

DREAMS FROM THE STREET

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A Prefatory Note

I received my doctoral degree in psychology 60 years ago. Ince that time, wherever I have lived or traveled, I have made an effort connect to the dreamlife of those society tends to neglect and ignore: the homeless, the drug addicts, the mentally ill, all those souls who live on the streets. Street people need money for their needs. I've never considered it my place to judge their needs. Early on, I decided I would not offer a free handout, but an exchange for something of value. I offered money in exchange for telling me a dream. No one has ever refused.

I wish now I had been more diligent in recording what I heard over these many years. What I offer here is but a miniscule portion of what I was told. Some I never recorded. Some I recorded and lost. But what I have I is "representative" and provides a fair sense of "dreams from the street." From the start, I did not just record the narrative texts of dreams. What I did was to put the whole experience into a poetic form. Poetic because this form seemed to give these experiences more value.

My encounters with street people in this way continue to this day. I find these experiences to be of great value. The dreams of the ignored, devalued, rejected and those tossed away have much to say. To all those I have encountered or will encounter in the future, I thank you for one of the true high points of my life.

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Buffalo Bill and the Slithering Sidewalk

Sporting a Buffalo Bill mustache, a goatee, cascading hair topped by a weathered leather hat of much the same breed, one expects a handsome vest and matching chaps with fancy boots to complete the ensemble, not a tattered blue sweatshirt over a frayed red tee, old patched corduroys hugging ground, broken tennies that weren't a match; a left leg limping to boot. But this was not a fashion ramp; it's a newly surfaced market parking lot and he was asking me, with hand out, and pleading eyes, and rasping voice, if I could spare a couple of bucks.

He was new to the lot and didn't know what I do when asked. No, I say, I cannot spare, but I am in the market for dreams. You have a dream you can tell me, sell me for a couple of bucks? Taking a step back, he says, You serious? Dead serious, I answer. OK, then. I'll tell you the dream I remember when Jango shook me awake this morning. Jango? Yeah, I slept with her last night and woke her up moaning and groaning something awful, she said. That's her over there in the black tights. Did you tell her? Yep. What did she say? She said I better get off all the junk.

You sure you're gonna give me—Yes, I interrupt. OK, then. What I saw in my dream was the sidewalk, and it was moving like something was under the sidewalk, long like a snake or something, something slithering along, but still under and not coming out no where's I could see. The sidewalk was moving as far as I could see. It was creepy and I guess it got me scared or something to make me moan and groan and waking up Jango and all. That's all there was. Pretty silly dream, I'd say. You think it's worth two dollars? Not silly at all. I handed him two dollars.

He stood there looking at me, standing perfectly still, staring. Jango's man asked, almost whispering, What's it mean?

Ah, now that, I charge for. But for free I'll tell you that's not the question. The question is:

What are you going to do now, now that the snake is moving?

Snakeman Cat

Snakeman Cat was a regular
along the Boulevard holding
court after midnight in the
flickering light of the 7-11
with stories made up or not
teaching the young street guys
and gals the ways and means

He'd shared with me dreams
he'd had or not. Each would net
him a buck or two—my usual
pay for dreams I buy on the
street. No more. The flash
of police cars told me it was
not good. Snakeman Cat was
on the ground, knifed, I was
told and dying slow but sure

Wish I'd written down the
dreams he sold me.

A Rolling Stone

The beggar woman calls me over to her perch on the sidewalk; she's shouting out in excitement something I cannot hear without my hearing aids. Moving closer I hear her now. "I saw your lovely picture in the paper," she says, glow-faced with a big smile. She's referring to the \$200 I won in the market's drawing, which came with photo in the local paper, me posed there with the manager handing me the check. "Thanks. It was a lucky thing." My words hid discomfort at the disparity of her luck of the draw and mine.

As I check out, the thought comes to me to ask her if she has dreams and to ask her if she wants to be involved in my project which I call dreams from the street. I have a dollar bill as change and give it to her straight away, asking, "do you have dreams?" "You mean the sleeping kind or the other?" "The sleeping kind," I say. "Yes, a lot of them." I describe my project and she lights up and beams, my interest kindling a fire in her. "Ok, then, when next we meet, I'll buy a dream."

As I approach my truck, she hobbles up to me, and grabs my arm eagerly: "Do you know the meaning of dreams?" "I'm a dream analyst," I respond, "that's what I do for a living." "I have this dream and it's been with me my whole life, repeating

and repeating. A big boulder rolls over me and then I become part of the boulder. Over and over again I have this dream. Do you know what it means?"

"I must be off," I say, having no time. "Let's talk about it next time." She lets go of my arm and her excitement rolls over me like a rock and I too, become excitement.

Sidewalk Kingdom

He claimed the corner sidewalk his domain
the traffic signal his moat control:
green, inviting pedestrians to risk wild
gesticulations, raucous shouts and such;
red, producing claims of victory
and a dance of celebratory turnings.

The old woman pulling a half-filled cart
got half-way across on green, saw
the corner king, turned, scrambled back.
Next, a young mother, pushing stroller
with babe shielded from the king's view,
finally saw and heard and froze.

The king was jubilant as he watched
the stricken mom and breaking cars
he stomped and bellowed joy
almost falling as I asked his back,
“Do you dream? In the night?”
He turned, his turn for fright.

“Scratch and ramble,” he threatened
as if it was enough to send me away.
“Itch and bramble,” I answered back.
He cocked his head in listening pose
“Tell me then and the money's yours.”
He eyed the dollar I waved around.

“Fire,” he yelled, as passersby took
a wide berth. “Fire, fire,” screaming
at the averting eyes. “Does the fire
touch you?” He cocks his head again.
“Always.” he answers, “ It never
hurts. Never burns.” “Passion,” I say.

“We need some chalk,” I continue.
“Chalky chalk and chalky talk.”
Cocks his head to hear what I’ll say.
“Yellow and red is all we need.
Stay, I’ll get some from the drug store.”
Chalk as medication I mutter to myself.

Chalk in hand, I bend down, draw
flames around the borders of one of
the squares on the corner sidewalk.
“Get in,” I say, “and sit down,” I
instruct. “Here’s the chalk; it’s yours.
Use it when you occupy a corner again.”

Westwood Nights 1978

By day fashion rules the streets
and appetites of the Westside's
jeweled crown called Westwood.

Pretty women, pretty men, pretty
windows, pretty money everywhere
pretty is pretty much all there is.

My Dorchester House office
sits next door to Sissy Spacek's
But I never saw her--or Carrie

Nighttime, after midnight, pretty
went to sleep and the streets woke
up to a different song

Walking the streets one night
I was approached by another
street walker--one plying her trade

No need for her services
but I wondered if I could buy
a dream she might have had

Intent on her business she
shouts, "Fuck you!" and walked on.
Just some local color I decided

"Hey mister," she shouts at my back
"how much you pay?" \$2 I say
"OK," she says and begins to tell

"I'm naked--no surprise in that--
with rabbits--all different colors
snuggling and nosing me all over

What's even stranger is that they
are all singing in different voices
songs I never heard, ever

Then all go quiet, no sound at all
the silence is scary, I cry and
then lights out, no light at all.”

“Thank you,” I say and hand her
the money. She looks wide-eyed
and whispers: “Does it mean anything?”

“Yes,” I say. You must begin to sing
before the music stops and the lights
go out. Start now.” Smiling, she walks on.

At the Post Office

“Can ya spare a buck?”

I got two for you if you

Tell me a dream

“You some kind a weirdo?”

I suppose; how about you?

“No one asks about dreams.”

I do, and I pay too.

“I won the lottery.”

In your dream?

“Yeah. Think I be here

Beggin’ if it was true?”

You look like Red Cloud.

“Yeah, I heard that before.”

You Lakota?

“Naw...Duwamish.”

Sad how Seattle ran Chief

Seattle and all the Duwamish

out of town.

“You think we expect better?”

No. But you won the lottery

in your dream.

“How ‘bout that two bucks?”

Do you have an Indian name?

“Can’t tell you, but yes.”

Take these two dollars, hold

them tight, whisper your name.

“You trying to spook me?”

No. But you may find the way

to the lottery inside you where

the prize is waiting.