

PUBLICITY STUNT

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It was 1967, I was eighteen and living in Little Rock Arkansas. The draft came by post, most of my friends where drafted too. Some of my friends bolted to Canada or enrolled in Theological studies. My grandmother had begged me to enrol in Theological studies. She told me and anyone that would listen, that she had prayed every day since she got me that I would one day become a man of the cloth. My grandmother never said that before I received the draft.

I had to make money to take care of my grandmother and I had to get out of Little Rock, there was no decision to make. I did make the decision not to bad mouth the guys that decided to avoid the draft, their lives where different to mine, they had their reasons. I told everyone that living in the greatest democracy in the world meant I had to fulfil my duty and accept my mandatory military enlistment. I didn't mean it; my grandmother knew it and told me every day up until the day I was leaving that I could change my mind. She was a good grandmother and I was determined to make her proud and give her comfort in her old age.

My grandmother raised me and it broke my heart not to do what she asked and enrol in Theological Studies but the truth was I was on a suicide mission. I had done enough living and I was ready to leave this world. I was empty and angry. I did not want to commit suicide because it would shame my grandmother and she deserved more than that. I was angry at God and being his servant would be a noose around my neck. I was angry at God for killing my mother, for getting

her pregnant by a coward that didn't stick around, for leaving my grandmother a widow in poverty and for making me attracted to men. God had a lot to answer for.

When my mother died in childbirth my grandmother walked three miles to the unmarried mothers' home she was in and demanded the nuns give me to her. It was a Saturday and the next day, as bold as brass, in 1949 she gave the proverbial finger to Little Rock, Arkansas marched me into church demanded the priest to baptise me there and then and told the congregation if any of them said anything to the bastard son of her dead daughter they would not live to tell the tale. It was only after her death I learned that.

We did not have much money but she loved me. My happiest memories are my grandmother and I tracking deer to hunt. When I was small I thought it was fun, when I got a bit older I realised it was out of necessity to feed us. At first, it was her and I but as I got older and better at it I did the hunting on my own. I would go into the woods with my grandfather's rifle, a friend of his brought back to my grandmother during World War II after his death. I was always hunting and practicing shooting. It was all there was to do where we lived.

I used to pretend to be a soldier hunting the Nazis that my grandmother told me killed my grandfather in Germany. The memory of my mother, the rifle, me and hardship was all my grandmother had left to remember my grandfather by. I was an excellent shot and when I was old enough my grandmother entered me in shooting

competitions. I won every competition she entered me in. The prize money I won was enough that my grandmother did not have to work in as many people's houses as she did when I was small. I was proud that my shooting was able to provide a living for me and my grandmother. I once entered and won the Wimbledon Cup the most prestigious prize for long-range shooting. Winning that prize was what guaranteed that I would always make a living from being a good shot.

My grandfather was a marine and since he was the only man my grandmother talked about I wanted to be like him. I wanted to be a marine. I wanted to make my grandmother proud and I wanted to die in combat, honourably, like my grandfather, before anyone found out I was attracted to men. I went over to Vietnam deployed as an MP and later became a sniper after a big push to turn Marines into snipers. I had ninety three North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong personnel kills confirmed which was difficult because the kills had to be confirmed by a third party. One of my most famous kills was shooting an enemy sniper through his own rifle scope, hitting him in the eye and killing him.

They asked me to shoot, it's what I did, I shot. I did not think about their families, their lives, the impact, I only went shooting. If I didn't shoot I would have been shot or one of the men in my platoon would have been shot. I had to do it. The awards I got for the lives I took never filled the emptiness inside me. I was never proud of those metals because they reminded me of all the fathers, sons, brothers, friends, husbands, lovers that I killed. I could never understand why I got awards for killing people and other people got life sentences.

Physically I never got hurt but the Vietnam War was a different life sentence.

I was getting angrier and angrier with God for not letting me die. I had gone to Vietnam willingly to die, that was my plan, living and getting metals was a painful reminder that nothing I planned worked out for me. I sent all of my wages to my grandmother and the only comfort I had was that she was not struggling. I never wrote her any letters because I did not know what I would write to her. I did not want to upset her and tell her everything horrible thing she thought about Vietnam was true and that the only reason I came was because I wanted to live with men instead of women. I rarely spoke to any of the men in my platoon. I was attracted to them and I was afraid they would notice and kill me. My silence scared them and the knowledge that I was such a good shot gave kept them from killing me.

I was so good at shooting and not getting myself killed I was given command over a platoon of snipers until 1974 when President Gerald Ford announced the Vietnam War was finished. When I returned home for my achievements in battle I was asked to head up the sniper academy for Marines but I declined. I asked if I could join the Secret Service. With my sniper ability I immediately joined the advanced security team of President Ford. My grandmother was proud and that eased my disappointment in not being dead. I took good care of my grandmother, she wanted for nothing in her old age. On her death bed I flew home to Little Rock to be with her. When I went into the room she sent the personal carer I had hired from the room and asked me to sit next to her on the bed and she held her hand. She was frail but still

the same woman that took me hunting as a small boy. My grandmother looked at me and said, 'Michael, I know what you are and it is okay,' I started to cry and she hugged me and told me it was okay and that she always knew and was proud of me anyway. My grandmother was funny that way, a good southern woman set in her ways but modern in her thinking when it came to me and my happiness. My grandmother died that night. I know she waited for me to come home so she could tell me that before she died.

I have been protecting Presidents for the last thirty eight years. During the seven Presidents I protected I was never as embarrassed of any mission like I was over my last mission. The United States Government frivolously spent sixteen and a half million on a publicity stunt. President Obama declared he wanted to find his Irish roots. He needed to seal a gentleman's agreement allowing U.S. war planes to refuel in the Shannon airport. I arrived six weeks prior to his visit in Doolin, County Clare. I checked in to a Bed and Breakfast under the guise of a wealthy tourist with Irish heritage that wanted to find my lineage and meet the President of the United States. The owner of the Bed and Breakfast was a retired primary school teacher, named Dessie. He was tall, handsome, articulate, good with his hands, and knowledgeable about every local person and every Irish myth, friendly and about my age. I immediately liked him.

I was busy during the six weeks pre-arrival. I had to do sea and air surveillance of the surrounding areas and each individual home the President would be near. Background checks on all the home and business owners, their employees and state officials that would meet

President Obama. Phone lines had to be secured, computers hacked and checked for key words. Provisions made to deactivate mobile handsets during the visit. If Dessie noticed I was busier than a normal tourist he did not say. Dessie made sure to make time for me when I had time and seemed to understand when I was busy.

Dessie talked a lot. I often thought to myself he chatted like a woman with the same frequency and type of judgemental gossip that I remembered from my grandmother as a child. The first night he opened a bottle of Jameson and with each shot I could feel myself loosening up and telling Dessie things about myself that I had never told anyone. Dessie told me he had been married and had three children but that was all over now. I asked him what happened in his marriage he only said, 'I was not very good at it.' I understood. Dessie asked me why I never married. I told Dessie, 'as soon as I was old enough to know, I knew. But in those days men did not like men, so when I was old enough I joined the marines. I thought choosing a career driven by integrity, honour, dedication, trust and masculinity would change who I was. My grandmother knew because she begged me to be a man of the cloth instead of going to Vietnam. At the time I was angry with God for making me like men and had planned on dying there.' The idea of me dying before Dessie got a chance to meet me made him visibly sad and he said quietly, 'I am glad you didn't die.'

Dessie took my glass of Jameson put it on the coffee table and kissed me. He asked me up to his room and we had sex the entire night. This became our ritual for the next six weeks. Each morning, over what he

called a full Irish breakfast we pretended nothing happened. We joked that no one ever heard of an Irish man named Obama. Dessie gave me history lessons about my name and tips on the top tourist attractions in Clare and Galway. Dessie's Bed and Breakfast was filling up with tourists in anticipation of President Obama's visit which added to my workload. Dessie and I could not sit openly drinking whiskey and kissing in front of the tourists. Instead of sitting in his parlour every evening after dinner I met him in his room and we would talk and drink.

I was starting to feel something that I had never felt before. Actually, I was starting to feel which was something I had never done before. I had been with men, prostitutes, never with an openly gay man because I was not interested in people knowing I was gay. I dated women to cover my attraction to me and to bring to work events. I never slept with a woman. I always broke it off before it got that far. Now, at sixty two on my last mission I met this Irish man that I looked forward to seeing every evening and admired him every morning when I woke. The emptiness I had felt for the last sixty two years was being replaced with a warm feeling which I found difficult to understand and difficult to accept. When I became a Marine I had decided to die never knowing love in fact that was my personal mission.

Sometimes, during my preparations for President Obama's visit I felt annoyed with Dessie for knowing I was gay and for knowing how to get me to open up to him. The only person I ever loved was my grandmother and now Dessie was looking for that affection. Anger would wash over me. I would decide to go back to the Bed and

Breakfast, check out and finish the mission at another Bed and Breakfast. Then I would see him and all of those feelings were immediately forgotten and I knew whatever time I had left, not that I deserved much had to be spent with him.

The day before President Obama arrived I was busy and I did not get back to Dessie's Bed and Breakfast until late. I did not go into his room because I had changed my mind and decided I did not want to stay with Dessie. I had bought a little house in Bisbee, Arizona to retire in. Dessie needed to understand and accept he would not see me again. I never wanted to live as a gay man it just was not the way I was brought up. Dessie knocked on the door instead of waiting for me to answer he entered the room with a bottle of Jameson. I was annoyed but when I saw the kindness in his face I couldn't say anything. Instead I took the glass and had a drink with him. Tonight we had one drink, spoke very little, we did not have sex we just kissed and held each other. Dessie asked me would I stay on in Doolin with him as a friend. I didn't answer him, I couldn't. I'm not a stayer, I'm not a lover, it's not what I do. I am a grandson, a service man, a legal murderer but not a stayer.

Dessie told me he loved me. I didn't say anything, I couldn't. I had feelings for Dessie but I wouldn't call them love. I thought about him a lot. He was a very nice man, a much nicer man than I, but love, no, I wouldn't call it love. I didn't do love, never did, didn't know how. I loved my grandmother that was it, no one else, never. I observed people who thought they were in love, cheating on each other, killing each other, themselves, no love was not something I was interested in.

I felt bad, I was annoyed with Dessie for making me feel bad. I couldn't tell Dessie what I was thinking, I couldn't stay, I'm just not a stayer. I felt a pain in my chest that I had never felt before.

The day of President Obama's visit I was up at 4a.m. Dessie was asleep. I had learned that Dessie was a heavy sleeper and a late riser which would have annoyed me if I had decided to stay with him. It occurred to me that a man that slept heavy and late was no good to me. He would burden me with all the sleeping and not waking, I would have had to protect him. I packed my bags quietly. I decided to leave tonight after the President. I did not want a messy good bye with Dessie. I wrote him a note and left it on the pillow next to him. I wrote, 'You are a good man Dessie, I will miss you but I am not a lover, a friend or a stayer.' I kissed him lightly on the forehead and left with my bags.

I was stationed at the top of the Cliffs of Moher outside the lighthouse to watch for anyone suspicious. I was dressed as an American Tourist. I had a Travelers baseball cap on, the minor league team in Little Rock, I always wore the Travellers baseball cap on a mission overseas. If I died I wanted everyone to know I did it for Little Rock. I had sunglasses on, a sweatshirt, a rain jacket over that with a small radio in it to communicate with my team, a black fanny pack to cover my gun and a large camera around my neck. The camera was a live recorder used for surveillance of the area. I had an ear piece in so that I could hear what was going on in the operation. In that six weeks I had passed over the Cliffs of Moher many times but had not taken the time to look at the infamous view of the Cliffs of Moher but that day I did.

The beauty of the ocean crashing into the side of the cliffs reverberated through my soul. There was a sorrow so vast that on the tops of those cliffs every sin I ever committed played on my mind like an old movie. Dessie was top of the list. As if by mental link the tall head of Dessie O'Callaghan was bobbing up the steps of the Cliffs of Moher. Immediately annoyed I wondered why he couldn't just leave it, why was he going to make me do this. I whispered a possible assassin with Dessie's description to the agents mixed in the crowd ready to hold people until the visit was over. Dessie spotted me, he grinned at me with a huge wave. I didn't acknowledge him. At the same time two secret service men approached him. He looked visibly upset, they escorted him out of sight. I felt bad but I couldn't understand why he didn't accept what I wrote to him in the note. The note was not a suggestion, it was the reality, I'm not a stayer, I'm not his friend or his lover, he was dead to me the moment I wrote him the note. I just wish I could get him out of my mind.

A sign was posted three euro to walk to the top of the light house. I considered the unreasonableness of putting a levy on a view of the Atlantic Ocean. A man in a wheel chair arrived at the top, pushed by a young man and woman out of breath. I thought about the luxury of walking to the top, and what it must be like to envy that basic right. The young man resembled the man in the wheel chair. I thought he must be his son. I wondered what it must be like to have someone love you so much they would push you up a steep cliff to meet a President and see one of the most amazing views in the world. I knew Dessie would do that for me if I stayed but I knew I wasn't staying. He was probably being interrogated right now. It would be an uncomfortable

few hours for him but it would buy me enough time to finish this mission and get out of Clare. They would figure out Dessie was only a local and let him go. I wasn't worried anything bad would actually happen to him. I also knew Dessie would love to be able to tell all the locals the story of meeting the President's Secret Service Men. Dessie would see it as a new found friendship instead of an interrogation it's just who he was.

I wish I had told him he was sleeping with one of the President's top men, he would have loved that. I wish I had told Dessie about my years in Vietnam War, he would have understood. I wish I had told Dessie about all the people I killed there, he would have forgiven me. I wish I had told Dessie about my mother dying and never having met my father, he would have been sympathetic. I wish I had told Dessie about all the people I never let myself love about all my years of loneliness. I wish I had told Dessie about why I never open up to people, he would have accepted that and been slower with me so as not to scare me away, I knew that. I wish I had gone over to Dessie and spoke to him when he came to find me at the Cliffs of Moher but that is not the kind of man I am. I'm not anywhere close to being a man as good as Dessie O'Callaghan he was one of a kind.

Quickly brought back to reality, by a crazy old Santa impersonator, standing in front of me, wearing a spaghetti strainer for a hat. He kept repeating 'end of humanity' mumbling 'I told you so.' I wonder what Santa might tell me about my future or President Obama about the future of the United States of America.

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