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When Denim Surrendered to Silk

By JK Savoy

Like a bothersome mosquito, writer's block attacks at the worst possible time, particularly when and where this writer goes to write! Since all things do pass, from my usual Prospect Park writing bench, my vision wandered to my former Park Slope commune home where I lived a few years earlier as I flashed back to the high times I had with my roomies. Aging hippies that we were, we'd hang out, dance our butts off and party on whatever came our way, drinkable, smokeable and often, questionable. As time slithered by, we began to grasp that the party had been over and switched to protein shakes, chamomile tea and a long overdue intro to hard work ethics.

As the wind swirled the dead leaves into a neat pile at my feet, I closed my eyes and wondered, "Are my hippie friends who would lay freebie joints on us still doing that while nose candy hustlers are ripping one another off so they can keep the snow storm blowing through their nostrils?"

Distracted by one of my Kenny The Mover trucks taking more soon to be former commune dwellers to Staten Island, Jersey or anywhere affordable; I saw a notice on their former brownstone's boarded window stating: *"Another Cinderella Project, sponsored by Brooklyn Union Gas."* Like a claim stake into the eye, this harbinger of corporate intent declared itself amongst the many other sealed windows of the mid-1800's mansions along Prospect Park West. A local realtor chaining

the doors shut had seconded the motion.

"Cinderella Genocide" became the spray-painted response overlaying the numerous gas company's posters. The tenants who shared their lives in those many sealed spaces had been relocated to far less elegant surroundings. In the meantime, another high end property awaited the tightening tentacles of Wall Street to secure its grip on those treasured, landmark buildings. It wasn't only the remnants of the peace, love and *'End The Illegal War!'* generation who became scattered to the wind: Blue collar homeowners who strengthened vintage neighborhoods with their hard work attitudes and sense of human decency throughout historical sections of Brooklyn, were being cast to the wind in favor of investor dwellers.

While sipping at my Purity Restaurant brew, recollections of loudspeakers blasting from those very brownstone's windows telling of a long ago party for one and all, danced through my mind. Chains upon the door fell from sight as I recalled a time when those very doors stayed open so people might say as you entered: *"Hey bro, walk right in, sit on down or dance all night! Who gives a rat's ass what your name is or isn't, or who you're with or not with? Rock on!"*

From the park bench where I sat, I looked at a completed Cinderella Project alongside of a condemned commune. My mind burst from the imaginary clinking sound of Waterford Crystal during a toast given by a tycoon from another era who helped to develop Park Slope, thus displacing working class victims of that age. Memorializing that thought, I wrote into my journal, *"Where once there were commune parties blasting rock anthems, cellists now play softly to select guests; as denim surrenders to silk."* The prose on a section of scrap wallboard,

jutting from a trash dumpster, read: *"We The Unwilling Are Led By The Un-Hip To Do The Unnecessary For The Ungrateful!"* Flower Power maxims that rallied an entire generation of young Americans in search of truth and social justice lay in iron funerary vaults as long abandoned assertions. The power of youth driven radical statements, which once echoed from a brownstone's walls, were displaced by the force of financial statements that would see to the unraveling of the young social activists' place in Park Slope's long checkered history.

A year earlier, I sat on that same park bench observing the random sight of the enormous dumpsters heralding pending renovations. I noted in my journal, *"Like huge seed pods from the '50s sci-fi film Invasion of the Body Snatchers, the dumpsters were placed in front of the mansions. Just as Dorothy did in the storied poppy field, those of us inside would lay our bodies to rest. The hippies and working class people would drift off to sleep only to be magically replicated as moneyed replacements, who'd beckon others of their kind to join them."*

As autumn leaves became caught up in wind swirls near my feet, waves of flashback caused my eyes to flutter then to shut while reflecting on those times. A case of writer's block is one hell of a thing for an author to flash back to. There I was, trying my best to write but my pen would stall halfway down the page of my journal. As if being drawn by the hand of another, thick black circles arose like snake eyes staring back at me. I gazed into the circles then had to leap onto the park's wall trying to escape them while my one time commune friend, Danny, skidded his bike to a stop. His dilated pupils peered at the circles in my journal as he said, *"Hey, man! sorry, bro!"* Then he squinted, looked at me and yelled; *"Kenny, my ex-*

roomie! Is it really you? ¿Qué pasa?" Danny was peddling three hours of loops of the park to burn off some speed-laced acid that he dropped the night before. He joined me upon the park wall just as we heard a familiar voice behind us say; *"Far out, man! I can't believe my sorry eyes; it's Danny and Kenny! I hope you dudes don't mind but we're like, totally tapped out of food. Like, we all had this brutal case of the munchies and gobbled up everything in Sally's basket."*

Danny lurched back and shouted to the new arrivals; *"Sally! Paulie! Wow! This calls for a joint. Hey man, do ya got anything for me to roll?"*

Like ghosts in the classic play, Our Town perched upon their headstones, we all sat on the wall surrounding Prospect Park recollecting long gone spirits from my futile coffee house venture, September's Child. The warm sense of being with friends in that magical moment was eclipsed by a feeling that our paths were crossing for the last time, while enroute to our separate ways. Danny began rolling skinnies as fast as Paulie could lay the pot on him and he could lick the joints. Sally took her guitar from its case, sat on the wall and sang.

Paulie pointed to a dumpster across 8th Avenue shouting, *"My asshole landlord totally laid it on me that he wants to sell us our apartment! Man, like how the hell can you buy an apartment? I mean, you can buy a house that sits on the ground, but how do you buy an apartment that's totally stuck inside a building, man! What a total idiot!"* Paulie's eyes crossed as he sucked in the pot smoke. The master of his craft that he was, he held the fumes in while asking; *"No shit, is he gonna tear the damn apartments apart and then spread them out or somethin'? What if I wanna move someday? Man, if I wanna*

split, do ya think anyone besides me would be totally stupid or stoned enough to buy an apartment? If the buildin', inside an' out is the apartment, then what the hell are ya buyin,' the air in it? Even if this shit's possible, I got no bread to live on never mind buyin' somethin' stupid like another apartment! So, if we can't buy it, we're outta there, totally!" Paulie took yet another long hit and disclosed his survival strategy: *"I gave the eviction papers to my brother. Man, he's in pre-law! Them people don't know who they're fuckin' with! He'll figure out a way to make them dudes quit hasslin' us! If we're supposed to be rent controlled; don't that mean that we can just sit there and the owner can't do shit to us?"* He exhaled and went on to say, *"My brother told me that if the dude wants us out, he'd have to lay some serious bread on us. But if we take it, we totally got no way back. Two people in the buildin' grabbed up the buyout from the dude already and your trucks moved them, Kenny. I mean, like you didn't do it or anythin'! Like, nobody's blamin' you! Ah shit, you'll probably be seein' it happen all the time."* Paulie interrupted himself to yell; *"Hey, Tank! Get your chubby ass on over here! Danny, roll another skinny for the fatty."*

Sniffing the smoke, Tank, another of my roomies from back in the day, joined us asking, *"What's happening, everybody? If we're all flies, then Prospect Park must be shit-heaven!"* Tank grabbed the joint and passed it around while I passed it up.

"What the hell happened to your freak-flag, Kenny? You look like a new recruit. You didn't join the Military on us, did you?"

"No Tank, my hair got tangled in the debris when I got tossed from my old coffee house, so I cut myself free."

"Shit Tank, all you totally left everyone is a one-inch flamer!" shouted Paulie, burning his fingers as he stole the tiny roach.

Sally threw him a roach clip, then strummed her Angelica guitar that she claimed was a Martin, and sang; *"We're helpless and hopeless, soon to be homeless, 'cause we ain't got a dime. Someone find us an answer or we'll be in a shelter, a-wastin' our time."* Teary eyed, she put her guitar down and said, *"Tank, they're trying to throw us outta our crib! Do you know anybody that can do anything about it? If the pigs get their way, they'll have to haul mine and my kid's asses outta our home with a rope!"* Leaning her guitar on the wall, she said, *"Let Paulie talk to his idiot brother about making a deal all he wants. I don't give a shit how much they give Paulie; it'll go up his nose or into his arm in less than a month. This neighborhood is getting to be only about the money! Hell yeah! The Slope used to be about people helping people, these days it's about helping rich people trample over our sorry corpses."*

"Right on Sally, right on!" yelled Tank. He took a long hit and passed the freshly rolled double E-Z Wider joint, capable of handling his mass, to Danny. Tank's face reddened. When it approached crimson, the alleged former soldier of fortune exhaled and stood before us shouting for the world to hear: *"You're sounding like people who would put up with bullshit without a fight! Just say, hell no! You have the Movement behind you and the Movement ended a war! These realtors can't stop those same people who stopped Washington from turning yet another generation of innocent American kids into gunslingers for hire! Right on, my brothers and sisters! If our collective voices stopped Dick-head Nixon from dropping his bombs on Cambodia, we sure as shit can sing out and stop speculators from dropping eviction notices into our mailboxes!"*

Tank took another long toke, looked deeply into his heart

for words and to the sky for inspiration and declared: *“The people of this neighborhood will stand tall, look the speculators and realtors right in the eyes and tell them to shove their blood money up their butts with the rest of their shit! Money can't buy off the will of the people. if the people stand their ground! I'll give this block-busting shit 'til '81, and that's a stretch! Those realtor pigs will pack it all in, split and look elsewhere for bodies to bleed. Like an eagle's talons, the hands of the people will swoop down and strike to free our people's homes from greed's grasp! Word of our resistance will spread as if on the wings of eagles! The Slope will become the bastion of our final resistance to Big Real Estate's power! No offense, Kenny but: We will not be moved! We will not be moved!”*

A chorus of three joined in; *“We will not be moved! We will not be moved!”*

Tank drew from his alleged Weather Underground roots and shouted; *“The Peace and Love Movement is only on hiatus! This greed thing that's going on here, and all over the city, will trigger us to regroup and fight again! This time it will be heard all over America! Once more, songs of protest will sound their cries for resistance! We will march to Boro Hall and make the case for our liberty and for our homes against the Wall Street real estate cartel! The resolve of the masses will put an end to the power grab of our neighborhood! Ours will not become one more notch on the gun belt of Big Real Estate, among wasted abundance of the ever-gluttonous! We will no longer feed our homes and our ways of life to the pigs! The next twenty years will again be about society nurturing itself and fulfilling its destiny! This money thing is but an anomaly that will serve to remind us of our true goal: Power to the people! Power to the*

people! Right on, brothers and sisters! Right the hell on!" Then, Tank's voice yelled stridently, but solely, *"Eat the rich! Eat the rich!"* Oblivious to his tirade, the chorus was busy toking and missed their turn to join in by shouting their support. Tank's noble cause was lost when their held back exhales seemed to have shut down their hearing and aspirations.

Danny turned to Paulie asking, *"Hey, man, ya got any more of that righteous weed we been smokin'?"* Paulie shrugged and showed them his empty hands. Danny slapped one of them while Tank slapped the other. Having blown their cannabis smoke up one another's butts, they all split. Sally sang *"Turn-Turn-Turn"* while they walked toward Seventh Avenue. As Paulie thrust his fist into the air, his fading voice reverberated from the canyon walls of the buildings around him; *"Yuppie pigs! Screw you and to hell with yer money!"*

Echoes of their shouting slogans and singing songs of days long gone, accompanied the sounds of clashing symbolisms rumbling in my memory: Would the generation that set out to change the world be forced to change with the world? Will they become servants and attendants to the lords of a land they once saw as their own? Will the flame of the torch that signified their revolution evolve to embers becoming ashes, becoming dust? Will the delirious lead the oblivious to further uncertainty? Did The Movement turn to stillness, dissolving in its inertia? Gazing at the park's vast foliage, I wrote, *"Songs of desperation whisper through branches of inspiration, which grew from trees of truth, hanging leafless in winds of change."*

The sound of leaves of the past spinning around my feet blended with those of the present as the hiss of airbrakes interrupted my reverie. One of my massive, new trucks had

parked behind my minibus. My fragmented meditation joined the leaves swirling skyward as I stared at the diesel powered fruit of my endeavors. Bob, one of my former roomies, jumped from the truck and headed toward my bench. Back in the day, Bob and I would reminisce about our years as corporate executives who walked away from a world of thinghood to seek our true inner personas. And there we were: Penniless, stoned out and full of excuses, until the day when I turned my life around, by building my moving business from my tiny VW. A refurbished Bob was my first helper, then the head honcho as my budding company grew. Like serving as one another's AA sponsors, we became the reminders of our pledge to kick one another's ass to force us to remember what we did back in the day as corporate hacks, and to never again become servants of greed itself. Bob was followed by a brawny, dark skinned helper who he recently hired. The kid claimed he knew me from back in my early coffee house days.

"Kenny my man! Staring at that hi-rise ain't gonna make it rise any higher," the kid said, "although it certainly doubled in value since you started gaping at it. Hey bro, remember me?"

His face and voice were vaguely familiar but his body was something from a super hero magazine. I shrugged and said, "I give up. Who the hell are you, kid?"

"Demetrius! I'm the dude who helped you knock down the plaster in that old after hours place that became your coffee house a few years ago. You gave me some rusted old barbells from its cellar when you were giving everything you owned away to anyone who'd take it."

"Holy shit! And you sure as hell did use them! Your biceps must be twenty inches. You look friggin' amazing! I'll bet you

can lift all of the weights on the bar at the same time now.”

“Actually, I work out at a gym down on Fourth. I get a free membership just to stroll my steroid, bloated ass around the place, because I won a bunch of bodybuilding contests. By the way, my biceps are twenty two inches! Kenny, you gotta get bigger T-shirts. I'm breaking outta this one. Gotta go! See you around, boss. Hey, thanks for hiring my kid brother.”

Demetrius walked down First Street to his crib. While Bob counted the money from his day's moving job, I asked, “How long will that kid be able to call First Street home before his crib becomes another breeding nest for yuppie puppies? When you drove up, I was sitting here thinking about how fast the neighborhood changed from hippies in bellbottoms and sandals, and into three-piece suits, stuffed with lawyers and bankers. It's as if The Movement never happened at all, bro! I mean, it's like someone turned the lights on, everyone yelled *'Surprise!'* and here we are back in the Eisenhower '50s with nothing gained but evictions.”

“Kenny, wake up! The music's over and someone switched on the lights. Movement? Bro, that so-called Movement was just another fashion statement. The suits riding in limos to Wall Street today once wore torn bellbottoms and freak flags while quoting Kennedy, Doctor King and Malcolm-X as they marched on Washington a few years ago. Those chameleons talked the talk and wore the look that got them high, or got their asses laid. Hell, the next different drum they followed was Barry White's rhythm synthesizer. Like all the groups before us, hypocrisy became their manifest destiny. It was all smoke, mirrors and plain ol' bullshit! Years ago, they passed a joint around; talked peace and love while listening to Dylan

sing, “Blowing in the Wind.” Now, they pass a mirror around with a thousand bucks worth of lines on it, talking mergers and acquisitions while listening to Sinatra sing “Stairway to Heaven.” Somehow, throughout that grand façade, a few true idealists never changed one damn bit!”

“So, who were they, Bob? And who are they now? So, who’s the real deal?”

“Kenny, they were, and are the actual people who inspired The Movement. They had, and still have, a sincere desire to change America from a pig’s pen to a Utopia of peace, love and equality. Now they play to nearly empty houses at community colleges while the rest of what once was the crowd is gobbling up all the chips and dips at the next parties. Kenny, you don’t need your Tarot cards to see it. Over the next two years, the longhairs, who now work for you on your trucks, will become realtors, investment bankers or go back to what they said they rejected when they followed the Pied Piper of years ago.”

“Bro, where will you be a few years from now?”

“Kenny, actually I have some news for you: Start looking for a new head honcho.”

“What? Why? You said that this was a great gig for you. Bob, can we fix this?”

“You had to know that a guy like me wouldn’t be driving cabs or moving trucks for too long. Soon, I’ll be splitting for California to hang with our friend, Mel and chill for a while.”

“Chilling as a new career choice? I’m not buying that, Bob.”

“Screw careers! Haven’t we learned anything? Mel and his lady are going to teach me about something called ‘software.’ It sounds like a no pressure thing.”

“Bob, what the hell is soft wear? Let me guess: A rubber for

a flaccid pecker?”

“Actually, software is the programming for computers. Mel thinks there’s a future in designing programs because, as computers get smaller more people will use them. Bro, if I’m making a stupid choice, California has some great beaches to fall back on. I’ll stick around to help you train my replacement before I split. I’ve got to tell you, man; you inspired me to do this when you said, *‘Every day, I put everything I’ve done on the line for tomorrow as if there’s gonna be one.’* I thought you were laying a line of bullshit on me, but you haven’t gone one dollar in debt and everything you have was paid for in cash.”

“Those rings on a MasterCard card resemble handcuffs for a good reason.”

“That’s one for your journal, Kenny. You oughta turn it into a book about all of the bullshit that went down, somewhere in Brooklyn. Hey, when are you going to get a real car and stop driving around in that VW mini-moving van?”

“I drive it because I...”

“Why the hell do I even ask you that, bro? You’ll just tell me that a real car is decadent and you justify the use of the VW decked out with your logos as advertising while you drive. But hey, what should I expect from a guy who still lives out of a backpack and keeps a journal?”

“Perhaps the truth?”

“Yeah, and to quote the dude who once walked away from it all: *“Sadly, all too often, truth is the believable lie that turns heads just enough to make history what it will become.”* But hey, bro, being for real with people is its own reward, and then there may be that unexpected tip somewhere down the road. Bottom line Kenny, I’m hoping I can do the same for me

in LA that you did for yourself here in Brooklyn. Hey, bro! Ain't life really nuts? Years ago, I got lost in a mind numbing career, then I spent an eternity drifting in the wind until I found myself in a singular moment. Now, I'm living it and looking to a future of hanging on to what I'll become."

"Let me know how to reach you just in case I need a reality check, Bob."

"You're totally on cruise control! Yeah, we should keep in touch. You know, freaks like us have to keep in mind that maintaining the purity of our ideals requires staying true to their spirit." Pointing to pigeons alighting atop a statue at the park's entrance Bob said, "Ah, pigeons! No matter what lofty dreams we live, they always get us in the end."

"What do you mean, bro?"

Referring to decades of excrement concealing a dead hero's name below his effigy, Bob said, "They create statues of those who stood their ground, so they can get shit on forever!"

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