

## DENNIS

My instincts having failed me so on a recent trip through Kennedy, I quickly asked for the nearest ATM machine. The guy sitting inside a low partition cubicle at the baggage exit says to me, you'll have to go back upstairs and through security, but dependin' on where you're goin' I'll run you by one. McCormick Place, I say. No sweat, fixed rate thirty-five bucks. He explains that a cab would run anywhere from twenty-five to fifty depending on the traffic. So I say, lets go. He puts out his hand and says great, my name's Dennis. We walk up through to the parking deck and being that the flight was from Atlanta we talk about the Series. Dennis likes the Braves - but Ted should'a stopped listening to Hanoi Jane when it came to spending money on players. At level 3 we break outside into a balmy late October day, he brings a mini-van around and soon we're dodging cars along the exit route from O'Hare.

My 5:30am departure from Lauderdale made the flight up a little rough - particularly given the revels of the previous night (but that's another story.) Our flight path into Chicago took us right along the shore and as we approached the city I was startled - the view down was completely familiar, the small lakeside airstrip I'd crash landed at so many times at the controls of Flight Simulator II, the Sears Tower off to the west, its twin antenna unmistakable. How strange a sensation indeed, and I only played the old old version, and only in this city. The younger veterans of the numerous generations of Flight Simulator since must have this experience all the time. For me the effect was disorienting

But I had no such reference for the maze of roads fanning out from O'Hare so all that passed by the windows was unfamiliar. Our conversation began casually, Dennis explaining how his wife of three years was a great cook and he'd only recently begun getting back in shape after the forty pounds he put on since their wedding. He was accustomed to being in shape, having been in one of the most dangerous professions on earth, but her cooking was so good. We talked about food, George Forman's grilling machine, good restaurants and the like. But of course, you

couldn't let a comment like "most dangerous profession" just slip buy.

I would guess Dennis to be maybe 53 years old, gray hair an inch or so long kinda stickin straight out, his glasses thick, a tooth or two missing. His manner is all Chicago - the guy is right off the page of a Studs Terkel book. A certain edge to the voice formed at the back of the mouth and shoved out at you. The jean jacket a little bigger than normal hiding an upper body that has clearly been back in the gym.

So I ask about the work - how could I not - and for most of the remainder of the ride out to McCormick I listen to tales of being the tough guy willing to take a bullet. Working over the years mostly in Chicago for businessmen with investments in the wrong parts of town "the kinda places white folks don't go, even in the day time." He'd worked for some celebrities here and there and managed to stay at arms length from the mob guys - all the while maintaining their respect as one of the very best" - he said in fact that in those circles he was something of a legend.

One of these customers leads the conversation - or rambling monologue - on to a particular period of business which caused him to know the "real" story behind the Kennedy assassination. A particular Chicago mob guy arranged for enough ballot boxes to get stuffed so Kennedy prevails in the election. Dennis is braiding this together with Marylyn, father Joe, the institutionalized sister - and so forth - when we arrive at McCormick Center. He says, hey gimme a call tomorrow when you're ready to get to the airport and I'll tell you the rest of the story.

And like the story Harvey Kitel delivers at the end of the film Smoke, its completely unimportant whether there is any actual truth here, the quality of entertainment reins supreme. Not to mention the extraordinary sense of timing - how could I not call Dennis for my trip back to O'Hare the next day?

And indeed Dennis was right on time out front of the Hyatt and the trip to O'Hare passed amid intrigue and betrayal - he's talking with an agent now and made me promise to give him a call when he becomes rich and famous.

I may have only had one day in town but there could be no doubt I'd been to Chicago.

Donald Ansley  
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