

Just a Kid From St. Louis – Part 1

Born in '46, dad not long home from the war,
 mom, a payroll clerk, while dad went to school,
 Hoping to become something more.

A local grocer, murdered, me, just barely three,
 Funny, the things we remember,
 Like those awful things growing on the back-yard cherry tree.

In fifth grade, I'd opted to become a missionary priest
 Wanderlust is what did the trick,
 Slide shows of 1940s China – those were the perfect sales pitch.

But I dropped out after two years,
 Celibacy was NOT my thing
 I first drove a car at 16, then kissed a girl at 17.

Then Kennedy was killed, we shot people into space,
 Dr. King, Birmingham, Little Rock ...
 Some things were just terribly amiss,

The events on the stages of history were huge,
 Me? I was always so small.
 An insignificant sack of protoplasm of immigrant grandparents is all.

Raised to believe I was Irish –
 Oh, and American, too.
 But in the end there was, and is, only one thing I really knew.

I was just a kid from St. Louis.
 A nobody, which was fine by me.
 Not destined for greatness, riches or to make any marks on the pages of history.

Donncha Ó Corcráin – my real Irish name –
 Meaning Brown-haired Warrior Of the Ruddy-Complexed
 But I mostly stick with the English - Dennis Corcoran – that's who I am.

Just a kid from St. Louis.
And I'm kind-of proud to be.

Just a Kid From St. Louis – Part 2 - Walter Reed, Washington DC, Winter, 1970

We had a Psych building all our own.

Four floors, two closed wards each, no one in or out, without a pass and a key.
Mostly military, some dependents – many back from Viet Nam.

Each ward had a nurses' station walled in with windows of wire enmeshed in glass,
locked from the inside in case of attack. It wasn't as dangerous as it may seem,
but then again ... no one was taking a chance.

At shift change, mini-rounds - Reading aloud the nurses' notes from prior shifts ...

I had coffee for William added - only if he asked. Behavior mod – I thought we'd give it a chance. He was mute six months, back from Viet Nam, and would LOVE to have a coffee - but ONLY if he asked for some. The note was added, all complied, and in one day his muteness was gone. Other than ask for coffee he only cursed GALORE – but at least he was talking, which proved useful, as you'll learn below.

A corporal back from Nam had gotten hold of a chair - there were only beds and nightstands,
we didn't know from where ... he was holding a psych tech hostage in back of one of the
wards ... we were told to take him down, put him in restraints, til a nurse could jam some
junk in his arm. I came to call my job 'mugging' mental patients, not psychotherapy.

A colonel, admitted by the Pentagon, his care plan pre-ordained - which his MD said was wrong
- experimental doses of ECT - and I was put on the treatment team. The OR scene was so
bizarre: the anesthetist was late, hung over from the night before, bragging on a hot, sexy
babe he'd picked up at the bar, said what drugs he would use, but couldn't get the airway
in, fumbled about with loud rock music on, til the attending told the OR nurse to get the
job done. Our guinea pig had an IV in, an EEG mapping his brain, was knocked out,
zapped, convulsion timed, flat-lined, timed and zapped again - 5 rounds in all. When I
brought him back to the ward, he was totally fried. Didn't know day from night, who he
was or why and remained that way til I was transferred out.

Transferred to a dependents' ward – oh, my – what a sight!

An officer's GORGEOUS daughter, 20 or so, would strip naked at night, diagnosed a
nympho - the nurses' notes read 'do not even think twice'. Another, an officer's wife,
Shirley, loved to hold my hand while one named Cherokee Dee wanted me to join her
band. One invited me to her house while her husband was away ... I was ever so happy to
be assigned to a cycle in ICU Neurology!

We held pretend boat races in the hospital's halls ... I was a coxswain - we won 'em all.

Often took William out on walks where he'd curse all the big-wigs we saw, as we staff
feigned our apologies – I mean, he was a psych patient after all. Then we'd continue on
our stroll in search of more big brass to verbally maul. This, the Army's flagship!

Meanwhile 2 to 400,000 protesters marched on the mall – the death march it was aptly called.

Just a Kid From St. Louis – Part 3 – Tripler Army Medical Center, Honolulu HI – 1970-1

He tried to kill himself.

No one knew why.

He'd jumped thru the plate-glass window of a grocery store nearby.

Reasons why didn't matter ... not at that point in time.

The job of the ER docs and nurses was simply to keep him alive.

But they also had this rule:

To treat a potential suicide,

they required a psych attendant –who turned out to be me.

A drafted army medic, with a degree in psychology,

Dispatched by my ward shrink to go be and do

whatever the ER staff needed me to

As for the next hour and a half

they tried to sew our jumper back together again.

Part way thru the quilting bee,

I had to say I wasn't ok ...

The amount of blood and bloody gauzes, strewn all over the floor

Far outdid by miles anything I'd ever seen before ...

I felt sick to my stomach,

A bit dizzy in the head

I was afraid I'd pass out ...

But one of the nurses matter-of-factly said –

Hang in there, you'll be fine ...

This is really common for someone's first time ...

She was right.

It was a god-awful mess, but I made it thru ok.

Until I screwed up massively taking him down to the psych ward one floor away.

I had to admit him and get him settled in,

but it was such a beautiful day,

I chose to skip the elevator and take him over the lanai ...

Half way across the open-air path

He leapt from his wheelchair

Made a mad dash for the rail,

So he could jump to his death – once more.

I grabbed him by the neck,

Pulled him back into the chair

locked him in his seat with an armbar on his head

and held him like that the rest of way,

Til he was admitted, sedated – and thank god, **WE** were saved.