from my carry sack as I walked.

If I walk a mile up to Thomas Road, I should be able to catch number, number. . . ah, where the hell's my schedule?

I checked the schedule and concluded that by the time I made an alternate route, I could've just waited for my currently scheduled following connection. As I fumbled through my hitchhiking carry sack to replace my schedule, I noticed a folded paper. I opened it and remembered I had kept it.

Oh, yeah, that hokey prayer list.

I scanned it over in self-righteous, religious ridicule as I walked the Arizona sun, sipping my hidden beer through a straw. I noticed something: Mrs. Marjorie Elfers, 2509 N. Twenty-Fourth Street.

Twenty-Fourth Street? Hell, I'm right here.

I walked a couple short blocks then I considered, *Then, that must be, must be. . .*

I considered as I scanned the building numbers to a nursing home. *Hell, Desert Terrace Nursing. I bet that's it. I gotta see this while I have time, and I'm right on top of it. I've gotta see how many visits she's had from those rich, holier-than-thou-ers since she's been on the prayer list of those two-faced, phony ass, hypocritical churchgoers. This'll be quick, and it won't cost me a dime. Hell, I need air-conditioning. Maybe they'll have free coffee.*

"Hi," I informed the cute figure of a female creature at the window. Knowing myself a flake, I figured I'd use North Phoenix Baptist as a legitimate visit. I did not realize they really could not care a cat's rear end who visited anyone or why.

"I'm from North Phoenix Baptist Church. Is this the right address for Mrs. Elfers? Marjorie Elfers?" I asked as I held the prayer list in clear view, considering they'd probably question my vagrant appearance.

"It sure is. She's a sweetheart. I bet she'd love a visit. Sign our visitor log," she advised as she pointed it out to me.

So I, the Christian-bashing political atheist, signed as a North Phoenix Baptist Church Christian outreach volunteer.

"Cutie" led me to the main room and brought me to an elderly lady with freshly-nursing-home hair styling, all fluffy and curled, full bodied, every gray-white strand.

"Marjorie," Cutie informed, "you have a visitor."

Smiling, she answered, "You tease me. No one visits me. That's your boyfriend, I bet."

"No, Marjorie, he's from a church. His name is George. He'd like to meet you," Cutie advised in tenderly manner.

Looking at me, "You have me confused. I don't have a church anymore. I did in Texas. I'm not in Texas now. They moved me to another state. I'm in, ah, ah. . ."

She looked at Cutie.

"Arizona, Marjorie, you're in Arizona."

"Yes, I think that's right. I think they sent me to Arizona."

"Well, Marjorie," I continued as Cutie and I nodded our good-bye upon her departure, "you have some people who love you at the church. That's why they sent me."

Whew, what a lie and exaggeration! Whatever, she didn't know she had a visit from an atheist from a church that couldn't anymore care about her beyond adding her name to a list, or that I needed air-conditioning whilst awaiting an air-conditioned bus.

"Who sent you?"

"I don't know exactly. You're on a visiting list."

"Well, I don't care who. You're charming, and I want you to stay."

"Fine, I have a minute. You're from Texas? You say?"

"Yes, and in Texas. . ."

Her minor dementia did not halt her reliving the plains, fields, and farms of The Lone Star State.

"I don't know much about Texas other than,

apparently, there's a coyote problem."

"A what?"

"I don't know. I met a cowboy, well, kind of a cowboy, on a bus in California on his way to Texas to rid his uncle's farm of a coyote."

"Where in Texas?"

"I don't know exactly. I'm not sure he actually knew either."

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I flashed back to my Greyhound bus ride from San Jose, California, to my parents' new home in Phoenix, Arizona, the day after I laid my crystal-meth needle down in hopes of beginning a new life:

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I bid farewell to my lonely California sidewalks as I boarded the Greyhound. Of only two available seats, one neighbored a sweet little elderly lady who would have served magnificently, but non-smoking. I opted for the smoking seat in the furthest rear seat where sat a cowboy appearing, well, *fella*, let us say. He appeared rather normal. After all, cowboys are okay, right? I placed my bag, turned to sit, and heard a loud, drawn out, "Howwwwwdeeeeee there!"

There stood Mr. Cowboy with his hand outstretched.

"Looks like your traveling with me. I tried to welcome the others but they wouldn't stay," he exclaimed with very wide eyes allowing the white of the eyeballs to circle around each brown iris. Something did not feel quite right.

He continued, "Bus is full, now. Guess you're stuck with me, Pardner! Ha, ha, aha haaaa!"

I turned to get the other--oops, too late, Ms. Little

Old lady already landed herself a guest. I could only think, *oh, crap, this is going to be a very long sixteen hours.*

"How far you going?" Not waiting for an answer, he continued. "I'm going to Teeeeeexas!"

"Texas? You say? Where do you connect? Fresno? Los Angeles?" I inquired as if I would be so fortunate as to say good-bye so soon.

"Phoenix, gotta change buses in Phoenix. So how far did you say you're going?"

"I didn't say. I'm, ah, going to Phoenix."

"Well, hot damn!" he drawled out. "We're gonna be friends all the way to Phoenix! Phoenix Areeeezohhhnah!"

"Well, I'm not exactly friend material. I'm not even a particularly happy person. I'll probably just read a book and leave you to yourself."

"I need someone to talk to. These people wouldn't sit here. I think they think I'm crazy. Some people do."

"You are crazy!" bellowed a voice from a forward row. "Now shut your ass up!"

"You see what I mean? You think I'm crazy?" he asked softly, as if we were telling secrets.

"I have my concerns," I honestly whispered.

He thought a minute with his eyes rolling in thought, then, "Ah ha! Ha! Ha!" he replied while hitting my leg with the back of his hand.

At least he took it well. The Greyhound pulled out then onto the road.

"Hey," Mr. Cowboy informed, "I ain't really a cowhand."

"Oh?"

"No, you see, I gotta kill me a coyote."

"Kill a coyote? You say?"

"Yup, my uncle has a coyote tormenting his ranch in Texas. He needs me to go kill it."

"I see."

He continued, "I'm really from San Francisco. You know?"

Then he limped his hand and wrist, “The Gaaaaayyy Bay. Huh? Ya know what I mean,” *chuckle*, “The Gay Bay?” he repeated with eyes widened to whites again.

“Yeah, I think I know what you mean.”

“I gotta dress like this ‘causa goin’ ta Texas. This is how they dress. So I got me this hat, these jeans, and boots.”

“Uh huh,” I responded with my mouth half open.

Then he got close and whispered while raising his eyebrows up and down.

“When I’m at home,” he boasted, losing his Western drawl and shifting to an effeminate tone. He continued, “I have some of the prettiest dresses. I wear them in the park with a plumed hat. I look like a real woman. Then I go to the park. You know? Golden Gate? Guess what the men do.”

I replied, “In San Francisco? I can only imagine, Guy.”

“They’ll hit me then drag me into the bushes and rape me! Sometimes, two, or three, or more!”

“Ah, well, sorry to hear that, but why do you go then?”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Because I loooooove every minute of it!”

“Hey, Bud, really, I’m not mentally healthy enough to hear this. I have my own psychosis. I’m trying to come down from drugs, and this ain’t helping.”

Then a voice came from ahead again, “Yeah, faggot, none of us need to hear it! Just shut up before we shut you up!”

Then a wimpy blonde kid with a squeaky voice propped himself halfway out of his seat and turned our way.

“Gomorraah, Sodom and Gomorraah! Back there is Sodom San Francisco! Up there is Gomorraah Los Angeles! God’s going to smite them both! All of us need to repent! Repent!”

Then another voice chimed in. “You shut the hell up too! You’re worse than the faggot!”

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My focus returned to Mrs. Elfers:

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“Anyway, you were saying?”

She continued then wrapped up with, “I learned to love and trust God, and look! I really feel lonely, but I’ve prayed oh so much, and finally, He sent you! I knew He would. I never have a visitor. You’re here just for me!”

She grabbed my hand during her laughing exclamation.

Okay, this took a bad turn, a real bad turn. She totally misperceived my arrival. I completed my job. I demonstrated that churchgoers preferred to pray than act. I could not tell her that there is no God and if there were, He would not send her the likes of me.

“Well,” I returned her hand squeeze as I conjured up a deeper lie, “I think your God sent me more for me than you.”

It sounded good. A “little white lie” couldn’t hurt, right? Well. . .

“You’re sweet.”

“No, I’m not,” I chuckled in a “Bless your heart” fashion. “You just caught me on an off day.”

“I don’t believe that. I bet you’re sweet everyday, everywhere.”

Whew, I really conned this innocent being. Hey, I did not mean to. It just happened that way. I could not tell her the truth.

“Marjorie, this cigarette would taste better with some coffee. I’m gonna see if they have some I can buy. I’ll be right back,” I advised as I glanced at my watch.

Ah, getting close for my McDowell bus, but I got time for coffee. Well, unless she gets started on Texas again.

I approached a staff member nearby and asked, “Any chance I could buy some coffee?”

“The cafeteria’s shut down, but the coffee should still be on. I’ll get you a cup. You need cream or sugar?”

“No, thanks, ah, just black is fine, but stir it with your finger. That should sweeten it just right. How much you need?” I asked as I reached for my wallet.

“Oh, if they still have some, no charge. I’ll be right back.”

She delivered me a steaming cup as I waited at the cafeteria door.

“They still had some,” she advised then further inquired through her button-brown large eye-lashed eyes about her slightly Hispanic-shaded, smiling face. Her shoulder-length hair bounced every curl as she spoke with her hands.

“Need anything else?”

“That’s fine, really, thank you. Did you stir it?” I asked with humorous expression.

“Yes, quite well, just as you asked. I expect it’s pretty sweet.”

As I sipped, she asked, “She your aunt or something?”

“Oh, no, I’m from the church.”

“You go to church?”

“Yeah, well, kinda, well, not exactly, oh, hell, let’s not go there. How many visitors does she get?”

She’s been here almost a year. I really don’t know. I’ve never known her to have a personal visit. You’re the first I know of. It’s a shame, though.”

“Why?”

“She has less here than most others, but she’s always pleasant and sweet. Some of them are such grumpy pains in the ass, but she always seems to appreciate us.”

“She a ward of the state or something?”

“Yeah, she has no family. There’s someone on file but we never reach her when we try.”

“Oh yeah, well, great church, great family, I guess. Well, I’m running out of time if I’m to visit. So thanks much for the hospitality. That’s some sweet coffee for black,” I softly smiled.

“Guess I stirred it right. My pleasure, really, you need anything else?”

Soft smile returned.

“I guess I’m okay. Thanks, I appreciate it.”

“Well, just let me know if you do, really, anything, really.”

“Yeah, again, thank you, really.”

I returned to Marjorie with coffee and cigarette in hand.

“You came to charm me, and you’re also charming her.”

“What’s that? I’m not charming anyone.”

“Look over there. She’s still looking. I bet she’ll wave.”

“Look over where?” I asked as I turned my head noticing the attendant still at the door.

She waved and smiled. I waved back and whispered, “Hey, again, thanks.”

She whispered back, “You’re welcome, anytime.”

Then she disappeared into the cafeteria.

“I bet she likes you.”

“Well, now even I’m convinced. Pretty girl, a little too chunky for my liking, but I’m flattered. Did you have a family in Texas?”

She relived her family years as she detailed expertly, for a dementia patient. As she talked, I relived the Granny Hastings days of my youth.

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A “Hey Betsy, get home” from across a field interrupted my lesson.

“Gotta go. See ya,” and off went Betsy. I sat there next to Kevin with a string in my hand. I compared myself to him to see if I could fit in with these Manteoans.

Well, I am not so different. He is my height, about my size, and his hair is thick and curly, like mine, just not so dark. I may be smaller than other eight-year-olds, but so is he. Really, I am not so different, just darker skinned and darker haired, I convinced myself.

Looking at Kevin I asked, “Well, now what do I do?”

“Nohtin’, just wait. If you see a crab come along, slowly pick up your string and move the bait in front of it. It’ll go for it. Then lift it out slowly until ya can grab it.”

We waited and waited. Still, “nohtin’” happened.

“Well,” asked Kevin, “ya wanna head over to Granny’s? I’m hungry. She’ll have strawberries and shortcake, always does.”

“Will your granny mind if I come along?”

“She’s not actually my granny, well, actually, she is--well, actually, she’s everyone’s granny. Yeah, you can come, but whatever you do, call her ‘Granny,’ not Mrs. Hastings.”

Through a field and around a corner we arrived at the tiny, one-bedroom mobile home of Granny Hastings. “Granny” tended her garden in front of her trailer. With her tiny frame and tied-backed hair and small spectacles, she sat in the dirt digging with her hands in the garden. With a cursory glance, she acknowledged us. “Hey, boys, kinda hot to be out runnin’ ‘roun’, ain’t it? Ahw, look at this, they’ll eat your vegetables away, if you ain’t careful,” she complained as she pulled an insect from a leaf.

“Yessum, Granny, it is hot,” replied Kevin.

“Who’s yer friend?” she asked.

“A friend a Betsy’s.”

“So, ‘friend of Betsy,’ what’s your name?” Granny asked.

“I’m George. I haven’t been here long.”

“You must be that Georgey Miss Doris loves over

at her diner,” she said as she looked me over. “Well, you’re certainly a cute Georgey; I’ll give you that. You boys come inside. It’s too hot to be out here. Hey, I got strawberries, fresh picked. `Ya hungry?”

Kevin looked at me whispering, “See? Told ya.”

Granny got us each a strawberry shortcake plate. Then she settled down with a crochet needle and yarn.

“Hey, Kevin, you still got your pot-holder here. It’s almost finished. Here’s a needle. I bet you could finish up this afternoon. It’s really looking good.”

“Yessum, Granny,” he replied as he wondered what I might be thinking about him crocheting a pot holder.

“Georgey, there’s some yarn there, and another needle.”

“I don’t know how to crochet, Mrs. Hastings, uh, I mean Granny.”

“C’mere. I’ll show you.” She did.

I must say, in the end, I liked my handiwork.

“Don’t come another step! I mean it, trespasser! I got me this shotgun, and I mean to `make you go away! Even if I gotta blow you away!” Then Granny giggled, “I tell you boys, that’s what I told him, and I meant it.” She had lots of stories. She could entertain me for hours with them. When not playing with Betsy, crabbing at the dock, or hanging around Walker’s Diner, I ate strawberries at Granny’s.

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I could have visited with her longer but the night’s transit schedule remained unyielding.

She asked, “Are you late?”

“My bus is in a few minutes. If I don’t catch it, it’ll be another hour. I need to go. I enjoyed our visit, Mrs. Elfers.”

Well, that part bore truth.

She grabbed my hand.

“Are you coming back to see me?”

As I gazed into her sky-blue eyes, feeling her hand squeezing mine, I did what any decent, true-blue atheist, by my consideration, should do. I lied. I figured she wouldn't remember the visit anyway, right?

"Yes, Mrs. Elfers, of course, I'll be back."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

Again, I lied.

I stooped to her wheelchair level and hugged her. It just seemed proper. I held my Granny Hastings memories more than Marjorie. Her frail self grasped me closely, tightly and long while kissing my cheek below my ear.

Again, her sky-blue penetrating eyes, half tear-filled, stared into mine in seeming desperation.

"Really? You will?"

"Really."

Again, I lied. Well, so I thought. Hell, I meant to.

How Do You Spell. . .?

oooooooooooooooo

. . .Then Ms. Liberty

Stood welcoming him new home.

"Still Welcoming All"

During another evening of documentary viewing with Ma, I mentioned my visit to Marjorie. I informed Ma that my churchgoer suspicions proved true. She never got visits from church members, just prayers.

"George, it's still good that you saw her. If she doesn't have visitors, then at least she had one."

"Yeah, well, it's a long way across town. I could probably visit for my sake. I miss having a Granny Hastings."

"Does this Marjorie crochet?"

Ma chuckled as she remembered Granny Hastings leading me to crocheting as a child.

"Hell, I don't know. I suppose. That'd be interesting, riding the transit across town with yarn and crochet needles."

I matched her chuckle.

"Sounds like fun though."

"That's thoughtful that you visited."

"Ma, I just wanted to make an ass of the church. My transfer provided a convenient time. Thoughtful, my ass. I visited with hidden motives. It's just the way she asked if I'd go back. Well, hell, I bit off more than I could chew. I should've just left it alone. It's not my affair. She's forgotten by now. The church'll be there bouncing balls singing the 'Hokey Pokey' and she won't know the difference. I'm leaving it alone."

"Yeah right," Ma replied with an expression implying that she knew different.

"What's that look?"

“I know you. You’ll go back.”

“Yeah right. I don’t think so. That’s her God’s job and the church’s. I made my statement.”

Tony appeared with some hard liquor and Budweiser.

“Whatchya watchin’, Ol’ Lady?”

“Nothing important.”

“Let’s do some music. George, you got any Haggard around?”

“Yeah, got my whole collection.”

“Hell, throw on a ‘Bottle Let Me Down’ vintage.”

Haggard’s “Tonight The Bottle Let Me Down” emanated Mammaw’s quaint abode.

If the neighbors knew Haggard or not, they knew him that night. I expect Haggard would not appreciate Tony’s and my vocal contribution to our neighbors’ introduction.

Eventually, the Haggard tamed down. Tony commented laughingly, “Yeah, George, this house is like Judge Roy Bean’s bar and court. Watch your mouth about Lily Langtree. You’ll be shot or hung, one. We’re the same over ‘Ol’ Hag.’”

“Hey, Tony, while at the library, I checked a name book.”

“A what?”

“A book of names. I looked for a Z for a middle name. I didn’t care much for Zachery or the others. They’re fine but they aren’t quite right.”

“What is this, my business?”

“You’re the one who came up with the Z idea. Help me think of something. I’m going with Jordan for my last name from Ma’s side of the family.”

“Hell, just use the initial, like Truman.”

“Like what?”

“Harry S. Truman, the S is just an initial, no name.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Yeah, ‘cause you’re a dumb ass.”

“Hell, if I did that, I could drop George, which I

hate, to a simple G., keeping a strand of old identity, kinda like our Stars and Stripes still waving Britain’s Red, White, and Blue, then have a Z name in the middle.”

“Yeah, that’s distinguished, just a first initial, kinda like doctors, lawyers, and other sleazes.”

“Yeah, now, G. *Zomething* Jordan. I like it so far.”

“Not bad, here, have a shot,” as he poured into my empty coffee cup.

It required some effort, but the liquor and Bud kept the effort humorous. It required a couple hours of thought, discussion, and humor, but we managed to wrap it up. By then, we switched to *My Fair Lady*.

“Okay, Tony, we have the *e* and the *i* constructed to best serve no ethical, racial, national origin suggestion as best we can. Now the *a* at the end, how does someone know to pronounce it in long *a*? Oh, hey, never mind, got it! We’ll use an *e* with an accent mark. Hell, that’ll look even cooler!”

“That might work.”

“Okay, hell, I need another shot.”

He accommodated.

“z-e-i-n-e-l-d-é, zeh-nel-day, hell, what’s wrong with that?”

In *My Fair Lady* mode, he affirmed, “By ‘George,’ I think we got it!”

“God bless Ms. Liberty. It seems I have a name!”

“Yeah, good for you.”

“Tony, now tell me,” I asked, maintaining *My Fair Lady* mode, “where does it rain?”

“On the plain in Spain!”

He sang, shot glass in one hand, Bud in the other, pony tail swinging.

“Yeah, Tony,” I sang back.

“While G. Zeineldé learned to spell his name!”

Pretty Flowers, Beautiful Eyes

∞∞∞∞∞ ∞∞∞∞∞

You have a beautiful smile. She's a lucky girl.

-Roadside Flower Girl

Thanksgiving Day found its way. Mammaw prepared the traditional feast. After eating and burping, the beer highlighted the holiday. As the television holiday broadcasting proved unentertaining, I grew restless.

“Ma, I’m heading out.”

“Where?”

“Hell, I don’t know, just somewhere.”

“You know the buses aren’t running today?”

“Doesn’t matter. I’ll be okay.”

I kissed Ma and the pets then walked off. I entered Camelback Road and noticed a flower girl on a nearby corner. Again, I acted in a manner unlike myself. I simply behaved differently as I had continually since my day on the cement. I could only ask myself as I moved along, *Did I just do what I think I did? Yeah, I surely did. Why? Well, whatever.*

A thought occurred. I approached the flower merchant. I examined the display. Many years later in retrospect, I realized that God had His plans regardless of my perceived focus. The act I just embarked upon would serve me a lifetime.

“Sir, if you don’t like those, I can rearrange something. What are you looking for?”

“Oh no, the flowers are fine, but the cheapest are four dollars. I’m a little short, not quite four bucks. Could you maybe take a stem or two out for a bit less?”

“Ah, well, maybe. What’s your lady’s favorite color?”

“Oh, she loves all colors, I’m sure, but she has some beautiful blue eyes.”

“Well, here, try this one and a little green spurt like this. How’s that?”

“It looks perfect but that’s a five-dollar one. I can’t even afford a four-dollar job.”

“Hey, I’m a hopeless romantic,” she replied.

“Three dollars is fine if your lady will be blessed this holiday. That’s sweet of you to get your girlfriend flowers for the holiday.”

Well, “Bless her heart.” The flower girl did not know any better. Anyway, her presumption landed me an affordable discount.

“Ah, cool, well, thank you, here. She’ll appreciate it.”

She collected my cash commenting, “Hey, cutie, if I weren’t married, I’d feel jealous seeing you buy flowers not for me.”

I did not feel good due to ego over her compliment. I felt good about my weight. Her compliment suggested my health continued regaining. I reflected on the nursing home girl’s flirtation. I enjoyed a sense of improving health. Apparently, I no longer presented an appearance of death as in my crystal-meth years of addiction.

Bashfully, I replied, “Whoa, you know how to charm customers.”

“Some,” she smiled. “You have a beautiful smile. She’s a lucky girl.”

“Thank you, I’m sure she’ll be ‘blessed’ by your warmth.”

My right-hand thumb managed transporting me to the eastside of Phoenix. I did not know what came over me. It simply felt proper. I considered, *Hell, it’s a holiday. There’s plenty of general entertainment for them. She won’t even know who I am anyway. Well, whatever, at least she’ll enjoy a new visit from a new visitor. Damn it, I promised. Hell, let’s get this promise crap over with.*

As my thumb beckoned motorists’ kindness, I recapped my recent female interactions. I considered, *Man, am I getting enough good health to attract a woman long*

enough to at least break my heart? Hell, a broken heart would at least establish me as human.

“Hi, I’m George Medeiros from North Phoenix Baptist Church.”

Whoa, what a double lie: George Medeiros died in San Benito and North Phoenix Baptist Church served as a character front. Whatever, it again, sounded good for appearances.

“The church sent me to see Mrs. Elfers. Is she available?”

“Oh, you mean Marjorie. She’s probably in the cafeteria. She’d probably love a visit. Here, come with me. I’ll show you.”

Escorted to the cafeteria door, I thanked my escort then scanned the cafeteria as the staff member departed. At the furthest spot across the room, I noticed a hand waving. It belonged to Marjorie waving at me.

Okay, I guess she’s not so senile.

I approached her table, pulled a chair beside her wheelchair, received her hug commenting in my best Humphrey Bogart impersonating fashion, “I figured a cute dame like you would’ve forgotten me already.”

My right hand straightened my imaginary Bogart hat.

“I’ll never forget you,” she replied. “I don’t remember your name, but I remember you. I thought you’d not come back.”

“Well, Mrs. Elfers, I had a problem today I knew you could solve.”

With saddened eyes she expressed, “Oh no, what problem? I don’t want you to have any problems. What can I do?”

“I happened along some pretty flowers today, but they didn’t have enough sky-blue. I didn’t know what to do with them. Then, I remembered your beautiful eyes. I thought that if I asked you nicely, you might add them to the bouquet.”

“What?”

I pulled the bouquet from behind my back asking, “If I place them here,” I held them near her face, “may I accent them with your eyes?”

I examined the eye-flower arrangement.

“Ah, yes, I knew your eyes were all they lacked. Your eyes make flowers picture-perfect!”

Bashfully, shyly, she responded, “You’re silly. I’m not pretty.”

Then she hugged me, asking, “These are mine? Really?”

“They don’t seem to fit in anywhere else. Besides, I have a lot of walking and hitchhiking to do. It’d be easier to find them an appropriate home rather than carry them around. I already looked like a sissy coming over.”

“No, you brought them for Valery.”

“Valery?”

“Yeah, your coffee girl. She’s asked if I’ve seen you, if you might need some coffee.”

“Oh, her, yeah, well, glad she asked, but her eyes are brown. They just wouldn’t work on this bouquet.”

“You make me feel like a schoolgirl.”

“Your words say you aren’t while your eyes say you are,” I commented while winking my eye in flirtatious fashion.

With another hug, she thanked me, “Thank you for coming back. I thought you wouldn’t.”

“Hey, I promised. Why wouldn’t I?” I asked while feeling bad that not only had I lied, but she possibly perceived deceit.

“How’s your lunch?”

“It’s good. It’s better today because of Thanksgiving.”

“It looks quite attractive.”

“I’m through. I can’t eat much. Try some.”

“Well, thank you, but my Ma stuffed me before I left.”

“No room for dessert?”

“Well, Marjorie, that cake looks appealing. I think

I'll try a bite of what you left."

I did not need a sweet food taste. Nonetheless, people tend to feel something positive when food is shared. I felt grossed out by being in a nursing home environment yet, I wished she enjoy a food sharing. I grabbed her fork to sample a piece of her half-bitten cake. I generally did not eat behind someone, but. . .

"Ummm, great, thank you. If you're through, how 'bout I wheel you into the main room?"

"Sure, maybe something's on TV."

"We'll see."

Into the main room we rolled. Her conversation remained fixed on Texas and God, mostly.

"You said something about a husband. He's not with us anymore?"

"No, no, I've been a widow a long time."

"Oh, I'm sorry. How long?"

She shifted to thinking posture, "Well. . .well. . .I'm not sure. What year is this?"

"It's 1987."

"Oh my, I've been a widow a real long time, really long, then."

As she spoke, her flowers remained on display, hugged to her chest. As other guests or their visitors or staff members came near, she sported her flowers with smiles against her face while pointing to her eyes and bouquet, making the match known.

She began to doze.

"I'll get me some coffee, Marjorie. I'll be right back."

"You better," she advised with a balled fist as if I were in for a whipping if I did not.

I returned to discover her snoring. I pulled out my news magazine from my rear pants pocket, rolled, and lit a cigarette and sipped my coffee. Shortly, her eyes struggled open. She checked my chair to ensure that I remained there then touched my knee and dozed again. A male attendant came my way.

"Hey, I'm glad you came back."

"I'm sorry, have we met?"

"I remember your first visit. She went on and on to everyone she could tell that she had a personal visitor."

"Oh, well, glad it made her day."

"Her day? It made her week."

I glanced at her snoring then back to him.

"Good, good, hmm, thanks for telling me."

"That's one fine church you have there."

"Oh, you're familiar with it?"

"No, but church visits are usually for the group. They'll do shows and songs, which is good, but they don't do individual things. None I know of. Well, not around here. Not like this."

"Oh, I'm sure they do, but it'd be hard to cover everyone."

Man, what hogwash.

"I'm glad Marjorie got one then. She's a real sweetheart. All of us really like her."

"I understand. I like her too, more than I planned. Believe me."

"Thank you, really," he replied.

He returned to his mopping of wheelchair deposits.

Marjorie reawakened with an energy surge. I noticed the sunset and advised, "I need to go; it's getting dark."

"Oh no, you have to?"

"Yes, I have a long way home. I waited for you to wake up so I could say good-bye."

"Oh, I'd have been broken if you'd been gone.

Thank you for waiting. You're coming back?"

"Would I lie?"

"No, you'll be back. I just know it. I know it because God heard my prayers and sent you to me. And I know you wouldn't lie."

She squeezed my hand. As we hugged, she informed me, "I love you so much. I haven't had any family in so long."

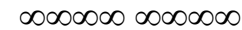
Still hugging, I answered, "I expect I love you too. I haven't had a Granny 'in so long.'"

Her hug tightened. Then I asked, "You know how to crochet?"

"I used to."

"Yeah, me too; we'll talk about it real soon."

Atheist Libertarian



Socialism [Government] creates an illusion of quenching peoples' thirst for justice. In fact, it lulls their conscience into thinking that the steamroller which is about to flatten them is their salvation. It isn't.

-Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the West*

"Don't come another step! I mean it, trespasser! I got me this shotgun, and I mean to make you go away! Even if I gotta blow you away!' Then Granny giggled, 'I tell you boys, that's what I told him, and I meant it.'"

Eyes wide and mouth half open, Marjorie marveled at my former Granny's gumption.

"She didn't?"

"Well, from what I remember of Granny Hastings, Marjorie, I expect it's pretty accurate. I can't watch *The Beverly Hillbillies* without thinking of Granny Hastings. They looked so much alike. Also, their temperaments further served familiarity."

"My goodness, how did you meet these people like her and *The Sound of Music* lady with the organ?" referring to my Mrs. Mussack stories.

"Well, they just happened. What can I say? Call me a lucky kid."

As the calendar turned its pages well into 1988, my Marjorie visits remained regular, not so regular as my Nick's Bar visits, yet regular, nonetheless. When not at the library or zoo, it served a convenient place to relax with reading material, coffee, and cigarettes. Often, she merely slept during our visits but often woke to affirm I remained.

I could read and smoke conveniently. Desert Terrace Nursing Center sat a mere third the distance from Mammaw's than the zoo, and when visiting Marjorie, I

could cheat the Phoenix Transit by manipulating the fare-transfer arrangement when routing myself the McDowell Street and Central Avenue lines for the one-and-one-half-hour connecting time allowance when including a library visit.

Upon one of her awakenings, as I watched the clock for my bus, I offered my good-bye, commenting, “Hey, wish me luck tomorrow. I’ve got a lunch date. I’m a bit nervous over it.”

“A lunch date? With a girl?”

“Yeah, I met her the other night.”

Squeezing my hand, “I bet she’s beautiful.”

“She’s quite pretty, too pretty for me.”

“No, you’re too handsome for her, no matter how pretty she is!”

I chuckled, “Thank you, Marjorie, you have more confidence than I. I just hope I don’t make a fool of myself.”

“Charm her like you charm me. I’ll never see you again. She’ll not let you go.”

“I don’t know about all that. I just hope she doesn’t slap me on her way out.”

“I just hope you don’t forget me now.”

“I won’t, Marjorie. I won’t. As the old saying goes, ‘Women are like buses. If you miss one, there’s another right behind.’ Grannies, however, are hard to find, I say.”

“Where’d you meet her?”

“I attended a seminar called Omega. It’s a self-improvement enlightenment program. Rich people pay for it but average people attend at no cost.”

“En, en, enli. . .” Marjorie attempted repeating *enlightenment*.

“En-light-en-ment, Marjorie.”

“What’s that?”

Glancing at my watch, I had only a few minutes left, “Well, they present exercises to help people think a little differently about themselves and other people.”

“Oh?”

“For example, in one, they had about seventy-five of us lined up around the four walls. With the lights turned down to complete darkness, they instructed we walk to the opposite wall. Well,” I chuckled, “we didn’t make it in the dark. Some of us wound up right back at our original wall.”

“My goodness, why would they make you do that?”

“Well, then they set a tiny dim light at each wall.

On that attempt, we almost all made it to the opposite wall. The point being is that if we let even the dimmest of lights shine in learning about the people and events in our lives and even ourselves, we make destinations attainable.”

“Oh, so that’s where you met, ah, ah. . .”

“Julie? No, I didn’t meet her there. She’s actually Julia, but she goes by Julie. She attended a later class, but the two classes scheduled a social at a restaurant in Scottsdale.”

Glancing at my watch, I ended my story.

“Well, Marjorie, I’ll have to tell you the rest next time.”

I assured, “I’ll be back. I promise. Don’t I always?”

Again, I offered her assuring words actually carrying truth. My success and failure with soon-to-be Julia Ann Jordan destined me a derailing, but, come hell or high water, Marjorie remained my granny.

Once I made my McDowell bus into downtown, my transfer offered much more flexibility. I opted to stop by Mark’s, finally.

I stepped off my Camelback bus near Mark’s new location. As I approached the store, I marveled at the increased size from his previous Central and Camelback location. Looking as vagrant as the day I met him, I stepped inside. Lynn, once again, offered the greeting.

“Hi, how may I help you?”

“My goodness, Lynn? Is that still you after these years?”

She glanced then, “My goodness! George, I’ll be!” she exclaimed as she came closer with an arm extended for

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