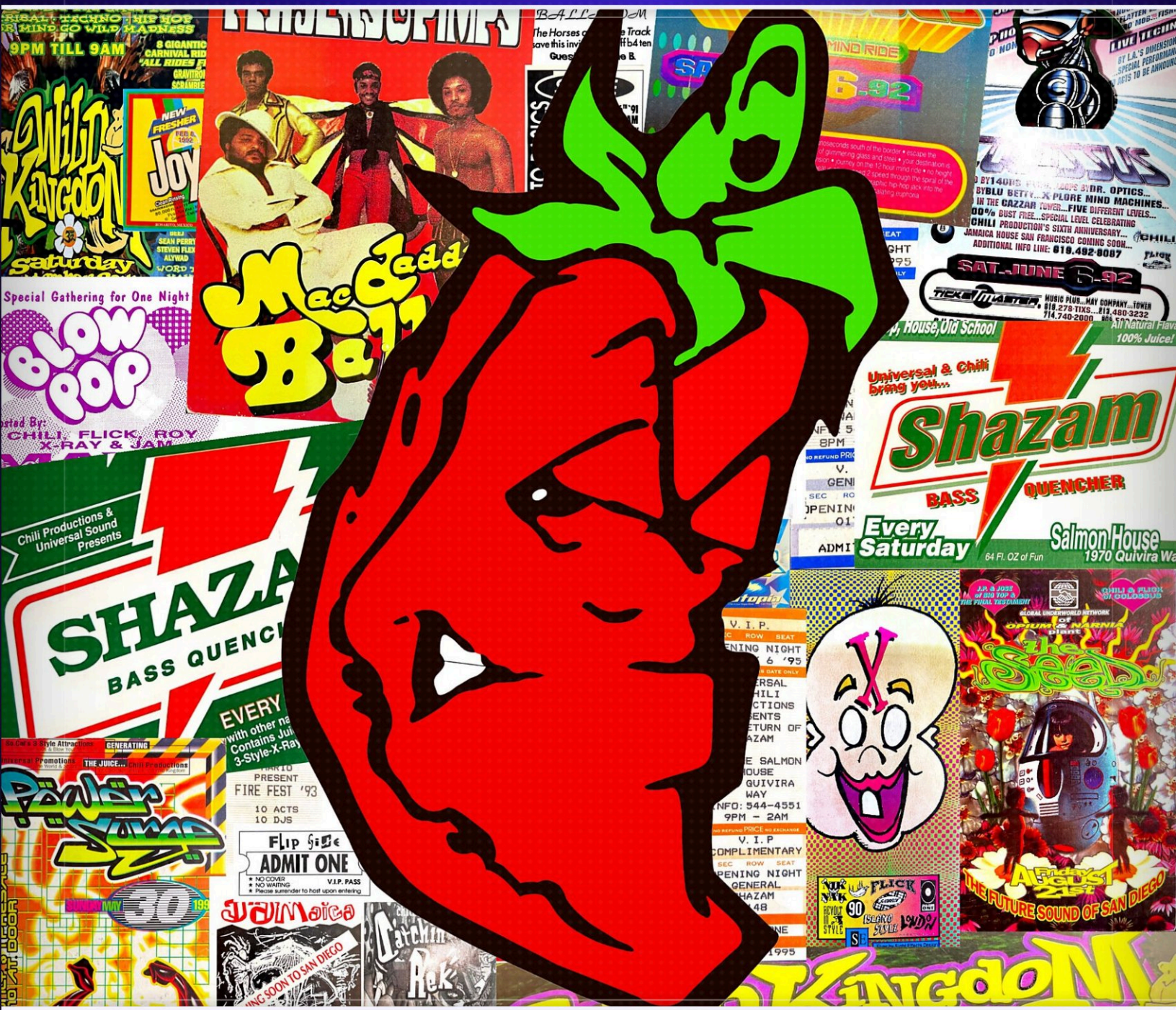
CHILI PRODUCTIONS



EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001

MEMOIR

GIL ORTEGA AKA CHILI AKA RICK BLISS

A COLLECTION OF STORIES
AND TIMELINES WITH EVENTS



CHILI

PRODUCTIONS



FRONTISPIECE

Colossus. *Saturday, June 6, 1992.*
"200% bust free ... special celebrating Chili Productions sixth anniversary."

DIE-CUT POP-UP FLYER FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

CHILI
PRODUCTIONS

EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001

MEMOIR

GIL ORTEGA
AKA CHILI AKA RICK BLISS



SAN DIEGO · LAS VEGAS

To the friends and business partners who were in the room for all of it.

To my wife Renata, who has had to hear every one of these stories more than once, for twenty-plus years.

And to Darryl **“Flick”** Blount — I can hear you reading this, laughing, adding the parts I left out.

REST IN PEACE, FLICK

CHILI PRODUCTIONS

EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001

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ON THE RECORD

This is a work of nonfiction. The events are recounted from the author's memory, supported wherever possible by flyers, photographs, tickets and printed material saved from the period. Some conversations are reconstructed. Where memory and the paper disagree, the paper wins.

FLYERS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND REPRODUCTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, all flyers, photographs and printed material are reproduced from the author's own collection. Where an original designer signed the sheet, that credit appears with the reproduction. Several objects in this book are editorial illustrations drawn for the page and are labeled as such where they appear. Every effort has been made to credit correctly; corrections will be made in later printings.

FIRST EDITION · 2026

GILORTEGA.NET



I found this bumper sticker as a teenager.
It became my lifelong motto.

EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001

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BEFORE WE START

Dear Reader,

This started as housekeeping. I had a box of flyers from years of throwing parties in San Diego and Las Vegas, and I realized the only place half those nights still existed was in my head. So I started writing a line under each one. Who, where, what went wrong.

The lines turned into paragraphs. The paragraphs turned into this.

What's here runs from 1985 to 2001 — the clubs, the warehouses, the nights that sold out and the ones that absolutely did not, and the people who made both happen. It is also the origin story of my artwork, though I had no idea of that at the time. Nobody ever does.

A few of these I've been telling at dinner for thirty years. A few I have never told at all.

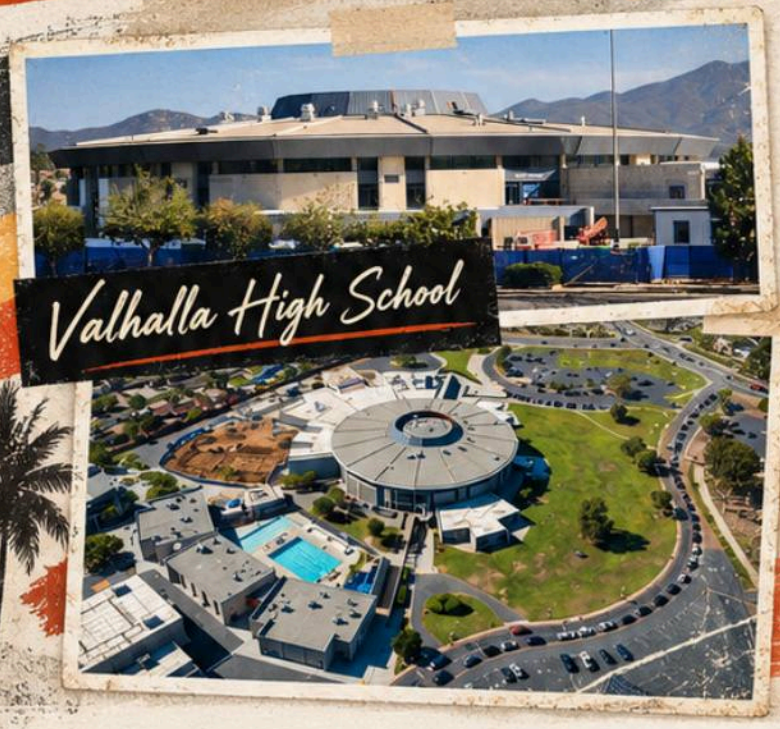
Start anywhere.



GIL ORTEGA
AKA CHILI AKA RICK BLISS

The Early Years

I grew up in the heart of the countryside on a farm bustling with every farm animal you can imagine and probably a few you can't. This was in a rural little town called Jamul, California, about thirty minutes from downtown San Diego. My dad owned a successful automotive paint & body shop and hit it big, becoming a multimillionaire. So, I had a silver spoon firmly planted in my mouth until I hit thirteen. Then came the plot twist: Dad made some bad real estate investments and lost nearly everything just as I was starting high school.



I ended up at a public high school where most of the student body seemed to have rolled off the set of a Beverly Hills drama, judging by the fleet of European cars in the student parking lot. I was one of a handful of Hispanic kids, and there were even fewer Black students. Diversity wasn't exactly our school's strong suit. Nonetheless, my High School experience was excellent. Some of my teachers were truly great, leaving a lasting impression on me.

1984-1987

In tenth grade, I enrolled in an Entrepreneurship class, though up to that point, I had grand plans of becoming an orthodontist. With no family fortune to fall back on, I was laser-focused on high-earning careers. Unfortunately, I was a terrible student. My grades hovered around a C+, and I barely graduated, relying on some serious begging and a bit of extra credit to scrape by. I suspect I have some form of dyslexia since I constantly invert numbers and have to concentrate intensely to learn new things. Neither of my parents graduated high school, and part of me thought I didn't need to finish either. College? Forget it—I had zero interest.

But then there was Mr. Kraft and his tenth-grade Entrepreneurship class. I'm forever grateful to Mr. Kraft. His class was a game-changer for me, and I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to take it. My dad had been instilling entrepreneurial lessons in me my whole life through a sort of osmosis. When Mr. Kraft started teaching us about entrepreneurship, all those scattered ideas suddenly came together in a way they never had before.

THREE KIDS · ONE BORROWED SUPRA · FORTY-FIVE MINUTES SOUTH

MARGARITA VILLAGE 1985



AVENIDA REVOLUCIÓN · ZONA CENTRO

Tim had held his driver's license for six days. Not six months. Six days. The ink was practically still tacky.

Which is why, when he said, "Let's take my mom's brand-new Supra to Tijuana," Mike and I did what any two reasonable fifteen-year-olds would do.

We got in the car.

Understand the math here. Three kids. Forty bucks between us. A Toyota Supra with almost nothing on the odometer, belonging to a woman who did not know it had left the driveway. Mexico was forty-five minutes south, and down there the drinking age was eighteen.

We were fifteen. But we were tall.

The border in '85 wasn't so much a checkpoint as a formality. A guy waved. We waved back. And just like that we were in another country, in somebody's mother's car, with no plan beyond the word *beers*.

Mike was our ambassador. He spoke real Spanish, not the drive-thru kind. He leaned out the window at a red light, asked a man how to find Avenida Revolución, got a point of the finger and a nod. That was the entire navigation system. No map, no phone, no backup plan. Just a stranger's finger and three boys who believed in it completely.

Revolución at night was a carnival that forgot to close. Neon stacked on neon. Mariachi spilling out of one doorway, synthesizers out of the next. Vendors working the sidewalk with blankets, silver, and Chiclets — occasionally all three from the same guy.

Then we saw it. **Margarita Village.** One of the oldest bars on the strip. Old enough that my own father had stories about the place from when he was a kid — which is a strange thing to be thinking about while you're parking across the street from it with a six-day grip on the steering wheel.

We locked the Supra. Looked at it one more time. Crossed the street.

Inside, a staircase pulled us down into the basement. Half full. Which, for our purposes, was ideal. A packed room has witnesses. An empty room has attention. Half full has neither.

So we did the only thing that works when you have no business being somewhere: walked in like we owned the building and sat down like we were already bored of it.

Chips hit the table. Mike said something easy to the waiter — small talk, a little joke — and slipped *tres cervezas* into the middle of the sentence like it was the least interesting part of it.

The waiter didn't blink. He just walked away.

And came back with three cold ones.

I'D LOVE TO TELL YOU WE PLAYED IT COOL. WE DID NOT.

Three Southern California ninth-graders in a Tijuana basement, holding legal beers, grinning like we'd cracked the source code of adulthood.

We were half a beer in when Tim elbowed me and pointed across the room. A man had his head wrapped in a bar towel while another man shook him like a can of spray paint.

This, I was about to learn, was a Popper.

HERE'S THE MECHANICS.

Tequila and something fizzy in a shot glass. The waiter brings it down on the table with his whole arm — the thing erupts into foam — then catches the back of your skull with the towel so you can't flinch, can't spit, can't reconsider. Glass to your lips. Towel over your mouth. And then he rattles your head like he's shaking the last of the ketchup out of the bottle.

Mike and Tim had already decided it was my turn. They weren't asking.

The waiter arrived with the towel in his hand before I'd finished working out how to say no.

What I remember is the slam, the fizz, the grip, and then the ceiling and the floor politely trading places. When the room finally agreed to stand still, Tim and Mike were howling.

And Tim had two fingers up.

THE SECOND POPPER · A BROKEN GLASS · A WEEK IN THE DARK

THE MIND OF A FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD

1985







REVOLUCIÓN · THE BASEMENT · THE AUTHOR, FIFTEEN

A Popper doesn't happen quietly at Margarita Village. Somewhere behind me a whistle started up — the house ceremony, the announcement to the entire basement that someone was about to have his head shaken off his shoulders.

Twice.

The waiter came back carrying both glasses, one in each hand, and Tim and Mike were already in hysterics before he set them down.

Slam. Foam. Towel over my mouth, palm on the back of my skull, and down went the first one. He let me up for air — one breath, maybe a breath and a half — then went right back in for the second.

That's where the laughing stopped.

I came out of it spinning, waiting for my friends to be howling again. They weren't. They were looking at me the way you look at a car accident you watched develop.

Mike pointed at my mouth.

I touched my face. My fingers came back red.

The waiter stepped around from behind me, and I saw his towel. It wasn't a towel anymore.

> ONE OF THE GLASSES HAD BROKEN WHEN HE SLAMMED IT.

He never noticed — the whole move is built on speed, and nobody's inspecting glassware at that tempo — so he delivered the shot anyway, then shook my head with the broken glass still at my lips. Every rattle, another pass.

I tried to say something. What came out was glass.

Panic has a very specific sound. Mine was a chair going over backward as I bolted for the bathroom.

If you've never visited the men's room of a Tijuana bar in 1985, let me put it gently: it is not where you would choose to perform a medical procedure. I performed one anyway. Fifteen minutes at a sink, spitting shards and blood, running my fingers around the inside of my mouth, feeling along my throat and slowly working out the part I still don't love — that not all of it was coming back up. Some of it had already gone the other direction.

I patched myself together as well as a fifteen-year-old can with cold water and a paper towel, and walked back out to my friends.

TALK ABOUT A BUZZ KILL.

Nobody had to say it. We left, and we left fast.

The ride north was its own kind of long. My mouth was swelling by the minute, and by the time we hit the border it looked like Edward Scissorhands had been doing dental work on me without an appointment. So there I sat — passenger seat of a brand-new Supra, six-day driver at the wheel, tasting copper, feeling things move around inside me that had no business being inside me.

I had no idea what to do. I was fifteen. So I went with the only plan available.

I lied.

I told my parents I got jumped at the mall. And because I am who I am, I added that the other guy looked worse.

For a solid week I could feel the glass. Swallowing became a negotiation. I didn't tell anyone, didn't see a doctor, didn't do one intelligent thing about any of it. I just toughed it out, because that's what you do at fifteen when the alternative is explaining Tijuana to your mother.

And in that week, lying in the dark running the odds on whether a piece of glass was going to find something important, I made a lot of promises about what I'd do with my life if I got to keep it.

I got to keep it.

So here's what three fifteen-year-olds actually took away from that night. Not *we nearly killed Gil*. Not *we should rethink our decision-making process*.

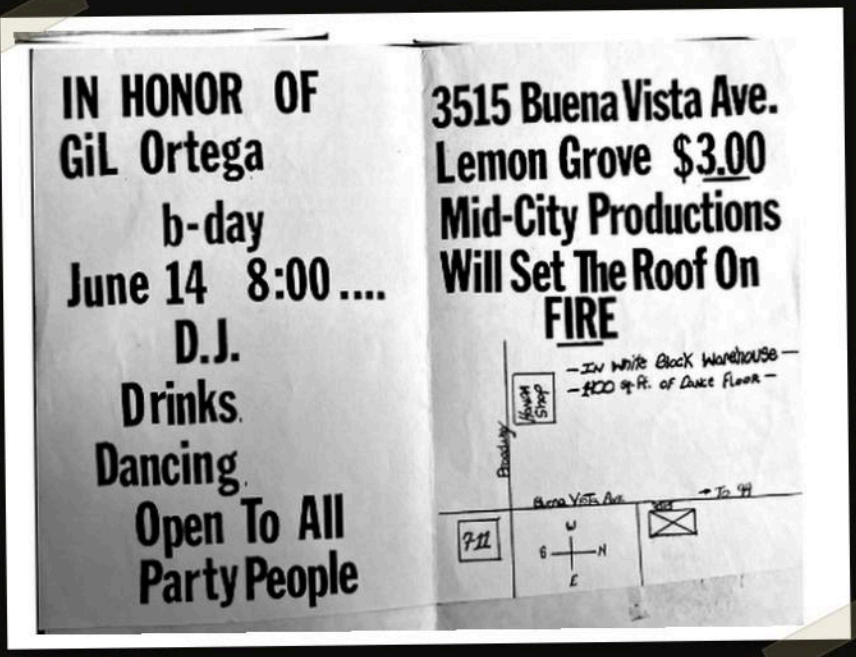
WHAT WE TOOK AWAY WAS THIS: WE CAN GET SERVED IN TIJUANA. SCORE.

FRIDAY · JUNE 14 · 1985 · DOORS AT EIGHT

THREE DOLLARS A POP

1985

A paint-and-body-shop warehouse, a scooter, four high school parking lots — and a sixteen-year-old who hired professional security before he was legally allowed to drive himself there.



INSIDE SPREAD — HAND-LETTERED, HAND-DRAWN MAP.
3515 BUENA VISTA AVE., LEMON GROVE · $3.00

WILL I SET THE ROOF ON FIRE

I came back from Tijuana with a shredded mouth, a week of bad dreams, and a story about a fight at the mall that my parents, to my knowledge, still believe.

What I did not come back with was caution.

That summer I got my driver's permit — which in California means you may operate a vehicle under the direct supervision of a licensed adult. So I bought a scooter.

My family saw a kid who could now get himself to school. I saw a vehicle that could hit four high school parking lots in one afternoon.

THE FLYER · FRONT & BACK

Front: a photocopy of a photocopy, and a can of beer. **Back:** the word **party** — four times, four sizes.
Inside: everything that actually mattered, in marker.

BECAUSE I'D BEEN THINKING.

My dad ran a paint and body shop. Big warehouse, concrete floor, roll-up doors, the whole building permanently perfumed with primer. My sixteenth birthday was coming up, and I asked him if I could have the place for a night.

HE SAID YES.

I want to be clear about something. He said yes to a birthday party.

WHAT I BUILT WAS AN EVENT.

The flyer was front and back, which at the time meant you knew somebody at a print shop and you were prepared to be nice to him. IN HONOR OF GIL ORTEGA. 3515 BUENA VISTA AVE, LEMON GROVE. JUNE 14TH, 8:00. DJS. DRINKS. DANCING. OPEN TO ALL. THREE DOLLARS.

And across it, the line I was proudest of, lifted straight off every speaker in Southern California that year:

WILL I SET THE ROOF ON FIRE.

Then I got on the scooter.

I knew people at four different schools, which meant four lunch periods, four parking lots, four sets of hallways where I had just enough standing to hand a stack of flyers to the right person and let it spread on its own. I did not think of this as distribution. I thought of it as showing my friends something cool. Same thing. Different word.

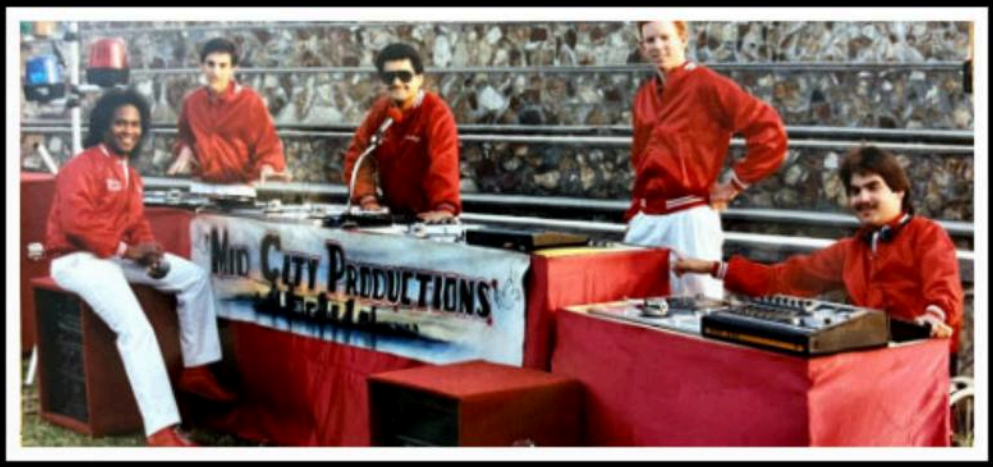
Meanwhile I was quietly building the actual machine.

Music was Mid-City Productions — real DJs, not somebody's brother with a milk crate of records. Kegs came through friends, which is the sixteen-year-old version of a supplier relationship. And then I spent money on the part nobody my age would have spent money on.

I HIRED PROFESSIONAL SECURITY.

THREE DOLLARS A POP

CONTINUED · THE NIGHT ITSELF



MID-CITY PRODUCTIONS — THE CREW NAMED ON THE FLYER. RED SATIN, 1985.

THE NIGHT, BY THE NUMBERS	
TICKET	$3.00
THROUGH THE DOOR	800-1,000
NIGHT'S PROFIT	$2,000
WHAT IT BOUGHT	280Z 2+2
WHAT FOLLOWED	12 Yrs

Not for the crowd. The crowd was going to be fine. I hired them for the police, because I had already run the night forward in my head and arrived at the obvious conclusion: at some point, uniformed adults were going to show up at my father's business, and I did not want that conversation to be with me.

Nobody told me I was building a business model. I thought I was throwing a party. Those turn out to be the same activity with different paperwork.

DOORS AT EIGHT.

They came from all four schools, and then they came from schools I'd never set foot in, which is how you know a flyer has left your hands and started working for you. Three dollars each, in cash, into a box.

Somewhere between eight hundred and a thousand people came through that warehouse.

The cops showed up, exactly as scheduled. My security handled it, exactly as scheduled. I was sixteen years old, standing in my father's shop with a thousand people and a live DJ, and the single most adult thing in the building was my contingency plan.

THE PARTY WENT ALL NIGHT.

When it was over and the last car finally pulled out of the lot, I sat down with the box and counted.

Two thousand dollars. Profit. After the DJs, after the kegs, after the security, after the printing.

Two thousand dollars, to a sixteen-year-old, was not money. It was a door.

I bought a Datsun 280Z 2+2 — my first car, and I want the record to show that I loved that thing in a way that is probably not healthy to admit in print. A year earlier I'd been a passenger in somebody's mother's Supra with my mouth full of glass. Now I had keys of my own, bought with cash I made by convincing a thousand people to show up somewhere.

All week, people found me. In hallways. In parking lots. At the beach.

WHEN'S THE NEXT ONE?

I told them I'd think about it.



BACK PANEL



FRONT, DETAIL

I'D ALREADY PICKED THE DATE.

AND THAT DATE BECAME THE NEXT ONE, AND THE ONE AFTER THAT — ALMOST EVERY MONTH FOR THE NEXT TWELVE YEARS.

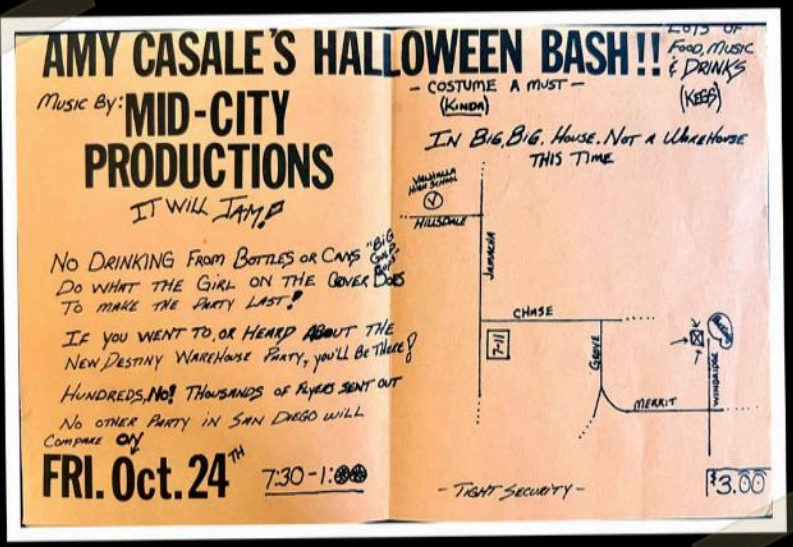
HALLOWEEN · OCTOBER 24 · 1986 · 7:30 TO 1:00

PAID TO PARTY

1986

Inwhichasixteen-year-oldwithexactlyoneeventtohisnameincorporateshimself, over the course of an afternoon, as the primary supplier of fun for the greater San Diego area.

NO OTHER PARTY IN SAN DIEGO WILL COMPARE



INSIDE SPREAD — HAND-LETTERED, HAND-DRAWN MAP.
COSTUME A MUST (KINDA) · TIGHT SECURITY · $3.00

I can't read this flyer without laughing.

1986.I'msixteen.Amy's mom hires me — a grownwoman,with a mortgage — to run a Halloweenpartyin her house. And her backyard.

I had one event to my name. One. Amy talked her into it, which means my first real sale happened at a kitchen table I wasn't even sitting at.

SO NATURALLY I FORMED A COMPANY.

NEW DESTINY

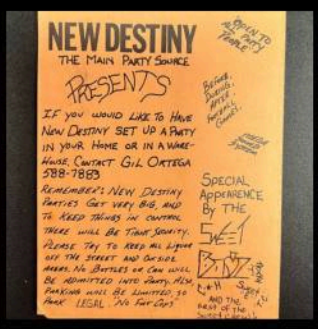
The Main. Party. Source. One event deep and I'm declaring myself the primary supplier of fun for the greater San Diego area. Nobody asked for a business license. Nobody asked for anything.

THEN I PUT AN AD FOR MY COMPANY INSIDE THE INVITE FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S PARTY.

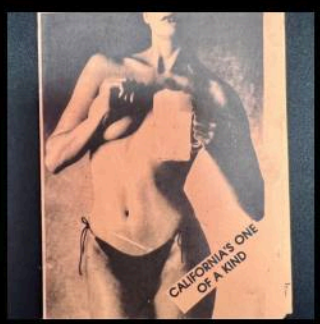
Hire New Destiny for your home or warehouse. Call Gil. 588-7883. That was my mom's phone number, by the way.

I also wrote "tight security" and "no fat cops" on the same piece of paper, which tells you exactly how much adult supervision was involved.

FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE SHOWED UP.



THE AD, INSIDE THE INVITE



FRONT PANEL, DETAIL

RECEIPTS

TICKET	$3.00
SHOWED UP	500
EXPERIENCE · LICENSE	One · None
CORPORATE HQ	Mom's Kitchen
FAT COPS ADMITTED	Zero PEOPLE

AMY'S MOM, WHEREVER YOU ARE — THANK YOU, I'M SORRY, AND THE LAWN GREW BACK

OPEN TO ALL PARTY

New Destiny

The parties kept working, so people started asking me to throw theirs.

So I did what any seventeen-year-old would do. I printed a brochure.

An actual brochure. Services listed. Professional security. *You tell us what you want.* A line promising to turn your party into a concert. And — I want to be clear that I am not inventing this — the option of a **mini-circus tent** in your backyard.

Where does a teenager get a circus tent? Genuinely could not tell you. It was available. That was enough.

My name, my title.

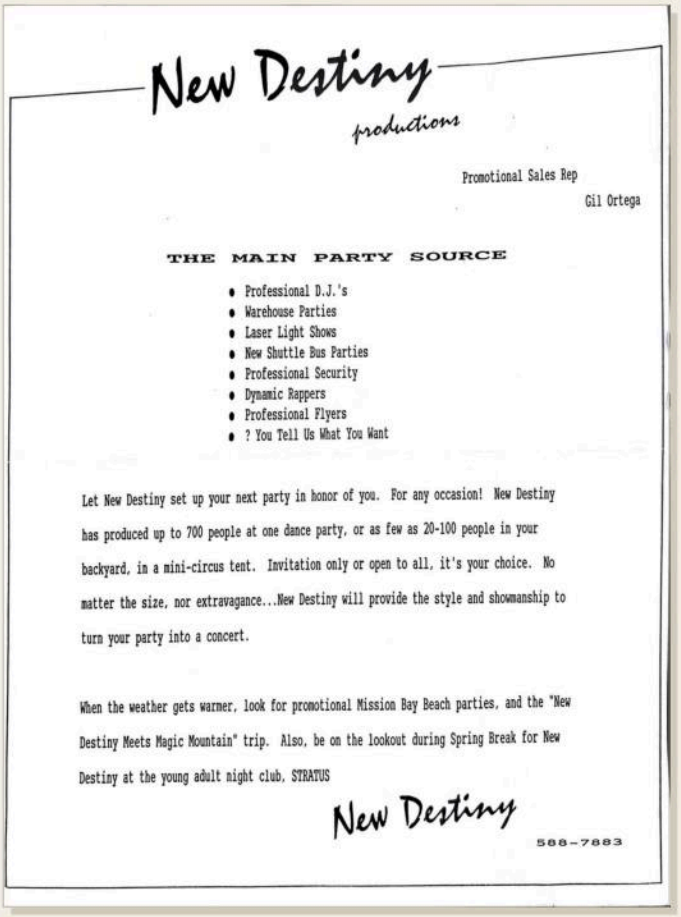
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GIL ORTEGA — PROMOTIONAL SALES REP.
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Read that again. *Rep.* As in, representative. As in, of the larger organization. As in, somewhere out of frame there's an office, and a boss, and a guy named Dennis in accounting, and I am merely the polished young man they send out to handle your event.

There was no organization. There was me, my mom's phone, and a tent.

I worked my high school. Then the other nine in the district. All ten. I was managing DJs and bands by then too, so at seventeen I had a roster, which made the lie feel less like a lie.

Then one afternoon the vice principal called my mother.



New Destiny
productions

Promotional Sales Rep
Gil Ortega

THE MAIN PARTY SOURCE

- Professional D.J.'s
- Warehouse Parties
- Laser Light Shows
- New Shuttle Bus Parties
- Professional Security
- Dynamic Rappers
- Professional Flyers
- ? You Tell Us What You Want

Let New Destiny set up your next party in honor of you. For any occasion! New Destiny has produced up to 700 people at one dance party, or as few as 20-100 people in your backyard, in a mini-circus tent. Invitation only or open to all, it's your choice. No matter the size, nor extravagance...New Destiny will provide the style and showmanship to turn your party into a concert.

When the weather gets warmer, look for promotional Mission Bay Beach parties, and the "New Destiny Meets Magic Mountain" trip. Also, be on the lookout during Spring Break for New Destiny at the young adult night club, STRATUS

New Destiny
588-7883

He told her I'd been handing out flyers on campus.

She said, "And?"

He explained, more slowly, that she needed to make me stop.

She said, "Well, it's *his* business."

And just like that, months of carefully constructed corporate mystique evaporated in a single sentence.

Blew my cover completely, but in a good way.

The word spread, the VP's couldn't stop me.

My Mom always had my back.

Love you, Mom.

THREE YEARS · HUNDREDS THROUGH A SINGLE DOOR · ZERO AT HOME

HOUSE PARTIES — NEVER MY HOUSE

'86–'89

Here's how it worked. A friend calls. Their parents are going out of town. Could I produce something.

Notice the phrasing. Not *their house*. **Their parents' house.** A distinction every one of us understood perfectly and nobody said out loud.

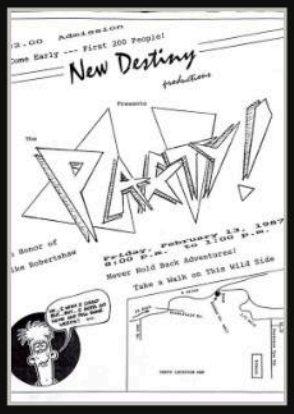
So I'd show up with DJs, a door, a plan, and security. Always security. By then I'd learned exactly one thing: the party is never the problem. The party's fine. It's the forty people in the driveway at one in the morning who are the problem, and you cannot be the guy handling that *and* the guy running the night.

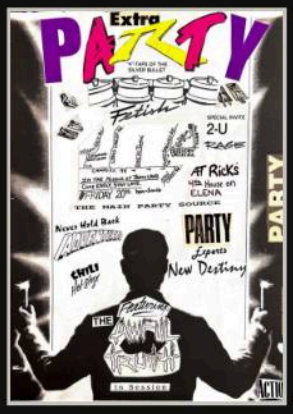
Three years of this. '86 to '89. Hundreds of people through a single door on a good night. Living rooms. Backyards. Somebody's dad's garage, which I'm sure he was thrilled to learn about later.

And in all that time — all those houses, all those parents conveniently elsewhere —

THE STANDING RULES
NEW DESTINY · 1986 TO 1989

YEARS RUNNING	3
GOOD NIGHT, THROUGH THE DOOR	100s
SECURITY	Always
AT MY PARENTS' HOUSE	0









ORIGINAL FLYERS · HAND-DRAWN, PHOTOCOPIED, DISTRIBUTED BY HAND

I NEVER THREW ONE AT MY PARENTS' HOUSE.

Not one. Not a small one. Not even a *let's-just-have-a-few-people-over* one.

I'd watched my mother dismantle a vice principal over the phone in under thirty seconds.

I'M MANY THINGS.
I'M NOT STUPID.

SATURDAY · DECEMBER 13 · 1986 · DOORS AT EIGHT

BINGO

1986

A folding-table bingo hall on the Sycuan reservation, a seventeen-year-old with a booking, and the sentence that changed what a party could be.

I rented a bingo hall.

Not a venue. Not a club. A bingo hall — on the Sycuan reservation, where I'd gone to school with half the kids who lived there. Folding tables. Fluorescent lights. The faint permanent smell of coffee. I booked it because it was big and it was cheap.

Then somebody explained to me what a reservation actually is.

**A SOVEREIGN NATION.
INSIDE ANOTHER NATION.
WITH ITS OWN LAWS.**

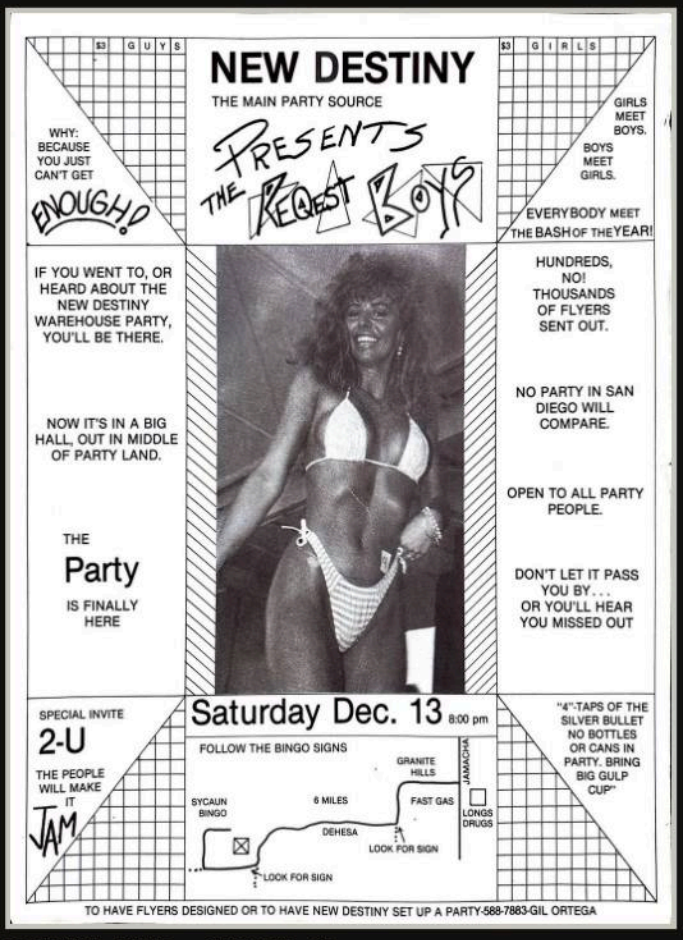
I need you to understand that I was seventeen, and this information landed in my brain the way a winning lottery ticket lands in your hand.

Noise complaint? Not their jurisdiction. Underage drinking? Not their jurisdiction. Every single reason a sheriff has ever used to shut down a party at 11:40 on a Saturday night — all of them, very politely, *not their jurisdiction*.

This was before the casino. Before any of that. Just a hall, a December Saturday, and twenty-plus kegs.

THE HALL, BY THE NUMBERS
SYCUAN · SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1986

KEGS	20+
THROUGH THE DOOR	1,000
SIRENS	0
PROMOTER'S AGE	17
JURISDICTION	None



ORIGINAL FLYER · DECEMBER 13

A THOUSAND PEOPLE CAME THROUGH.

It made SDSU frat parties look like a church social, and I say that having thrown both.

And somewhere in the middle of it — a thousand people deep, zero sirens — I had exactly one thought.

HOW MANY RESERVATIONS ARE THERE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY?

FRIDAY · MARCH 6 · 1987 · BIGGER HALL, BIGGER EVERYTHING

BINGO X2

1987

The answer, it turns out, was more than one.

Barona had a bingo hall too. Bigger one. Also pre-casino. I walked it once and started doing arithmetic in my head faster than I had ever done arithmetic in a classroom.

So we went bigger. More lights. A sound system you could feel in your sternum. Bands and DJs — two stages, two load-ins, roughly double the things that could go wrong by 9 p.m.

More kegs. Obviously. Always more kegs.

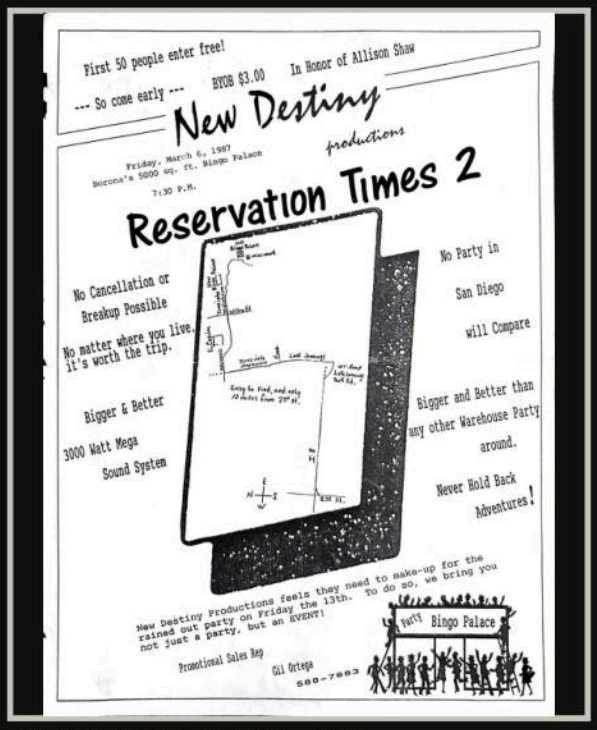
Fifteen hundred people showed up.

And somewhere in there I added a feature to the business that I still think about.

PERSON OF HONOR.

The party would be thrown in honor of somebody. Sometimes a friend, free, because that's a nice thing to do for a friend.

And sometimes — somebody paid me to be that somebody. Let's call it sponsorship.



ORIGINAL FLYER · MARCH 6, 1987

Fifteen hundred people in a room and one name on every flyer. That was the product. I was seventeen years old, standing in a bingo hall, having accidentally invented a thing that now has its own line item in marketing budgets.

BARONA, BY THE NUMBERS
NEW DESTINY · MARCH 6, 1987

THROUGH THE DOOR	1,500
STAGES	2
LOAD-INS	2
PROMOTER'S AGE	17
NAME ON EVERY FLYER	1

I JUST CALLED IT A PARTY, BUT IT WAS AN EVENT AND EVERY EVENT NEEDS SPONSORS.

FREE PARTIES · RENTED ROOMS · STAYING IN FRONT OF PEOPLE

BEACH PARTIES + HOTELS & MOTELS

'86-'87

The beach parties never made a dime.

That was fine. That was the design.

Big venues take time. Find the hall, book the hall, print, distribute, wait. Six weeks, eight weeks. And in those weeks everybody's Fridays quietly fill up with other things, and by the time you come back around with something enormous, they've made other plans.

So: the beach. Free party. Whoever shows up, shows up. No door, no cover, nothing in the box at the end of the night.

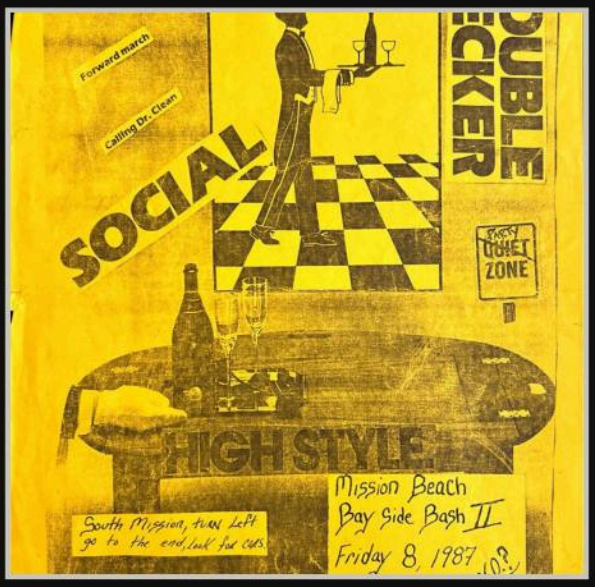
REGULAR EVENTS WERE THE KEY. I KNEW THAT EARLY ON.

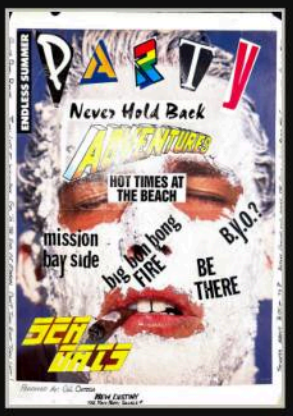
I also rented hotel & motel rooms for parties. Regular sized rooms.

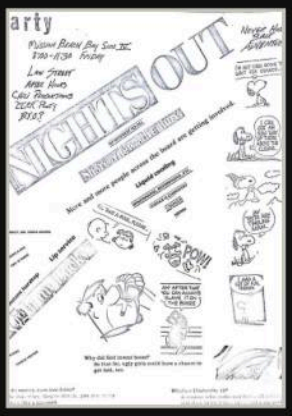
Yep. People assume I mean a block of rooms. I mean **a room**. One. With a bed in it. And a bathroom. And somewhere between twenty to fifty people would show up.

I have never successfully explained that number to anyone who wasn't there, and I've stopped attempting it.

People asked what I did back then and I'd say I threw parties.







ORIGINAL FLYERS · BEACH PARTIES AND ROOM PARTIES, 1986-1987

THE ROOM PARTY
NEW DESTINY · 1986 TO 1987

ROOMS RENTED	1
PEOPLE WHO SHOWED	20-50
DOOR CHARGE	0
BEACH PARTY PROFIT	None

NO DOOR, NO COVER

REGULAR SIZED ROOMS

WHAT I WAS REALLY DOING WITH THESE PARTIES WAS MAKING SURE NOBODY FORGOT I THREW PARTIES.

THURSDAY · APRIL 16 · 1987 · THE NIGHT A CLUB GIVES A GUY IT ISN'T SURE ABOUT

STRATUS

1987

Two years before I pitched Sam B. on a club night, I cracked my ribs in his club.

Sam was the owner of Stratus night club.

Big Audio Dynamite. I was fifteen. I knew Sam, so he let me in early, which is how I ended up in the front row, which is how I ended up in the middle of a mosh pit, which is how I ended up breathing carefully for about a month.

Great show. Ribs, not so much.

So when I came back at seventeen with a pitch, at least he listened to me.

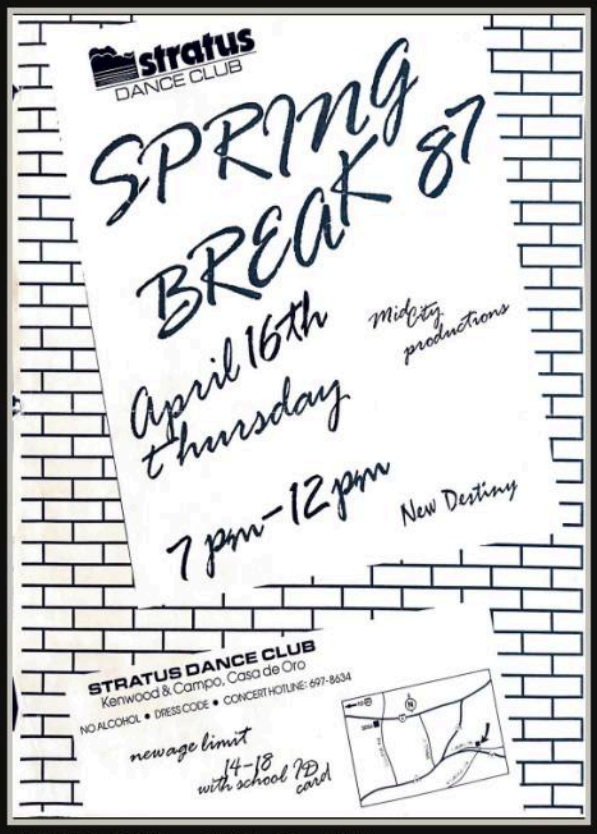
Here was the pitch. Two years of parties behind me. Kegs, bingo halls, sovereign territory, the whole operation. And what I wanted was a night at Stratus — a teen club.

WITH NO ALCOHOL.

Understand that my entire business model, as understood by every single person who had ever attended one of my events, was alcohol. And I'm walking into this man's office to argue that I can fill a room where the strongest thing on the menu was soda.

My portfolio was a stack of flyers.

That was the deck. Photocopies. With my handwriting on them.



ORIGINAL FLYER · APRIL 16, 1987

SAM GAVE ME THURSDAY.

Not Friday. Not Saturday. Thursday — the night a club gives a guy it isn't sure about. It was Spring Break.

Five hundred people showed up.

THE PITCH, BY THE NUMBERS
STRATUS · SPRING BREAK, APRIL 16, 1987

AGE AT THE PITCH	17
NIGHT HE GAVE ME	Thu
ALCOHOL ON THE MENU	None
SHOWED UP	500

I'VE BEEN DOING THIS EVER SINCE.

MY PORTFOLIO WAS A STACK OF FLYERS

SAM GAVE ME THURSDAY

SENIOR YEAR · THREE YEARS · NET 90

THE CHILI BRAND

When I was twenty-one I drove to The Forum in Los Angeles to sell a cartoon chili pepper to the man who owned the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

I SHOULD BACK UP.

Senior year of high school I started a clothing line. CHILI Sportswear and Surfwear, and then a line of surfboards called CHILI Hot Styx. A buddy of mine had a line called Wet Dreams, we knew the guys over at Life's a Beach, and the entire decision process was *well, why not us too.*

That was it. That was the business plan.

My partner was David Coons, who shaped surfboards and was quietly ghost-shaping for Peter Benjamin over at T&C Surf Designs — meaning his boards went out into the world with somebody else's name on them. Coons was also deep into the stock market. Read about it constantly. Had opinions about all of it. Later became a hedge fund manager and got very rich.

We ran that company three years and I learned more inside it than in anything since. Getting orders was never the problem. Orders were easy.

MONEY WAS THE PROBLEM.

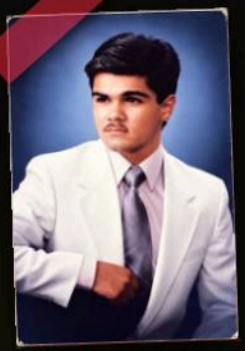
You ship on net 30, the shop pays on net 90, and in between you still have to buy more t-shirts. Invoice factoring, at our age, was basically a rumor.

So we did what any two broke kids with a clothing brand would do. We threw parties. Sponsored by our own brands. Cover at the door.

01
3 Years
HOW LONG IT RAN

02
Net 30 / 90
THE WHOLE PROBLEM

03
The Door
HOW IT GOT FINANCED



GIL ORTEGA · SENIOR YEAR
THE YEAR IT STARTED



ORIGINAL CHILI APPAREL
SPORTSWEAR · SURFWEAR



CHILI · COONS · HOT STYX
THE LINE

OUR SURFWEAR COMPANY WAS FINANCED ALMOST ENTIRELY BY NIGHTCLUB STYLED EVENTS IN HOTEL BALLROOMS.

THE LINE, ON PAPER

CHILI

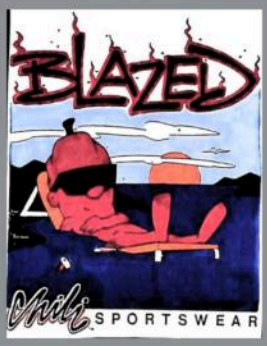
SPORTSWEAR / SURFWEAR / HOT STYX



01



02



03



04



05



06



07



08



09



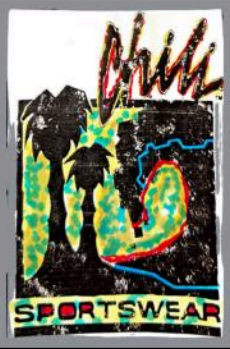
10



11



12



ONE LAST IDEA FOR SQUEEZING MONEY OUT OF THE BRAND

THE CHILIMAN

Somewhere in there Coons got hired to work on the Batmobile for the Michael Keaton movie, on the grounds that shaping a surfboard and shaping a Batmobile are roughly the same job if you don't think about it too hard. I went down to the garage to help sand it, because I'd grown up sanding cars in my dad's paint and body shop.

THAT IS A TRUE THING THAT HAPPENED AND IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE REST OF THIS STORY.

I just need you to know I worked on the Batmobile.



THE BATMOBILE · MICHAEL KEATON ERA
SHAPED BY A SURFBOARD GUY · SANDED BY ME

CHARACTER SHEET · PROPERTY OF GIL ORTEGA



PROPERTY	THE CHILIMAN
CLASS	CHILI PEPPER DUDE
YEAR	C. 1990
STATUS	UNLICENSED
CURRENT LOCATION	A BOX IN THE GARAGE

When the clothing brand started winding down and the parties started winding up, I had one last idea for squeezing money out of the brand without putting more time into it. I had a character. **The CHILIMAN.** He was a chili pepper dude. He was great. I thought somebody should license him.

So I went looking for whoever owned the T&C surf characters, those being the nearest thing to what I had. The answer was a man named **Gary Propper**. Surfing legend first. Then a manager — he handled Gallagher, and later Carrot Top. Old-school concert promoter on top of that.



T&C SURF DESIGNS
THE NEAREST THING TO WHAT I HAD

I THOUGHT: THIS GUY IS GOING TO RELATE TO ME QUICKLY.

UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED · UNLICENSED

BEFORE A GALLAGHER SHOW

THE FORUM

What I did not know when I picked up the phone was that he also owned the rights to a black-and-white comic book about four turtles.

The movie hadn't come out. Nobody had heard of it. Every serious person in the business had looked at that premise — teenage turtles, pizza, karate, a rat sensei — and politely passed.

I tracked down his number and called him cold. No introduction, no mutual friend, nothing to trade on except that I actually had something to show him and I'd thought about it first.

He took the call. He was interested. He told me to meet him at The Forum in LA, before a Gallagher show.

So I show up at The Forum with a portfolio under my arm and pitch a man sitting on a comedy empire and a franchise about to go off like a bomb — on buying the rights to my chili pepper dude.

He was gracious about it.

HE SAID NO.

Then he leaned in and told me all about the turtles.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES · 1990
THE THING HE OWNED AND I DID NOT

That movie came out in 1990. Made outside the studio system for a fraction of what a studio would have spent, and it out-earned most of what the studios put out that year.

PROPPER GOT VERY RICH.

I stayed for the show, watched a man destroy produce with a sledgehammer in front of thousands of people, and drove back to San Diego.

I kept calling him for years. He always picked up.

The pepper's still in a box in my garage.

MAYBE THE CHILI DUDE IS GOING TO MAKE A COMEBACK?

THE PEPPER'S STILL IN A BOX IN MY GARAGE · THE PEPPER'S STILL IN A BOX IN MY GARAGE

THE BALLROOM YEARS · EIGHTEEN AND UP

FLIP SIDE

BAR MINIMUM

Here is a thing nobody told me until I asked: a hotel will give you its ballroom for free.

Not cheap. **Free.** No rental fee. All they want is a minimum bar spend, and in 1990 that number was something like four thousand dollars.

Four thousand. In a room that holds two thousand people. Who are coming specifically to drink.

I remember running that math in a Marriott lobby and waiting for somebody to stop me.

NOBODY STOPPED ME.

So we ran Flip Side. Saturdays, ballrooms, eighteen and up at the door, wristbands for twenty-one and up at the bar. We kept every dollar of the cover. The hotel got its bar.

Everybody walked away happy, including the hotel, which I think genuinely surprised them.

Inside a year we had worked through nearly every large ballroom in San Diego.

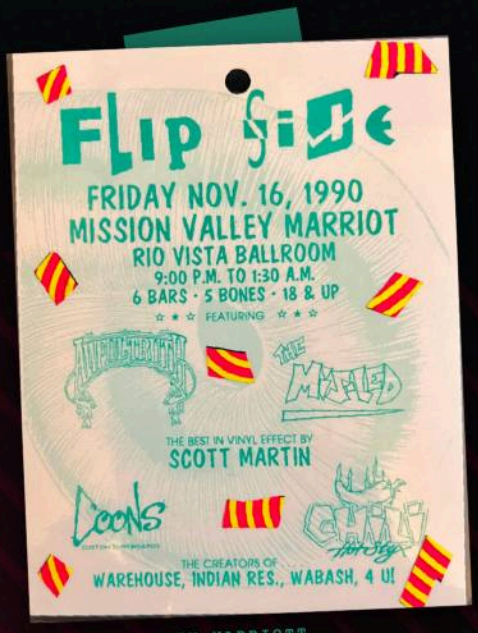
THEN I TURNED TWENTY-ONE.

Which meant I could finally get into a bar. And — much more interesting to me — it meant I could finally *open* one.

01
$4,000
BAR MINIMUM

02
2,000
ROOM CAPACITY

03
100%
OF THE DOOR, OURS



MISSION VALLEY MARRIOTT
FRI NOV 16, 1990 · RIO VISTA BALLROOM



FLIP SIDE & CLASS ACT
FRI JAN 4, 1991 · LA JOLLA MARRIOTT

FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLIP SIDE · FLI

MY FIRST NIGHTCLUB · 1990

MR. WHIPPLE'S

Everybody else got a birthday. I got the entrée to twenty-one-and-up nightclub land.

Mr. Whipple's. Every Wednesday. Twenty-one and up, four dollars at the door, dollar drinks, at a spot on El Cajon Boulevard.

I named my first nightclub after the man from the toilet paper commercials. I have no defense. It was 1990 and it felt correct.

And the positioning statement — printed right at the top of the flyer, above everything — was six words.

WEDNESDAY, BY THE WAY. THEY GAVE ME WEDNESDAY.

They always give you Wednesday.

No email. No social media. The entire marketing department was flyers handed out at this week's party for next week's party, plus a phone list.

NEAR SDSU • NOT IN P.B.

THAT'S THE WHOLE PITCH · SIX WORDS, AND I'D SPLIT AN ENTIRE CITY IN HALF



MR. WHIPPLE'S — A BRAND NEW FUNK
EVERY WEDNESDAY · 7353 EL CAJON BLVD



V.I.P. PASS — ADMIT ONE
NO COVER · NO WAITING

And when I say phone list, I mean *I called them*. Me. Down the list. Hey, it's Gil, we've got a thing Saturday.

Hundreds of calls, by hand, because that was the available technology — and because it worked better than anything I've used since.

Every one of those calls was about the party. One of them turned into something more. First love. Ended badly. That's all you're getting out of me today.

That was also the year I started covering the walls with murals. I hired artists at first. Then I started painting them myself, which meant I was often still getting paint off my hands while taking money at the door.

IT TOOK ME ABOUT THIRTY YEARS TO WORK OUT THAT THE PAINTING WAS THE PART I ACTUALLY LOVED.

NO EMAIL · NO SOCIAL MEDIA · NO EMAIL · NO SOCIAL MEDIA · NO EMAIL · NO SOCIAL MEDIA · NO EMAIL · N

WHEN THE BALLROOMS WEREN'T AVAILABLE

WABASH

THE FALLBACK

The hotels loved us right up until they thought about it.

Which is fair. Their read on the deal was: a guaranteed bar night in a room that would otherwise sit empty. My read was: two thousand young adults, in their building, on a Saturday.

Both readings were correct.

So we kept those relationships warm for years, and I spent a meaningful share of my early twenties being extremely reassuring to hotel managers.

But some months the ballrooms just weren't available.

AND WHEN THE BALLROOMS WEREN'T AVAILABLE, WE WENT TO WABASH HALL.

01
700
CAPACITY / WABASH HALL

02
1/3
OF A BALLROOM

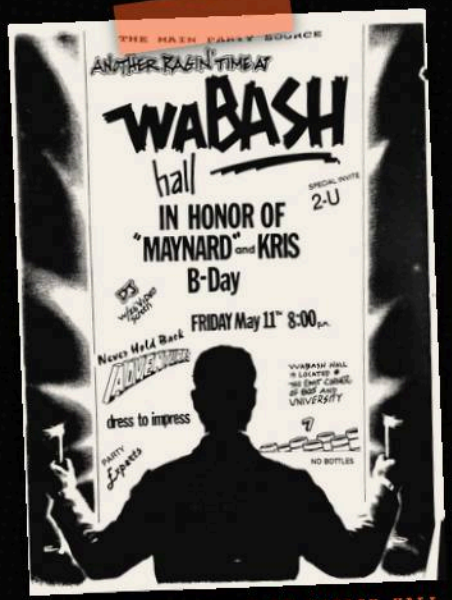
03
1/3
OF THE MONEY

Wabash Hall. Seven hundred capacity, punk venue by reputation, in a neighborhood where advice about where to park was genuinely useful information.

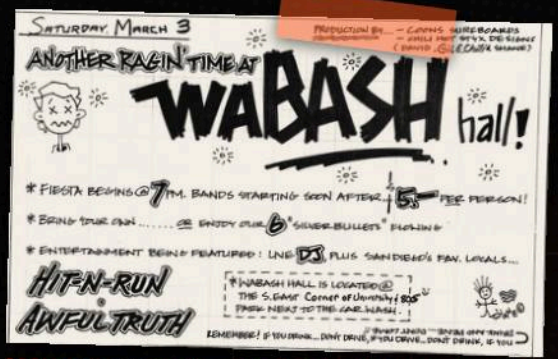
No chandeliers. No carpet anybody was protecting. Nobody from corporate.

Seven hundred is about a third of a ballroom, which is also about a third of the money. I noticed that every time.

Nobody else did. The parties were wilder, and if wild was what you came for, Wabash was the better night — which is a strange thing to learn about your least profitable room.



ANOTHER RAGIN' TIME AT WABASH HALL
FRI MAY 11 · DRESS TO IMPRESS



SATURDAY MARCH 3 · HIT-N-RUN / AWFUL TRUTH
DOORS 7PM · $5 PER PERSON

WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH · WABASH ·

NO CHANDELIERS · NOBODY FROM CORPORATE

YOU WERE THE MANAGER

At the Marriott, when something went sideways, you found the manager. At Wabash, you were the manager.

And the security. And the guy with the mop.

I produced so many parties in that building I lost count — which I know is the sort of thing people say without meaning it. I mean it. I could not give you a number.

At the ballrooms, the hotel ran the bar. At Wabash, **we** ran it.

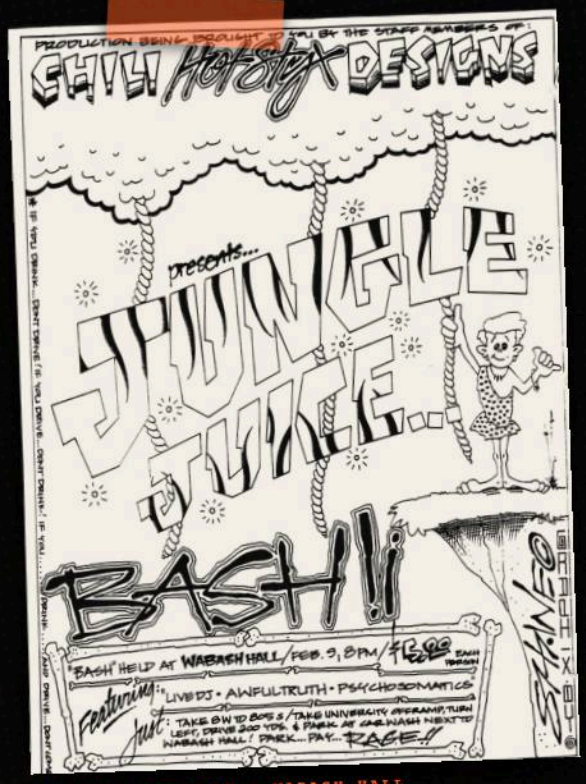
Plural. Actual trash cans.

In our defense, they were new.

That is the entirety of our defense.

A thing like that can go wrong in several directions at once, and over enough Saturdays I found all of them.

WHICH IS HOW WE ARRIVED AT JUNGLE JUICE, MIXED INSIDE A LARGE TRASH CAN.



JUNGLE JUICE BASH · WABASH HALL
CHILI HOT STYX DESIGNS · HAND-DRAWN FLYER

IN OUR DEFENSE, THEY WERE NEW.

THAT IS THE ENTIRETY OF OUR DEFENSE

01
The Bar
OURS, NOT THEIRS

02
The Mop
ALSO OURS

I COULD NOT GIVE YOU A NUMBER.

PARTIES PRODUCED AT WABASH HALL · LOST COUNT

THE HOTEL BALLROOMS TAUGHT ME HOW TO BE PRESENTABLE. WABASH WAS RAW. IT TAUGHT ME EVERYTHING ELSE.

WABASH HALL · WABASH STREET

LOST COUNT. I MEAN IT.

ELEVEN TO THIRTEEN YEARS OLD · EATING THEIR DUST

SUPERCROSS

JAMUL

I grew up on a dirt bike in Jamul, which at the time was less a town than a set of directions.

Some of the best motocross riders in the country trained on tracks near my house. Between about eleven and thirteen years old, I'd ride out to watch them, and when they'd let me, I tried to keep up.

I did not keep up. I ate their dust, specifically and repeatedly, for roughly two years.

A DECADE LATER, SUPERCROSS CAME TO JACK MURPHY STADIUM.

And I threw the after-party.

Radisson Ballroom, Mission Valley. Ten to two. Five bars. Five dollars at the door.

The riders came. Not all of them — most of them. The names off the program, in the ballroom, which the fans worked out about four minutes after doors opened.

We did that event for three years running.

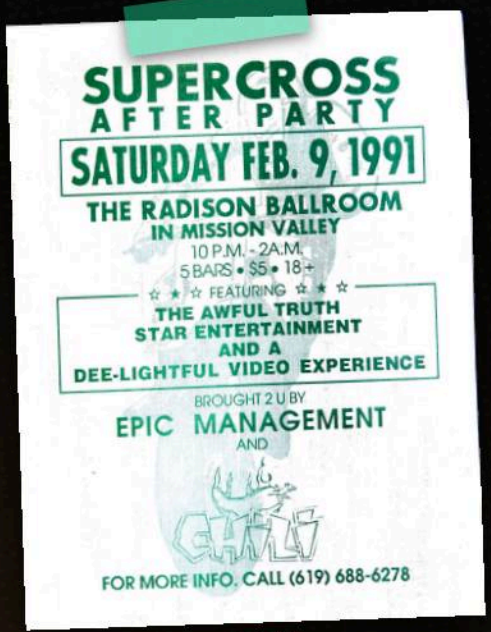
I DON'T THINK I EVER SAID A WORD ABOUT IT TO ANY OF THEM.

01
2 Yrs
EATING THEIR DUST

02
5 Bars
RADISSON BALLROOM

03
$5
AT THE DOOR · 18+

04
3 Yrs
RUNNING



SUPERCROSS AFTER PARTY
SAT FEB 9, 1991 · 10PM–2AM · $5

> What was I going to say — *you don't know me, but I spent two years of my childhood looking at the back of you?*

Instead I made sure their drinks got handled.

I HAD STAFF FOR THAT BY THEN.

SUPERCROSS

JACK MURPHY STADIUM → MISSION VALLEY

BALLROOMS, BORROWED · 1990–1992

SURGE

SURGE (serj) **verb.** To rise or swell with great force. (ooh, baby!)

For about two years, I kept convincing hotels that what their ballroom needed was a thousand or two thousand people who were absolutely not there for a conference.

WE CALLED IT SURGE.

The flyers included a definition: *to rise or swell with great force.*

Because apparently the dictionary needed me to finish the thought.



THE URGE TO RISE OR SWELL
CHILI PRODUCTIONS · SAN DIEGO



SAT. AUGUST 3RD
LA JOLLA MARRIOTT BALLROOM

SURGE

TO RISE OR SWELL WITH GREAT FORCE

SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SURGE · SUR

BEAUTIFUL ROOMS · CHANDELIERS · CARPET

THE MARRIOTT. THE HILTON. THE RED LION. KONA KAI.

The kind of place where somebody normally thanks the regional sales team.

CHILI PRODUCTIONS MOVED IN.

House. Hip-hop. Techno. Funk. DJs, bands, lights. Eighteen and up at the door, a full bar for the people old enough to appreciate how little the drinks cost.

That door policy wasn't generosity. It was defense.

BECAUSE MY ACTUAL COMPETITION WAS A COUNTRY.

Every weekend in San Diego, everybody drove to Tijuana. Eighteen to drink, and cheap. Kids came down from LA to do it. Revolución was packed every Friday and Saturday of my entire youth — a drive I'd been making myself since I was fifteen.

I never emptied Tijuana. Nobody has ever emptied Tijuana.

BUT ON THE NIGHTS WE RAN, IT WAS A LITTLE LESS PACKED DOWN THERE.



SURGE II · FRI. MAY 8, 1992
MISSION VALLEY HILTON · GRAND BALLROOM



SAT. AUG 3, 1991
THE HORSES ARE ON THE TRACK



UNITED SPICE NETWORK
FULL BAR W/ID · 18 AND UP

SURGE — CONTINUED

MARRIOTT · HILTON · RED LION · KONA KAI

NOBODY HAS EVER EMPTIED TIJUANA · NOBODY HAS EVER EMPTIED TIJUANA · NOBODY HAS EVER EMPTIED TIJUANA

ONE FLYER SAID

EXPECT A FOUR FIGURE TURN OUT.

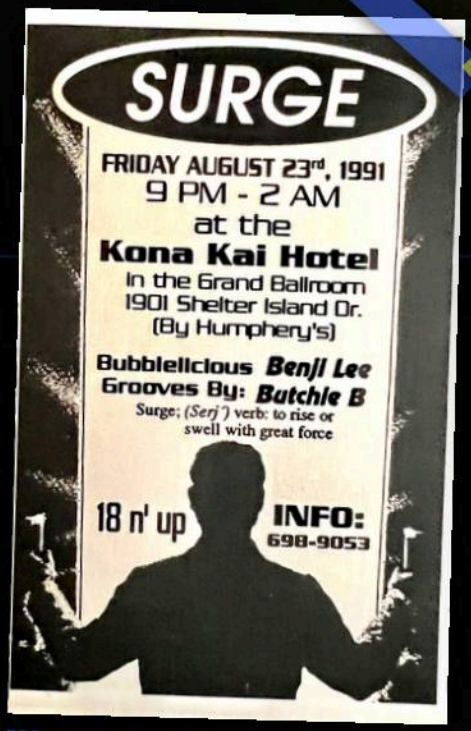
Apparently I'd reached the point where "a lot of people" sounded insufficient.

And almost all of them advertised **secured parking**.

WHICH WAS DIFFERENT FROM THE WABASH PARTIES.



THE URGE TO…
CHILI PRODUCTIONS



FRI. AUG 23, 1991
KONA KAI HOTEL · 9PM-2AM



FRI. JULY 26 · RED LION HOTEL
SIX FULL BARS · $3 B4 TEN

RED LION HOTEL · FRI. JULY 26 · 9 PM TILL 2 AM
SIX FULL BARS · SECURED PARKING · 18+ · $3 B4 TEN
DAZZLING SYNCRO SLIDES OF ALL THE HOUSE & FUNK

HOSTED BY R.B., IBE, CHILI & ROY
THE CREATORS OF THE WABASH, INDIAN RES., KONA KAI, WAREHOUSE, HOLIDAY INN, RADISSON AND MARRIOTT EXPERIENCES

THERE, YOU WERE ON YOUR OWN.

SECURED PARKING · SECURED PARKING · SECURED PARKING · SECURED PARKING · SECURED PARKING · SECURED P

SURGE — CONTINUED

SECURED PARKING

THE WORLD OF — IN THE 3RD DIMENSION

SWIRL

THURSDAYS AT WINTERS

Swirl was the second weekly nightclub I produced. I had been legally allowed inside a 21-and-up club for roughly ten minutes.

Near SDSU. Every Thursday.

THURSDAY AGAIN. OBVIOUSLY.

5880 El Cajon Boulevard. Doors at eight, three dollars before ten, dollar Jägermeister shots, dollar-twenty-five drafts, and a flyer promising **ABSOLUTE ELABORATE LIGHTING**, which I want on the record was not a lie.

The lights were run by a guy named Dave McKinnon. First event he'd ever worked. He runs Felix Lighting now and has for decades — still a big deal in LA. I gave Dave his first gig and have been taking credit for it ever since.

It's also where I met Darryl "Flick" Blount and Branden Powers — fast friends, eventually business partners.

01
8 PM
DOORS OPEN

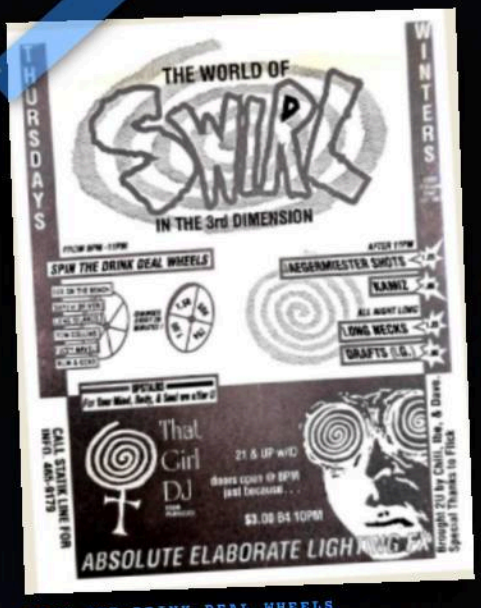
02
$3
BEFORE TEN

03
$1
JÄGER SHOTS

04
$1.25
DRAFTS



SWIRL · REX
THE WORLD OF SWIRL — IN THE 3RD DIMENSION



SPIN THE DRINK DEAL WHEELS
ABSOLUTE ELABORATE LIGHTING FX

GROOVES BY
ALL FOR ONE

JUICE BY
FLICK

BROUGHT 2U BY
CHILI, IBE & DAVE

AND THEN THERE WAS THE BARTENDER.

ABSOLUTE ELABORATE LIGHTING FX · ABSOLUTE ELABORATE LIGHTING FX · ABSOLUTE ELABORATE LIGHTING FX

DOORS OPEN @ 8PM

JUST BECAUSE…

NICE GUY. QUIET.

THE BARTENDER

Showed up, poured, went home. Nobody thought anything about it one way or the other.

Couple of years later I'm watching MTV.

THAT'S EDDIE VEDDER.

I have spent most of my adult life unable to prove this to anybody. No pics.

HE WAS THERE.
HE POURED.



SWIRL · 5880 EL CAJON BLVD · 582-1813
THURSDAYS AT WINTERS · 21 & UP W/ID

SPIN THE DRINK DEAL WHEELS

CHANGES EVERY 20 MINUTES

DRAFTS	$1.00	LONGNECKS	$1.25
KAMIZ	$1.00	JÄGERMEISTER	$1.25
SEX ON THE BEACH	ON THE WHEEL	SKREW DRIVERS	ON THE WHEEL
LONG ISLANDS	ON THE WHEEL	TOM COLLINS	ON THE WHEEL
FUZZY NAVELS	ON THE WHEEL	RUM & COKE	ON THE WHEEL

JUST BECAUSE… · JUST BECAUSE… · JUST BECAUSE… · JUST BECAUSE… · JUST BECAUSE… · JUST BECAUSE…

HE WAS THERE. HE POURED. NO PICS

THE NICKNAME, THE BRAND, THE BUSINESS CARD

ORTEGA, LIKE THE CHILI

1982. Middle school. A substitute teacher is working down the roll sheet and gets to my name.

ROLL CALL · PERIOD 3 — 1982

SUB — "Ortega."

ME — "Here."

SUB — "Ortega, like the chili?"

ME — "Yeah."

THAT'S IT. THAT'S THE WHOLE ORIGIN STORY.

A man who was not my teacher, who did not know me, who was gone by Monday, and whose name I could not give you under oath — looked at a twelve-year-old and assigned him an identity in four words.

NOBODY VOTED. NOBODY CHECKED WITH ME.

By that Friday my friends were calling me Chili. By high school, when the clothing line started, it had stopped being a joke and become a label. Literally. It was printed on the shirts.

Then 1991. Flick — Darryl Blount — tells me I should put CHILI on everything. Not just clothes. The events.

He was right, which I want on the record I did not enjoy at the time.

By then the math had gotten loud anyway. The clothing company was a cash-flow machine running in reverse. The parties made money and I was having a substantially better time at them. We'd also started giving the t-shirts away for free, which is about the clearest signal you can get about which business you're actually in.

01
4 Words
TOTAL COST OF THE NAME

02
1 Day
LENGTH OF HIS EMPLOYMENT

03
40+ Yrs
AND COUNTING

SO THE CLOTHES WENT. THE NAME STAYED.

ORTEGA, LIKE THE CHILI · ORTEGA, LIKE THE CHILI · ORTEGA, LIKE THE CHILI · ORTEGA, LIKE THE CHILI

THE PARTNERSHIP, THE LOGO, THE JOB TITLE

CREATOR.

I still have the business card. Full name, a La Mesa P.O. box, a voicemail line, a pager number, and underneath all of it, the job title I gave myself.

1992. **CHILI & FLICK Productions** came about with a partnership. Slogan: We bring good things to life.

We also built the logo to look exactly like the GE logo, with a C and an F.

I'D LIKE TO TELL YOU THAT WAS COMMENTARY.

We were twenty-two and we figured nobody would notice.

CHILI & FLICK PRODUCTIONS
WE BRING GOOD THINGS TO LIFE



GIL E. "CHILI" ORTEGA JR. · CREATOR
V.M. (619) 492-8087 · PAGER (619) 968-7042

Nineteen ninety-two. I put **CREATOR** on a business card in 1992, and the rest of the world took roughly thirty years to arrive.

NO ROYALTIES. NO PLAQUE. NOT EVEN A THANK-YOU NOTE.

These days people find me under a few different names. Some know Gil. More know Chili. At my art shows I'm **Rick Bliss** — which means my wife occasionally gets introduced as **Mrs. Bliss**. She enjoys that.

THREE NAMES, AND THE ONE THAT STUCK HARDEST I GOT FOR FREE — FROM A GUY COVERING SOMEBODY ELSE'S CLASS FOR A DAY.

CHILI ORIGIN — CONTINUED

WE BRING GOOD THINGS TO LIFE

PROUDLY ANNOUNCE

THE BIRTH OF BABY X

I DIDN'T PRODUCE THIS ONE.

Branden Powers and Nicholas "Nik Nak" Luckinbill did. One from LA, one from Nor Cal, neither of whom had ever thrown anything in San Diego — which is a problem when your event is in Mexico and your entire crowd has to come from San Diego.

So they hired me. Put my name on the flyer.

THAT'S IT. THAT'S THE WHOLE JOB.
MY NAME WAS THE DISTRIBUTION.

It worked. We bused people across an international border in the dark, two dollars a head, round trip, departing every half hour from a parking lot. I'd like to note that nobody questioned this at the time.

100% BUST FREE

12 HOURS OF NON-STOP ANESTHESIA

10,000 WATTS OF WOMB BOOMING

TECHNO · HIP HOP · FUNK

30-ACRE BEACHFRONT ESTATE

MAGICAL NURSERY

BOUNCING DRAGON

3 CIRCUS TENTS



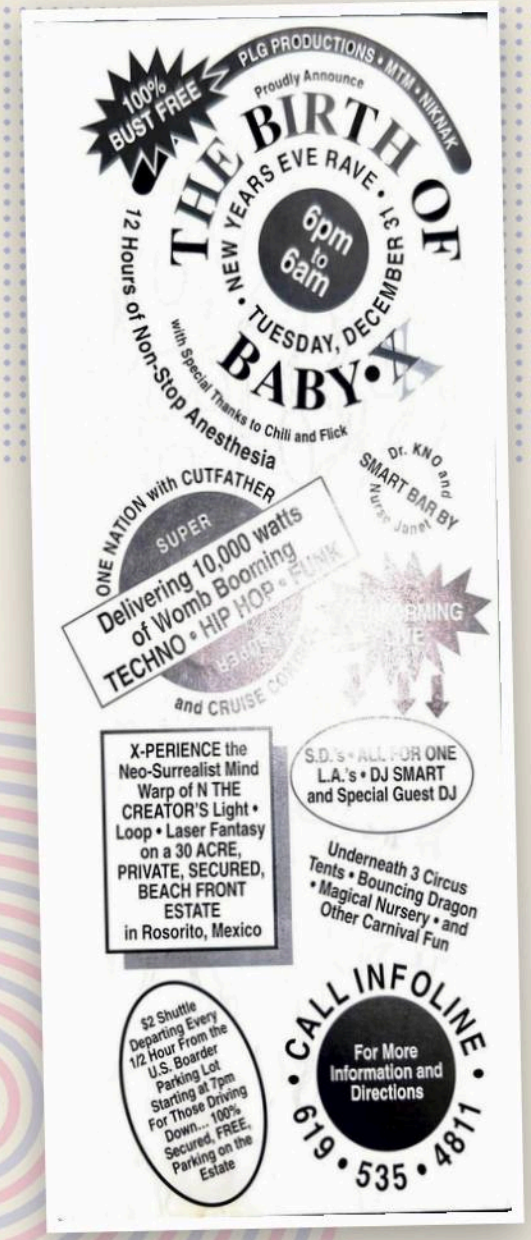
BABY X · B. 12/31/1991



NIK NAK · REVOLT IN STYLE · FLICK · SJOBECK · ISLAND STYLE
FLYER BY SIGHT EFFECTS DESIGN

ROSARITO

6PM TO 6AM



NEW YEAR'S EVE RAVE · 6PM TO 6AM

CALL INFOLINE 619 · 535 · 4811

AND THEN THERE WAS THE ENTRANCE.

I want to walk you through this slowly, because it deserves it.

They built a giant foam crotch. Two legs, parted. You walked in between them and into a tunnel of love constructed as a fallopian tube, the full length of it, and came out the other end at the party.

TWO THOUSAND PEOPLE GOT BORN THAT NIGHT.

Multiple stages. Techno, hip hop, bands. Twelve hours of it, six to six, on a polo field next to the beach in Rosarito, under three circus tents and a bouncing dragon.

The flyer promised **100% BUST FREE** and a **Magical Nursery**, and I am not going to tell you which of those we delivered.

THE RUMOR IS PERRY FARRELL WAS THERE.

He launched Lollapalooza later that year. That may just be the kind of thing people say about a good night.

ENTRANCE SEQUENCE

ONE WAY IN · NO EXCEPTIONS

1. PARKING LOT, U.S. SIDE — $2
2. THE BORDER, IN THE DARK
3. THE FOAM CROTCH — TWO LEGS, PARTED
4. TUNNEL OF LOVE, FULL LENGTH
5. YOU ARE NOW NEW

X-PERIENCE THE NEO-SURREALIST MIND WARP

OF THE CREATOR'S LIGHT · LOOP · LASER FANTASY

$2 SHUTTLE — EVERY 1/2 HOUR FROM THE U.S. BORDER PARKING LOT, STARTING 7PM

FOR THOSE DRIVING DOWN — 100% SECURED, FREE PARKING ON THE ESTATE

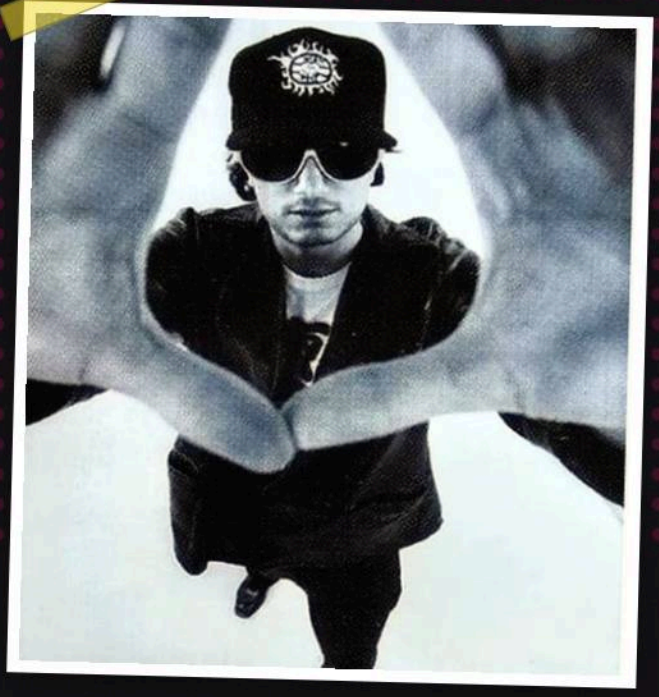
ABOUT THE POLO FIELD.

It belonged to the La Greca family. We worked directly with Pietro Jr., who was our age, easy to deal with, and very clearly from money. We didn't ask about it. You don't ask about it.

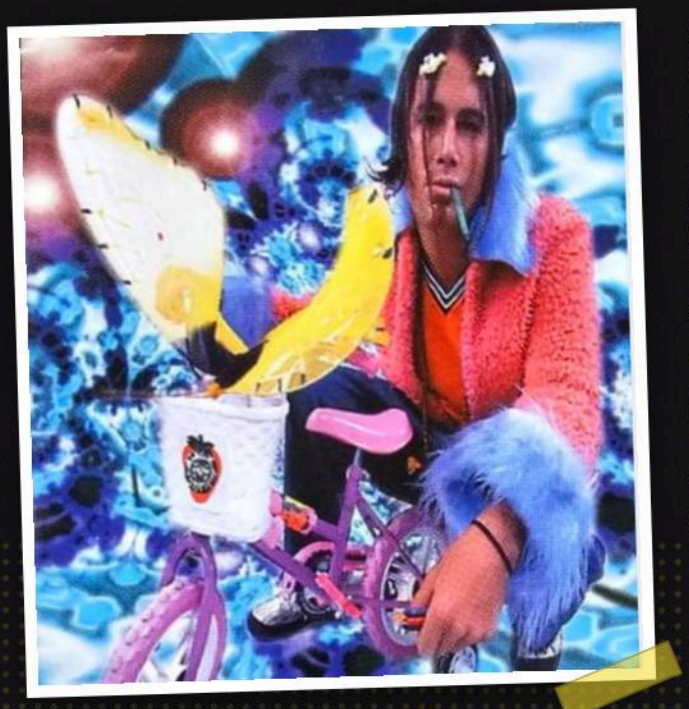
In 2022 Pietro published a book called *Pesos: The Rise and Fall of a Border Family*, in which he explains that his father was known as Mexico's real-life Don Corleone.

SO THAT ANSWERS THAT.

That night opened a few doors I'll get to later. Not all of them went anywhere good.



BRANDEN POWERS · PLG



NICHOLAS "NIK NAK" LUCKINBILL · MTM

I produced a lot more with Branden and Nick after this. These two don't have ideas. They have conditions.

Today Branden builds restaurants and bars in Las Vegas — the Golden Tiki, Evil Pie, Pachi Pachi. Nick is Vice President of Brand Strategy at Insomniac, which makes Electric Daisy Carnival, Beyond Wonderland, Nocturnal Wonderland and Escape: Psycho Circus, plus many, many more.

WHICH TRACKS.

Thirty years ago those two looked at an empty polo field and said: *what if everyone has to be born first.*

FURTHER READING · FILED UNDER THINGS WE DID NOT KNOW

PESOS: THE RISE AND FALL OF A BORDER FAMILY

LA GRECA, PIETRO JR. · PUBLISHED 2022
SUBJECT: "MEXICO'S REAL-LIFE DON CORLEONE"
OUR CONTACT AT THE VENUE: HIS SON, OUR AGE

1991 · 2,000 ATTENDED

SAN DIEGO'S FIRST LARGE-SCALE RAVE

HIP HOP

EARLY 80'S – MID 90'S

In 1982 I was in seventh grade, learning to breakdance in Jamul, California.

FLATTENED · DRIVEWAY · JAMUL

Jamul is countryside. Horses, dirt, a lot of sky. If there was a hip hop scene in Jamul, it was me, on a flattened cardboard box, in a driveway.

Nobody out there was breakdancing. John Denver was not breakdancing. And I want to be clear — I love John Denver. I am a country boy.

Hip hop wasn't on the radio yet. It wasn't on TV. You couldn't look it up. You got it from somebody who had it.

Then Mike Arias moved in from LA to Jamul.



THE TOUR THAT CAME THROUGH
A BUILDING I COULD GET TO

MIKE HAD IT.

He had the mixtapes. He had the flyers — real ones, from real house parties, with lettering you could stare at for an hour. Productions. Crews. A whole functioning world happening ninety minutes north that nobody in my zip code had been informed about.

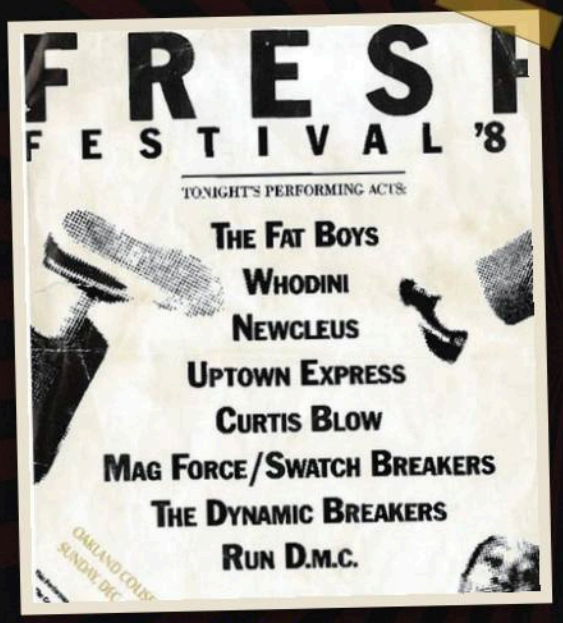
I'd like to note, for later, that the first thing hip hop ever handed me was a flyer.

THEN FRESH FEST CAME TO TOWN.

It rolled through San Diego a few times in the early-to-mid eighties and it was the entire thing at once. Not a sample of it. The whole pinnacle, on one stage, in a building I could get to.

And it didn't just bring the groups. It brought the breakers. Not the local best. The world best.

THE ROCK STEADY CREW WAS THERE.
CRAZY LEGS WAS THERE.



UNDERGROUND SOURCES ONLY

THE PARTS NOT ON STAGE.

The real battles weren't on stage.

THEY WERE IN THE HALLWAYS.

Concrete corridors of the San Diego Sports Arena, a boombox, and whatever floor the crowd decided to give you. I watched some of the best breakdancing I will ever see in my life happen approximately eleven feet from a concession stand.

And then I got in.

I BATTLED THE ROCK STEADY CREW.

CENTER STAGE · SEVENTH GRADE · KID FROM JAMUL

I'm not going to tell you I won. I am going to tell you that someone from the 2024 Olympics would not have gotten a floor in that hallway.

THOSE CONCERTS WERE THE START OF IT. EVERYTHING AFTER THAT JUST GOT LOUDER.

FRESH FEST
SAN DIEGO SPORTS ARENA

JAMUL, CA

SPORTS ARENA

OH. I FORGOT TO MENTION.

I got crushed.

Demolished, actually. In front of everybody.

IT DIDN'T MATTER EVEN SLIGHTLY.

I WAS THERE, DOING IT, AND DOING IT WELL.

BY THE EARLY NINETIES I WAS THE LEADING HIP HOP PROMOTER IN SAN DIEGO.

If it was hip hop in San Diego, I probably had a connection to it. The rooms, the crews, the flyers, the night itself.

And there is one reason I am telling you any of this.



FLICK & CHILI



ROCK STEADY CREW · ZULU NATION
FLICK · CHILI · MARTY BEAT

WE CO-FOUNDED THE SAN DIEGO CHAPTER OF THE UNIVERSAL ZULU NATION.

Me and my business partner, Darryl "Flick" Blount.

RIP, FLICK.

PROPS TO YOU.
IT WAS YOUR IDEA.

Recently we celebrated hip hop's fiftieth. Same year I turn fifty-five.

A lot of the people in these pictures aren't here anymore.

I'M GLAD SOMEBODY BROUGHT A CAMERA.

RANDOM EVENTS

1992 – 1993

SEVEN NIGHTS A WEEK

ONE NIGHT ONLY

One-night events were the hardest thing we did.

NOBODY HAD EMAIL.

At best you mailed a flyer. Our audience was nineteen and moved every four months, so a healthy portion of them landed in a mailbox belonging to somebody's parents, in a city the kid had already left.

Calling the list helped. Calling the list also took all week.

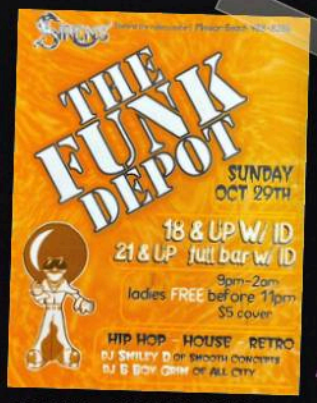
SO THE PROMOTION WAS ME.

Out every night. Clubs, events, other people's parties, seven nights a week. Shaking hands, spreading the word, and turning up at other promoters' events — because that was the deal. You went to theirs. They came to yours.

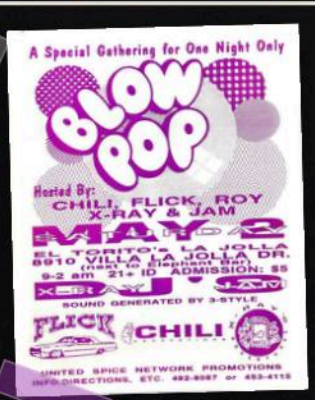


FEB 8, 1992 · ROSARITO, MEXICO
80,000 FL WATTS · CLEAN RINSING

ONE NIGHT ONLY · 18 & UP W/ ID · HIP HOP · HOUSE · RETRO · $5 COVER · FULL BAR · ONE NI



SIREN'S, MISSION BEACH
LADIES FREE BEFORE 11



EL TORITO'S, LA JOLLA
HOSTED BY CHILI & FLICK

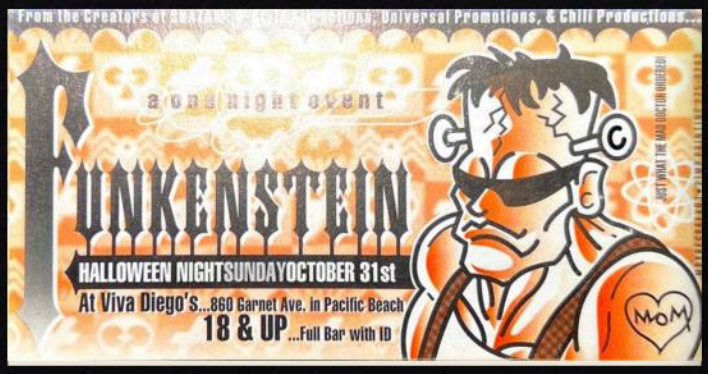
It was an absurd amount of legwork.

IT ALSO WORKED EVERY SINGLE TIME.

No event page. No RSVP. No analytics. A stack of flyers, a phone list, and me in a different room every night of the week.

THEN FIVE HUNDRED TO A THOUSAND PEOPLE WOULD SHOW UP.

A ONE NIGHT EVENT · HALLOWEEN NIGHT, SUNDAY OCTOBER 31ST 1993 · VIVA DIEGO'S, 860 GARNET AVE., PACIFIC BEACH · TWO ROOMS HAUNTED





1992-1993 · 500-1,000 ATTENDED

SHAZAM ATTRACTIONS
UNIVERSAL PROMOTIONS · CHILI PRODUCTIONS

SEC | ROW | SEAT

THE TICKET

1992 — 1995

No. 0170

ADMIT ONE THIS DATE ONLY

Sometimes the ticket *was* the flyer.

They were cheap to print, and something happens to a person holding a VIP ticket. It stops being an invitation and becomes a thing they already own. Nobody throws away a ticket. Nobody leaves a VIP ticket in a drawer and stays home.

SO WE PRINTED THE PROMOS ON THE SAME STOCK AS THE REAL ONES.

Same roll. Same dot-matrix. Same **NO REFUND NO EXCHANGE** running down the side. If somebody handed you one on the street and the person next to you had paid seven dollars for theirs, the two of you were holding the identical object.

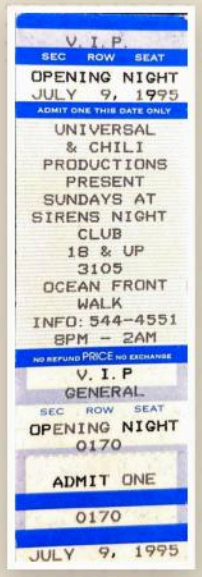
EVERYBODY FELT LIKE A VIP.
NOBODY COULD PROVE THEY WEREN'T.

WE USED TICKETMASTER EXACTLY ONCE.

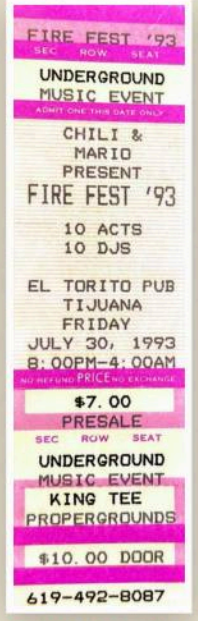
COLOSSUS · CAZZAR TOWER, TIJUANA
SAT JUNE 6, 1992 · 9PM-9AM · 18 AND OVER WITH I.D.
8 BALL · CHILI · FLICK · GEN ADM · $15.00

That one was big enough to need America's Ticket.

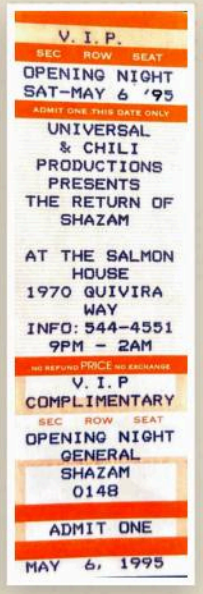
THE REST OF THEM NEEDED A PRINTER AND A ROLL OF STOCK.



V.I.P. · GENERAL
SUNDAYS AT SIRENS
3105 OCEAN FRONT WALK
JULY 9, 1995 · 0170

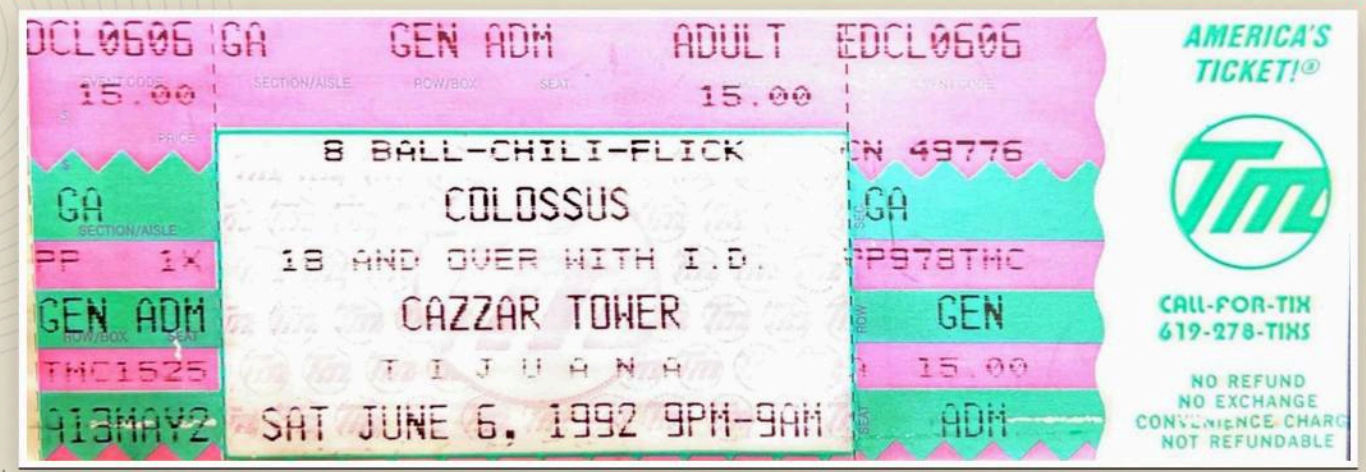


$7 PRESALE · $10 DOOR
FIRE FEST '93
EL TORITO PUB, TIJUANA
JULY 30, 1993 · KING TEE



V.I.P. · COMPLIMENTARY
THE RETURN OF SHAZAM
THE SALMON HOUSE
MAY 6, 1995 · 0148

AMERICA'S TICKET · CALL-FOR-TIX 619-278-TIXS · NO REFUND · NO EXCHANGE



ADMIT ONE

THIS DATE ONLY

THE BEST HIP HOP CLUB IN LOS ANGELES · 1992

JAMAICA HOUSE

JAMaica House was the best hip hop club in Los Angeles. So Flick and I drove up.

Monthly at first, then weekly, then often enough that the owners knew our names.

Howard Lynch and David Ferguson. 4 Play Entertainment. At some point we stopped being two guys from San Diego who kept showing up and started being two guys they talked business with.

WE ASKED IF WE COULD HAVE IT. THEY SAID YES.

Not a one-off. Not a tribute night with the name borrowed for an evening. The actual club, in San Diego, every week, mid-week.

ALSO FEATURING

D.J. ALYWOD OF JAMAICA HOUSE L.A.

D.J. JAM ★ OF S.D.

D.J. GENERAL LEE OF L.A.

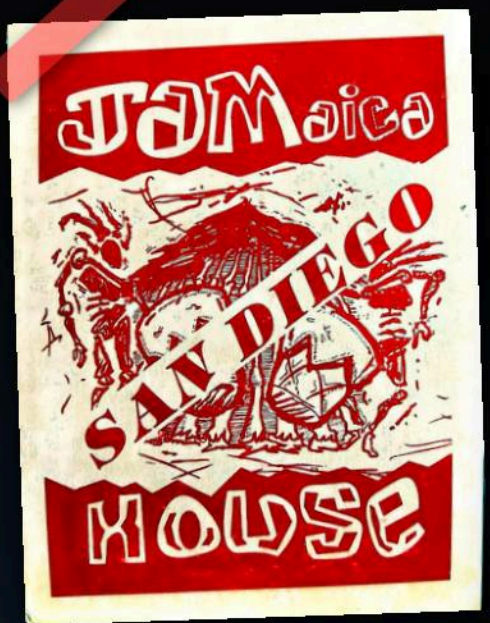
D.J. JOHNNY OF ALL FOR 1 S.D.

★ D.J. JAM WENT ON TO BECOME DR. DRE'S DJ.

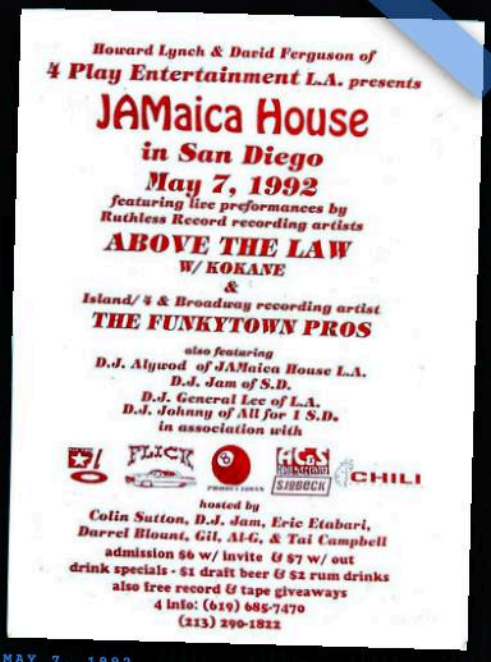
HOSTED BY COLIN SUTTON · D.J. JAM · ERIC ETABARI
DARREL BLOUNT · GIL · AL-G · TAI CAMPBELL

4 PLAY ENT. L.A.

IN SAN DIEGO



JAMAICA HOUSE · SAN DIEGO
THE POSTER


Howard Lynch & David Ferguson of
4 Play Entertainment L.A. presents
JAMaica House
in San Diego
May 7, 1992
featuring live preformances by
Ruthless Record recording artists
ABOVE THE LAW
W/ KOKANE
&
Island/4 & Broadway recording artist
THE FUNKYTOWN PROS
also featuring
D.J. Alywod of JAMaica House L.A.
D.J. Jam of S.D.
D.J. General Lee of L.A.
D.J. Johnny of All for 1 S.D.
in association with
FLICK
CHILI
hosted by
Colin Sutton, D.J. Jam, Eric Etabari,
Darrel Blount, Gil, Al-G, & Tai Campbell
admission $6 w/ invite & $7 w/ out
drink specials - $1 draft beer & $2 rum drinks
also free record & tape giveaways
4 info: (619) 685-7470
(213) 290-1822

MAY 7, 1992
ABOVE THE LAW W/ KOKANE

THE FIRST WEEKLY HIP HOP CLUB SAN DIEGO EVER HAD.

National recording artists. Every single week. That had not happened here before, and people did not entirely believe it until they were standing in the room.

JAMAICA HOUSE · SAN DIEGO · JAMAICA HOUSE · SAN DIEGO · JAMAICA HOUSE · SAN DIEGO · JAMAICA HOUSE

CLUB 860 · 860 GARNET AVE., PACIFIC BEACH

CONTINUED — FREE RECORDS AT THE DOOR

860 GARNET AVE. · PACIFIC BEACH

CLUB 860

FIVE WEEKS OF A SIX-MONTH RUN

ABOVE THE LAW W/ KOKANE

THE FUNKYTOWN PROS ISLAND / 4 & BROADWAY

DEL THA FUNKEE HOMOSAPIEN MISTADOBALINA

DADDY FREDDY CHRYSALIS

HEN-GEE & EVIL E RHYME SYNDICATE

That's five weeks of a six-month run, and it's the part that still surprises people. Del did *"Mistadobalina"* at Club 860 on Garnet, which had been Diego's about ten minutes earlier.

ADMISSION W/ INVITE	$6
ADMISSION W/OUT	$7
DRAFT BEER	$1
RUM DRINKS	$2
RECORD & TAPE GIVEAWAYS	FREE



JAMAICA HOUSE · SAN DIEGO
JUNE 4TH

CLUB 860

GARNET AVE.

FREE RECORDS AT THE DOOR.

Hand a thousand people a record every week and you are, whether you planned it or not, in the record promotion business. That is how the labels found me — majors and indies both.

THE CLUB RAN SIX MONTHS. THE RECORD PART NEVER STOPPED.


Howard Lynch & David Ferguson of
4 Play Entertainment L.A.™ presents
JAMaica House™
in San Diego
Thursday, June 4, 1992
featuring live performance by
Electra/ Street Knowledge recording artist
DEL tha funkee homosapien
performing his hit singles including
"Mistadobalina"
with other special guest celebrities in attendance
located at club 860 (formerly diego s) in pacific bch.
also featuring
D.J. Alwood of JAMaica House L.A.
D.J. Jam of S.D.
D.J. Johnny of All for 1 S.D.
spinning the best of reggae, hip-hop, funk, & soul
in association with
CHILI
hosted by
Colin Sutton, D.J. Jam, Eric Etabari,
Darrel Blount, Gil, Tai Campbell, & Chris
admission $6 w/ invite & $7 w/ out
drink specials - $1 draft beer & $2 rum drinks
also free record & tape giveaways
4 info: (619) 685-7470
(213) 957-4631
4PLAY

JUNE 4, 1992
DEL THA FUNKEE HOMOSAPIEN


David Ferguson & Howard Lynch
of 4 Play Entertainment L.A. Present
JAMaica House
IN SAN DIEGO
Thursday April 23
located at Club 860 (formerly Diego's)
860 Garnet Ave
featuring live performances by
DADDY FREDDY
Electra/Street recording Artists
HEN-GEE & EVIL E
of the Tri Rhyme Syndicate
DJ
ALWOOD of Jamaica House L.A.
WITH
COLIN of All for One S.D.
GENERAL LEE of L.A.
DJ JAM of S.D.
spinning reggae, hip-hop, funk, & soul
in association with
Darrel of FLICK
Colin of
also hosted by:
Eric Etabari & Tai Campbell
$1 Draft Beers $2 Rum Drinks
ADMISSION: $6 w/invite $7 w/out
4PLAY
4 INFO: (619) 685-7470
(213) 290-1822
and
JAMAICA HOUSE

APRIL 23
DADDY FREDDY

1992 · 1,200-1,500 ATTENDED

WATCH THE MOVIE
THE JAMAICA HOUSE MOVIE

HOSTED BY COLIN SUTTON · D.J. JAM · ERIC ETABARI · DARREL BLOUNT · GIL

4 INFO: (619) 685-7470

COLOSSUS

1992

A 12 HOUR MIND RIDE

This could be a very long story. I'm going to keep it short, and I'm going to leave things out.

I've told it maybe four times, privately, to people who needed to know. I have never told anyone all of it.

Here's why.

AFTER THIS PARTY, THERE WAS A CONTRACT ON MY LIFE.

We'll get there.

First, COLOSSUS. It became the largest underground festival in Southern California, at the time, which sounds impressive right up until you learn it was in Tijuana.

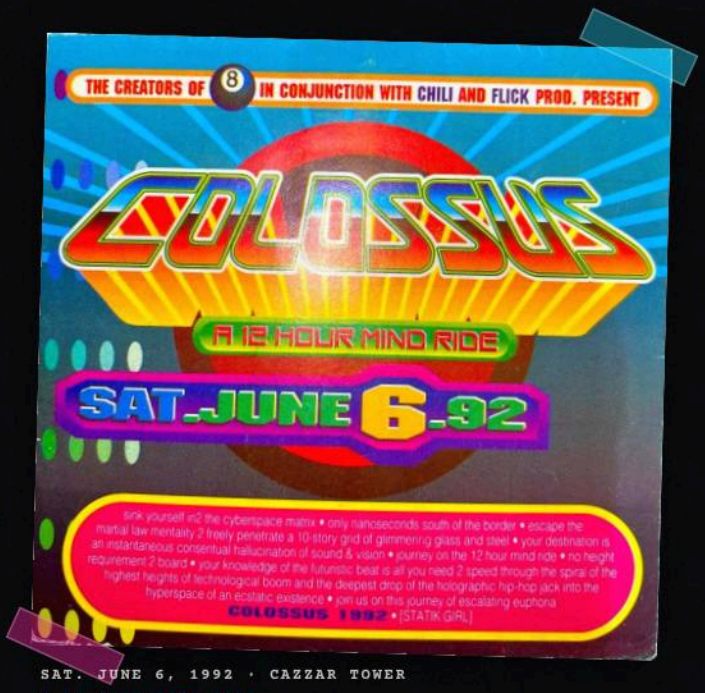
So how does something like that start?

A VOICEMAIL.

I had party info lines, and people left messages on them around the clock. Looking for tickets. Looking for the address. Looking for someone they met at the last one. This message was a man with a Spanish accent saying he had an excellent venue for a large party and wanted to talk about producing an event there.

I'll call him the Manager.

I called him back, because obviously, he had me at *large venue*, I called him back. I was looking for large venues on the daily.



SAT. JUNE 6, 1992 · CAZZAR TOWER
A 12 HOUR MIND RIDE

FROM THE FLYER

SINK YOURSELF IN2 THE CYBERSPACE MATRIX · ONLY NANOSECONDS SOUTH OF THE BORDER · ESCAPE THE MARTIAL LAW MENTALITY 2 FREELY PENETRATE A 10-STORY GRID OF GLIMMERING GLASS AND STEEL · YOUR DESTINATION IS AN INSTANTANEOUS CONSENTUAL HALLUCINATION OF SOUND & VISION · NO HEIGHT REQUIREMENT 2 BOARD · JOIN US ON THIS JOURNEY OF ESCALATING EUPHORIA

TIJUANA

SAT JUNE 6 · 92

AN ASIDE.

BECAUSE IT HAPPENED THE SAME MONTH

About a week after that voicemail I got a different call. Guy in LA, wanted to fund a party at Vertigo. Vertigo was a nightclub — a big deal in the late eighties and early nineties. Again, another voicemail.

So I drove up. I had been to Vertigo before.

We toured the place. Met with Vertigo's management. We had lunch. Completely normal.

Then he asked if we could swing by his friend's office for a minute.

SURE. WHY NOT?

He parked and told me to come up and wait.

ON THE DOOR IT SAID

UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

MY HEAD IS GOING A HUNDRED MILES AN HOUR. LIKE — WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

I sat in a tiny waiting room for fifteen minutes.

A few other people were in there. Not one word was spoken by anybody. The room had what I remain fairly confident were two-way mirrors, a detail I have never once managed to talk myself out of.

He came out. He said, "Let's go."

He drove me back to my car. I'm like, dude. The United States Secret Service? What's up with that?

Super nonchalant: *"Oh yeah, my buddy works there."*

I never heard from him again.

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT WAS.

VERTIGO

TWO-WAY MIRRORS

A 12 HOUR MIND RIDE

I'm not suggesting anything. I wouldn't even know what to suggest.

The most illegal thing I was doing in 1992 was throwing parties without permits, which is the class of crime where the punishment is a fine and a man in a windbreaker asking you to turn it down.

Granted, in the nightclub and underground music scene there were drugs everywhere. I didn't mess with that stuff. I stayed clear.

On top of that, I treated everybody like they were 21 Jump Street. Meaning undercover PoPo.

I KNEW FOR A FACT I HAD BOTH SIDES OF THAT CIRCLING ME.

But you have to admit — out of nowhere, the United States Secret Service? That was strange. I've always wondered why.

Then I read a book an old friend wrote.

In 2022, Pietro La Greca Jr. published *Pesos: The Rise and Fall of a Border Family.* That is how I learned that his father, Pietro Sr., was deeply connected to criminal activity and owned **the largest currency exchange on the Mexican border.**

We threw the Birth of Baby X on their polo field.

The Secret Service, among other things, investigates counterfeit currency.



SHUTTLES TO AND FROM PARTY
60,000 FLYERS DISTRIBUTED

DOOR
$15 IN ADVANCE
$20 AT DOOR
18+ · FULL BARS
200% SAFE & EFFECTIVE
UNDER A 10 STORY SKYSCRAPER

I'M NOT CONNECTING THOSE TWO THINGS.
I'M SETTING THEM NEXT TO EACH OTHER AND BACKING AWAY SLOWLY.

We met for coffee in Chula Vista, near his place.

I was twenty-two, about to turn twenty-three. He was at least ten years older, which at that age registers as roughly forty years older. He'd owned and operated clubs in Mexico. He knew the business, and he was good at this — inside of ninety seconds he had stopped describing a building and started describing a party.

A vacant ten-story office building in Tijuana. Owned by a friend of his.

He'd been to some of my parties. He'd heard about Rosarito. He liked what we did.

None of this struck me as strange, and I want to be clear about why. People were lining up to fund my parties. That was simply the year I was having.

THE DEAL.

They fund the production. They keep every dollar of the alcohol. They get repaid out of ticket sales for anything they front.

It was the hotel ballroom deal with better terms — a sentence I might have examined more closely had I not been twenty-two.

CHILI & FLICK would partner with EightBall Productions. Three guys with a solid reputation for pulling large crowds. They knew exactly what they were doing. A week later all of us met the Manager at the border to go look at the building.

THEN WE SAW IT.

As an office building, it was unremarkable. New construction, about eighty percent finished, the kind of place where someone is eventually going to have a disagreement about a copier.

As a venue, it was the best thing any of us had ever stood inside of.

Ten floors, completely empty. Plus three levels of underground parking.

ALL OF IT OURS.

The Manager said we'd have to move fast, because they were going to finish construction. Then he said the sentence that broke all of our brains simultaneously:

"YOU CAN PAINT WHATEVER YOU WANT ON THE WALLS. WE'RE REPAINTING IT ANYWAY."

Tell a room full of promoters in 1992 that they have ten stories of blank wall and permission.

Nobody slept much after that.

WE PAID OUR GRAFFITI ARTIST FRIENDS TO BOMB THE ENTIRE PLACE.

MEETING THE BOSS · NOON · MCDONALD'S · SAN YSIDRO · RIGHT UP AGAINST THE BORDER · MEETIN

I got there a few minutes early. I had no idea what the building's owner looked like. All I had was a first name.

I'm going to call him The Boss, because that is what he turned out to be, in more ways than one.

I spotted him the second I walked in.

Lunch rush, place packed, and he was the only still thing in it. It wasn't jewelry and it wasn't clothes. It was presence. He was sitting there the way a man sits when the room already belongs to him.

He was with another guy. They clocked me before I clocked them, like somebody had given them a description.

The other guy was his driver.

He was also his bodyguard, which I would not find out for quite some time.

I laid out the entire plan for the party. The Boss asked sharp questions in near-perfect English. The driver's English was rough, but he followed everything fine.

Here's the part I still think about.

The driver kept seeming distracted, so I kept pulling him back in. *What do you think about that? Does that make sense to you?* Straight out of sales training — never let anybody in the room check out.

So picture it. Twenty-two years old, lit up about my production plan, periodically turning to a man whose actual job was scanning a McDonald's for threats, and soliciting his feedback on the production plan.

HE MAY HAVE BEEN DISTRACTED FOR OTHER REASONS.

I always had the sense that The Boss liked me, and there was nothing performed about it.

I also had the sense that he was a very serious man.

THERE WAS NO INTERNET.

I couldn't look him up. There was nothing to look up. No Google, no reviews, no news archive I could search at two in the morning in my underwear, no profile page telling me where he went to school.

If I genuinely wanted to know who this man was, I had three options. A library and a microfiche machine. A newspaper I'd have to already know to ask for, by name and by date. Or asking around.

And asking around about a guy like that, in 1992, in that town, means the question reaches him before the answer reaches you.

So there's no data. What's left is how a man conducts himself in front of you, and whatever your father taught you.

My dad taught me a lot of things. One of them was never to make a deal with the devil — not even a small one. He'd been offered the small ones over the years. *Just hold this million dollars for me. You're only holding it.*

He always said the same thing. **Don't do it.**

I'm not telling you The Boss was the devil. I don't know what he did or didn't do. I've heard things since. I can only imagine, and I've had thirty years to imagine.

What I can tell you is that I had two pleasant hour-long conversations with him, both without the Manager, and that by the end of them I had shaken hands on a deal with a very serious man.

NO CONTRACT. NO PAPERWORK. A HANDSHAKE.

There was no backing out.

I also didn't want to back out. I wanted to throw the biggest badass party anyone had ever seen.

The other thing my dad taught me was how to carry yourself inside a deal. Be respectful. Don't lie, don't cheat, don't steal. Then you can always stand behind what you did.

I'M SPECULATING. BUT I THINK THAT'S THE PART THAT SAVED MY ASS.

NO INTERNET

A HANDSHAKE

JUMP MOTHERFUCKER JUMP

We planned and promoted around the clock. Logistics, promotion, entertainment, day-of operations, every detail we could think of and several we invented to worry about.

The question running on a loop in my head was: *what did I miss?*

I'll tell you what I missed.

THE TAXI DRIVERS.

The building sat less than a mile from the spot where people walk across the border and pick up a cab. So we rented six buses and ran our own shuttle from the main pickup center — where the taxis picked people up — straight to the building.

Here is the thing I had not considered: the Tijuana taxi drivers were going to take that personally.

They did not own the pickup location. This mattered to no one. Several of our staff — men whose entire assignment that night was pointing at a bus — came extremely close to being stabbed by highly motivated cab drivers.

These TJ cabbies were furious about the amount of business they were losing. Three thousand five hundred people went to this event.

Obvious in hindsight. Every item on this list is obvious in hindsight.

It took a while for word to come down from the General, and they nearly choked off our entire flow of people before it did.

(The General is a whole other part of this story, coming up.)

SIX BUSES

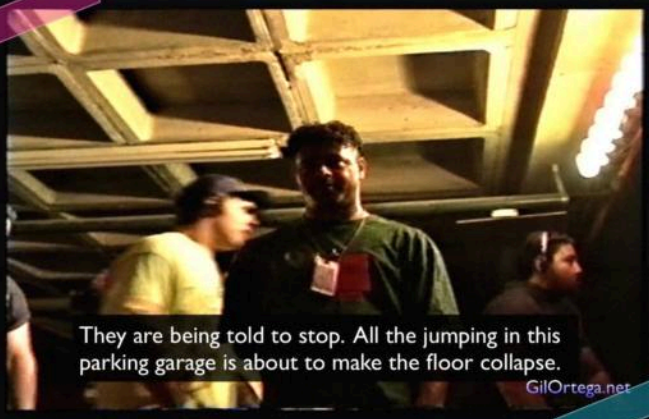
SECOND LEVEL

AND THAT WAS THE SMALL ONE.

The thing that almost put us on the news happened on the second level of the parking structure.

And I mean world news. CNN main-story kind of thing. It came that close.

The Movement were playing. Their single was called "Jump Motherfucker Jump." It is not a subtle record. It makes one request, repeatedly, and about a thousand people standing on a concrete deck elected to honor it. All at the same time.



STILL FROM THE COLOSSUS VIDEO
SECURITY STOPPING THE BAND MID-SONG

THE FLOOR STARTED MOVING.

Not vibrating. Moving. Rolling like a wave, with a thousand people jumping on top of it and more people on the level below.

WATCH THE VIDEO

APPARENTLY, A THOUSAND PEOPLE JUMPING IN UNISON ON FRESHLY POURED CONCRETE IS INADVISABLE.

Nobody got hurt. Nobody went through anything. The party kept going, which felt like a result at the time and in hindsight feels like a coin landing on its edge.

The concrete did not come down.

THAT ISN'T THE PART THAT NEARLY KILLED ME.

THE POP UP FLYER

1992

The lineup kept growing, which is the thing nobody warns you about when you get a building with ten floors. You have to fill all of them.

DJs, bands, an ambient room, live techno, a smart bar. Dig. Sprung Monkey. House of Suffering. Flatten Manhattan. Fishwife. Jose Amezcua in the ambient room. Dimension 23 coming down from LA. And Above the Law.

We hired him to bring his crowd south.

Which left the actual problem.

AND FOR THE TOP OF THE BILL, WE GOT GARY RICHARDS. DESTRUCTO.

Gary was a badass, and he was one of the rare ones — a promoter who could actually DJ and a DJ who could actually promote. In 1992 that was like finding a guy who could cook *and* do your taxes. He had a real following in LA, and we'd helped push some of his events, so we knew exactly what he'd do for us.

HOW DO YOU REACH LOS ANGELES FROM SAN DIEGO IN 1992?

You can't email anybody. There's no event page. There's no feed, no algorithm quietly deciding to show your party to twenty-four-year-olds in Silver Lake. You flyer the shit out of the places your audience goes.

SO THE FLYER HAD TO BE A WEAPON OF MASS PERSUASION.



THE COLOSSUS POP-UP, OPENED
DESIGNED BY MEL MARCELO

ENTER THE COLOSSUS POP-UP.

First pop-up party flyer in Southern California. You opened the fold-out and a helmeted figure stood straight up off the page at you.

Mel Marcelo designed it. I'm putting his name in here because people have been borrowing that thing for thirty years and most of them have no idea who to credit.

Now here's the part where I need you to picture the economics.

A pop-up is not a thing a printer does. There was no machine for it. There was no vendor you called. There was a die-cut piece, there was a fold-out flyer, and the only way to join those two objects together in 1992 was for a human being to apply glue and press down.

So we hired a team.

A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE WITH GLUE GUNS.

Every single flyer. By hand. One at a time. For weeks.

If you have never spent a day in a room where a dozen people are hot-gluing underground party flyers, I can report that it smells like a craft store on fire and by hour six nobody's thumbs work correctly.

And the flyer itself was shameless, which I say with enormous affection.

PRINTED ON THE FOLD-OUT

SOUND BY 140DB PLUS · LOOPS BY DR. OPTICS
SMART BAR BY BLU BETTY · X-PLORE MIND MACHINES
LOCATED IN THE CAZZAR TOWER · FIVE DIFFERENT LEVELS
200% BUST FREE

Two hundred percent. Not a hundred. We had somehow doubled the available supply of bust-free.

It also announced a special level celebrating Chili Productions' sixth anniversary, which sounds corporate right up until you remember that six years earlier I was sixteen, throwing a Halloween party inside somebody's mom's house.

And along the bottom: Ticketmaster. Music Plus. May Company. Tower Records. Four area codes.

AN UNDERGROUND PARTY IN TIJUANA. ON TICKETMASTER. I WANTED PEOPLE TO SEE THAT AND THINK BIG.

ON APRIL 29TH WE LOADED THE CAR WITH BAGS OF POP-UP FLYERS AND DROVE TO LA.

PAPERBOY

ALMOST NOBODY HAD HEARD OF HIM YET

David Ferguson was one of the partners in Jamaica House. He'd started a record label, and the label had an artist.

In June 1992 that artist was a rapper named **Paperboy**, and almost nobody had heard of him yet. So we helped David out and added Paperboy to the Colossus lineup.



ONSTAGE AT COLOSSUS, SIX MONTHS BEFORE THE HOT 100 — AND WEARING A CHILI PRODUCTIONS T-SHIRT WHILE HE DOES IT

Then David asked whether I could get Paperboy played at **Z90**, the local hip hop station.

I said sure. I knew the music director there well.

The management and the owners did not know me well, but they'd formed an opinion anyway. *We'll get to why later.*

THE ASK

I brought the single over. *"Ditty."* I brought the Colossus flyers with me and told him Paperboy was on the bill. I asked him to spin it.

He wanted to. Then he did the math out loud. If he started playing this record and the kid turned up onstage at my event two weeks later, management was going to have exactly one question, and **it wasn't going to be about the record.**

So he couldn't play it.

I'll be fair to the guy — he wasn't wrong about his bosses. He just worked somewhere that had decided a song was a referendum on me.

WEEK	ARTIST	TITLE	BROUGHT IN BY	ADD
JUN 1992	PAPERBOY	*"Ditty"*	CHILI PRODUCTIONS — DECLINED	NO
NOT LONG AFTER	PAPERBOY	*"Ditty"*	THE REST OF THE COUNTRY — NO CHOICE	YES
PEAKED — NO. 10, BILLBOARD HOT 100			GRAMMY NOMINATION, 1994 — BEST RAP SOLO PERFORMANCE	

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RECORD

"Ditty" went to **No. 10 on the Billboard Hot 100.** In 1994 it was nominated for a Grammy. Best Rap Solo Performance. Paperboy lost to Dr. Dre. Amazing to be on the same nominated list.

When the single started to blow up everywhere else, **Z90 had to start playing it too.**

WHAT I TOOK OUT OF IT

Seeing that single blow up was one of many confirmations that I was on the right track.

It was also clear to my friend the music director that I'd walked in and handed him a winner. He told me so. The owners didn't enjoy hearing it.

I enjoyed it enough for both of us.

And somewhere in there I started dreaming about producing a record that won a Grammy. I could see it happening in my mind.

AND THAT'S THE FIRST PLACE IT NEEDS TO HAPPEN, IF IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.

CHAOS BEFORE COLOSSUS

APRIL 29, 1992

Flick and I had enough pop-ups finished to make a real run at LA, so we loaded the car and started dropping them at every location that mattered.

First stop was Gary Richards's place, with bags of them.

Gary had the news on.

THE VERDICT IN THE RODNEY KING TRIAL HAD JUST COME DOWN.

We stood there a few minutes watching it with him, saying what everybody in the country was saying — that this was messed up — and then we got back in the car and drove downtown to drop flyers with one of our sponsors, Eric SjoBeck of SjoBeck Clothing.

We had no idea what we were driving into. Nobody did yet.

We spent about forty-five minutes at Eric's office, tenth floor of an old building downtown.

Then we got in the elevator to leave.

A GUY GOT IN WITH US CARRYING A SHOTGUN.

He was lit up. Hyped. *Shit is going down.*

Flick and I did exactly what two men holding a bag of party flyers do in an elevator with a man holding a shotgun.

WE SAID NOTHING AND WATCHED THE NUMBERS.

We came out into the parking lot and the city had changed while we were upstairs.

People running with armloads of merchandise. Some of them so overloaded they were shedding items behind them as they went, like a cartoon.

Flick assured me we had nothing to worry about, because we weren't white.

OKAY. SURE.

THEN THERE WAS THE GUY WITH THE TELEVISION.

Half a block up, a man was crossing the street carrying a big-screen TV. And understand, in 1992 a big screen was a piece of furniture. It weighed what a refrigerator weighs.

He got about halfway across and dropped it.

Flick and I started laughing. Not politely. We pointed.

HE PULLED A GUN AND STARTED SHOOTING AT US.

The rounds hit the wall behind us.

That was the moment we understood we were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

NOBODY TELLS YOU HOW FAST YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR LEAVES YOUR BODY.

GETTING OUT WAS THE HARD PART.

This wasn't only about the verdict anymore. For plenty of people out there that night it had become a free pass — a window where you could be exactly as crazy as you had always wanted to be.

We decided to go home. Simple plan. Terrible execution.

Every street I drove up was blocked. The cops were trying to hold traffic and crowds at the same time across an entire city. The sun went down, and with it went any chance of finding a southbound on-ramp by instinct.

So we circled.

> NAVIGATION
>
> Flick navigated using my Thomas Brothers map.
>
> For anybody under forty: the Thomas Brothers was a spiral-bound book of street grids about the size of a phone book, and operating it required one person to drive while a second person held it open across his lap and read coordinates out loud like a sea captain.
>
> **THIS WAS PRE-CELL PHONE.**

We knew LA well enough. It did not help. I just did not want to stop moving, because everywhere we looked people were smashing cars.

DOWN BROADWAY.

People working on the windows of what we were fairly sure was a bank. A car burning in the middle of the street, abandoned, nobody anywhere near it.

It looked like a movie. Not a crime movie. The other kind. The one where something has ended.

We kept pushing south, hunting for an outlet. Looting and fighting on every block we passed.

At an intersection ahead of us, a car came through fast and hit a man who was trying to stop it.

He went at least twenty feet and rolled to the curb like he was dead.

He wasn't. Nobody died in front of us that night.

MORE THAN FIFTY PEOPLE DIED OVER THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED.

THE FREEWAY DIDN'T HELP.

We finally found a southbound on-ramp, and from the freeway we counted at least a dozen buildings burning.

And every time a car came up alongside us, both of us tensed, because some part of my brain had decided the people inside it might start shooting.

That is not logical. I know it isn't. It was either straight paranoia or whatever happens to your nervous system an hour after a man fires a gun at you over a dropped television.

We got home.

We still had a ton of pop-up flyers to hand out and a little over a month to do it.

WE DID IT.

PRISON

1992

Before I tell you how the money went, I have to back up a few weeks.

As we got closer to the date, people started talking.

That's what happens when you put a ten-story building in Tijuana on a flyer with four area codes on it. Everybody in two cities has an opinion, and a few of them have information.

I couldn't look anybody up. I've already explained that part.

I didn't have to. People came and told me.

Different people. Different rooms. Same message — which is how you know it isn't gossip.

THE MEN I WAS DOING BUSINESS WITH WERE VERY POWERFUL.

Not successful. Not well connected. Powerful.

Once I understood that, I made one decision that mattered more than every other decision I made that year.

I WAS NOT GOING TO TOUCH THE MONEY.

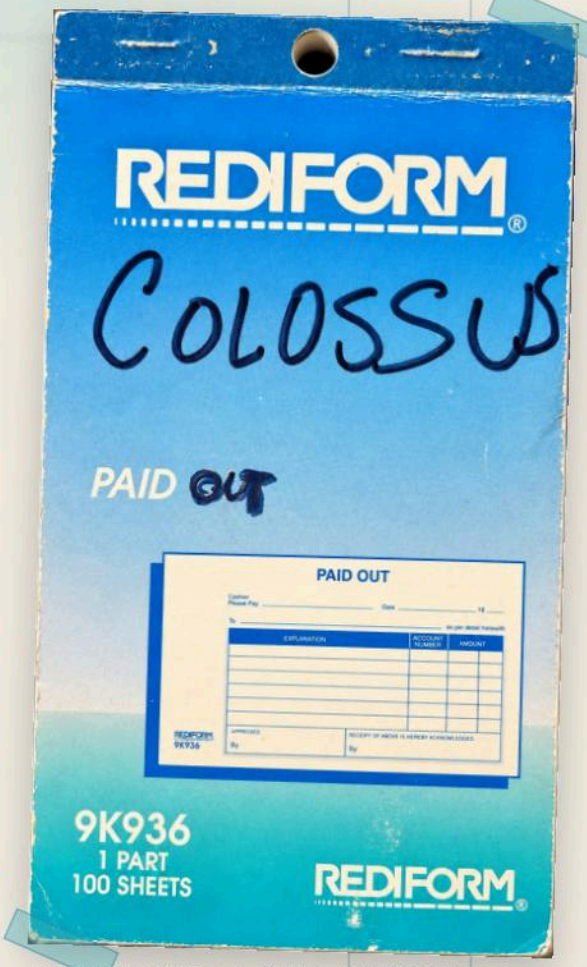
Not a dollar. Not the door, not the bar, not the payouts.

I brought in friends. People I trusted completely, people who were comfortable operating inside a sensitive situation, because that is exactly what this had become. They ran ticket sales, collection, accounting, and every cash payout to the DJs, the bands and the production crew. The partners oversaw all of it together. Nothing moved without several sets of eyes on it.

I'd like to tell you this came from wisdom.

IT CAME FROM FEAR.

IF I NEVER TOUCH IT, I CAN NEVER BE THE GUY WHO TOOK IT.



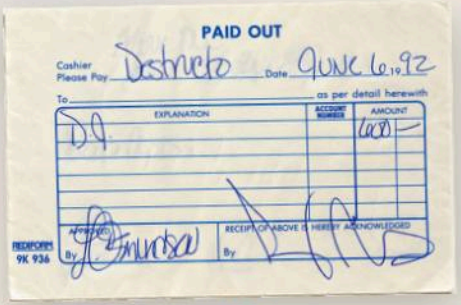
REDIFORM 9K936 · 1 PART · 100 SHEETS
LABELLED IN MARKER: COLOSSUS

And we wrote everything down.

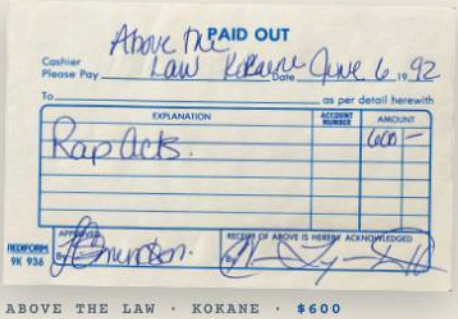
Every payout, in a receipt book, by hand, signed. In 1992 there was no other kind of record. No spreadsheet, no bank app, no screenshot of a transfer. A book, a pen, and a signature.

I STILL HAVE THAT BOOK.

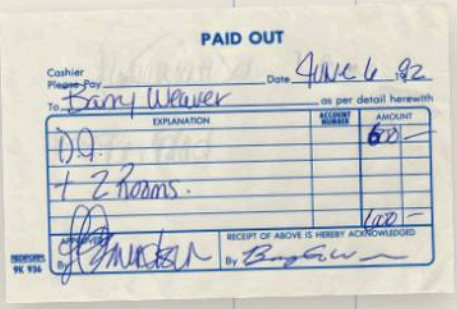
RECEIPT OF ABOVE IS HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGED BY



DESTRUCTO · D.J. · $600



ABOVE THE LAW · KOKANE · $600



BARRY WEAVER · D.J. · $600

TO — AS PER DETAIL HEREWITH

THEN WE THREW THE PARTY.

THREE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE.

The biggest underground event south of Los Angeles at the time, and every indication we had said we'd pulled it off.

The last partygoers walked out at sunup. By morning, everybody was paid. Every DJ, every band, every member of the crew. In cash. Signed for.

We left that building cheering.

One loose end. Nine thousand dollars sitting at Ticketmaster.

Only about 600 people bought a COLOSSUS ticket through Ticketmaster. Underground party people did not drive to Tower Records and stand in line at a counter to buy a ticket to a warehouse in Mexico.

We put it on Ticketmaster anyway, for exactly one reason.

NOBODY HAD EVER RUN AN UNDERGROUND PARTY THROUGH TICKETMASTER.

EXPLANATION	ACCOUNT NUMBER	AMOUNT
TICKETS SOLD THROUGH TICKETMASTER	–	600
FACE VALUE, EACH	–	$15.00
SITTING AT TICKETMASTER	–	**$9,000**

That was the whole business case. It was cool. I was twenty-two, and *nobody has ever done this* has remained one of my favorite reasons to do something ever since.

A few days later, a rumor started moving through the partners and the Manager.

FUNDS WERE MISSING.

I couldn't make sense of it. The Manager and The Boss weren't owed a dollar. Under our deal they kept the alcohol and got repaid off ticket sales, and they had been paid in full. There was nothing outstanding on their side. Nothing.

EXPLANATION

SO WHERE WAS THIS COMING FROM?

Nobody could point at a column and say *this is the hole.* There was no hole. There was only a sentence, moving.

Staying away from that money was the smartest thing I did all year.

THE TROUBLE WITH THE MONEY FOUND ME ANYWAY.

APPROVED — BY

ALMOST A MONTH LATER, THAT EXACT NUMBER — NINE THOUSAND DOLLARS — WOULD ARRIVE AS A MESSAGE.

WE'D BE SITTING IN A PRISON CELL IN TIJUANA WHEN WE GOT IT.

TNT IGUANAS

SOLD OUT · 2,000+

12,000 SQ FT · 500 YARDS
FROM THE UNITED STATES

We had the next one booked before we threw the last one.

TNT @ Iguanas. A venue you could walk to from another country.

FOURTH OF JULY WEEKEND.
FRIDAY, JULY 3, 1992.



FRONT OF THE TNT FLYER · DIE CUT · 1992

THE CREATORS OF COLOSSUS
IN CONJUNCTION WITH
CHILI & FLICK PRODUCTIONS

PERFORMING LIVE: THE MOVEMENT · "JUMP, MOTHERFUCKER!"

Iguanas. Twelve thousand square feet in the Pueblo Amigo Shopping Center, five hundred yards from the San Ysidro crossing. Five hundred yards. You could park on the American side, walk across a bridge, and be holding a drink in Mexico before the song changed. Nirvana played that room. Bad Religion, Green Day, Butthole Surfers, Sonic Youth. It was a real venue with a real stage and a real liquor license, which after a ten-story shell in a Tijuana construction zone felt like being handed a corner office.

And I had the best distribution channel in Southern California, because I had just put three thousand five hundred people inside one building for twelve hours.

So we plastered it. TNT flyers on the walls, on the stairs, at the bars, on every level of that tower. And then a flyer into every hand on the way out — sunrise, ears ringing, shirts soaked, and here's the next one. Nobody on earth is more ready to buy a ticket than a person who has just had the night of their life and hasn't gone to sleep yet.

IT WAS THE BEST PROMOTION I'D EVER DONE.

Top billing was The Movement. Their single "Jump Motherfucker Jump" was the number one record in Los Angeles at the time, and a month earlier they had very nearly brought the house down at COLOSSUS. Literally. I was standing under it when we cut the music mid-song and sent everybody off that floor.

So this time, I figured, they'd finally get to finish it.

TWO THOUSAND TICKETS.
SOLD OUT IN ADVANCE.

IT NEVER CROSSED MY MIND
THEY WOULDN'T GET TO START.

IGUANAS · BAJA CALIFORNIA'S
SHOWCASE THEATER & PATIO BAR
18 & OLDER W/ID



TNT · IGUANAS

FRI · JULY 3 · 92

My partner on TNT was Javier. Javier owned a successful record pool for DJs, was wired into the music business at a level I wasn't, and was the reason we had The Movement at all. Solid guy. The kind you'd be glad to do business with.

AND, AS IT TURNED OUT, BE IMPRISONED WITH.

I still had my weekly club running Wednesday nights, so between flyers, phones and the regular grind, I was also on a series of calls with my COLOSSUS partners and the Manager. Looking back at those calls now, they were strange. Not hostile. Strange.

Nobody would point at anybody. Everyone talked around the missing money the way you talk around a bad diagnosis. The Ticketmaster account got settled. Every question I asked got an answer, and none of the answers connected to each other.

The calls thinned out, which was normal — we didn't have an event in production together anymore — but the Manager had gone somewhere in his voice. Polite. Distant. The last time I'd seen him in person was COLOSSUS. As far as I knew, The Boss hadn't even come to his own building that night.

So: everything settled, everybody friendly, nothing outstanding.



EVERY QUESTION GOT AN ANSWER.
NONE OF THEM CONNECTED.

VIBES WERE NOT TENSE.

PARTY FAVORS

One Wednesday, after my club emptied out, a girl started flirting with me.

That wasn't unusual. That was a perk of the job. What was unusual was *this* girl, because we had been orbiting each other at events for a while with exactly zero happening in either direction — a comfortable, settled, mutual nothing. And now, suddenly, she was on.

Then she introduced me to her girlfriend. Who I had never seen before. Anywhere. And her girlfriend was on too.

THEY WANTED TO PARTY.

I knew what that meant. Everybody in that building knew what that meant. And something about it was off in a way I couldn't name yet — like a song you know is playing in the wrong key before you can tell anyone which note.

She asked if I had specific party favors.

I didn't. And I told her I didn't know where to get them, which was true and which is apparently the least believable sentence a club promoter can say out loud.

At that point in my life I didn't touch drugs. I barely drank, and almost never at my own club — I wanted a clear head, because the clear head was the business. I'd experimented a little in high school, back when X was still legal, which is a sentence that makes young people's eyes go wide and makes everybody my age nod and say *oh yeah, that's right.*

By 1992 the last thing on earth I wanted was a drug charge. I was in the one industry where drugs were in every room, every night, without fail, and my entire survival strategy was to treat every stranger who talked to me like they were from *21 Jump Street.*

For the young folks reading: that was a cop show where undercover officers posed as high school students. Johnny Depp was one of them. Yes, that Johnny Depp.

So when a girl who had never looked twice at me suddenly looked four times, with a friend I'd never met, asking about product —

Alarm bells. Not sirens. Bells. The kind you hear and then decide you probably imagined.

I SHOULD HAVE LEFT.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT · WEEKLY CLUB
THREE WEEKS BEFORE TNT

THE NIGHT THAT ALMOST WENT WRONG

I started doing the thing you do when you're trying to exit politely. Vague. Unhelpful. Looking at the door.

Which is exactly when both of them decided we should all go back to her apartment.

She told me to get in her car. Half a mile away, she said. I said I'd follow in mine, because I am not a complete idiot, just a partial one with excellent survival instincts and terrible interest in hot chicks.

I pulled up alongside her car and she was on her cell phone.

STOP THERE A SECOND. IN 1992 A CELL PHONE WAS A BRICK WITH AN ANTENNA THAT COST MORE THAN MY CAR AND RAN ABOUT A DOLLAR A MINUTE. **THE PEOPLE WHO HAD ONE:**

01	02	03	04
DOCTORS	EXECUTIVES	DRUG DEALERS	COPS

That was the entire list. A girl from the Wednesday night crowd was not on that list.

I DID NOT THINK ABOUT THAT UNTIL MUCH LATER.

She hung up and said her contact for the party favors was meeting her down the street at the 7-Eleven. Follow her there, then we'd go to the apartment.

We parked at the 7-Eleven and they asked me to wait in the front seat of her car with the two of them. So I did. It was cozy.

A few minutes later a guy knocked on the window. She told him to get in the back.

He was Mexican and barely spoke English. I don't speak Spanish. Neither did either of the girls. So the four of us sat in a car in a convenience store parking lot at one in the morning, and nobody in the car could fully talk to anybody else in the car, and I remember thinking this was an unusual way to buy drugs.

7-ELEVEN · LOT · APPROX. 1:00 AM

HER	HER FRIEND	ME
DRIVER	NEVER MET HER	NOT DRIVING
—	THE GUY KNOCKED ON THE WINDOW	—

SPANISH SPOKEN IN THIS CAR: **NONE**

ENGLISH SPOKEN IN THE BACK: **BARELY**

IT WAS COZY.

FOUR PEOPLE. THREE LANGUAGES' WORTH OF TROUBLE AND NONE OF THEM SHARED.

THREE ACROSS THE FRONT BENCH. **AN UNUSUAL WAY TO BUY DRUGS.**

In broken English he told her to meet him at his car. They both got out. They were gone a few minutes. They came back.

She said he was going to party with us.

Now, I want to be fair to myself here. I did react. I got out of the car. I was out. I was standing in a parking lot, free, next to my own vehicle, with my own keys in my own hand.

And the other girl came around and made it very clear I should come. We'd have a fun time.

I SAID OKAY.

I followed them to the apartment. I walked up to the door.

And she had the screen off the window and was climbing through it.

She'd lost her house keys, she said.

SHE CAME AROUND AND OPENED THE FRONT DOOR FROM THE INSIDE, HAVING JUST BROKEN INTO HER OWN APARTMENT.

BREAKING & ENTERING

SIX PEOPLE IN THE ROOM
ABOUT FOUR PEOPLE'S WORTH OF FLOOR

Inside, we all sat down on two couches like, *okay, we're here, now what.*

I asked the guy from the 7-Eleven where he was from.

He said Mexico.

OKAY. GREAT. THANKS. REALLY OPENED THINGS UP.

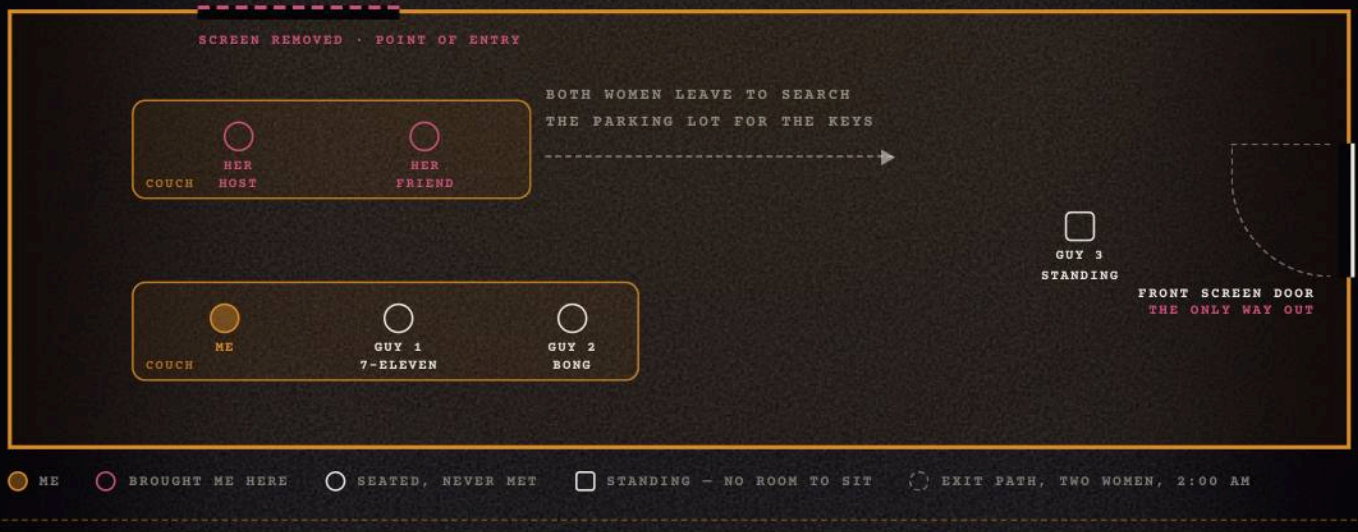
Then he got a call and said his friends were bringing beers and weed. He was still finishing that sentence when two more guys came through the screen door — no knock, no pause, no beers.

THEY BROUGHT A BONG.

No English between them. They greeted us in whatever they had and talked to their friend in Spanish. One sat down. The other stayed standing, because there wasn't room for him to do anything else.

And the girl, our host, the one whose apartment it was, the one who had entered through a window — was still looking for her house keys.

THE APARTMENT · RECONSTRUCTED FROM MEMORY · NOT TO SCALE



TWO COUCHES

SIX PEOPLE

The first guy looked at me and said, "Smoke some weed."

What I said was nothing.

What I thought was: *What the fuck is going on here. I need to leave. Right now.*

He hit the bong and passed it to the second guy.

And then the girl announced that she was going to go check the parking lots to see if she'd dropped her keys out there.

Her friend said she'd help look.

AND THE TWO OF THEM WALKED OUT.

So now I'm sitting in an apartment that was broken into five minutes ago, with three men I have never seen before, none of whom I can speak to, while the two women who brought me here are outside conducting a key search in a dark parking lot at two in the morning.

I almost said I'd come help look. I didn't. Something told me that standing up and walking toward the door right behind them wasn't going to go the way I wanted it to go.

SO I PLAYED ALONG.

THREE MEN · ONE DOOR
THE DOOR WAS COVERED

AND I SAW IT. THE WHOLE THING. FULLY FORMED.

Now, I don't smoke. I want that understood. I had no skill, no tolerance, and no plan beyond the next nine seconds. I took the biggest hit of my life and I came apart. Hacking, eyes streaming, bent in half, and the whole time trying to laugh and smile and wave like, *haha, wow, strong stuff, fellas* — and standing up. That was the important part. I was coughing my way into a standing position.

And then the guy on my left took an enormous hit, lost his entire chest, and went outside to cough in the open air.

I GRABBED THE BONG.

The third guy hit it and started coughing too. Beautiful. Contagious. The room was becoming a tuberculosis ward. They were both on the couch. I was on my feet.

01	02	03	04	05
TAKE THE BIGGEST HIT OF MY LIFE	COME APART COUGHING	COUGH MY WAY INTO STANDING UP	GRAB IT AND HIT IT AGAIN	POINT AT MY THROAT. WALK OUT.

NO SKILL. NO TOLERANCE. NO PLAN BEYOND THE NEXT NINE SECONDS.

And now I'm genuinely dying. This is no longer a performance. I am a twenty-two-year-old non-smoker who has just taken two consecutive bong rips as a tactical maneuver, and I am going to need air whether I'm escaping or not.

I pointed at my throat and headed for the screen door, waving like a man who needs oxygen, because I was.

The guy who'd gone outside was coming back in as I was going out. We met in the doorway. I gestured. He turned sideways to let me through.

And as the screen door swung shut behind me, I looked back to see if the other two were getting up.

AND THAT'S WHEN I SAW IT

THE GUN IN THE WAISTBAND OF THE MAN I HAD JUST SQUEEZED PAST.

I waited for him to fully go inside, then I ran.

I have never run like that before or since. Straight to my car, in, gone, not a glance in the mirror until I was blocks away.

DID I OVERREACT?

I drove to Flick's house. Flick lived nearby and Flick was the person you went to. I came through his door coughing, red-eyed, talking fast about guns and keys and 7-Elevens, and Flick could not tell whether any of this was real, because Flick had never once in his life seen me high, and here I was at 2 a.m. absolutely baked out of my mind and describing a conspiracy.

What I knew was that nothing else was going to happen to me that night with Flick in the room.

For days afterward it didn't feel like a memory. It felt like something I'd watched. Did I just get out of something, or did I run out of a stranger's living room because I'd smoked too much weed and panicked?

Why did that man have a gun?

And if they had wanted to hurt me — three of them, in a closed room, with the door covered — they could have. Easily. At any point. I handed them the opportunity and then took it back by inhaling.

THE MANAGER WASN'T RETURNING MY CALLS. I HAD NO WAY TO REACH THE BOSS AT ALL.

A HEAD FULL OF QUESTIONS AND NOTHING RESEMBLING AN ANSWER.

THE MOVEMENT

WORK PERMITS OBTAINED

FOR THE GROUP AND THE DJS PROPERLY · IN ADVANCE

I had an event in a few days and it wasn't going to promote itself.

So I did what I always did, which is the only trick I've ever really had: I went back to work and let the questions wait in line.

TNT sold out. Over two thousand tickets.

The morning of, we ran a caravan — three vans to collect The Movement in San Diego and bring them down to Iguanas. It wasn't just the group. They brought girlfriends and wives. With Javier, me and the drivers, we were seventeen people.

Javier was completely unbothered. He'd produced concerts all over Mexico, he was fluent in Spanish, and to him this was a Friday.

I want to be clear about this part, because it matters later:

This was not COLOSSUS. This was not an underground party in a half-built tower reached by word of mouth and four phone lines. This was a licensed venue, a sold-out ticketed concert, an established promoter, and a folder full of correct paperwork.

WE DID EVERYTHING RIGHT.



BACK OF THE TNT FLYER
THE LINEUP THAT NEVER PLAYED

+0:00 **THE CARAVAN PULLS UP TO IGUANAS**
SOLD OUT. THE PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T GET TICKETS ARE MILLING AROUND OUTSIDE.

+0:01 **OFFICIALS APPROACH THE VANS AND ASK FOR THE WORK PERMITS**
JAVIER HANDS THEM OVER. EVERYBODY STAYS SEATED. MORE OFFICIALS ARRIVE. PHONE CALLS FROM THEIR CARS, VERIFYING THE DOCUMENTS.

+0:15 **A DIFFERENT GROUP OF OFFICIALS ASKS FOR THE WORK PERMITS**
WE LOOK AROUND FOR THE FIRST OFFICIALS. THEY ARE GONE. SO ARE THE PERMITS.

+0:30 **ESCORTED TO THE GOVERNMENT OFFICES ON THE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE**
TEN, FIFTEEN MORE MINUTES OF SITTING IN A VAN OUTSIDE A SOLD-OUT SHOW WE COULD HEAR THROUGH THE WALLS.

+2:30 **ESCORTED TO PRISON**
SOMEWHERE IN THOSE OFFICES, EVERYONE STOPPED PRETENDING THE CONCERT WAS HAPPENING.

Here's what I knew about incarceration in Mexico up to that moment: I had been to the Tijuana jail a few times to bail out friends who had done something stupid at a bar. That's a holding tank. It's loud, it's temporary, it smells like a decision you regret, and you go home.

THIS WAS NOT THAT.

This was a prison. All seventeen of us, men and women, were in the same facility and the same cells. We were told it was for political prisoners.

And as they walked us in, we passed cells that looked like studio apartments. Furniture. Personal things.

Guys watching television inside their jail cells.

THOSE MEN LIVED THERE.

WELCOME TO PRISON IN MEXICO.

SEVENTEEN PEOPLE · NO PHONE CALL
NOBODY KNEW WHERE WE WERE

IN PRISON

SEVENTEEN OF US · MEN AND WOMEN
SAME FACILITY · SAME CELLS

Picture walking into a prison with a hit record's worth of people. The band, their girlfriends, their wives. Seventeen of us.

You may not remember The Movement — one-hit wonder, and the hit was called "Jump Motherfucker Jump," which is not a song that gets you into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. But the people in that group were serious talents.

They put us in two cells next to each other. We stayed there through the night and watched the light change.

Nobody panicked. That's the part I still think about. Seventeen people, no explanation, no phone call, and everyone stayed composed — the band most of all, and they had done absolutely nothing except get in a van to go play a show.

THE MOVEMENT

RICHARD "HUMPTY" VISSION
AJ MORA
WITH RAPPER DJ HAZZE

MORA & VISSION CO-CREATED AND HOSTED POWER TOOLS — THE LONGEST-RUNNING WEEKLY RADIO EDM MIX SHOW IN THE UNITED STATES. VISSION WENT ON TO A STACK OF #1 BILLBOARD DANCE REMIXES, WORKING WITH

MADONNA · LADY GAGA
BLACK EYED PEAS
STEVE AOKI · MAJOR LAZER

AND IN JULY OF 1992 WE WERE ALL SLEEPING ON A CONCRETE FLOOR IN TIJUANA FOR REASONS NOBODY WOULD TELL US.

I told Javier what I was thinking, which was that this had something to do with COLOSSUS.

Then I told him about the apartment. I hadn't told anybody. I was still turning it over, trying to decide if it had actually happened.

Javier didn't buy the connection for a second. He said the same thing more than once that night:

"If those guys wanted to hurt you, it would have happened. You wouldn't know what hit you."

And he was right. That's exactly why none of it made sense.

Morning turned into lunchtime and we started smelling food, because the guards were feeding the other prisoners.

That's when we learned how it works. You can get food. You just have to pay for it. Those of us with cash started ordering for everybody who hadn't eaten, and an official would walk out to a taco shop nearby and bring it back.

HOW THE PRISON RUNS
YOUR FAMILY KNOWS WHERE YOU ARE AND SENDS MONEY

WHO PAID FOR LUNCH
WHOEVER STILL HAD CASH IN HIS POCKET

PHONE CALLS PERMITTED
NONE

IT'S FUNNY RIGHT UP UNTIL IT ISN'T. NOBODY KNEW WHERE WE WERE.

We weren't in the jail. We were in a facility most Americans don't know exists, and people were out there looking for us in all the wrong buildings. And we hadn't been allowed to make a single phone call.

Still nothing made sense.

Day turned back into night, and the concrete floor stopped being an inconvenience and became the main event. You cannot get comfortable. There is no position. You just rotate.

And then, finally, they came for us.

Javier and me. Out of the cell, down a hallway, into a small office. Guards standing around the walls.

Everything was in Spanish. I understood none of it. Javier translated.

AND THE WARDEN SITTING ACROSS THE DESK.

ONE SMALL OFFICE · GUARDS ON THE WALLS
EVERYTHING IN A LANGUAGE I DIDN'T HAVE

CONCRETE FLOOR

TWO CELLS

WHY $9,000?

NOT ONE WORD ABOUT COLOSSUS

NOT ONE

Javier explained that he'd obtained every required work permit for the concert. That government officials had taken them at the venue. That he had duplicate documentation at his San Diego office and could have someone bring it down tonight to prove it.

REASONABLE.
VERIFIABLE.
SOLVABLE.

About five minutes in, the warden reached down and threw a bag of white powder on the desk.

AND THE WHOLE ROOM CHANGED TEMPERATURE.

JAVIER · TO ME — *"The warden is saying this is ours."*

ME · STUNNED — *"What? That's not mine."*

THE WARDEN · IN ENGLISH · LOOKING STRAIGHT AT ME — **"YES. THIS IS YOURS."**

JAVIER · AFTER MORE SPANISH — **"THE WARDEN WANTS US TO PAY HIM NINE THOUSAND DOLLARS RIGHT NOW, OR HE'S GOING TO SAY THAT BAG IS OURS."**

Javier was allowed to make a phone call.

Note what the phone call was *not* for. Nobody wanted the documentation anymore. Nobody was going to look at a permit. The paperwork had stopped being the subject some time ago and I'd been slow to notice.

We needed nine thousand dollars delivered to a prison in Tijuana, immediately, or this was going to become something none of us would get out from under.

Around the same time Javier got his call, our families found us. Friends, relatives, and my dad — outside the gates, negotiating for our release, having finally located the right building.

They had no idea about the warden. No idea about the bag. No idea there was a number.

And when Javier and I went back into the cell with the other fifteen, we didn't tell them either. We told them we'd be out soon.

THE MONEY WAS DELIVERED.

It was night when they finally let us all go. On the way out, Javier was taken aside and informed that we were never permitted to do business in Mexico again.

Everybody got home. Nobody was hurt. We walked out with our freedom, a group chat's worth of trauma, and a show that never happened.

In the days and weeks that followed, the stories started coming back to me, and the dots started lining up — because even standing on American asphalt, free, I still had no idea what had actually happened or why.

I never spoke to the Manager again. I never spoke to The Boss again.

And Javier was right about one thing, which I've never been able to shake. If The Boss had wanted me handled a different way, it would have been handled. I could have been gone in a snap, and the last thing I'd have heard would have been nothing.

HE HAD SEVENTEEN AMERICANS IN A BUILDING NOBODY COULD FIND.

HE COULD HAVE NAMED ANY NUMBER ON EARTH.

FIFTY THOUSAND
A HUNDRED THOUSAND

HE SAID

$9,000

WHY NINE THOUSAND DOLLARS?

HE HAD US COMPLETELY

AND THAT IS THE NUMBER HE CHOSE

CONNECTING THE DOTS

THREE EXPLANATIONS · NO CONFIRMATION
I NEVER HEARD FROM EITHER OF THEM AGAIN

A seed of doubt got planted the moment the words *missing money* started moving. Whether anything was actually missing or not stopped mattering very early. Once that sentence is in the air, somebody is going to be held accountable, and accuracy is not part of the selection process.

And Javier was right about one thing, which I've never been able to shake. If The Boss had wanted me handled a different way, it would have been handled.

01

SOURCE: FRIENDS WITH PEOPLE INSIDE THOSE CIRCLES

THE PRISON WAS A FRIENDLY MESSAGE FROM THE BOSS

Friendly. And the reason it wasn't worse, they said, was that The Boss liked me enough to have it go down the way it went down.

OKAY.

PLAUSIBLE

02

SOURCE: SEVERAL PEOPLE IN A POSITION TO KNOW

THERE WAS A CONTRACT ON MY LIFE

Not for anything I did. Money was missing, or money was said to be missing, nobody knew whose hand or how much, and in that situation an example gets made so the other partners understand the shape of the arrangement.

I was available to be the example.

PLAUSIBLE

03

SOURCE: OTHERS — IT WAS NEVER THE BOSS AT ALL

IT CAME FROM THE MANAGER'S SIDE. THEY FELT SLIGHTED.

I stood in their building, at COLOSSUS, on their night, and covered it wall to wall with my own event flyers — a concert a month later, in a venue they didn't own, with their name nowhere on it. Every person who walked out of there went home holding my next party in their hand.

At the time I thought that was good promotion and fair game.

PLAUSIBLE

SO WHAT ABOUT THE APARTMENT? WHAT ABOUT THREE MEN, ONE GUN, TWO WOMEN, AND A DOOR I HAPPENED TO COUGH MY WAY THROUGH?

I'm told there's no way that was The Boss, because I'm still here. And I believe that. If that had been The Boss, it would have been finished, and it wouldn't have hinged on whether I felt like getting some fresh air.

I don't know. I never heard from him again.

What I knew for certain, standing in San Diego with my freedom and a permanent ban on doing business in Mexico, was this:

ALL OF IT IS PLAUSIBLE. THAT'S THE HONEST ANSWER, AND I'VE HAD THIRTY YEARS TO COME UP WITH A BETTER ONE.

I WAS NEVER CROSSING THAT BORDER AGAIN.

AT LEAST, THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.

END OF THE TNT CHAPTER
CHILI & FLICK PRODUCTIONS

BACK IN SAN DIEGO

THERE'S NO DECOMPRESSION CHAMBER IN THIS BUSINESS.

You get home from a Mexican prison, you sleep, and then you get up and go hand out flyers at the mall, because there's a club on Wednesday and it is not going to fill itself.

So that's what I did.

My job — and I want to be clear about how glamorous this was — my job was walking into retail stores in the middle of the afternoon and convincing a nineteen-year-old behind a register to care about my party.

THE STREET TEAM

In a normal week I had a handful of people out there with me. For a big event I had over a hundred people on the street.

A hundred people working for me across San Diego, which sounds like a company, except for one detail.

I almost never paid cash. I paid in access. VIP list. A drink tab at the club. Your name at the door and a nod from the guy holding the clipboard, in front of whoever you brought.

If you've never been twenty something in a city that has a velvet rope in it, let me explain the exchange rate: that is worth considerably more than money. Money runs out at the bar. Getting walked past a line does not.

Now. If you hand a hundred teenagers a stack of flyers and a reason to tell you what you want to hear, some of them are going to tell you what you want to hear.

So I checked.

Flyers on the counter. A stack dropped in the break room. And then the real prize, which was the wall.

The wall was the whole game. A stack on the counter gets tossed the second a manager walks by. But a flyer pinned up in a break room gets looked at by every employee in that store, twice a day, on their break, with nothing else in the room to read. That flyer works for two weeks for free.

I had a network. Nothing dramatic — just people, everywhere, who owed me nothing and liked me fine and would pick up the phone. Scattered across every neighborhood that mattered.

Which meant that when somebody told me he'd covered Pacific Beach on Thursday night, I could make two calls and find out whether Pacific Beach had ever laid eyes on him or my flyers.

I never confronted anybody. I never made a speech about it.

I JUST STOPPED GIVING THEM FLYERS.

So I asked. Every time. Politely, like a man applying for a job.

Then the campuses, all the colleges, including the junior colleges. Then the next mall.

THAT WAS THE DAY.

STREET TEAM STATEMENT OF EARNINGS

CHILI & FLICK PRODUCTIONS
HEADCOUNT: 100+ · BIG EVENT WEEK

VIP LIST	∞
DRINK TAB	∞
NAME AT THE DOOR	∞
THE NOD FROM THE CLIPBOARD	∞
WALKED PAST THE LINE	∞
NET PAY	$0.00

IT WAS WORK

And then at night I went out. Every night. Seven nights a week. Every club worth standing in, every event worth being seen at, from the time the doors opened until they stopped letting people in. I was making rounds.

I called it doing the politician.

Because that's exactly what it is. You work the room. You shake a lot of hands. You know the name of the guy on the door and the name of his girlfriend. You meet, you greet, you ask about the thing they told you about last week — and somewhere in there a flyer ends up in their hand without the night ever stopping.

That was the gig. People hear that and they picture a party.

IT WAS WORK.

Nobody has ever believed me about this, including people who were standing right next to me. *You were twenty-two and you went to nightclubs every single night as a career. That was your job. Sure, Gil.*

Yes. And while I was there I was counting the room, clocking which night was pulling and which night was dying, finding out which DJ just got booked where and by whom, figuring out who was about to lose their lease, and handing the owner a flyer before I left.

DOING THE POLITICIAN
SEVEN NIGHTS A WEEK

You can do all of that with a drink in your hand. That's the trick of it. Everybody assumed I was out.

I WAS AT WORK.

And people wonder why I'm such a homebody now.

I like going out. I still do. But there were years — a lot of years — where walking into a nightclub was walking into the office. The music comes up and some part of my brain starts counting heads.

YOU DON'T WANT TO GO TO WORK WHEN YOU'RE TRYING TO RELAX.

MALLS · CAMPUSES · BREAK ROOMS
THEN EVERY CLUB IN THE CITY

FRIDAY · AUGUST 21 · 1992

GET INVOLVED · GET EVOLVED

1,500+ ATTENDED

THE SEED

One month after the Mexican government put me and sixteen other Americans on a concrete floor of a prison, we threw a rave at a roller rink.

Chula Vista. The venue was a building attached to a roller rink, and we took the whole thing — the building and the rink.

To this day I cannot tell you whether that was the room we wanted or the room we ended up with.

In fairness, in this business those are frequently the same room. Venues fell through constantly. You'd have a deal on Tuesday and a locked door on Friday, and the party was still happening Saturday, so you found a new building with forty-eight hours of lead time and you did not mention it to anybody.

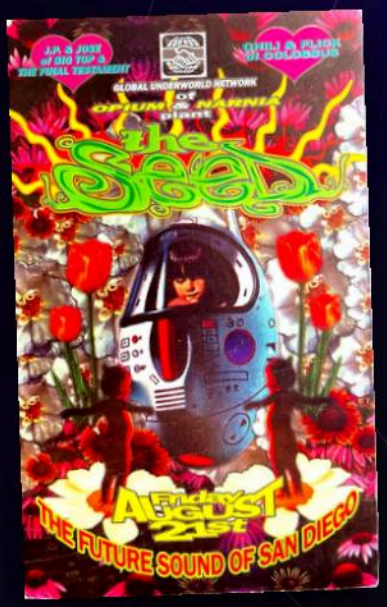
But here's the part of the flyer I'm still proud of. Printed right on it, where nobody could miss it:

FULLY PERMITED LOCATION.

Four weeks earlier I had been sitting in a van outside a sold-out show in Tijuana, watching my work permits walk away in somebody else's hand.

So on the next one, I wanted that word on the flyer. Big. Up front.

SPELLED HOWEVER IT CAME OUT OF THE PRINTER.



FRONT · THE FUTURE SOUND OF SAN DIEGO



BACK · BLOOMING BEATS PRESALE AT THE RECORD STORES

ONE T.



DETAIL, BACK OF THE FLYER

EXACTLY AS IT CAME OFF THE PRESS

THE SEED was the second party I did with Branden and Nick from Global Underworld — the Baby X guys — and the first time I worked with JP and Jose.

Jose owned AC&S, the record store, and produced underground events on the side. His partner JP ran a long-running weekly called Geraldines at the Kansas City Steak House on 5th Avenue in the Gaslamp, which tells you everything you need to know about that era: on any given night, the best room downtown was frequently a restaurant that had stopped serving dinner.

JP is Linda Perry's brother. Four Non Blondes fame. Producer extraordinaire.

I met her about a year later, at an event JP produced for the Action Sports Retailer show.

In this business you connect with music people constantly. Which is great, when you're really into the music.

AND THE SEED WAS ABOUT THE MUSIC.

That's the honest reason we did it. We were showcasing a new sound that we were convinced was about to become the next direction for raves in San Diego.

At least, that was our thinking.

Here's the thing people get wrong about CHILI & FLICK. Everybody in San Diego knew us for hip hop. That was the brand. And we threw a rave anyway, because there was no rule that said we couldn't and because almost nobody else was crossing over.

That was the actual edge. Not the hip hop. Not the raves. The fact that we did both, on purpose, in the same month.

Meanwhile Flick was the lead singer of a hardcore band called House of Suffering.

So in a given week we might produce a punk show, a hip hop club, and a rave — three crowds who would not have agreed on one single record between them, in three different rooms, with the same phone number at the bottom of the flyer.

None of that music was on the radio. That was the entire point. The radio had a list, the list was short, and everything that wasn't on it had to find a room somewhere.

WE BUILT THOSE ROOMS.

FIFTEEN HUNDRED PEOPLE CAME OUT TO A ROLLER RINK IN CHULA VISTA TO HEAR A SOUND THAT DIDN'T HAVE A NAME YET.

AND I STILL HAD A CLUB ON WEDNESDAY.

WILD KINGDOM

SATURDAY · SEPTEMBER 26 · 1992
9PM TILL 9AM · **3,500 ATTENDED**

LOOK AT THE FLYER. TOP LINE, YELLOW, ALL CAPS, EXCLAMATION POINT:

ONE YEAR IN THE MAKING!

IT TOOK A MONTH.

WILD KINGDOM was an underground music festival we produced on an Indian reservation in Escondido. We had a contact who lived out there, and this was all pre-casinos — nobody was building anything on that land yet. We rented thirty acres.

Thirty acres of nothing. No buildings. No structures. No power, no plumbing, no anything. Just bushes, in every direction, forever.

SO WE HIRED TWO BULLDOZERS.

Not small ones. We brought in two massive bulldozers to level the hills, scrape out the brush, and open up enough flat ground for parking, eight carnival rides, three dance floors, and several thousand kids who had every intention of dancing until the sun came up.



OPENING THE CAGE TO PURE · TRIBAL TECHNO · HIP HOP
LET YOUR MIND GO WILD MADNESS

PERMITS FOR THIS EVENT
Zero

INSURANCE, IN CASE
Also zero

WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

TWO BULLDOZERS · THIRTY ACRES
ZERO ADULTS

WE WERE DUMB KIDS.

8 GIGANTIC CARNIVAL RIDES · ALL RIDES FREE
3 MASSIVE DANCE FLOORS

THIRTY ACRES

OPENING THE CAGE

ALL RIDES FREE

Your ticket got you in. Your ticket also got you everything inside, which is a sentence I'd like you to hold onto while you read the next part.

01 GRAVITRON	02 SCRAMBLER	03 PARATROPPER
04 TWO-STORY FUNHOUSE	05 GIANT 40-PERSON SWING	06 SEVEN-STORY GIANT SLIDE
07 BUNGIE JUMPING	08 HOT AIR BALLOONS	09 THREE MASSIVE DANCE FLOORS

All of it free. Ride it as many times as you want, all night, with no wristband and no line monitor and no adult anywhere in the vicinity asking whether this was a good idea.

And then there was the balloon. We put a hot air balloon on the property. And your ticket included bungee jumping out of it.

THREE HUNDRED FEET. FREE. IF YOU WERE INSANE ENOUGH.



THE BALLOON, LIT, AGAINST THE BLACK
HANDS UP UNTIL NINE IN THE MORNING



EIGHT GIGANTIC CARNIVAL RIDES
OUT IN THIRTY ACRES OF NOTHING

I have the video.

It is not good video. 1992 camcorder, middle of the night, held by somebody who was having a night of his own. Half of it looks like a bigfoot sighting.

But you can see the balloon lit up against the black. You can see the rides turning. You can see a person come out of that basket and drop.

WATCH THE VIDEO

I'M NOT GOING TO DESCRIBE IT ANY FURTHER THAN THAT. THIRTY YEARS LATER IT STILL DOES A BETTER JOB THAN I CAN.

THERE WAS EXACTLY ONE WAY TO LOSE

WILD KINGDOM was the third event CHILI & FLICK produced with Branden and Nick of Global Underworld. We also produced it with our investor, Artie Parent, who owned the printing company that printed our flyers — which is its own kind of beautiful. The man printing the paper decided he'd rather be on the other side of the invoice.

Artie was an old-school promoter himself, going way back. Among other things, he'd put on Mötley Crüe shows at roller rinks.

Now. A reservation is a nation within a nation. I already knew that going in, and it's the entire reason we were out there.

But I also knew what it didn't protect us from.

THE ROAD.

The CHP couldn't come onto that land. What the CHP absolutely could do was sit on the road leading to that land and stop every car heading toward us. And if they did that, we were finished — a sold-out festival with a hot air balloon and eight carnival rides and nobody in it.

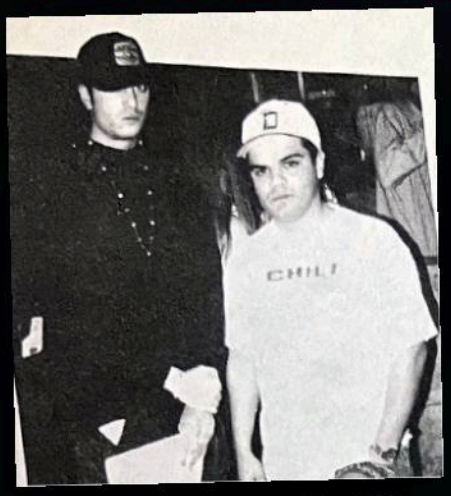
I knew that because it had already happened to me once, in high school, on a different reservation.



ROUND UP
THIRTY ACRES OF NOTHING, LIT

THE FUN'D RAISER

NOBODY KNEW. NOT THE CROWD, NOT THE DJS
NOT MOST OF OUR OWN PEOPLE



WILD KINGDOM · SEPTEMBER 26, 1992
THE COPS CAME. THEY WERE ALWAYS GOING TO COME.

So we made WILD KINGDOM a fundraiser. The beneficiary we chose was the Widows of CHP Officers' Foundation.

The donation was real. The check was real, and it was sizable, and we invited the foundation's president to come to the event and collect it in person.

01
WE ASKED HIM FOR ONE MORE THING WHILE HE WAS OUT THERE

02
STAND AT THE FRONT. AND WAIT.

03
HE DID

04
WHAT THEY FOUND AT THE GATE WAS A MAN FROM THEIR OWN WIDOWS' FOUNDATION, HOLDING A CHECK, HAPPY TO EXPLAIN EXACTLY WHAT THIS EVENT WAS AND EXACTLY WHO IT WAS FOR

05
THE PLAN WORKED. 9PM TILL 9AM. THERE'S VIDEO PROOF OF THE SUNRISE.

Three thousand five hundred people. Eight rides. Three dance floors. A hot air balloon over the countryside with human beings falling out of it on purpose, all night long.

Nobody got seriously hurt. I want that said out loud, because by any reasonable accounting we had no business saying it.

It was the first underground event with carnival rides and a hot air balloon bungee drop. As far as I know it's still the only one that started with two bulldozers and ended with a widows' foundation standing at the gate like a bouncer.

ONE YEAR IN THE MAKING.

THIRTY DAYS, IF YOU WANT THE TRUTH.

AND THE PROBLEM WITH DOING SOMETHING NOBODY HAS EVER DONE IS THAT NOW YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW IT.

3,500 ATTENDED · ZERO PERMITS · ZERO INSURANCE

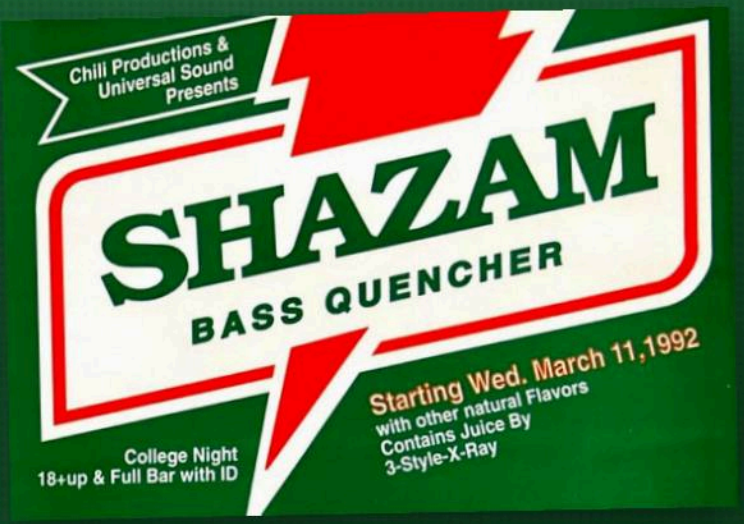
SHAZAM

HIP-HOP · HOUSE · OLD SCHOOL
ALL NATURAL FLAVA · 100% JUICE

You've been reading about my weekly club. I never told you its name.

Wednesday, March 11, 1992. College night, 18 and up, full bar with ID.

NOW LOOK AT THE FLYER, AND TELL ME WE WEREN'T ENJOYING OURSELVES.



STARTING WED. MARCH 11, 1992
WITH OTHER NATURAL FLAVORS

BASS QUENCHER

NUTRITION FACTS

SERVING SIZE	64 FL. OZ. OF FUN
CONTAINS JUICE BY	3-STYLE-X-RAY
FLAVORS	HIP-HOP · HOUSE
	OLD SCHOOL
BOTTLED AT	SALMON HOUSE
	1970 QUIVIRA WAY
AVERAGE COVERS	1,500+
PERSONAL BEST	1,700

And here's the part I didn't understand at the time: that flyer worked harder than any flyer we ever printed, because people didn't throw it away.

You hand a kid a flyer, it ends up on the floor of his car. You hand a kid a Gatorade spoof with nightclub language in the middle, he puts it on his wall.

That line on the flyer — **contains juice by 3-Style-X-Ray** — isn't a made-up ingredient. That's a credit.

3-Style and X-Ray had been running underground events for years before SHAZAM. They knew how to fill a room nobody was supposed to be in.

Here's something it took me twenty years to notice.

EVERY STORY IN THIS BOOK SO FAR IS A SINGLE NIGHT.

SHAZAM ran for three years. 1992 to 1995. Not every single week — we took breaks.

But while all the big event planning was happening somewhere else, SHAZAM was packed. Every time.

We always broke 1,500 covers. Our biggest night was 1,700.

WHICH IS ALSO HOW WE MET THE FIRE CHIEF.

This was their first time inside a legit nightclub. Liquor license, door count, fire code, the whole apparatus.

THEY BECAME A BIG PART OF THE PRODUCTION.

It started Wednesdays with Universal Sound. Hip-hop, house, old school.

Then it moved. Every Saturday. Salmon House, 1970 Quivira Way.

AND IT STAYED THERE.



UNIVERSAL & CHILI BRING YOU…
EVERY SATURDAY · 64 FL. OZ. OF FUN

PEOPLE REMEMBER THE BIG NIGHTS.

THE WEEKLIES PAID FOR THEM.

CMYK

1/2 INCH CROP BOTH WAYS

MOST WANTED

MY LITTLE BROTHER RAN THE DOOR. HE WAS IN NINTH GRADE.

Before anyone calls child services, understand the economics of a nightclub at that age. You need people at the door, people on the register, people watching the room. What's scarce is not muscle. There is always another large man willing to stand somewhere for money. What's scarce is somebody you would hand a cash register to at one in the morning and never think about again.

That was my brother. He was family, he was sober, and he could count.

He was also a fullback. He had a punch like a mule's kick. Even at that age, you did not want to be the guy who found that out.

So he worked the door, watched the register, and helped the door guys organize the line when it got long. He was good at it. Uncomfortably good at it, in a way that made grown men take direction from a fifteen-year-old without noticing they were doing it.

The guy he worked next to most was Dave.

Dave was the best employee I ever had. Six months, never late, never a word out of place. Intimidating in exactly the way you want and friendly in exactly the way you want, which is a combination almost nobody can do. Dave could turn somebody away without the guy behind him in line deciding to be a problem about it. That's a skill. That's actually the whole skill.



THE SALMON HOUSE · QUIVIRA RD
THE LEGEND CONTINUES…

10× FIELD

AND DAVE HAD A GIFT. DAVE COULD SPOT A FAKE ID FROM ACROSS A PARKING LOT.

So he started teaching my brother. Night after night, the two of them bent over some kid's California license like two jewelers with a loupe. My fifteen-year-old brother got very, very good at it.

Tell 01	Tell 02	Tell 03	Tell 04
WRONG LAMINATE	WRONG FONT ON THE DATE	HOLOGRAM'S FLAT	HAIRLINE'S NOT THE RIGHT KIND OF SOFT

Then one night Dave didn't show up.

Then another night. We filed this under things that are probably normal and moved on, because a club does not stop for anybody.

A few nights later we're watching *America's Most Wanted.*

BROADCAST BULLETIN — SUBJECT AT LARGE

METHOD CONFIRMED · REPEAT OFFENDER

WITHHELD

KNOWN AS	DAVE
POST	DOOR SECURITY
TENURE	SIX MONTHS
ATTENDANCE	NEVER LATE
SPECIALTY	DOCUMENT EXAM
ASSOCIATE	[REDACTED], 15

The segment was about a man who robbed banks. Not with a note and a ski mask. His method was this.

01 FIND THE BANK MANAGER
02 FIND THE BANK MANAGER'S FAMILY
03 TAKE THE FAMILY HOSTAGE, HOLD THEM
04 IN THE MORNING, DRIVE HIM TO HIS BANK
05 OPEN EVERYTHING. VAULT, DRAWERS, THE WORKS
06 THEN CLEAN THE PLACE OUT

Because the manager knew exactly what was sitting at home waiting on him. He had done it more than once. He had not been caught. They were asking the country for help.

THEN THEY PUT HIS PICTURE UP

IT WAS DAVE.

WTF.

Our Dave. Door Dave. The man currently teaching my ninth-grade brother how to authenticate government documents.

They picked him up days later. I never found out exactly how, and I never asked, because at some point in this business you learn which questions improve your life.

And that is when my little brother decided to mention the phone calls.

PLACED TO	CALLER	VOLUME	DURATION
THE CLUB	UNKNOWN	NOT MANY	SHORT

Always the same, in the sense that Dave was never the same after them.



860 CLUB · GARNET AVE
18 & UP · FULL BAR W/ ID



SATURDAYS · SALMON HOUSE
THREE ROOMS · 1,200-1,700

I GUESS THERE WAS A REASON DAVE WAS SO GOOD AT SPOTTING A FAKE ID.

YOU JUST NEVER KNOW WHO YOU'RE WORKING WITH.

SANTA'S FUNKY TOY DRIVE



2ND ANNUAL · DEC. 11, 1992
MULTIPLE ROOMS · DOORS 9PM

FIFTY-ONE WEEKENDS A YEAR, EVERY NAME ON THAT FLYER WAS TRYING TO OUTDRAW EVERY OTHER NAME ON THAT FLYER.

Same city. Same Friday. Same fifteen hundred kids with the same forty dollars. There was exactly one good night a week and we all wanted it, so we booked against each other on purpose, poached each other's DJs, and papered over each other's flyers while the glue was still wet.

If your party was Friday, mine was Friday, and by Saturday one of us had taken a bath.

That's the business. Twenty crews, one Friday, no referee.

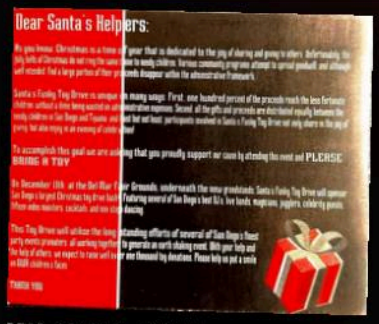
THEN ONCE A YEAR, EVERYBODY PUT IT DOWN.

CHILI & FLICK
JP & JOSÉ
PSYCLONE
STEVE BILLINGS
GLOBAL UNDERWORLD
L.O.S.T.
ROCKWROK
3-STYLE
INT'L RECORD SOURCE
NEBULOUS
SIDE JOB
TAXXI
J2
PLAYSCOOL
SIN MAGAZINE
TIC-TOC

THE TRUCE · ONE NIGHT
JASON A.
PRENICE & SINISTER
SOUL 'O
UNIVERSAL SOUND

Every one of them spent the other three hundred and sixty-four days of the year trying to take the same night off each other.

FOR THIS ONE, THEY ALL WORKED FOR FREE.



DEAR SANTA'S HELPERS
100% OF PROCEEDS · NOT A DIME

So did the DJs. So did the bands. So did the security, the lights, the sound companies, the magicians, the jugglers. The printer donated the printing and signed it—

Happy Holidays from the Pimps of Print
Custom Printing Services

—which remains the finest credit line I have ever been associated with.

Steve Billings and I put it together. Del Mar Fairgrounds, under the new grandstand. Multiple rooms. Doors at nine.

I still wasn't going into Mexico at that time, so Steve drove the toys down to the orphanage in Tijuana.

That's the part that mattered. The rest of this book is me telling you about parties.

THIS ONE WAS WORTH THE TROUBLE.

ADMISSION **$10** — OR — ONE UNWRAPPED TOY OF EQUAL OR GREATER VALUE *[we prefer toys, please]*

GARNET AVENUE · PACIFIC BEACH · THE NIGHT BEFORE
PUBLIC SIDEWALK

YOU'D THINK A TOY DRIVE WOULD BE THE ONE THING NOBODY PICKS A FIGHT OVER.

However, the night before, I'm on Garnet Ave in Pacific Beach handing these "Toy Drive" flyers out. That was me, one red suit and a hand bell short of a Salvation Army situation. Public sidewalk. Not inside anybody's club, not in anybody's doorway, on the concrete the City of San Diego pays to maintain.

A nightclub manager comes out and tells me to leave.

I did not leave.

He goes back inside and sends two bouncers.

The first one hit me from the side while I was mid-sentence explaining the party to a girl. The second one got behind me, pinned my arms, and held me there while the first one went to work on my face like it owed him money.

And here is where the story gets interesting, because the girl jumped on his back.

Not metaphorically. She climbed the man and stayed on him until he stopped. She saved my ass that night.

We went out a few times after that...

Then the manager came out. He walked up slowly, leaned in, and whispered, "I told you to leave."

I'm thinking *son of a bitch,* and a split second later I hit him. I didn't just hit him.

I CLOCKED HIM.



Legal documents say I broke his jaw. I'm not going to pretend that's a tragedy. He had just watched two employees hold a man down for distributing charity flyers, and his contribution to the moment was to come outside and gloat about it.

TOYS TO TIJUANA	EVERY DOLLAR
PAID TO THE TALENT	NOTHING
PAID TO ME	NOTHING
INJURY LAWSUIT	-$20,000

Every dollar that came through the door at Santa's Funky Toy Drive went to kids in Tijuana.

THE ONLY MONEY I EVER PERSONALLY MADE OFF A CHARITY EVENT CAME OUT OF A NIGHTCLUB MANAGER'S FACE.

KRAVE

THEY PAID ME IN TICKETS.

Sixty of them. Gary — DESTRUCTO — produced the New Year's Eve show and that was the deal: no fee, just sixty tickets and go do what you do. I gave thirty to friends and family.

The other thirty I sold for a hundred dollars apiece, at the gate.

Face value was twenty-seven fifty. Thirty at the door. They went in minutes. Everyone wanted these tickets. The show sold out. People were climbing the fences.

PAID	GAVE AWAY	FACE VALUE	SOLD AT THE GATE
60	30	$27.50	$100
TICKETS, NO FEE	FRIENDS & FAMILY	$30 AT THE DOOR	GONE IN MINUTES



LEADING THE NATION TO NEW FRONTIERS
A NEW WAY OF LIFE!

KNOTT'S BERRY FARM. WHO WOULDA THOUGHT?

Take a second with that. A rave. At a family amusement park. The one with the boysenberry jam.

If you wanted a sign of where this whole thing was headed, that was it, sitting right there in front of all of us. Nobody read it.



EXHIBIT A
THE GREATEST DOCUMENT HERE

The flyer is the greatest document in this entire book and I want to walk you through it. Seven dance floors, listed by name.

01 TECHNODROME	02 FUNK FACTORY	03 HOUSETOPIA
04 AMBIESSENCE LOUNGE	05 TRANCE-MISSION CONTROL	06 CLOUD NINE
07 TECHNOPOLIS		

Fine. Beautiful. Standard issue. Then it lists the rides.

01 CALICO LOG RIDE	02 BIGFOOT RAPIDS	03 BOOMERANG
04 GREASED LIGHTNING	05 MONTEZOOMA'S REVENGE	06 THE SLAMMER
07 DRAGON SWING — & MANY, MANY MORE!		

Then the dinner package. Early Bird menu, six to nine, at the Knott's Family Restaurant. Unlimited soft drinks. Choice of dessert. And a free K-RAVE '93 souvenir whistle.

Then breakfast. Five in the morning, Chicken Dinner Restaurant.

And then, in case anybody got the wrong idea—

PRINTED ON THE FLYER



IN ITS OWN LITTLE BOX



Six months earlier I was handing over cash in a Tijuana prison to get one of my headliners out.

NOW YOUR TICKET HAS A CHOICE OF DESSERT WITH BOYSENBERRY JAM.

The lineup was genuinely great, which is the part nobody expects.

BLACK SHEEP

THE MOVEMENT

MESSIAH · DJIMBE · LUNATIC FRINGE
DIMENSION 23 · BLEU · RASUCO

JOEY BELTRAM · KEOKI · BARRY WEAVER · DOC MARTIN · DESTRUCTO · HUMPTY VISSION
STEVE LORIA · ERNIE MUNSON · DR. SISQO · ELI STAR · MARK LEWIS · MR. FLASHBACK · DALE CHARLES

Nine at night to eight in the morning, with a hard cutoff — *no entry after 2:00 a.m.* — because an amusement park is still an amusement park.

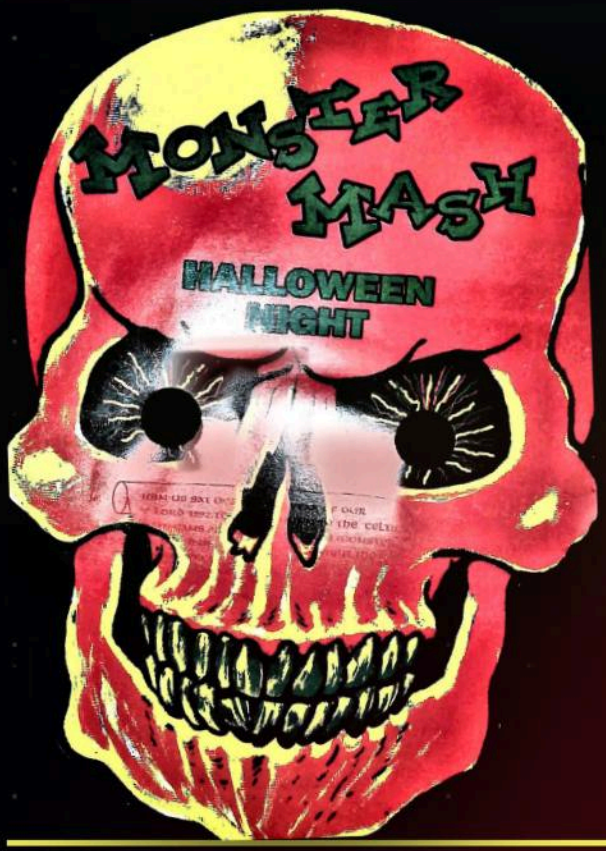
AND SECOND ON THE BILL, UNDER BLACK SHEEP: THE MOVEMENT.

Colossus
SHUT DOWN MID-SONG

TNT
SAME BAND I WAS IN A MEXICAN PRISON WITH

KRave · New Year's Eve
SOMEBODY FINALLY LET THEM FINISH

It happened on a stage at Knott's Berry Farm on New Year's Eve, and I watched the whole thing from the side with a drink in my hand like a man at a wedding.



MONSTER MASH

HOLLYWOOD PARK RACETRACK & PAVILION
HALLOWEEN NIGHT · SATURDAY, OCT 31

Then came Halloween at Hollywood Park racetrack. Giant screaming skull on the flyer, and — I promise I am reading this correctly —

LIVE	MOBY
ALSO LIVE	LUNATIC FRINGE
HANGING OVERHEAD	50 × 60 FT AUTHENTIC 1970S MIRRORBALL
COSTUME CONTEST, FIRST PRIZE	A FLIGHT TO LONDON
CANDY	1,000 LBS, FREE
DISTRIBUTED BY	ROLLERSKATING GHOULS

We got hired to promote these events. It was cool, because they were huge.

But the mixed feeling was that the underground was no longer underground. These kinds of events were getting enormous.

IT WAS ALREADY HERE. IT HAD A SOUVENIR WHISTLE.

YEARS LATER THEY'D FILL A MOTOR SPEEDWAY AND CALL IT THE ELECTRIC DAISY CARNIVAL, AND EVERYBODY WOULD ACT SURPRISED.

RECESS

I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

Three business licenses. City of El Cajon. Finance Department. Business License Division. Stamped **AMOUNT PAID** in blue ink, with the dates right there.

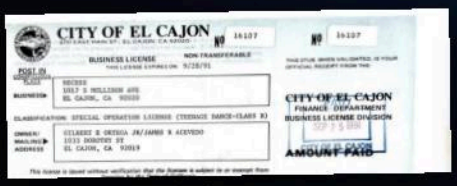
CLASSIFICATION

SPECIAL OPERATION LICENSE
(TEENAGE DANCE — CLASS B)

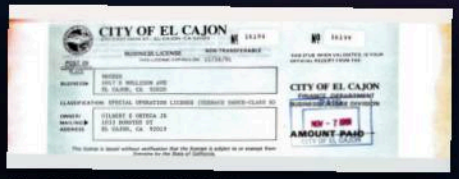
Issued to **GILBERT E ORTEGA JR.**



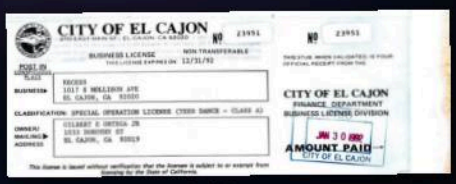
$1 OFF BEFORE 9:00PM · $6 AT THE DOOR
I.D. REQUIRED



NO. 16107 · EXP 9/28/91
SEP 25 1991



NO. 16199 · EXP 11/16/91
NOV 7 1991



NO. 23951 · EXP 12/31/92
JAN 30 1992

I have been inside a Mexican prison for this business. I have rented two bulldozers and flattened a hillside on sovereign land with no permit, no insurance, and no plan. I once got beaten up on a public sidewalk for handing out flyers about toys.

And the city of El Cajon looked at all of that, or more accurately looked at none of it, and said sure, kid. Here's your license.

APPROVED
City of El Cajon

HERE IS HOW YOU GET ONE

STEP 1
PRODUCE TWO EVENTS

STEP 2
POLICE SHOW UP AT BOTH AND INSPECT

STEP 3
IF THEY LIKE WHAT THEY SEE TWICE

STEP 4
THE CITY HANDS YOU A PERMIT GOOD FOR THE WHOLE YEAR

I'D LIKE THAT READ AT MY FUNERAL.

So twice, a San Diego County police officer walked through a room full of teenagers I was responsible for, looked around, and approved of me.

AGES	NIGHTS	HOURS	AT THE DOOR	ATTENDANCE
13-17	**Friday**	**7:30-12**	**$6**	**500**
18 & OVER NOT ADMITTED	EVERY WEEK	DOORS TO MIDNIGHT	$5 BEFORE NINE	PER FRIDAY

OF EVERY ROOM IN THIS BOOK, THIS IS THE ONLY ONE I WAS LEGALLY TOO OLD TO ENTER.

The business reason was simple, because it always is. Stratus — the teen club everybody went to — shut its doors. And at the same time, the clubs in Tijuana finally started actually enforcing the 18-and-up rule they'd been printing on their flyers for years.

So a few thousand San Diego teenagers woke up one week with absolutely nowhere to be on a Friday. I'm a promoter. That's not a tragedy, that's a vacancy.

The flyer says **I.D. REQUIRED**, which it absolutely did, except backwards. Everywhere else in my life we were checking IDs to keep kids out. Here we were checking them to make sure you were young enough.

The problem was reaching them, because adults can't walk onto a high school campus and hand out flyers. So I didn't. I recruited a crew of kids, taught them how to promote, and turned them loose on their own campuses.

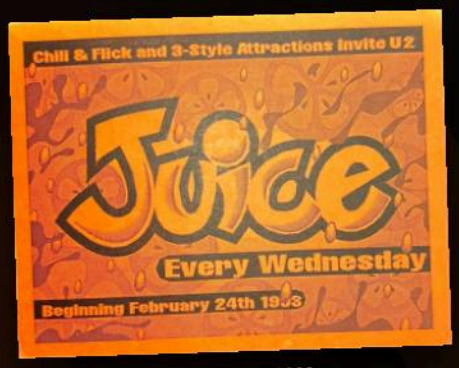
Here's the part that still gets me. Almost nobody in the 21-and-over scene knew about any of it. My partners, the other promoters, the guys I was competing with every weekend — they had no idea where I was on Fridays.

FIFTEEN-YEAR-OLD STREET TEAM. BEST ONE I EVER HAD.

EVERY OTHER STORY IN THIS BOOK, I'D TELL AT A DINNER PARTY. THE ONE I KEPT QUIET WAS THE LEGAL ONE.

JUICE

POUR SOME JUICE INTO YOUR WEDNESDAY NIGHTS.

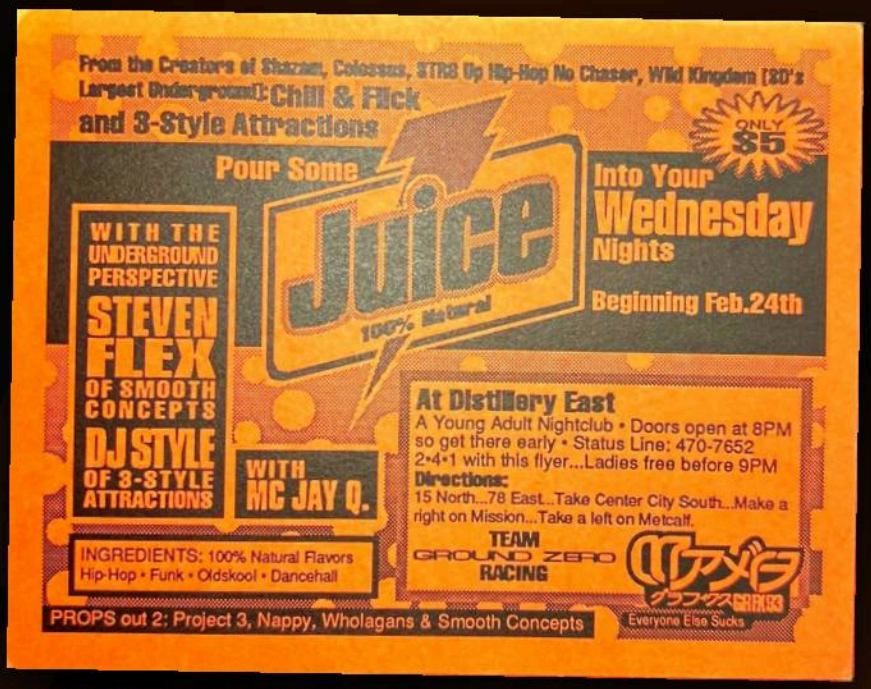


BEGINNING FEBRUARY 24TH, 1993
A YOUNG ADULT NIGHTCLUB

After RECESS, we ran it back. JUICE was the north county version — same idea, other end of the county, except this one wasn't a weekly. JUICE ran on school breaks. Spring break, the holidays, the stretches when a teenager has nowhere to be the next morning and nowhere to go at night. The RECESS crowd carried the word north with them.

It worked immediately. Same rules as before: under eighteen only, nobody over it, a room that belonged to the kids standing in it. Seven hundred showed up.

Two clubs, two ends of the county. And all either one of them really proved is that there was a market sitting in plain sight the entire time, while every promoter in San Diego fought over the 18-and-over crowd.





DOORS	8:00 PM
SO GET THERE	EARLY
WITH THIS FLYER	2 • 4 • 1
LADIES	FREE BEFORE 9
STATUS LINE	470-7652

STEVEN FLEX OF SMOOTH CONCEPTS
DJ STYLE OF 3-STYLE ATTRACTIONS
WITH MC JAY Q.

PRINTED ON THE FLYER, IN ITS OWN LITTLE BOX



DIRECTIONS, BECAUSE IT WAS 1993

15 NORTH → 78 EAST → CENTER CITY SOUTH → RIGHT ON MISSION → LEFT ON METCALF

ROOM ONE
Under 18
EL CAJON & NORTH COUNTY
NO ADULTS, NO EXCEPTIONS

ROOM TWO
18 & Over
THE REST OF SAN DIEGO
EVERYBODY ELSE'S MARKET

SOME NIGHTS I RAN BOTH CLUBS AT ONCE. TWO CLUBS, SAME NIGHT, TWO CROWDS THAT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH EACH OTHER.

ATLAS

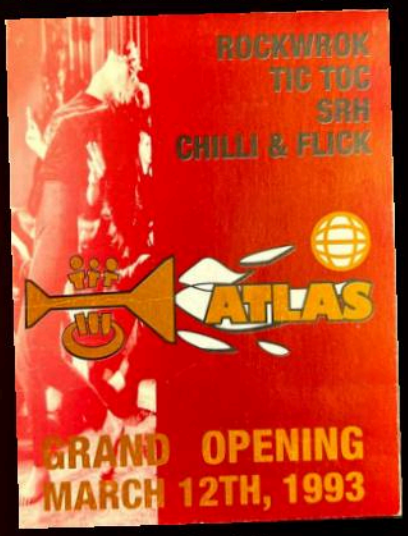
HERE'S THE PITCH I WALKED IN WITH: LET ME DO DOLLAR DRINKS IN YOUR BAR EVERY FRIDAY NIGHT.

No owner on earth wants to hear that. Friday is the night you make your money. Friday is the night you charge seven dollars for a well vodka and nobody argues, because it's Friday.

My friends owned the place — The Rage, 3595 Sports Arena Boulevard, directly across the street from the San Diego Sports Arena. Same guys who gave me my very first 21-and-over club, years earlier, at a different address.

They'd already bet on me once. That's the only reason the pitch got a hearing.

Huge room. Two thousand capacity. And this bar had something almost no other venue in this city had: a permit to stay open until four in the morning.



ROCKWROK · TIC TOC · SRH
GRAND OPENING · MARCH 12, 1993

SAN DIEGO'S ONLY LEGAL AFTER HOURS.

The owners said yes on one condition. Bring me four top promotion companies, together, every week.

SO I DID.

CREW 01	CREW 02	CREW 03	CREW 04
Rockwrok	Tic Toc	SRH	Chili & Flick

Four crews who spent the rest of the calendar trying to bury each other, booked into the same room on the same night, under one name.

ATLAS ran about five, six months. Nine at night to four in the morning. Two dance floors, a patio, seventies funk and house, Scott Martin and Jon Bishop on the decks.

And nobody — nobody — tried to run a party against us on a Friday.

NOW, THE ECONOMICS, WHICH ARE MY FAVORITE PART.

Each promotion partner cleared somewhere between five hundred and a thousand dollars a night. That is not a lot of money for packing a two-thousand-person room until sunrise.

But we also negotiated a bar tab.

Think that through. The drinks are a dollar. And we have a tab. There is no mathematical ceiling on that arrangement. Four promotion companies, unlimited credit, dollar drinks, open till four in the morning. I'm amazed the building is still standing.

FRIDAY NIGHT, 1993	PER PARTNER
DRINKS, ALL NIGHT	$1.00
DOORS	9PM - 4AM
PARTNER TAKE, PER NIGHT	$500 - $1,000
PROMOTERS' BAR TAB	NO CEILING
INFO LINE, 976-CLUB	$1.25 PER CALL

IT COST MORE TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE PARTY THAN IT DID TO DRINK AT IT

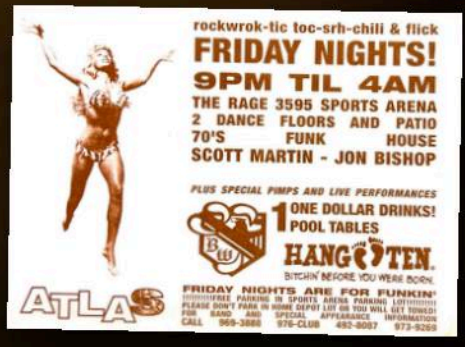
OH, IT'S NOT.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE CLUB



We never once sold the whole thing out. Two thousand is a lot of people for a weekly. We'd do twelve, fourteen, sixteen hundred, and it felt like a riot in there every single week—

—but there was always a corner of that place we never filled, and I knew exactly where it was.



9PM TIL 4AM

ONLY LEGAL AFTER HOURS

Because it was a sports bar. That was the problem. Great permit, great size, zero atmosphere. It looked like somewhere you'd watch a Chargers game and eat a basket of wings.

SO WE PAINTED BED SHEETS.

BED SHEETS & A FLASHLIGHT

Day-glow murals, on actual bed sheets, hung all over the club, lit with black lights so the whole room went electric. Go-go dancers out in front of them.

GREEN · PINK · CYAN · YELLOW · ORANGE

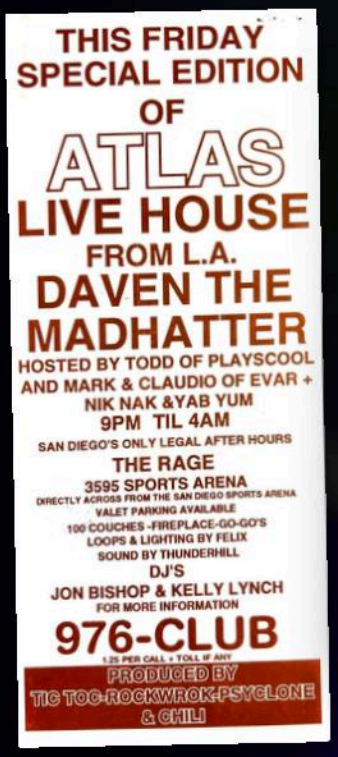
COUCHES	100	FIREPLACE	YES	DANCE FLOORS	TWO + PATIO
LOOPS & LIGHTING	FELIX	SOUND	THUNDERHILL	MURALS	BED SHEETS

We turned a sports bar into something else entirely with laundry and a flashlight.



PAINTED, BLACK-LIT
IN FRONT OF THE MURALS

AND THEN CAME THE NIGHT GRANT KING TOLD ME TO PAINT.





One of my promotion partners. Doors are about to open. He walks up and says the body paint isn't done — somebody has to paint the go-go dancers, everyone else is busy, you're it.

So that is how the guy who built the night ended up backstage with a brush and a jar of day-glow, painting dancers.

I WANT TO BE CLEAR THAT I DID NOT VOLUNTEER, I WAS DRAFTED, AND I DID A PERFECTLY ADEQUATE JOB.

Props to SRH, by the way. Zinger is still at it. His indie label has sold over twenty million records, and his management company reps a long list of big names. Not many old-school promoters stayed in the music business and made it big. He did.



IT CAME FROM PAINTING BED SHEETS AND BOOTIES.

Years later I'd start making art under the name Rick Bliss.

I never really thought about where that came from until I sat down to write this.

BORDER JAM



AVENIDA REVOLUCIÓN
EL TORITO, UPSTAIRS, ON THE CORNER

THE LAST TIME I DID BUSINESS IN MEXICO, I ENDED UP IN A MEXICAN PRISON.

And when I got out, I was given a piece of advice that was not really advice. Keep your business out of Mexico. Period.

I took that extremely seriously. I'm a lot of things, but I'm not a man who needs to be told twice.

Then The Boss was killed.

He and his driver were shot leaving his home in San Diego. It was the kind of news that stops a room. And for the record, I never wished any harm on The Boss. He was always good to me, considering the deeply unusual way he chose to express it.

What I did not do was look at that news and see an opening. The opposite. The Manager — the one I actually believed caused my problem — I still hadn't heard a word from. As far as I was concerned Mexico was a country I used to work in.

THE ADVICE THAT WAS NOT ADVICE

Keep your business out of Mexico. Period.

A few months later I got a voicemail from a man named Mario.

Mario had a venue on Revolution Avenue. The venue was large. It held thirty-five hundred people. Two levels. He wanted to talk.

I called him back to be polite. That is genuinely the only reason I called him back.

He came to San Diego with photographs of the club, which was unnecessary, because I knew the building. El Torito. I'd been in it as a teenager, back when I was the one buying the tickets.



RESTAURANT · DISCO · SINCE 1978
TWO LEVELS. THIRTY-FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE.

AND THEN MARIO STARTED TALKING, AND THE THING THAT WORRIED ME WAS NOT WHAT HE WANTED. IT WAS HOW MUCH HE ALREADY KNEW.

He knew my clubs. He knew my parties. He knew about the prison — not that it happened, but *how* it happened, and who made it happen. That is not information you pick up around town.

So I told him flat out: you sound like a man who runs in the same circles as the people who put me in there.

He took it well. He said he and his partners were completely legitimate. Zero criminal anything.

I nodded like a man accepting that. I did not accept that. Would you?

But I asked the obvious question. Say I believe you. How exactly do you protect me from The Boss's people, from the Manager, from whoever else is out there that I don't even know exists?

And Mario said the Manager wouldn't be a problem.

HE WAS ON A PERMANENT VACATION.

I let that sentence sit there for a while, same as I'm letting it sit here.

The rest of it he backed up. His partners were in beer and liquor — hundreds of retail stores and nightclubs across Mexico. Real businesses with real government relationships, which in that place is the only kind of insurance anybody actually sells.

HERE'S WHAT I DID DIFFERENTLY THIS TIME

COLOSSUS	THIS TIME	THEN	RESULT
DECIDED IN ABOUT FOUR SECONDS	ASKED EVERY FRIEND I HAD	ASKED MY FATHER, WHO KNEW PLAYERS IN TIJUANA	THE ANSWERS CAME BACK CLEAN

Somewhere in this story there is a conversation where a grown man who has been to a Mexican prison asks his dad to run a reference check. I went down there, met the partners, and asked them directly how they all knew so much about me. They laughed. Tijuana's a small town, they said.

I asked what happens when the other club owners get jealous and kick the hornet's nest just to get me out of the picture. They didn't pretend that couldn't happen. They just said they had people for that. It felt good. I want to be honest that it felt good, because that's usually when I get into trouble.

NOW. LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT Z90.

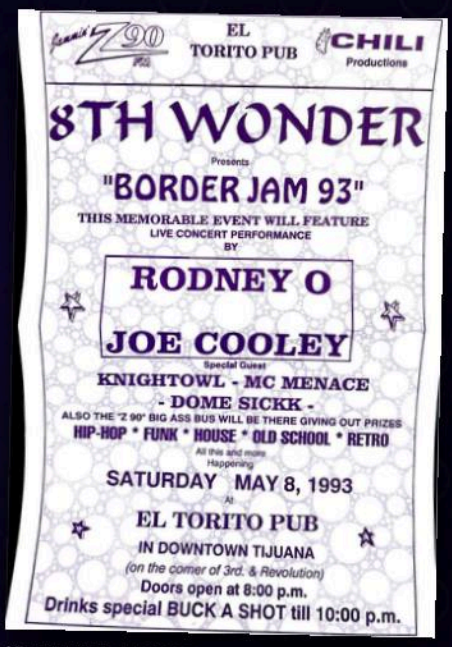
Z90 was the only station in San Diego playing hip-hop, and the management there could not stand me. Not because I'd ever done anything to them. Because I never bought radio from them — and when they threw a party the same night I did, mine was bigger.

That's it. That's the whole grudge. I beat them without spending a dollar with them.

So naturally they became my partner.

I'd started working with record labels by then, running street promotion for their artists. I pitched the label on putting Rodney O and Joe Cooley into El Torito, and the label loved it and said one thing: do it with Z90.





8TH WONDER PRESENTS
DOORS 8PM · BUCK A SHOT TILL 10

IF SOMETHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME IN MEXICO, I WANTED IT TO HAPPEN LOUDLY. I WANTED WITNESSES WITH TRANSMITTERS.

HEADLINE	RODNEY O · JOE COOLEY	SPECIAL GUEST	KNIGHTOWL · MC MENACE
ALSO	DOME SICKK	ROOM	EL TORITO PUB, 3RD & REVOLUTION
PRINTED ON THE FLYER	THE Z90 BIG ASS BUS WILL BE THERE GIVING OUT PRIZES	ATTENDANCE	2,000+

So that's the picture. A man who has carefully arranged for his own potential disappearance to be covered live on the radio.

The place was packed. And right before Rodney O and Joe Cooley went on, the Federales walked in.

BEHIND THE STAGE · THE CLUB OFFICES — EVENT OVER

THEY DIDN'T COME TO THE FLOOR. THEY WENT TO THE OFFICES. THEN THEY TOLD MARIO THEY WANTED ME. INTO CUSTODY.

All of this in Spanish. Rapid, loud, and entirely beyond me. I stood in a room where my immediate future was being decided in a language I do not speak, and the only thing I could read was the temperature.

The Z90 owners were in that room too. Prominent Mexican family, real influence, and absolutely not arguing on my behalf. They were arguing for their own name. Their station could not be the station whose concert got shut down.

I have never been so grateful to be somebody's collateral damage.

Every permit was in order. There was nothing to find. Somebody had simply sent those men to that building, and whoever sent them knew exactly which guy had filled it.

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT WAS SAID IN THERE.

WHATEVER IT WAS, IT WORKED.

The show went on. Rodney O and Joe Cooley played. More than two thousand people had no idea any of it happened.

AND FROM THAT NIGHT FORWARD, MARIO WAS NEVER JUST MARIO AGAIN

SUPER MARIO

I gave him that name and everyone started calling him that.

Two months later we went back and did it again. FIRE FEST '93, Friday the 30th of July, ten acts, ten DJs, eight at night to four in the morning, ten bucks at the door.

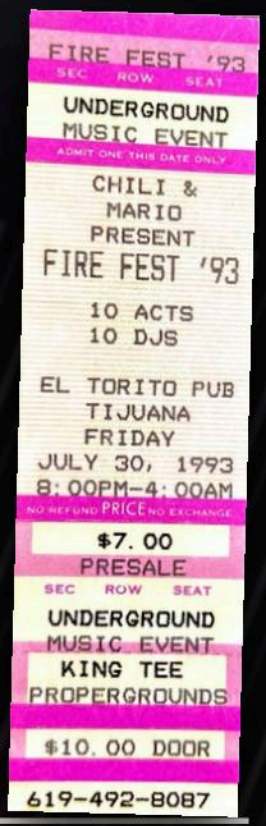
KING TEE	PROPER GROUNDS	BRONX STYLE BOB	DRED SCOTT
JUVENILE STYLE	TOMMY GUN	BROTHER HOOD FROM ANOTHER HOOD	SYKOALITION

DJS — UNIQUE · LA WREKLESS · MIKESKI · STEVEN FLEX · JOHNNY KING
HOSTED BY THE WHOLAGAN TRIBE & MISCHA · SOUND & LIGHTS BY AIRPLAY-BASS MECHANIX

PRINTED ON THE FLYER: "THE ONLY CLUB IN TIJUANA THAT TRULY SUPPORTS HIP HOP."

Packed.

FEDERALES	BACK OFFICE	CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ME IN A LANGUAGE I DON'T SPEAK	DOORS
None	None	None	8PM–4AM





Just a party in a building on Revolution Avenue, running legally until four in the morning.

AFTER THE YEAR I'D HAD, I'LL TAKE IT.

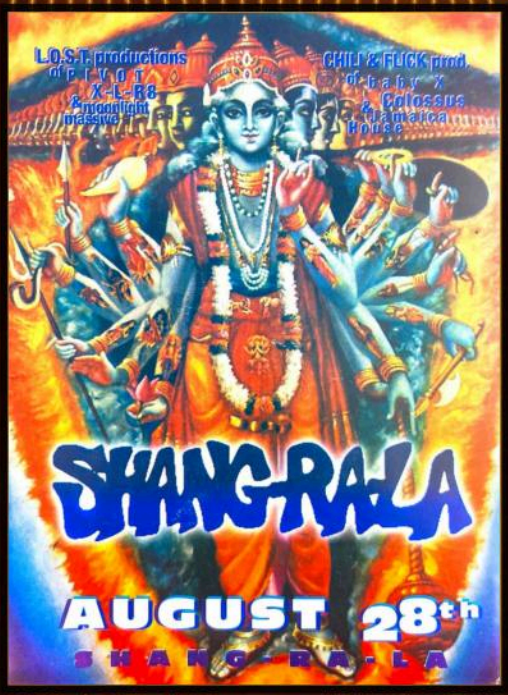
ZERO DRAMA

10 ACTS · 10 DJS

SHANG-RA-LA

THE ARMS RACE, FULLY LIT

LOCATION WITHHELD



FRONT / FOUR-COLOR · HOLEBODY DESIGN

The flyer promised **one hundred percent bust free.** Which tells you something about 1993 — that was a feature worth advertising.

We did this one with L.O.S.T., a newer crew doing undergrounds. By 1993 you could read a crew's whole résumé off the bottom of a flyer, and ours ran long. Baby X, Colossus, Jamaica House on our side. PIVOT, X-L-R8, Moonlight Massive on theirs.

THEIR SIDE

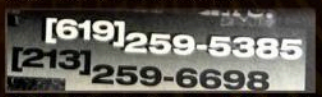


OUR SIDE



By then the arms race was on. Everybody had lasers. Everybody had a video wall. So you went bigger, because the only thing worse than spending the money was the other guy spending it and you didn't.

INFO LINES — AS PRINTED



[619] SAN DIEGO · [213] LOS ANGELES

MASSIVE — DECLARED INVENTORY · AS PRINTED

2 8-WATT LASERS	**4** EMULATORS	**16** CUBICLE VIDEO WALL	**60,000** WATTS SURROUND
1 RAISING DANCE FLOOR	**2** STORIES, MULTI-LEVEL		



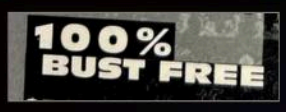
VENUE RECORD — SHANG-RA-LA — AUG 28, 1993

LOCATION	WITHHELD UNTIL DAY OF	AS BILLED	"NEW LOCATION"
STREET		DOOR	$5 / $10 / $15
DISCLOSED	DAY OF, TO ALL	ATTENDED	1,000+
BILL	MARK LEWIS · KAOS-X · STEVEN FLEX · B-SIDE		

The location stayed secret until the day of the event, which is standard. What isn't standard is spending that kind of money on a room you're not allowed to name, going out to thousands of people who all find out where it is at the same time you tell them.



REVERSE / ONE-COLOR



AND THE FLYER PROMISED A HUNDRED PERCENT BUST FREE.

WE DELIVERED ON THAT.

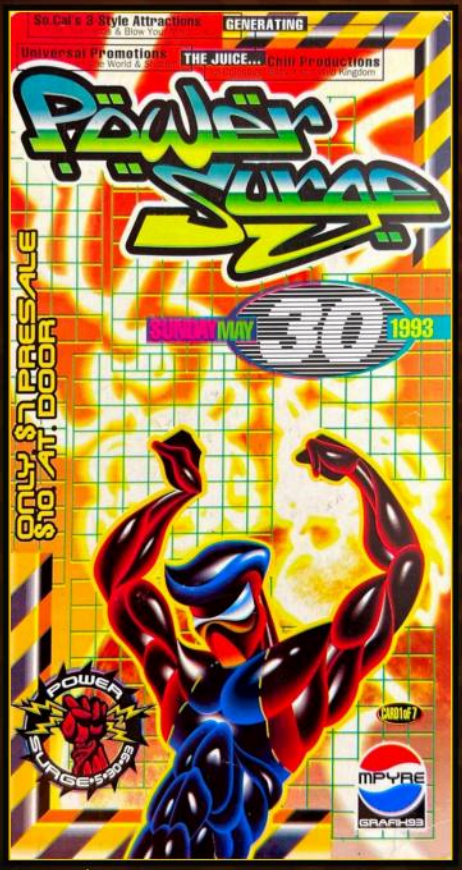
However, it was the most luxurious "underground" our audience had ever seen. And I don't know if that was the desired aesthetic the audience wanted.

IT DIDN'T HAVE THE RAW WAREHOUSE VIBE OUR AUDIENCE LOVED.

POWER SURGE

THE NIGHT NOBODY WANTED

CARD 1 OF 7



CARD 1 / 7 MPYRE GRAFIX 93

We borrowed the name from the original SURGE parties. **Borrowed.**

Sundays at El Torito in Tijuana, downtown, corner of Third and Revolution, with Super Mario. Four rooms, two levels, thirty-five hundred capacity, and a hundred-foot cathedral ceiling on level one. Sunday. In a cathedral.

EL TORITO METROPLEX — DECLARED		AS PRINTED
4 ROOMS	2 LEVELS	3,500 CAPACITY
100ft CATHEDRAL CEILING	9-3 PM TO AM	18+ W/ID · FULL BARS





AT THE NEW EL TORITO METROPLEX — 3RD & REVOLUTION

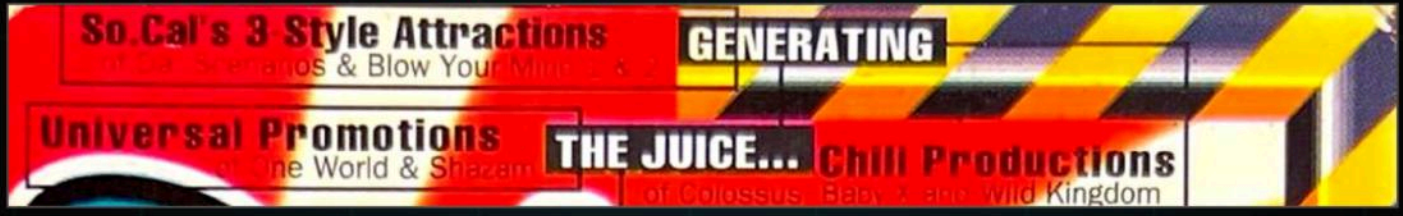
REVOLUTION AVENUE — WEEKLY OCCUPANCY

SUNDAY: UNCLAIMED

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
DARK	DARK	DARK	DARK	TAKEN	TAKEN	OURS

Nobody fought us for the night. Friday and Saturday, every club on Revolution fills itself whether the owner shows up or not, so every promoter in two cities is clawing at those doors. Sunday, nobody wanted. For once we got no static from the other owners.

THEN WE HAD TO FILL IT.



EL TORITO METROPLEX · 3RD & REVOLUTION · DOWNTOWN TIJUANA

9PM TO 3AM · 4 ROOMS · 2 LEVELS · 3,500 CAPACITY

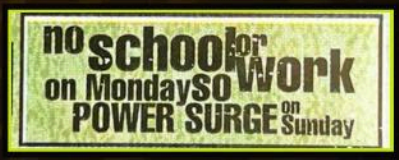
PERMISSION

COMMITTED TO THE BIT

PRINTED IN FULL

THE FLYER DID THE CLOSING

WE WEREN'T SELLING A PARTY. WE WERE SELLING PERMISSION.



THE HIP-HOP DJS GENERATED VINYL VOLTAGE

VYNIL VOLTAGE GENERATED BY **HIP HOP/OLDSKOOL DJ'S**

STEVEN FLEX LA WREKLESS STYLE JOHNNY KING X-RAY MR. TEE JOESKI

THE HOUSE & TEKNO GUYS WERE SHOCK THERAPISTS

SHOCK THERAPISTS **HOUSE & TEKNO DJ'S**

B-SIDE J.SINISTER RAGE QUICKSILVA MR. MYXZLPTK

Everything on that card was committed to the bit. Eighteen and up, full bars, and a special level for young adults, which is a very generous way to describe where we put the people who couldn't drink.

THE SET — SEVEN CARDS

TWO ACCOUNTED FOR



Seven cards in the set — it says CARD 1 OF 7 right on it — because somewhere along the line we decided we were collectible.

PRINTED BY PIMP PRINTING 619.275-0293

PRINTED BY PIMPS OF PRINTING. CUSTOM PRINTING.

TIJUANA
SUNDAY — THE NIGHT NOBODY ELSE WANTED

SAN DIEGO
FRIDAY + SATURDAY — LEFT WIDE OPEN

TWO CITIES. NO GAPS.

POWER UPS 2 Project 3, Wholagan Tribe, Severe & Zodak of TOP 2 BOT'M, DYSE 1 Cloze, No Sellout, MicFresh, Bo Bo, Yambo, MC Replay, Flavor, SCAE 1, L.O.D., L.P.S.D., Prhyme Suspect, Jose of AC & S, Naughty Co., Universal Zulu Nation, Kool T, Wildstyle, 4th Dimension, Dizzy Dee, West Coast Rock Steady Crew, ROB1, Groovles, Just I & Max 1, DJ Jam of Jam Ent., DJ Rhettmatic, DJ S.O.S., M.I.A., Phunkadelic Hobos, 2 Kidz from New York, 3-Style No. Cal., Hype Squad, 2-Step, Twice As Nice, Bishop & Alliance Ent., N.A.P.S., Naughty Desirez, UGR, Frequency, Pure Energy, D-Siples, Scam & Jam Psycotics, Eddie 8-Ball, Mad Funk Muzic, Realistix, IRS, Xerox, First Choice, C-Sharp, Tic-Toc, Rockwrok, SRH, Drowzy, S.D. Bass Mechanics, Legend LA & SD, United Kingdom, Bahay Tribe, Unique Style, STR8 Edge, Smiley D., Kutfather, Greyboy, DJ Icy Ice, FBI, T.O.C., DJ Unique, G-Rock, DJ Slyde



POWER UPS 2 — THE FULL ROSTER, AS PRINTED

POWER SURGE · 5·30·93

VYNIL VOLTAGE · SHOCK THERAPISTS · GUEST HOSTS

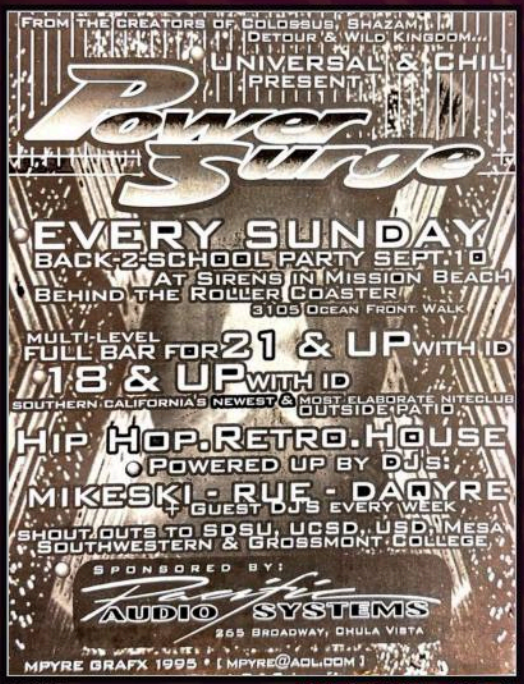
$7 PRESALE AT AC & S RECORDS · $10 DAY OF THE EVENT

SUNDAY NIGHTS

TWO YEARS, ONE NIGHT A WEEK

MPYRE GRAFX 1995

EVERY SUNDAY



CHROME

BACK-2-SCHOOL, SEPT 10



RED

1.800.975.0203

Later we moved it stateside.

Sirens, Mission Beach, 3105 Ocean Front Walk, behind the roller coaster. Hip hop, house, retro, guest DJs every week, two dollars off with a college ID, and the flyer shouting out SDSU, UCSD, USD, Mesa, Southwestern and Grossmont.

RELOCATED — SAME NIGHT

3105 OCEAN FRONT WALK

BEHIND THE ROLLER COASTER

HIP HOP — DJ MIKESKI

HOUSE — DJ DAQYRE

RETRO — DJ RUE

MIKESKI - RUE - DAQYRE + GUEST DJ'S EVERY WEEK

SHOUT-OUTS, AS PRINTED

$2 OFF W/ COLLEGE ID

SDSU	UCSD	USD	MESA	SOUTHWESTERN	GROSSMONT

SHOUT OUTS TO SDSU, UCSD, USD, MESA, SOUTHWESTERN & GROSSMONT COLLEGE,

WE SPENT TWO YEARS TURNING THE WORST NIGHT OF THE WEEK INTO THE BEST ONE.

THEN EVERYBODY WANTED SUNDAYS.

POWER SURGE · 1993-1995 · TIJUANA → MISSION BEACH

1,000-1,500 ATTENDED

SIRENS · MISSION BEACH · BEHIND THE ROLLER COASTER

MULTI-FLOOR MONSTER SOUND & LIGHTING · 18 & UP

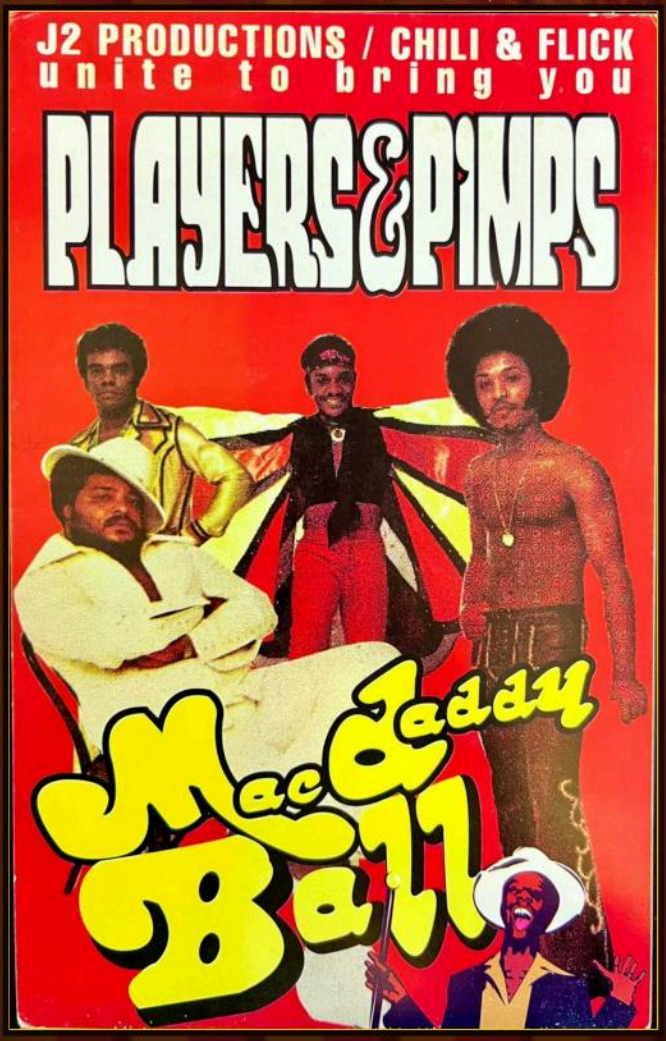
PLAYERS & PIMPS MACDADDY BALL

A FUNK CONVENTION ALL NITE

The name says it all. **The DJ lineup spoke for itself.**

Club 860, Friday, September 4th. The flyer called it a funk convention for all the funky Hustlers, Hoes, Macs, Turkeys and Jive time suckers. Convention. Like there'd be a Pimp keynote.

FRONT J2 PROD. / CHILI & FLICK



BACK CLUB 860 · SEPT 4



HUSTLER'S LOUNGE · PATIO · ALL NITE

KID CAPRI · STRAIGHT FROM NYC

HUSTLER'S LOUNGE

DJ JAM · GREYBOY · STEVEN FLEX
OLD SCHOOL · HIP HOP · DANCEHALL

KID CAPRI
STRAIGHT FROM NYC · DEF JAM COMEDY HOUR

PATIO

JOEY JIMENEZ · B-SIDE
DEEP HOUSE GROOVES · TECHNO

LPSD
SPECIAL GUEST PERFORMANCE

EIGHT GUEST HOSTS. FOR ONE NIGHT. ALL EIGHT MADE THE FLYER

JOSE OF AC&S	X-RAY OF 3 STYLE	ERIC ETABARI	ONE NATION	DJ S.O.S.	GUMBIE	CHARLIE ROCK	LINDA OF TOMATOS

THEN THE DOOR POLICY, WHICH I MAINTAIN IS THE FINEST THING WE EVER PRINTED.

PLAYERS & PIMPS MACDADDY BALL · CLUB 860 AC&S · SJOBECK · LONDON UNDERGROUND

THE DOOR POLICY

THE FINEST THING WE EVER PRINTED

BRING ONE

THREE WAYS IN, THREE DOLLARS OFF — ALL NITE

8-TRACK	BIG CRAZY HAT	BELL-BOTTOMS	
$3 Off	$3 Off	$3 Off	big oracy hat, bell-bottoms (all nite) $5 before 10pm music giveaways from ac&s

THREE DOLLARS OFF WITH AN 8-TRACK, A BIG CRAZY HAT, OR BELL-BOTTOMS. ALL NITE.

Read it again. We discounted admission for carrying a dead audio format. Not a player. Just the cartridge. Hold it up at the door, keep your three dollars, go on in. Twelve hundred people came through that night and I'd like to believe a few of them went home, went through the garage, and came back holding Earth, Wind & Fire like a passport.

$5 BEFORE 10PM · MUSIC GIVEAWAYS FROM AC&S

CLUB SIRENS · BEHIND THE ROLLERCOASTER



THE RETURN — SUNDAY, OCT 8

It came back. The next flyer billed it as *Another Chili Productions Joint* — we had seen a Spike Lee movie, and we were not subtle people — this time at Club Sirens in Mission Beach, behind the rollercoaster.

THE RETURN — BILLING	AS PRINTED
VENUE	CLUB SIRENS, MISSION BEACH
LANDMARK	BEHIND THE ROLLERCOASTER
NIGHT	SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8
MUSIC	DJ SCOTT MARTIN — HIP HOP & FUNK
ADMISSION	18 & UP W/ID · FULL BAR 21 & UP

We need the funk. You gotta have that funk.
Sundays al over San Diego are kinda bunk.
So we offer to you a funk convention for all the funky
Hustlers, Hoes, Macs, Turkeys and Jive time suckers

Dj Scott Martin
with tall stacks of butter
drenched Hip Hop & Funk

WE WERE INCLUSIVE. TURKEYS AND JIVE TIME SUCK'A'S.

PLAYERS & PIMPS MACDADDY BALL · 1993 · 1,200 ATTENDED · INFO 619.544.4551

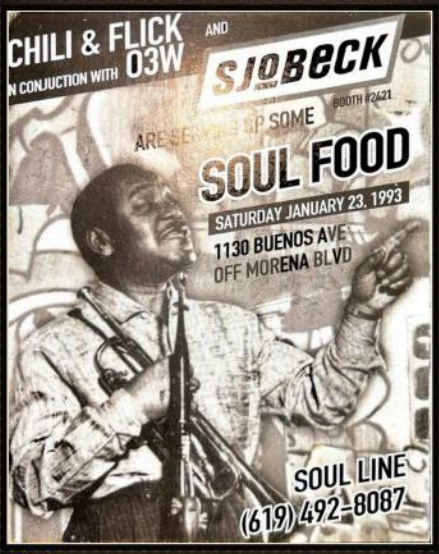
1130 BUENOS AVE · OFF MORENA BLVD · EVERY SATURDAY · 1993 · 500–700 ATTENDED

SOUL FOOD

HIP-HOP & DEEP HOUSE — THE NEW MECCA OF UNDERGROUND

HOUSE IS THE FEELING. HIP HOP IS THE HEART.

PRINTED ACROSS THE TOP



JAN 23 · SJOBECK

Hip-hop and deep house, every Saturday. We produced it with some East Coast friends — **03W** — in a small room with a stage.

By '93 the mega events were eating everything. Lasers, video walls, sixty thousand watts, thousands of people. We were running those too, so this isn't a complaint. But we wanted one club going the other direction. Small room. Underground music. East Coast feel. Nothing else in town felt like that.

slammin', sic, ass, raw dj's servin' up scoops & scoops of all the dope underground beats you can't get anywhere!

The name did a lot of the work, and the flyer committed all the way. Seven hours of grub, nine to four AM. DJs servin' up scoops and scoops.

CHILI & FLICK IN CONJUNCTION WITH 03W

SOUL LINE 619.492.8087

TONIGHT'S SERVICE	AS PRINTED
PERFORMING LIVE — ATLANTIC RECORDING ARTIST	O.F.T.B. ALONG WITH L.P.S.D.
SERVING YOU THIS EVENING	DJ STEVEN FLEX (SD) · DJ UNIQUE (SD)
ECCENTRIC HOUSE FOR THE ECCENTRIC DANCER	MAESTRO J SINISTER (BRONX)
	MAESTRO FELIX PRINCE (NYC)
RARE GROOVES	ICY-LEE (SD)
DANCE HALL	RAM JAM W/ COMMANDER JACKSON & SPIDERMAN
SEVEN HOURS OF GRUB	9PM TO 4AM · $5 W/ FLYER · 21+ / 18+ AFTER 2

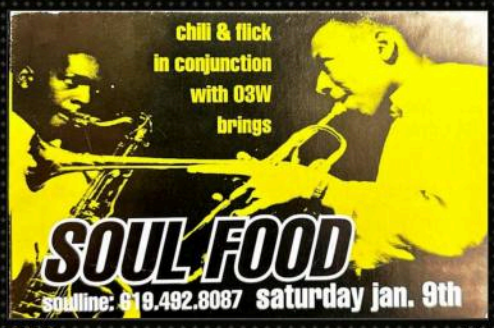


THE NEW MECCA OF UNDERGROUND

SO WE PRINTED DIRECTIONS				A WHOLE PARAGRAPH OF THEM
1	2	3	4	5
5 NORTH OLD TOWN AVE EXIT	LEFT ONTO OLD TOWN AVE	CONTINUE TO 3-WAY STOP	LEFT TURN ON HANCOCK ST	GO FOUR BLOCKS DOWN

1845 HANCOCK STREET

DOWN FROM THE MISSION BREWERY



JAN 9 · 03W

IT WAS A COOL CLUB. AND COOL PEEPS FOUND IT.



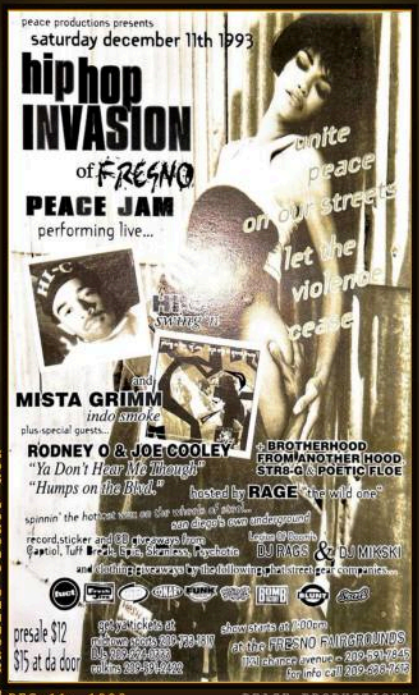
SPONSORS, AS PRINTED

SOUL FOOD · 1845 HANCOCK ST · 1130 BUENOS AVE · 1993 · SOUL LINE 619.492.8087

FRESNO

CALIF 99

HIP HOP INVASION OF FRESNO · PEACE JAM



I got hired to book a concert. Like always, it started with a voicemail. **Fresno, California.** The Fresno Fairgrounds.

PASSENGER MANIFEST — TWO LARGE VANS · PICKUP: LOS ANGELES

01	HI-C SWING'N	02	MISTA GRIMM INDO SMOKE
03	RODNEY O & JOE COOLEY	04	BROTHERHOOD FROM ANOTHER HOOD
05	STR8-G	06	POETIC FLOE
07	DJ RAGS LEGION OF DOOM	08	DJ MIKSKI LEGION OF DOOM

SAN DIEGO'S OWN UNDERGROUND · ON THE WHEELS OF STEEL

I booked the groups and the DJs. Then we rented two large vans and drove through Los Angeles collecting all of the artists, which is like herding cats, if the cats are on something other than caffeine.



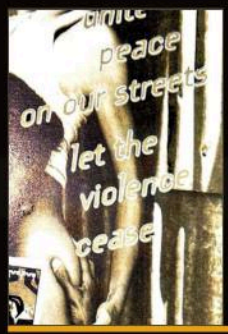
TWO VANS · LOS ANGELES PICKUP RUN

1121 CHANCE AVENUE · SHOW STARTS 7:00PM

THEN NORTH ON THE 99 · ARRIVAL: CHANCE AVENUE

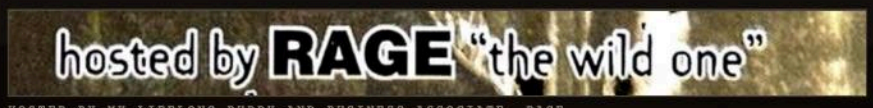
LOS ANGELES — THE 99 — FRESNO

Here's what I've learned about road trips with recording artists: they're exactly like the movies. I've come to think some of them watched those movies and took notes. Every trip ran on excitement and drama, usually more than the occasion called for. There are too many stories to put here and most of them can't be told.



I SHOULD MENTION WHAT THE FLYER SAID

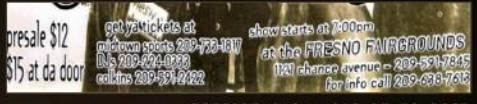
UNITE PEACE ON OUR STREETS.
LET THE VIOLENCE CEASE.



HOSTED BY MY LIFELONG BUDDY AND BUSINESS ASSOCIATE, RAGE

The concert was packed to the rafters and the energy was electric. The afterparty was just as wild. So was the afterparty after the afterparty.

WELL. IT WAS ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS.



PRESALE $12 · $15 AT DA DOOR

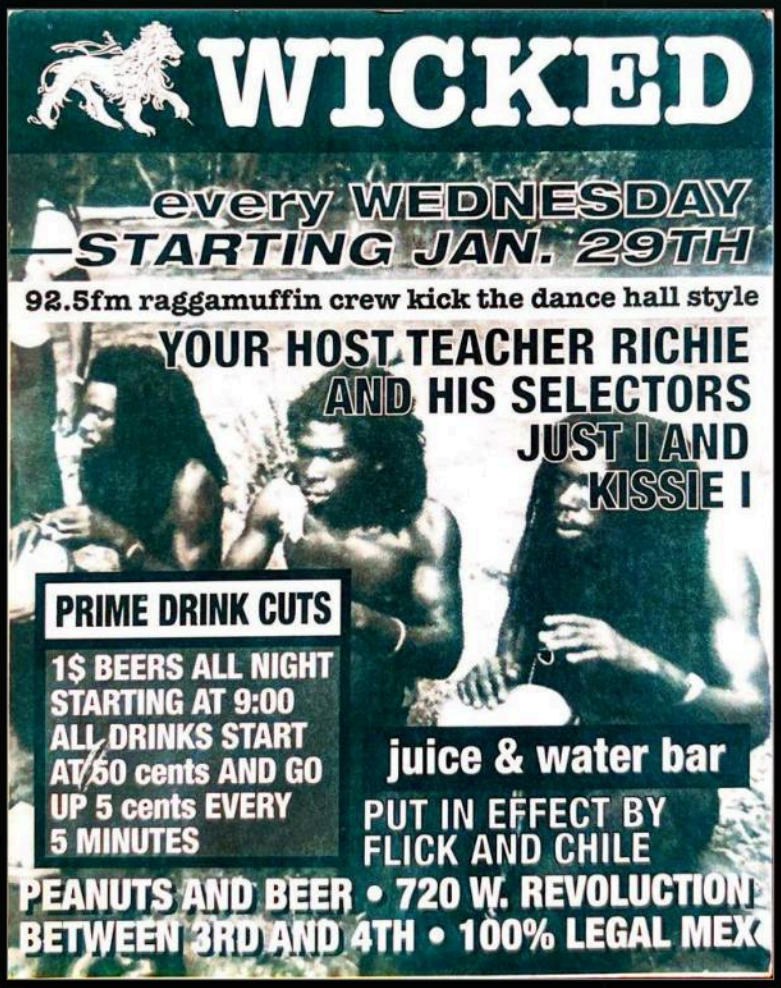
RANDOM FLYERS

FIFTEEN CARDS THAT NEVER GOT A CHAPTER

TIJUANA · PLATES 01-02

Fifteen cards that never got a chapter. Some of these were weeklies that ran for a year, some were one night that never came back, and a few I only know about because the flyer survived. **Every one of them was somebody's night out.**

PLATE 01 — TEAL / OFFSET



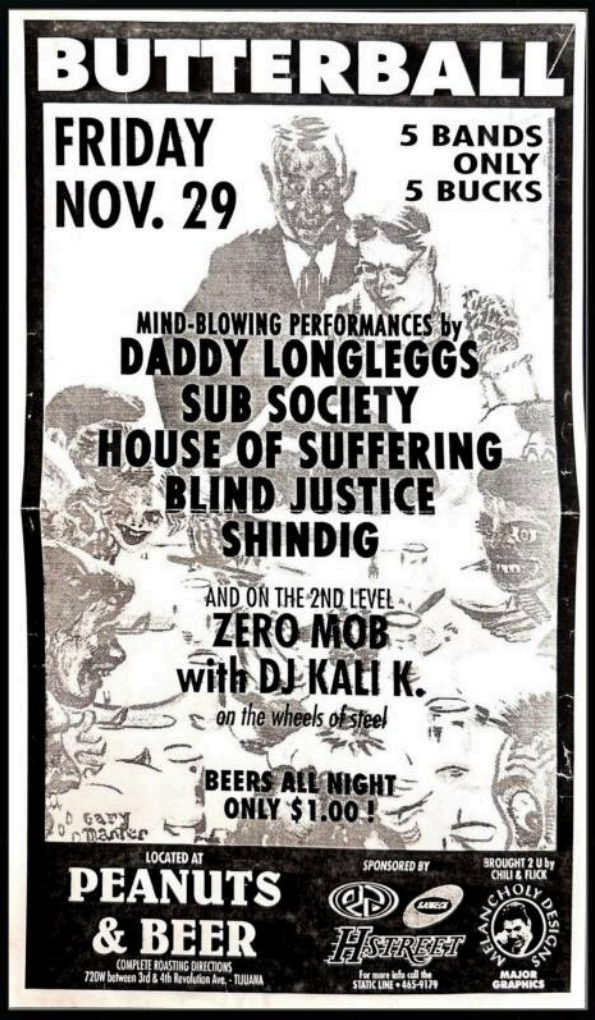
PEANUTS & BEER · 720 W. REVOLUTION

WICKED

EVERY WEDNESDAY · STARTING JAN 29 · PEANUTS AND BEER

92.5fm raggamuffin crew kick the dance hall style. Host: Teacher Richie with selectors Just I and Kissie I. Prime drink cuts — $1 beers all night from 9:00, all drinks start at 50 cents and go up 5 cents every 5 minutes. Juice & water bar. Put in effect by Flick and Chile. 720 W. Revolution between 3rd and 4th. 100% legal Mex.

PLATE 02 — ONE-COLOR / PHOTOCOPY



BETWEEN 3RD & 4TH · TIJUANA

BUTTERBALL

FRIDAY NOV 29 · PEANUTS & BEER · TIJUANA

Five bands, only five bucks. Mind-blowing performances by Daddy Longleggs, Sub Society, House of Suffering, Blind Justice and Shindig. On the 2nd level: Zero Mob with DJ Kali K on the wheels of steel. Beers all night only $1.00. Sponsored by H Street, Melancholy Design and Major Graphics.

WHAT'S IN THIS SECTION — FIFTEEN PLATES

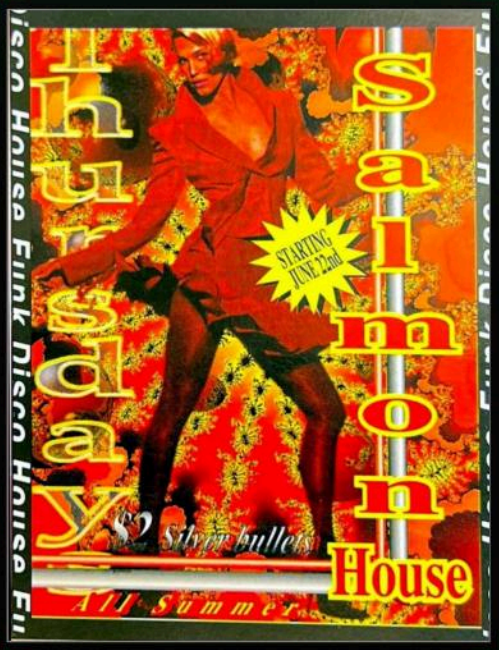
TIJUANA — PLATES 01-02
SALMON HOUSE — PLATES 03-06
SANCTUARY — PLATES 07-09
THE BANDS — PLATES 10-12
EVERYTHING ELSE — PLATES 13-15

SALMON HOUSE

ONE ROOM, ONE SUMMER, THREE SATURDAYS IN OCTOBER

PLATES 03-06

PLATE 03 — FOUR-COLOR

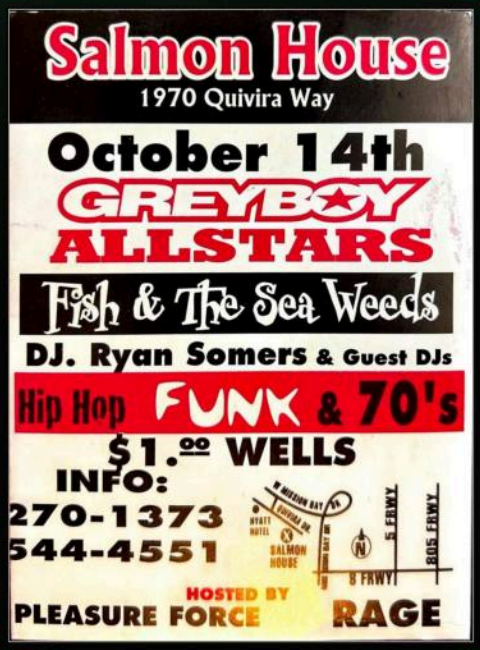


THURSDAYS ALL SUMMER

STARTING JUNE 22ND · DISCO FUNK DISCO HOUSE

$2 Silver Bullets. The summer night that ran before the October run started.

PLATE 04 — RED / YELLOW



OCTOBER 14TH

GREYBOY ALLSTARS · FISH & THE SEA WEEDS

DJ Ryan Somers & guest DJs. Hip Hop, Funk & 70's. $1.00 wells. Hosted by Pleasure Force and Rage. Map printed on the card: Mission Bay Dr, Hyatt, 5 and 805.

PLATE 05 — GREEN



OCTOBER 21ST

PHAZZ · FISH AND THE SEAWEED

DJ Izzy & guest DJs. Hip Hop, Funk & 70s. $1 wells. Hosted by Pleasure Force and Rage.

PLATE 06 — BLACK / WHITE



OCTOBER 28TH

FISH AND THE SEAWEED · DJ MIKE SKI · DJ RUE

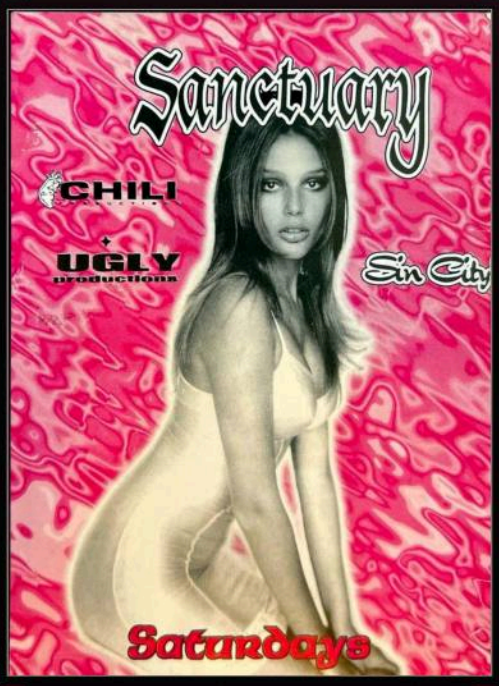
$1 wells. Hosted by Pleasure Force and Rage. Three consecutive Saturdays, three different colorways, one address.

SANCTUARY

THE SAME NIGHT, PRINTED THREE WAYS

PLATES 07-09

PLATE 07 — MAGENTA

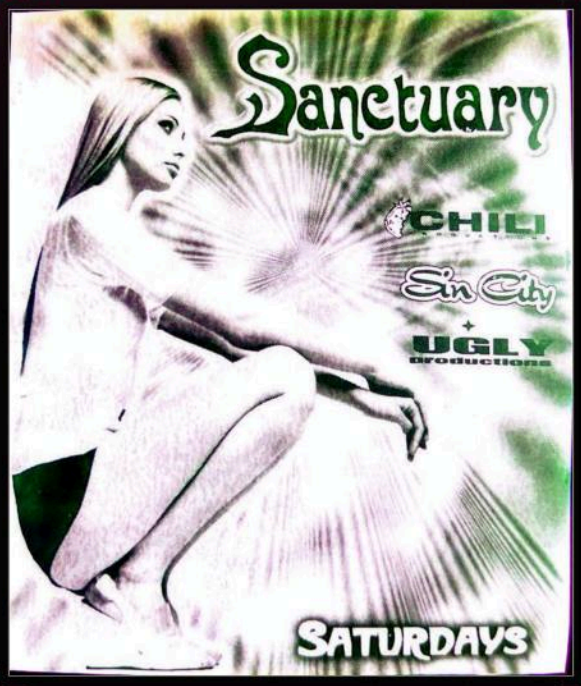


SANCTUARY SATURDAYS

CHILI · UGLY PRODUCTIONS · SIN CITY

The pink plate. Liquid chrome lettering over a marbled ground — the look the whole series ran on.

PLATE 08 — GREEN

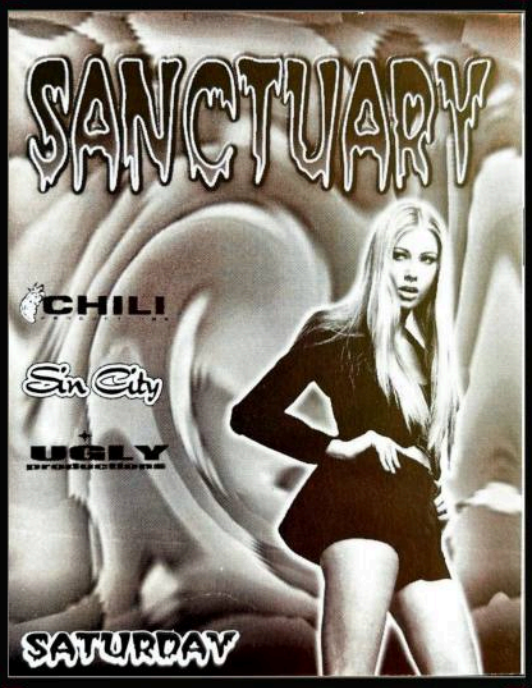


SANCTUARY SATURDAYS

CHILI · SIN CITY · UGLY PRODUCTIONS

Same wordmark, same credits, new color. Changing the ink was cheaper than changing the art.

PLATE 09 — SEPIA



SANCTUARY SATURDAY

CHILI · SIN CITY · UGLY PRODUCTIONS

The third pass. By now the card didn't need to say where it was.

SERIES NOTE — THREE PLATES, ONE NIGHT

NIGHT	SATURDAYS
CREDIT	CHILI + UGLY PRODUCTIONS
WITH	SIN CITY
PLATES	07 MAGENTA · 08 GREEN · 09 SEPIA

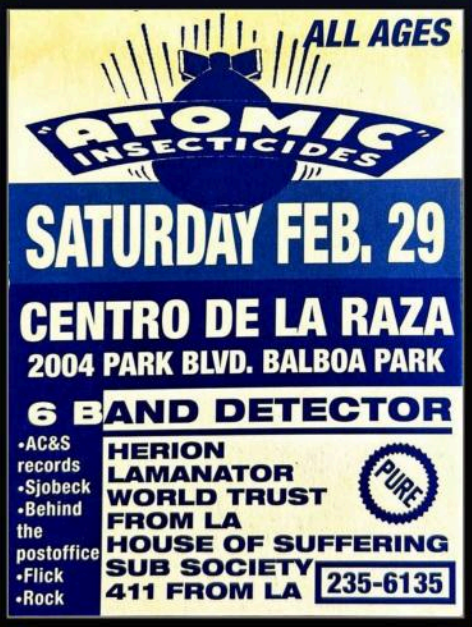
Three printings of the same night. The wordmark never moves, the credits never move, and the only thing that changes is the color and the woman on the front. That was the whole system: build one card people recognize across a room, then reprint it until the night is a name instead of a date.

THE BANDS

WHEN THE FLYER HAD TO LIST EVERYBODY

PLATES 10-12

PLATE 10 — BLUE / WHITE



ATOMIC INSECTICIDES

ALL AGES · SATURDAY FEB 29 · CENTRO DE LA RAZA

2004 Park Blvd, Balboa Park. Six Band Detector: Herion, Lamanator, World Trust from LA, House of Suffering, Sub Society and 411 from LA. Tickets at AC&S Records, Sjobeck (behind the post office), Flick and Rock.

PLATE 11 — OLIVE / LINE ART

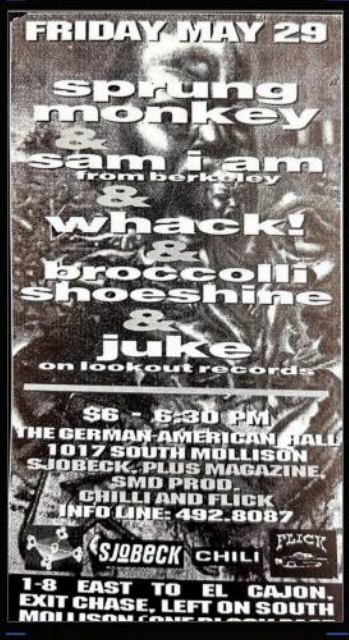


EAT YOUR VEGGIES

FRIDAY MAY 1 · UCSD'S CHE CAFE · #5

PLUS Magazine and Sjobeck present Ku De Tah, Dark Illusion, Whack! and Shindig, plus special guests Dahrel, Sergi Fresh, Tim Godfather and Koko Barr. Begins at 7PM.

PLATE 12 — PHOTOCOPY



FRIDAY MAY 29

THE GERMAN-AMERICAN HALL · EL CAJON · #6

Sprung Monkey, Sam I Am from Berkeley, Whack!, Broccolli, Shoeshine and Juke on Lookout Records. 6:30PM. 1017 South Mollison. I-8 east to El Cajon, exit Chase, left on South Mollison.

SHARED CREDITS ACROSS THESE THREE

PROMOTERS	CHILI AND FLICK
WITH	SJOBECK · PLUS MAGAZINE
ALSO	SMD PROD · AC&S RECORDS
INFO LINE	492.8087

These are the nights with no DJ booth. A band bill takes more room on a card than a DJ bill does, so the design gets out of the way and the names get bigger — five acts, two levels, one price, printed as plainly as the budget allowed. The same phone number runs along the bottom of all three.

SJOBECK · PLUS MAGAZINE · SMD PROD

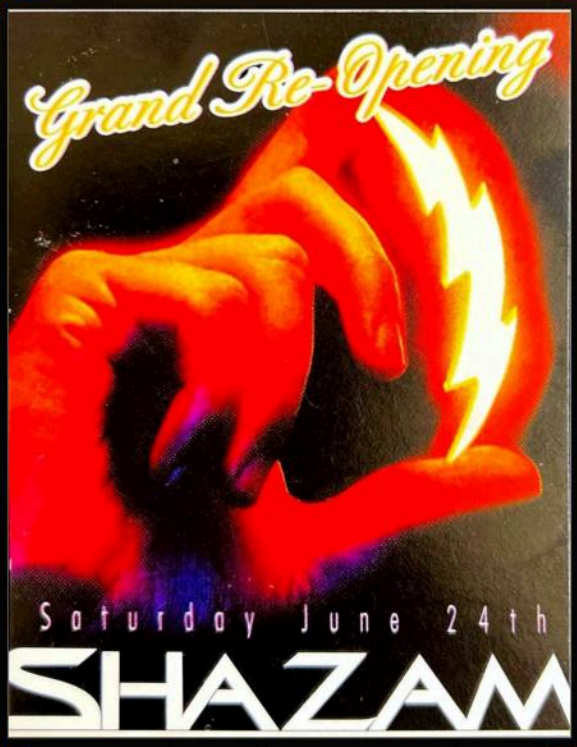
ALL AGES · CHE CAFE · GERMAN-AMERICAN HALL

EVERYTHING ELSE

THREE CARDS THAT BELONG TO NOTHING IN PARTICULAR

PLATES 13-15

PLATE 13 — FOUR-COLOR

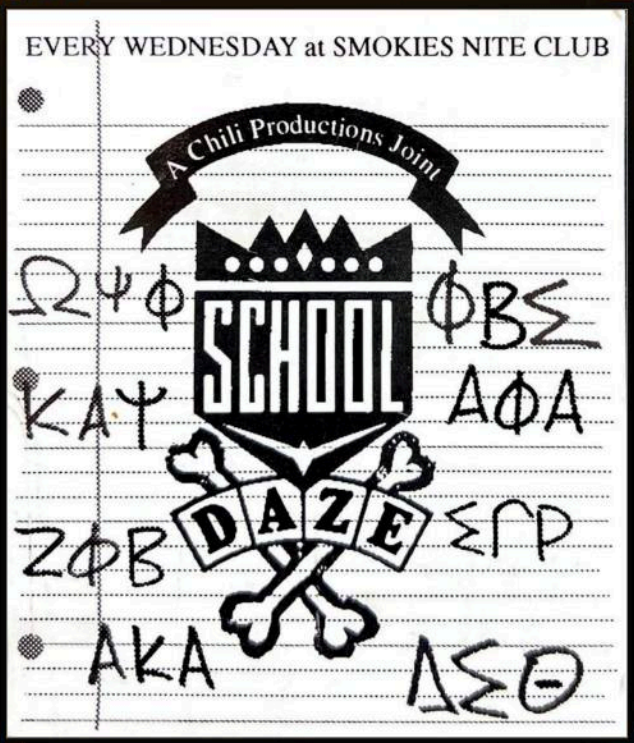


SHAZAM

GRAND RE-OPENING · SATURDAY JUNE 24TH

The airbrushed lightning fist. No bill, no price, no address on the face — the name was doing all the work by then.

PLATE 14 — NOTEBOOK PAPER

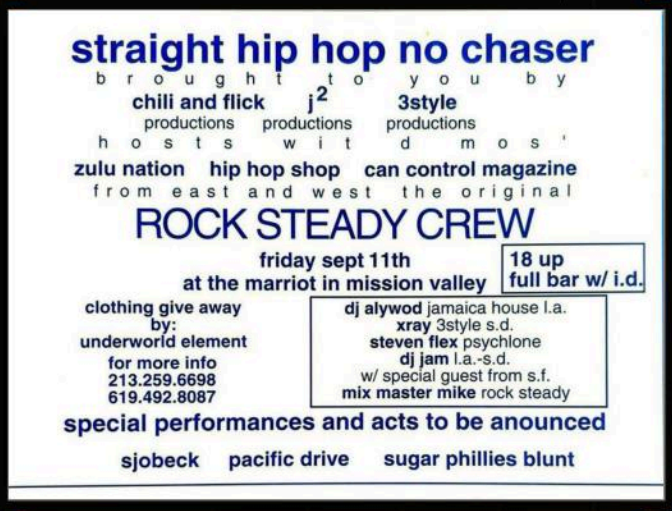


SCHOOL DAZE

EVERY WEDNESDAY AT SMOKIES NITE CLUB

"A Chili Productions Joint." Greek letters down both margins, drawn on ruled paper. The entire art direction is that it looks like homework.

PLATE 15 — BLUE / TYPESET



STRAIGHT HIP HOP NO CHASER

FRIDAY SEPT 11 · THE MARRIOTT IN MISSION VALLEY · 18 UP

Rock Steady Crew. Brought to you by chili and flick, j² and 3style. Hosts wit d mos: zulu nation, hip hop shop, can control magazine. DJ Alywod (Jamaica House L.A.), Xray (3style s.d.), Steven Flex (Psychlone), DJ Jam (l.a.–s.d.), with special guest from s.f. Mix Master Mike (Rock Steady).

PLATE 15 — READING THE SMALL PRINT

VENUE	THE MARRIOTT, MISSION VALLEY
DOOR	18 UP · FULL BAR W/ I.D.
GIVEAWAY	CLOTHING BY UNDERWORLD ELEMENT
SPONSORS	SJOBECK · PACIFIC DRIVE · SUGAR PHILLIES BLUNT

A b-boy jam in a hotel ballroom, set entirely in plain type with no picture on it at all. It is the least designed card in the stack and it books the biggest names — Rock Steady Crew, and Mix Master Mike up from San Francisco. Special performances and acts to be announced, it says. They were not announced.

GREEDY GREG

THE MOST GENEROUS DUDE AND THAT IS NOT THE JOKE

Through late 1992 and into 1993, the main thing I was chasing was **funding for my own record label.**

In early 1993 I struck a deal with Greg Jessie. Everybody knows him as **Greedy Greg.**

Greg is a hip hop producer and manager who had a real hand in building West Coast rap. He managed DJ Quik, AMG, and others. Let me say this up front: Greg is probably *the most generous and fairest dude in hip hop I have ever dealt with.*

He told me once where the name "Greedy" actually came from. It had nothing to do with business, and I'm not going to say it here.

What I can tell you is that I had a multi-million dollar deal fall apart with him, and **I still say he's not greedy.**

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CALL — LOS ANGELES, 1993

GREG JESSIE

KNOWN AS	GREEDY GREG
TRADE	PRODUCER · MANAGER · WEST COAST
MANAGED	DJ QUIK · AMG · OTHERS
ORIGIN OF THE NAME	NOT BUSINESS — AND NOT GOING IN THIS BOOK
MY VERDICT	FAIREST MAN I EVER DEALT WITH

THE COLD CALL

I cold-called Greg one day to ask about booking some of his groups. We ended up talking business for a while. He invited me to come meet him at his house in LA.

I brought my flyer portfolio, *because of course I did.*

He took me upstairs and showed me his studio. I booked **OFTB**, a group he worked with, for my club Soul Food. After that he'd invite me up to video sets for DJ Quik.

WE'D SIT IN HIS STUDIO AND LISTEN TO RECORDS.

"IT'S YOURS IF YOU WANT IT"

HE KNEW I WAS OUT LOOKING FOR THE MONEY



THE RECORD I HELD AND COULD NOT PAY FOR — OPTIONED, NEVER RELEASED BY ME

One of those afternoons he dropped **"Getto Jam" by Domino** on me.

I flipped out. I loved it immediately. I started asking what the deal was — the song, the artist, who had it.

He said it's yours if you want it.

He knew I was out meeting people to fund an independent label. So he wrote me a **three-month option** on Domino and "Getto Jam." Three months, maximum, to raise what it would take to put the record out.

I had two investors ready to go.

Out of the blue, *they got cold feet.*

THE CLOCK

MONTH ONE	MONTH TWO	MONTH THREE	THE EXTRA MONTH
MEETINGS	MEETINGS	COLD FEET	GRANTED
TWO INVESTORS, READY	STILL READY	OUT OF THE BLUE	HE DIDN'T HAVE TO

TERM — THREE MONTHS, MAXIMUM · EXTENSION — ONE MONTH, UNASKED FOR · RAISED — NOTHING

I remember calling Greg after I'd already missed the window. I felt terrible, because I had failed. **He didn't have to take that call the way he took it.**

HE GAVE ME AN EXTRA MONTH.

NOT OWED · NOT REQUESTED · GIVEN ANYWAY

Less than a month later, still unable to raise the money, I was done. Greg made a deal with *Outburst Records*, who handled manufacturing and distribution through Rush Associated Labels.

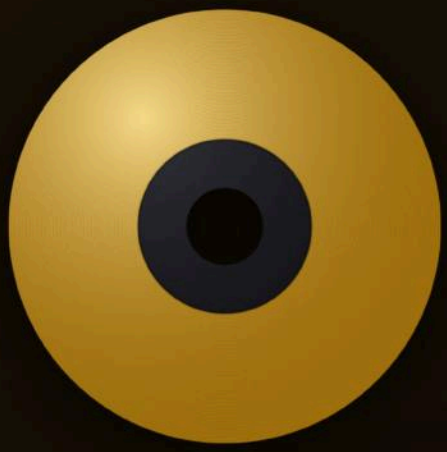
OPTION — EXPIRED · RECORD — GONE · NO. 02

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RECORD

I HAD IT FOR FOUR MONTHS SOMEBODY ELSE HAD IT AFTER

SINGLE	ALBUM	VIDEO	MTV YEAR-END
Nov 16	Dec 7	Jan	No. 59
1993	1993	1994	TOP 100 VIDEOS

BILLBOARD HOT 100	R&B / HIP-HOP	RAP	RIAA
No. 7	No. 4	No. 1	Gold
MAINSTREAM	–	–	JAN 5, 1994



RECORDING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

GETTO JAM

DOMINO · 500,000 COPIES · JANUARY 5, 1994

DRAWN FOR THIS PAGE – NOT AN ARTIFACT · AWARD – NOT MINE · THE EAR FOR IT – MINE

I HAD THAT RECORD IN MY HAND FOR FOUR MONTHS. I JUST COULDN'T GET IT FUNDED.

It was another sign, I was on the right track.

OPTION – EXPIRED · COST – ONE GOLD RECORD · NO. 03

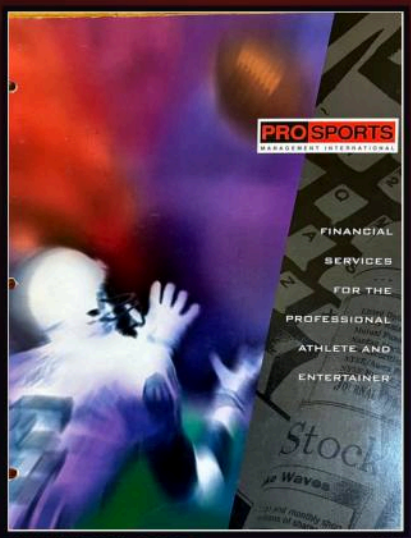
THE CHILI BOOK – SAN DIEGO

FOUR MONTHS IN MY HAND

PRO SPORTS MGT

TWO HUNDRED ATHLETES · ZERO ENTERTAINMENT CLIENTS

THEN ME



PRESENTATION FOLDER 1994

Pro Sports Management handled the money for about two hundred professional athletes, all of them making millions a year. In late 1993 they came looking for me. They wanted an entertainment division. They had **zero entertainment clients.** The division was going to be me.

POSITION — ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION	START: JANUARY 1994
ROLE	OPEN THE ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION
HEADCOUNT	ONE. LATER TWO.
FINANCIAL MGMT	KNEW NOTHING
INVESTING	KNEW NOTHING
ESTATE PLANNING	KNEW NOTHING
ASSETS HELD	A PHONE BOOK OF RELATIONSHIPS
ALSO	THE NERVE TO OPEN DOORS



BUSINESS CARD SUITE 203

That was the job. Take the people I knew who were making money in music and introduce them to the people who knew what to do with it.

FOUR WAYS TO REACH ME	AS PRINTED
TEL	619.284.1900
PAGER	619.968.7042
TOLL FREE	1.800.477.6441
FAX	619.284.1331

COMPANY AMEX — EXPENSE ALLOWANCE

MY FIRST ONE

LUNCHES	DINNERS	LIMOS	JETS	LAVISH ENTERTAINMENT
APPROVED	APPROVED	APPROVED	APPROVED	ITEMIZED AS SUCH

I started in January 1994 and they handed me a company AMEX. Somebody in that building looked at a party promoter and thought: what this man needs is an expense account. Ten years of promoting had made me a professional schmoozer, and now it was a job description. I had retired from producing events to producing sit-down appointments.

I was in the office almost never. I was at every event the industry showed up to — offering a limo, offering a jet, the whole red carpet — to get somebody on a plane to San Diego to sit in a conference room and hear a pitch about financial management. I'd introduce the entertainers to the athletes and the athletes to the entertainers, and then we'd all go out on the town. It was awesome.

MY TITLE WAS ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION. THERE WAS NO ONE ELSE IN IT, UNTIL I GOT TO HIRE MY BUDDY RAGE.

IT WAS PURE FUN.

IT REALLY WAS A DREAM JOB, UNTIL IT WASN'T.

LISTED OPTIONS · RATES · MUTUAL FUNDS · NASDAQ STOCKS · SECURITIES · NYSE/AMEX

PRO SPORTS MGT · 1994–1996

2365 NORTHSIDE DRIVE · SUITE 203 · SAN DIEGO

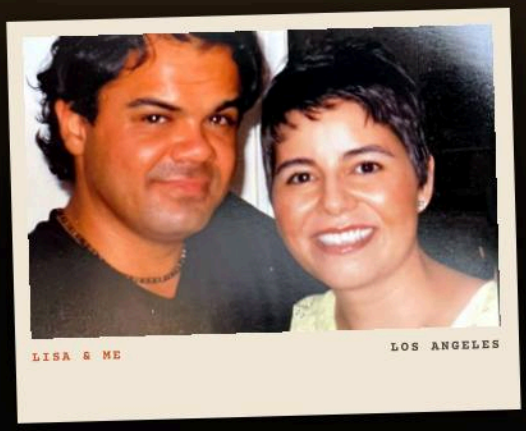
FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR THE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE AND ENTERTAINER

LISA

SHE TOLD ME WHERE THE HOLES IN THE FLOOR WERE.

THE STORIES ARE HERS TO TELL

MOTION PICTURES · TELEVISION · MUSIC — PUBLISHING · THEATER · DIGITAL



LISA & ME — LOS ANGELES

My cousin Lisa Ashook spent thirteen years as Jim Wiatt's assistant while he was co-CEO of ICM, then followed him to William Morris when he took over as CEO. **Thirteen years at that desk.** The stories were legendary, and most of them are hers to tell.

RECORD — L. ASHOOK	ASSISTANT TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
PRINCIPAL	JIM WIATT
DESKS	ICM CO-CEO → WILLIAM MORRIS CEO
TENURE	THIRTEEN YEARS
COVERAGE	FILM · TV · MUSIC · PUBLISHING · THEATER · DIGITAL
TO ME	MENTOR

Lisa is the reason I took the PSM job. She'd wanted me to become an agent for years and figured Pro Sports MGT was the on-ramp. She was my mentor. She told me where the holes in the floor were.

I had zero interest in college coming out of high school. None. My mom applied for Pell Grants without being asked, and one day she showed me a check. Tuition covered. Books covered. I was going to community college.

And I'll be honest about my reasoning. I was already on that campus every week handing out flyers. I figured since I was there anyway, I might as well take some classes.

I came out of it with an associate degree in video and film production and an actual interest in it. Talking to Lisa turned the interest into a direction.

FEDERAL PELL GRANT — APPLIED FOR WITHOUT BEING ASKED

PAY TO THE ORDER OF — COMMUNITY COLLEGE

FOR — TUITION + BOOKS

MEMO — SHE SHOWED ME THE CHECK — MOM

TWO YEARS OF EXTENSION CLASSES — EVENINGS

SAN DIEGO — — — — · UCLA — — — — · SAN DIEGO

Two years of extension classes at UCLA. TV, film, the music business. I was living in San Diego and running CHILI Productions, so I'd drive up for evening classes, stay with my cousin, take more classes the next evening, and drive home that night. The classes were taught by people who actually did the job. For the entertainment business there is no better education on earth.

I was in the front row. Not cool about it, either — absorbing everything, asking questions, in awe.

TELEVISION SYNDICATION — GUEST LECTURERS

LUCIE SALHANY
CHAIRMAN, FOX NETWORK

MEL HARRIS
PRESIDENT, PARAMOUNT TELEVISION GROUP
THEN SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT TELEVISION

THE ROOM
HALF THE CLASS WORKED AT PARAMOUNT

REALITY TELEVISION — TOTAL SHOWS ON THE AIR — THE TOPIC THAT NIGHT

2 In Existence

COPS ON THE AIR

MTV'S REAL WORLD ON THE AIR

THE CLASSROOM WAS FULL OF PEOPLE WHO RAN TELEVISION, AND WE ALL AGREED REALITY TELEVISION DIDN'T HAVE A BIG FUTURE.

LISA · UCLA EXTENSION · 1993–1996 — FRONT ROW

ICM · WILLIAM MORRIS AGENCY · THIRTEEN YEARS AT THAT DESK

SAN DIEGO ⇄ LOS ANGELES · EVENING CLASSES

UCLA

TREATMENT DUE · PITCH IT · REPORT BACK

THE ASSIGNMENT
REALITY TELEVISION
NETWORK
FOX

01 **WRITE A TREATMENT FOR A REALITY TV SHOW**
TURNAROUND **SEVEN DAYS**

02 **PITCH IT TO A MAJOR TELEVISION NETWORK**
OBSTACLES **ONE**

03 **REPORT BACK THE FOLLOWING WEEK**
QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR **MINE**

I raised my hand and asked how a person gets a meeting with a major television network.

I want to be clear that I was the only one in the room who needed to ask. It seemed like everyone else worked at Paramount. A few of them made a call and I had a contact at **FOX**. It probably helped that the woman who gave us the assignment was the Chairman of FOX.

THE ROOM — SEATING · NIGHT SECTION

PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT
PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT
PARAMOUNT	SAN DIEGO FLYERS	PARAMOUNT	PARAMOUNT

INDUSTRY CREDENTIALS IN ROOM — HAND RAISED 01

PEOPLE'S COURT FOR THE MTV AUDIENCE

JUDGES · CASES · DJS · A LITTLE NIGHTCLUB IN IT

DID NOT GET PICKED UP
OF COURSE THAT'S WHAT I PITCHED

A ROOM OF TELEVISION EXECUTIVES WHO HAD ALREADY DECIDED REALITY TV DIDN'T HAVE A FUTURE

LITTLE DID WE KNOW

The music business classes were just as good. Artist Management was taught by **Ken Kragen**, who managed Kenny Rogers, Trisha Yearwood and Travis Tritt, and who put together We Are the World and Hands Across America.

A man who once got Michael Jackson, Bob Dylan and Ray Charles into the same room on the same night was now grading my homework. Ken was cool. He took my calls. He met with me later.

INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD — ARTIST MANAGEMENT

MANAGES	KENNY ROGERS · TRISHA YEARWOOD · TRAVIS TRITT
ASSEMBLED	WE ARE THE WORLD · 1985
ASSEMBLED	HANDS ACROSS AMERICA · 1986

MICHAEL JACKSON · BOB DYLAN · RAY CHARLES

AFTER THE CLASS
- ✓ HE TOOK MY CALLS
- ✓ HE MET WITH ME LATER

Then one of them — the one on the business of hip hop — had a single internship to give away. One internship. One student.

I showed the teacher my portfolio of flyers. Almost ten years of producing events. After that it wasn't much of a competition. Out of 40 people in the class **I got the internship**.

The internship was with Tuff Break Records, a division of A&M. Once a week, between my night classes, I'd spend the day at A&M offices.

When the internship ended I asked if they'd keep me on and pay me. They put me on payroll to promote the entire A&M catalog in San Diego.

THE COMPETITION — ONE OPENING

01 INTERNSHIP / **40** IN THE CLASS

1416 N. LA BREA AVE
HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA
THE OLD CHARLIE CHAPLIN STUDIO LOT
A&M RECORDS

TUFF BREAK → A&M → PAYROLL

THEN CAME CONTRACTS WITH A LOT OF OTHER LABELS. MAJOR AND INDEPENDENT LABELS.

HUSTLE

EVERY BOOK · EVERY CLASS · ANYBODY WITH THAT THING

Before PSM I was trying to learn everything I could about the business side of the music business. Reading every book on it. Taking every class. Managing anybody who had that thing — and I could spot that thing from across a parking lot, which is a skill nobody pays you for, until you're right.

I put local San Diego groups into real studios on real production deals. Thousands of hours in recording studios. I'd give you a number but I stopped counting somewhere around the time I started sleeping in them.

The best night was the Record Plant in LA. Prince was in one studio room. Julio Iglesias was in another. **I never met Prince. Prince did not come out.**

Julio came out of the studio and hung out with us. Julio got in the jacuzzi. Imagine that, a recording studio with a jacuzzi. The Record Plant in LA is a famous recording studio.

The next day, in San Diego, my attorney called. John B. Von Passenheim, Pacific Beach. He had a client he wanted me to manage.

Her name was **Jewel Kilcher**. She was living in her van. Truth be told, you could tell.

We sat and talked about what she wanted to do. I said I'd come see her play that week at the Inner Change, a coffee house practically around the corner from me.

I got there and it was packed. Not packed with coffee drinkers. Packed with LA. You could pick them out by the shoes.

SESSION LOG — RECORD PLANT · LA

ROOM A	PRINCE — DID NOT COME OUT
ROOM B	JULIO IGLESIAS — CAME OUT
ALSO IN	US — SAME NIGHT
AMENITY	A JACUZZI · IN A RECORDING STUDIO

THEN JULIO WANTED TO SHOOT POOL

CHILI		IGLESIAS
1	-	0

HE MAY HAVE LET ME WIN. I CAN STILL SAY I BEAT JULIO IGLESIAS AT POOL.

SELF-ISSUED CURRICULUM — NO TUITION

READ	EVERY BOOK ON IT
TOOK	EVERY CLASS
MANAGED	ANYBODY WITH THAT THING

THE DOORWAY — THE INNER CHANGE

0

I DID THE MATH STANDING IN THE DOORWAY. ZERO CHANCE I'D BE MANAGING HER.

NEW CAR | NEW ADDRESS | NEW ATTORNEY NOT MINE

WITHIN WEEKS — THE HAND-OFF

THEN	SHE GOT CONNECTED WITH INGA VAINSHTEIN

THE DEGREES OF SEPARATION — HERE'S THE PART I FIND SO INTERESTING



THE DEGREE OF SEPARATION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND HOW THE WORLD MOVES — THIS IS WHY CURIOSITY IS A GOOD PRACTICE

Managing Jewel wasn't meant to be for me. Most likely it was the furthest thing from even a possibility. However, it was a question my attorney posed.

Turns out, Jewel and Inga didn't work out either. Now, I don't know Inga or Jewel, but from what I've read in the press, Jewel's mother replaced Inga as manager in early 1998. **So she lost her, and I never had her.** With the degrees of separation, it was never meant to be.

MATTER OF RECORD — FROM THE PRESS

1998	MOTHER REPLACES INGA AS MANAGER
SUIT	$10,000,000 FILED
2001	LABOR COMM. UNLICENSED AGENT · CONTRACT VOIDED
APPEAL	$1,843,450 DEMANDED · DENIED
ORIGINAL	STILL NEVER HEARD

WHEN YOU SET A DIRECTIONAL TRAJECTORY IN YOUR LIFE AND EXPERIENCE A NEAR MISS, YOU NOTICE. WHEN IT BECOMES A REPEAT OFFENDER, YOU START TO THINK DIFFERENTLY ABOUT YOUR LIFE CHOICES.

MANAGEMENT

IN MY FIRST YEAR AT PSM · THREE OF THEM · FAST

01 UNV UNIVERSAL NUBIAN VOICES

LANSING, MICHIGAN · THE POWE BROTHERS AMONG THEM

Signed to Maverick — which is to say signed to Madonna. The single was "Something's Gonna Go My Way." The album was *Ghetto Novelle*, 1993.

$600K → 0
SPENT PRODUCING THE FOLLOW-UP
BIG-NAME PRODUCERS · SEVERAL TRACKS

There is no faster way to make four men stop getting along than spending $600,000 together and getting nothing back.

OUTCOME — ALBUM ONE

IT ALMOST WENT PLATINUM

ALMOST WENT PLATINUM IS A PHRASE YOU HEAR CONSTANTLY IN THIS BUSINESS. NOBODY EVER SAYS IT HAPPY.

LABEL	MAVERICK / WARNER BROS.
RELEASE	GHETTO NOVELLE · 1993
THEN	SALES SLUGGISH · BREAKUP

02 BORN JAMERICANS

WASHINGTON D.C. · NOTCH & EDLEY SHINE · REGGAE AND HIP-HOP

Best clients I ever had. Great guys, great group, great label. Nothing went wrong, nobody sued anybody, and that's the whole story.

It's the shortest section on this page for exactly that reason.

DELICIOUS VINYL — THE LABEL

1994	KIDS FROM FOREIGN · CHARTED
1997	YARDCORE · CHARTED
BUILT	THE ALTERNATIVE HIP-HOP SOUND

TONE LÖC · YOUNG MC · THE PHARCYDE · MASTA ACE

03 THE DOVE SHACK

LONG BEACH · G-FUNK · C-KNIGHT · 2SCOOPS · BO-ROC

Signed to Def Jam. You heard them first on Warren G's *Regulate...G Funk Era*, then on their own record, *This Is the Shack*.

They signed with us before that album was finished. Which is how I ended up on the phone one morning with Def Jam.

The group wasn't getting to the studio on time. No transportation. The label's solution was that the group should buy cars. **Our job was to help them buy the cars.**

SUMMERTIME IN THE LBC — 1995

PEAK CHART POSITION

№54	№11
BILLBOARD HOT 100	HOT RAP SONGS

LABEL	G-FUNK / DEF JAM
PROBLEM	NO TRANSPORTATION
SOLUTION	BUY THREE CARS

WHAT THREE CLIENTS BOUGHT US — THE FOOT IN THE DOOR

MAVERICK
WARNER BROS.

DELICIOUS VINYL
INDEPENDENT

DEF JAM
G-FUNK

SO I DROVE UP FROM SAN DIEGO TO PICK UP THREE RAPPERS IN LONG BEACH AND GO CAR SHOPPING.

MAVERICK · DELICIOUS VINYL · G-FUNK / DEF JAM

THREE CLIENTS · YEAR ONE · SO CLOSE YET SO FAR

ROLLERCOASTER

FIRST STOP WASN'T A CAR LOT · FIRST STOP WAS WESTERN UNION

TRANSFER RECORD	CASH PICKUP
SENDER	DEF JAM RECORDS
METHOD	WESTERN UNION
REASON	NONE OF THEM HAD A BANK ACCOUNT
FEES	DO YOU KNOW WHAT WESTERN UNION CHARGES TO MOVE $45,000? I DO NOW.
RELEASED TO	ME

$45,000
IN CASH · IN THE HOOD AT A COUNTER

Def Jam's instruction was to hand it to me. Which makes me the guy walking around with $45,000 on him, deep in the hood, going car shopping.

We hit used car lots one after another. Two of them insisted on low-riders. **Of course they did.**

Car number three came off a lot in Compton where the salesman looked like Eazy-E had stepped out of the video and onto the asphalt of the car lot. I'm negotiating with whatever's left of the money. It took all day. But we did it — three cars, pick them up tomorrow.

Driving them home, they asked if I knew what Dove Shack meant.

I DID NOT.
THE DOPE HOUSE.

Then they mentioned we should probably be out of Compton before dark, on account of them being from Long Beach, which could be a problem. They watched my face do something. Then they laughed and said they were kidding.

KINDA.

Next morning I went into the PSM offices and reported in. I explained that we were now providing financial management to clients who did not yet have bank accounts.

Everyone laughed a little. Not a lot. Somebody said *I sure hope that album blows up.*

THE DAY'S PURCHASES	ALL DAY
01	LOW-RIDER · INSISTED
02	LOW-RIDER · ALSO INSISTED
03	A LOT IN COMPTON SALESMAN: EAZY-E, APPARENTLY

WHAT THE NAME MEANS
DOVE SHACK = THE DOPE HOUSE
I HAD NO IDEA UNTIL THE DRIVE HOME

STATUS REPORT	NEXT MORNING · PSM
SERVICE	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT
CLIENTS	NO BANK ACCOUNTS YET
REACTION	A LAUGH · NOT A BIG ONE
HOPE	THAT THE ALBUM BLOWS UP
LATER	LEGAL ISSUES · THE ACHILLES HEEL
FLEET	THREE CARS · COLLECTED NEXT DAY
DRIVER	ME
ROUTE	SAN DIEGO ⇄ LONG BEACH ⇄ COMPTON

THE ROLLERCOASTER OF THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY — YEAR ONE INTO YEAR TWO



PEOPLE YOU'D SWEAR WERE DOING BEAUTIFULLY FINANCIALLY — AND THEN THE NUMBERS

We took meetings with a slew of amazing artists on those rosters. And over and over we found the same thing. Hot one month, cold the next.

Year two it was impossible to miss. I still wanted my own label. PSM was interested in backing it. I had a friend, a wealthy lawyer, interested too. We went as far as forming the entity to sign groups into.

And I had my eye on somebody. **Michael Knott**, out of Orange County. One of the most talented people I've ever met, and he understood the business as well as he understood the music, which almost never happens. He would not let me pay for lunch. Not once.

THE LABEL WE ALMOST BUILT	YEAR TWO
BACKER	PSM · INTERESTED
BACKER	A FRIEND · A WEALTHY LAWYER
ENTITY	FORMED
ARTIST	MICHAEL KNOTT · ORANGE COUNTY
BAND	AUNT BETTY'S FORD
TABLE	NEWPORT BEACH · HE BOUGHT LUNCH

THEY LATER HAD TO GO BY THE AUNT BETTYS.
FORD MOTOR COMPANY HAD A WORD WITH THEM.

STICK-TO-ITIVENESS

IT WASN'T JUST PLANNING · THE LABEL WAS REAL

THE LABEL I HAD

FORMED · STANDING · WAITING

PARTNERS	ME + MY LAWYER FRIEND
TARGET	MICHAEL KNOTT'S BAND
HOLD-UP	WE WAITED

SIGNATURE · AUNT BETTYS — NEVER OBTAINED

THE DEAL THEY GOT

ELEKTRA · 1995 · AFTER A BIDDING WAR

TERMS	TOTAL CREATIVE CONTROL
CO-MGMT	GREEN DAY'S MANAGEMENT COMPANY

$1,000,000

AS MICHAEL TOLD IT TO ME

So there we are in Newport Beach planning a record label around Michael Knott's band. And it wasn't just planning. My lawyer friend and I formed the label. It was real. I wanted Michael's band on it and I was trying to get it done.

She wasn't ready to pull the trigger. So we waited.

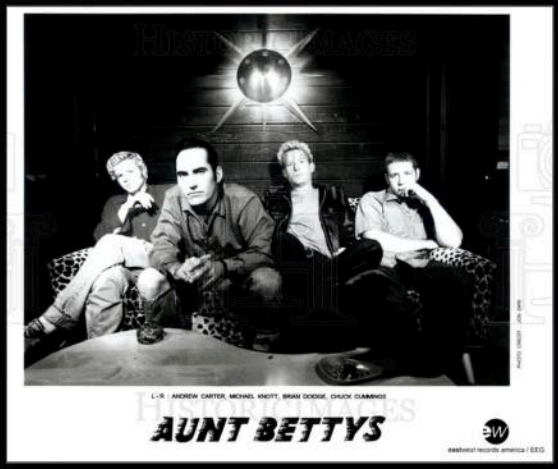
Then everything changed in a snap.

In 1995 the Aunt Bettys were signed to Elektra by Lara Noel Hill, who'd brought in Better Than Ezra, and Seymour Stein — Madonna, Talking Heads, the Ramones. A man who got it right three times in a row in three completely different directions.

There was a bidding war. Michael told me it came to a million dollars. Total creative control, which is close to the rarest thing anybody gets handed in that business. And Green Day's management company came on to co-manage them.

So I had a label, and no signature on the one act I wanted. Again, right track. Again, it wasn't meant to be for me.

And I was happy. Not the kind of happy you perform to be gracious — actually happy. It could not have happened to a nicer or more deserving guy. *He never once let me pay for lunch, and we had a lot of lunches.*



PRESS PRINT · EASTWEST RECORDS AMERICA / EEG PHOTO: JON DIPE

PERSONNEL	LEFT TO RIGHT
01	ANDREW CARTER
02	MICHAEL KNOTT
03	BRIAN DOIDGE
04	CHUCK CUMMINGS

WHILE I WAS WRITING THIS I WENT LOOKING FOR MICHAEL

MICHAEL KNOTT

DIED MARCH 12, 2024 · AGED 61 · ONE MONTH BEFORE I LOOKED

Go listen to the Aunt Bettys. Puts me right back there, every time.

ROCKET & A BOMB · KITTY COURTESY

So I kept getting close. There's a name for that — **three feet from gold**. The idea is that you never know how close you were when you quit, so don't quit.

I believe a lot of that. Stick-to-itiveness is the reason I've gotten anywhere, in business and otherwise.

But nobody mentions the other half. The three feet is only three feet in hindsight. From where you're standing it's just dirt, and some of the time there's nothing under it.

DEPTH REMAINING

3 FT
2 FT
1 FT
GOLD?

MEASURABLE ONLY AFTERWARD.
FROM HERE IT IS JUST DIRT.

THERE'S LOGIC TO STICK-TO-ITIVENESS.
THERE'S ALSO LOGIC TO KNOWING WHEN TO CUT YOUR LOSSES.

COOKIES

DIDN'T MUCH MATTER WITH WHO · GO FIND US AN ARTIST

After missing the Aunt Bettys, PSM wanted to fund a production deal. Didn't much matter with who. **Go find us an artist.**

So I brought in Rage.

Rage Richardson is one of my oldest friends. We'd thrown parties together for years. He stood as a groomsman at my wedding. He's also one of the people who went with my dad to find us in a Mexican prison, which is one of countless examples I could share of how down we are for each other.

CHILI
PRO SPORTS MANAGEMENT INT.
SAN DIEGO, CA

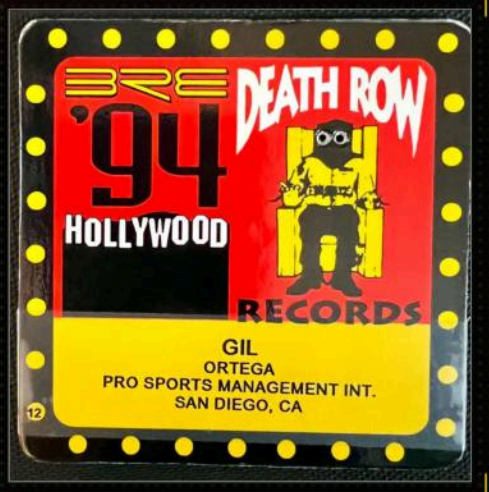
RAGE
RICHARDSON · RECRUITED TO PSM
GROOMSMAN · BROTHER

We went to the BRE Convention in 1994. Black Radio Exclusive was one of the first Black music trade magazines, and the convention was the whole industry standing in one building.

THE CONVENTION — BLACK RADIO EXCLUSIVE

EVENT	BRE · HOLLYWOOD · 1994
VENUE	SHERATON BY UNIVERSAL STUDIOS, LA
PRESENT	THE WHOLE INDUSTRY

THE CREDENTIAL — LAMINATE



BRE '94 · HOLLYWOOD — NO. 12

HOLDER	GIL ORTEGA
COMPANY	PRO SPORTS MANAGEMENT INT.
SPONSOR	DEATH ROW RECORDS

TWO OF US. ONE ASSIGNMENT. FIND A RECORDING ARTIST.

THE QUEST · 1994



CHOCOLATE SANDWICH CREAMEEZ CHOLESTEROL FREE

Rage and I rolled up with James Brown.

You read that right.

The Godfather of Soul. In our party. Or, rather, we were in his party, rollin' with Mr. Brown.

We also had boxes of cookies. James Brown Cookies. Rage's father was in business with Mr. James Brown — they had a cookie company together.

WHAT WE ARRIVED WITH

01 THE GODFATHER OF SOUL
02 SEVERAL CASES OF HIS SNACK PRODUCT

SO WE ARRIVED AT THE BIGGEST BLACK MUSIC CONVENTION IN THE COUNTRY WITH THE GODFATHER OF SOUL AND SEVERAL CASES OF COOKIES.

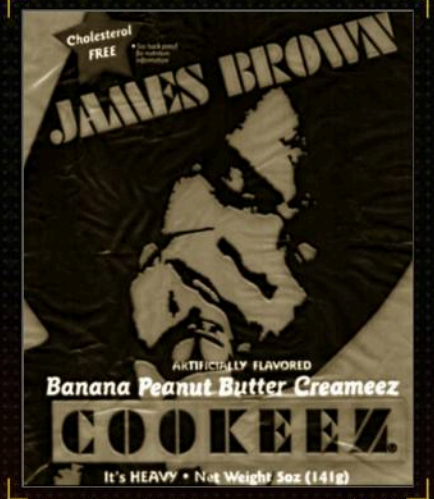
DOOR OPENERS

TWO DAYS OF PURE ENJOYMENT · WE CALLED IT WORK

Job 01
NETWORK FOR PSM

Job 02
FIND AN ARTIST

Job 03
MOVE COOKIES



BANANA PEANUT BUTTER IT'S HEAVY

The cookies were a tremendous door opener. Walk up to anybody holding a bag with JAMES BROWN printed on it and you're in a conversation.

They were, however, **the second-best door opener we had.**

Mr. Brown took a big suite and we brought people up to meet him all weekend.

DOOR OPENER · RANKED

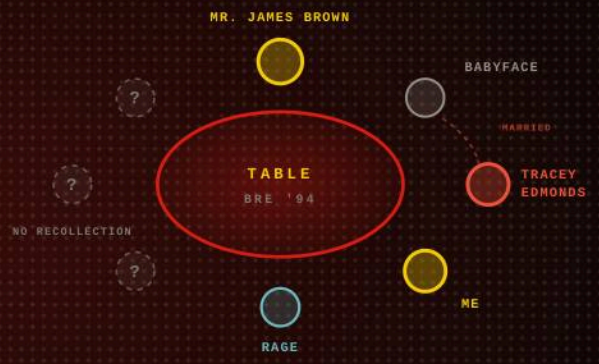
1 **MR. JAMES BROWN**
AVAILABLE BY INVITATION · UPSTAIRS · ALL WEEKEND

2 **THE COOKIES**
BOXES AND BOXES · CHOLESTEROL FREE

MR. BROWN'S SUITE · THE DINNER · THE RECEIVING LINE

THE DINNER · SEATING

MR. JAMES BROWN'S TABLE



AT THE DINNER WE SAT AT HIS TABLE.
I WAS NEXT TO TRACEY EDMONDS AND BABYFACE.
THEY WERE MARRIED AT THE TIME.

I COULD NOT TELL YOU ABOUT ONE OTHER PERSON AT THAT TABLE.
I WAS SITTING NEXT TO TRACEY EDMONDS.

What I do remember is the traffic. Every famous person in that room came by to pay respects to Mr. James Brown. It never stopped. A receiving line that just ran all night.

Jamie Foxx got up and sang something off his new album.

And later that night **I smoked a blunt with Snoop Dogg and Suge Knight.**

Barely inhaled. I was scared of the chronic. I'm a lightweight and I've made my peace with it.

Rage and Suge actually hit it off. Years later he spent a day at Disneyland with Suge and his kid.

LATER THAT NIGHT

ONE BLUNT THREE MEN

SNOOP DOGG · SUGE KNIGHT · ME
PARTICIPATION: BARELY
REASON: SCARED OF THE CHRONIC

ALSO WITNESSED — SAME ROOM

SANG	JAMIE FOXX · NEW ALBUM
LINE	EVERYBODY · ALL NIGHT
LATER	DISNEYLAND

SUGE KNIGHT AT DISNEYLAND.
I THINK ABOUT THAT MORE THAN I SHOULD.

TWO DAYS OF PURE ENJOYMENT WE CALLED WORK

CAUTION

THIS MUSIC CAN BE ADDICTIVE · PROCEED ACCORDINGLY

Rage is always in the middle of whatever's happening. Not always wild. Sometimes just odd.

For example, we watched OJ Simpson's white Bronco go past us on the freeway that day.

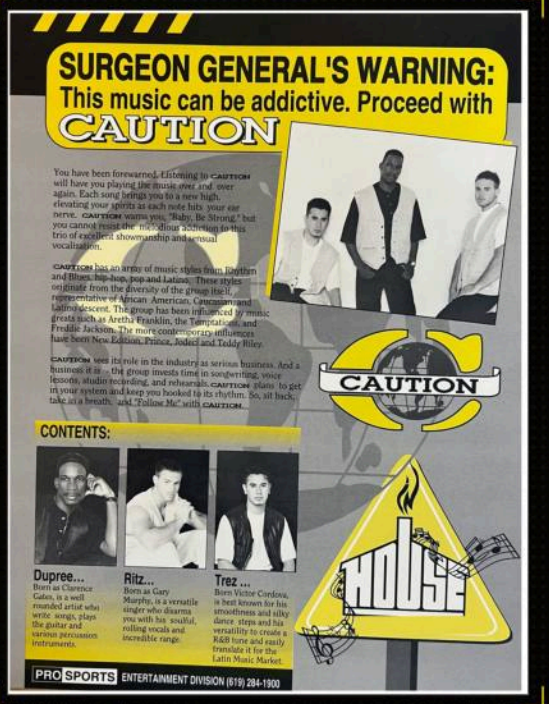
In 2001 we spent an entire afternoon in a suite at the Palms in Las Vegas with Jamie Foxx and his manager, watching movies.

Rage finds the room. I keep ending up in it with him.

SIGHTINGS — NON-EXHAUSTIVE

'94	A WHITE BRONCO · GOING PAST US ON THE FREEWAY
'01	JAMIE FOXX · THE PALMS · AN ENTIRE AFTERNOON OF MOVIES

THE ONE-SHEET — PRO SPORTS · ENT. DIV.



MANAGEMENT · HOUSE — (619) 284-1900

SO. THE ARTIST.

A TRIO OUT OF SAN DIEGO · R&B



DUPREE · RITZ · TREZ — SAN DIEGO

DUPREE
CLARENCE GATES

RITZ
GARY MURPHY

TREZ
VICTOR CORDOVA

They were called CAUTION.

PSM signed them to a production deal, which meant we now had to make a record and sell it to somebody.

We hired a husband-and-wife production team, **Swoop and Bright**. Difficult. Also excellent. Both were true at the same time and we needed the second one more.

ALSO **DIFFICULT**

MAINLY **EXCELLENT**

THEY CUT A SOLID SINGLE.
WE WENT SHOPPING.

RAGE FINDS THE ROOM · I KEEP ENDING UP IN IT WITH HIM
PRO SPORTS · ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION · (619) 284-1900

TWENTY-EIGHT HOURS

ROTATING DRIVERS · NOBODY DIED

Mia Redd co-managed OutKast. I'd been circling OutKast as a PSM client for a while.

I sent the CAUTION CD to her in Atlanta. She loved it. She said there's a SONY Music singing contest here, I can get you in, you should do it.

The contest was in three days.

We priced flights for five people. We could not afford flights for five people, on that short of notice.

So Rage, me, and all three members of CAUTION got into a rented van and drove to Atlanta. You'd have thought we were in the Cannonball Run.

THE RUN — SAN DIEGO ⇄ ATLANTA

ELAPSED

28 HOURS, DOOR TO DOOR
ROTATING DRIVERS · NOBODY DIED

FIVE FLIGHTS	ONE VAN
NOT AFFORDABLE	RENTED

WHAT WE LEARNED ON ARRIVAL

IT WAS A BLACK CLUB, AND EVERY ARTIST IN THE CONTEST WAS BLACK.

CAUTION WAS BLACK, WHITE AND HISPANIC.
RAGE AND I DID SOME QUIET PRAYING.

We stayed at Rage's father's house and got to the club with almost no time to spare — the Underground, a jazz club inside a mall, packed. All but one other act had already performed, so we didn't know what we were up against. I'm telling you, we barely made it to this contest.

They hit the stage and the crowd went with them. It was looking good. It was looking really good.

Then came the crescendo, which belonged to **Ritz**. At that moment the only white guy in the building. Center stage.



DUPREE
CLARENCE GATES



RITZ
TOOK THE CRESCENDO · CENTER STAGE



TREZ
VICTOR CORDOVA

RITZ DELIVERED. THE ROOM STOOD UP.

MIA LOOKED OVER AT ME WITH ACTUAL DOLLAR SIGNS IN HER EYES

THEY WON

WE HAD NO IDEA WHAT THEY'D WON. NOBODY SAID.

LAST GROUP TO PERFORM · HOST RETURNED FIVE MINUTES LATER
ALL WE WERE TOLD: SONY MUSIC EXECUTIVES WANTED TO MEET IN THE MORNING

CAUTION THOUGHT THEY HAD A RECORD DEAL. WE ALL FELT PRETTY GOOD WALKING INTO THAT REHEARSAL BUILDING.

SAN DIEGO ⇄ ATLANTA · ONE RENTED VAN · ROTATING DRIVERS

THE UNDERGROUND · A JAZZ CLUB INSIDE A MALL · PACKED

JAGGED CAUTION

THERE WAS ANOTHER GROUP THERE

We were told they'd performed in the contest too. We'd never seen them, because we rolled in at the very end and went on last.

We were in that building about an hour.

The short version is that **the other group got the record deal.**

Jermaine Dupri signed them to So So Def, distributed through Columbia/Sony. It took a while to break them.

THE OTHER GROUP — ATLANTA, GA

SIGNED THAT MORNING

JAGGED EDGE

LABEL	SO SO DEF · COLUMBIA / SONY
2000	ALBUM SOLD TWO MILLION COPIES
THEN	"WHERE THE PARTY AT" · №1 R&B

WOW.
DID NOT SEE THAT ONE COMING.

We did not get a record deal. We did not get any kind of deal.

We got donuts.

We drove twenty-eight hours, won the contest, and were given donuts. There we are. In Atlanta. With donuts.

I wasn't leaving town on that note. Pam Brown managed Tag Team — "Whoomp! (There It Is)" — and she put us in front of **Gary "Lil G" Jenkins**, the lead singer of Silk.

We spent the afternoon at his studio and then just walked around the mall together, getting to know each other. And there it was again. Hope. Gary was interested in working with CAUTION.

The drive home was not as fun as the drive out. We also finally got a speeding ticket.

BROUGHT HOME — SAN DIEGO

ATLANTA · ITEMIZED	QTY
DONUTS	YES
SPEEDING TICKET	01
RECORD DEAL	00
ANY KIND OF DEAL	00
TOTAL	DONUTS & A TICKET



WE WERE IN THAT BUILDING ABOUT AN HOUR

DONUTS · A SPEEDING TICKET · TWELVE YEARS

RIGHT TRACK AGAIN. AGAIN, NOT MEANT TO BE FOR ME.

CAUTION FELT IT TOO · WE BUSTED OUR HUMPS AFTER ATLANTA

One more thing about Swoop and Bright, the difficult, excellent husband-and-wife team.

Twelve years later, 2006. I'm at the Playboy Mansion as **Rick Bliss**, about to paint live on stage. Some group I don't know has just finished playing. The DJ is telling the crowd to get ready for Rick Bliss.

I'm standing at the side of the stage. The lead singer looks familiar and I can't place him. I look to my left. Standing right next to me is Bright.

And it lands. That's Swoop up there.

Hugs, hellos, how have you been — she knows me as CHILI. Then she asks what I'm doing here.

I said, I'm Rick Bliss. She said, *Huh?*

PLAYBOY MANSION · 2006

RICK BLISS

WITH SUPPORT FROM

SWOOP

DIFFICULT · EXCELLENT · TWELVE YEARS EARLIER

I SAID, I'M ABOUT TO PAINT LIVE. YOU GUYS JUST OPENED FOR ME. THEN I WENT OUT AND PAINTED. IT WAS KIND OF FUN.

NEW PATH

WHAT WAS I GOING TO DO INSTEAD

Six months into trying to get CAUTION a record deal, it started coming apart from every direction at once.

The math at PSM had stopped working for me. Financial management for recording artists is a rollercoaster, and **I was riding it without a seatbelt.**

PSM was used to athletes' contracts worth millions of dollars, with structured earnings for each year. Even in the event of an injury. Money management for that kind of client was a lot easier than a rollercoaster of up-and-down earning cycles.

THE CUTS — SPENDING · REDUCED

- ~~LIMOS~~
- ~~JETS~~
- ~~RED CARPET~~

TWO KINDS OF CLIENT — EARNINGS PROFILE

WHAT PSM WAS BUILT FOR

THE ATHLETE



MILLIONS · STRUCTURED YEAR BY YEAR
PAID OUT EVEN IN THE EVENT OF AN INJURY

WHAT I HAD INSTEAD

THE RECORDING ARTIST



UP · DOWN · UP · NOTHING · UP
NO STRUCTURE · NO INJURY CLAUSE · NO SEATBELT

PROSPECTIVE

WE WERE FLYING PEOPLE AROUND LIKE ROYALTY *BEFORE THEY'D SIGNED ANYTHING.*

WHY THE PRODUCTION DEAL DIED — THREE DIRECTIONS AT ONCE

01 THE GROUP WANTED MORE PRODUCTION

02 MORE PRODUCTION MEANT MORE INVESTMENT

03 JOHN GILLETTE WAS RUNNING OUT OF INTEREST IN THE WHOLE IDEA

TWO YEARS IN. I PACKED MY BAGS.

PRO SPORTS MANAGEMENT INTERNATIONAL · ENTERTAINMENT DIVISION · HEADCOUNT RETURNING TO ZERO

WHAT WAS I GOING TO DO INSTEAD?
I DIDN'T KNOW.

SIX MONTHS · COMING APART FROM EVERY DIRECTION AT ONCE

TWO YEARS AT PSM · THEN I PACKED MY BAGS

BURN OUT

BURNED OUT DOESN'T COVER IT

1996. I was twenty-seven, and burned out doesn't cover it. I was finished with the entertainment business.

Looking back, I never chose that career. **It chose me.** The minute I made money throwing a party the path lit up — more money and more fun than any corporate job was going to hand me.

PSM was supposed to be the clean transition out of CHILI Productions. It wasn't.

So now what. Back to producing events? Almost every week I was getting asked to produce another party.

THE STANDING OFFER — ALMOST EVERY WEEK

PRODUCE ANOTHER PARTY?	NO THANK YOU
JUST ONE MORE?	NO THANK YOU
WHAT ABOUT THIS WEEKEND?	NO THANK YOU
NAME YOUR PRICE.	NO THANK YOU

I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT. NO THANK YOU.

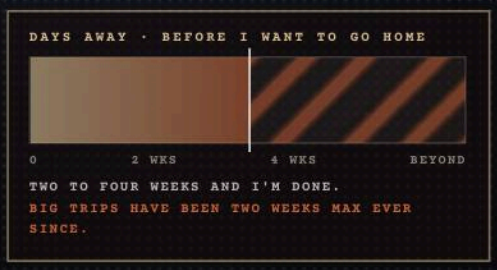
THE STANDING OFFER · DECLINED, WEEKLY

A DECADE OF SEVEN NIGHTS A WEEK TAUGHT ME EXACTLY ONE THING

I'M A HOMEBODY.

THAT'S THE FINDING. THAT'S WHAT ALL OF IT WAS FOR. I'D RATHER BE AT HOME. THAT'S ME.

TRAVEL TOLERANCE — MEASURED



I don't travel for long periods either. Two to four weeks and I'm done.

My honeymoon was a month of unplanned wandering through **Nicaragua and Costa Rica** — land somewhere, stay as long as we felt like it, move on when we felt like that. It was perfect.

After a month I told my wife, let's go home.

A MONTH OF TOTAL FREEDOM, AND I WANTED MY OWN COUCH.

IT CHOSE ME · THE MINUTE I MADE MONEY THROWING A PARTY

NICARAGUA · COSTA RICA · LET'S GO HOME

SO I BUILT IT

THAT JOB DID NOT EXIST

My cousin Lisa wanted me in LA. Hollywood agent, or something next to it.

I love visiting LA. **I do not want to live in LA.** The traffic alone.

I had driven twenty-eight hours to Atlanta in a van without complaining once. The 405 is where I drew the line.

San Diego moves different. I grew up on a farm and now I live at the beach. It's chill. *That's my vibe.*

TWO CITIES — ONE VIBE

LA	VS	SAN DIEGO
GREAT TO VISIT THE TRAFFIC ALONE		FARM, THEN BEACH IT'S CHILL

```
> MILES DRIVEN TO ATLANTA, NO COMPLAINTS ... 28 HRS
> MILES ON THE 405 BEFORE DRAWING LINE ... ZERO
```

What I wanted was a job where I could chill when I felt like chilling and still make good money.

That job did not exist.

So I built it. I started a lead generation company out of my house, back before the internet. When high tech was a fax machine.

Then the internet showed up.

POSITION WANTED
APPLICANT: ONE

DUTIES	CHILL WHEN I FEEL LIKE CHILLING
PAY	GOOD MONEY
LOCATION	THE BEACH
OPENINGS	NONE ANYWHERE
RESOLUTION	BUILT IT MYSELF

THE TECH STACK — SUCH AS IT WAS

1996
A HOUSE
A FAX MACHINE
THAT'S THE STACK

1997
THE INTERNET
SHOWS UP
BUSINESS GROWS WITH IT

1998
MARKETING ON IT
WRITING ON THE WALL
FOR THE MUSIC BUSINESS

I GOT OUT OF THE MUSIC BUSINESS RIGHT BEFORE THE MUSIC BUSINESS GOT TAKEN APART.

I'D LOVE TO TELL YOU I PLANNED IT

I DIDN'T KNOW IT YET, BUT IN A FEW YEARS I'D BE RIDING THE DOT COM WAVE. I HAD NO IDEA HOW BIG A WAVE IT WAS.

GREW UP ON A FARM · NOW I LIVE AT THE BEACH · IT'S CHILL

WORKING FROM HOME · WHEN HIGH TECH WAS A FAX MACHINE

FRAUD

THE SHIT HIT THE FAN · IN A HEADLINE NEWS KIND OF WAY

THE CLIPPING — SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

$9 million athlete scam alleged



By Don Bauder, SENIOR COLUMNIST

John W. Gillette Jr., financial adviser to professional athletes including San Diego Chargers linebacker Junior Seau, was charged yesterday with 37 counts of grand theft and one count of forgery in the disappearance of $9.3 million of investor funds.

Of the missing money, $5.6 million came from National Football League players. Dallas Cowboys safety Darren Woodson lost $2.5 million; Seau and Washington Redskins safety Stanley Richard, a former Charger, each lost $1.25 million. Ex-San Diego Padres pitcher Greg Harris lost $720,000.

Gillette, Seau's business partner in the Mission Valley restaurant that bears the star linebacker's name, pleaded

UNION-TRIBUNE

John Gillette Jr.: Alleged fraud.

See ATHLETES on Page A-17

JOHN GILLETTE JR. · ALLEGED FRAUD — PAGE A-17

AT ARREST · THE CHARGE

$9.3M

37 COUNTS GRAND THEFT
1 COUNT FORGERY
INVESTOR FUNDS, DISAPPEARED

DEC 1997 · THE SENTENCE

10 Years

~$11 MILLION EMBEZZLED
$11.8 MILLION RESTITUTION
BIGGER THAN THE HEADLINE

LEDGER OF LOSSES — AS REPORTED

NAME	AMOUNT
DARREN WOODSON — DALLAS COWBOYS · SAFETY	$2,500,000
JUNIOR SEAU — SAN DIEGO CHARGERS	$1,250,000
STANLEY RICHARD — WASHINGTON · FORMER CHARGER	$1,250,000
GREG HARRIS — EX-SAN DIEGO PADRES	$720,000
FROM NFL PLAYERS ALONE	**$5.6M**

A little more than a year after I left PSM, the shit hit the fan in a headline news kind of way. **John Gillette got arrested.**

I was lucky. Not one of my clients lost a dime.

In retrospect we saw things that didn't add up. We just never added them up. We figured it was his money. Or an investor's.

I was shocked and I was sad about it. I still had good friends working at that firm, and *I know they were blindsided.*

HERE'S THE PART I CAN'T GET PAST

THAT'S WHERE IT WENT.

THE ATHLETES WERE THE SAFE SIDE OF THAT BUSINESS. STRUCTURED CONTRACTS. GUARANTEED MONEY. PAID OUT EVEN IF THE GUY GOT HURT.

THINGS THAT DIDN'T ADD UP — WE JUST NEVER ADDED THEM UP

01 ENORMOUS MONEY CHASING TALENT CONTRACTS THAT NEVER BROUGHT ANYTHING CLOSE TO IT BACK IN

02 LIMOS. JETS. THE RED CARPET FOR PEOPLE WHO HADN'T SIGNED ANYTHING

03 AN OVER-THE-TOP CHRISTIAN MAN WHO ALWAYS TALKED ABOUT OPENING A STRIP CLUB

SOMETIMES YOU NEVER KNOW WHO YOU'RE IN BUSINESS WITH. WHERE HAVE I HEARD THAT?

A LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER I LEFT PSM

UNION-TRIBUNE · BY DON BAUDER, SENIOR COLUMNIST

LIFE MAGAZINE

SAME ISSUE AS THE KENNEDYS

August 1995. **LIFE put Jack and Jackie Kennedy on the cover.**

Inside, three pages on a rave in a gravel pit outside San Diego.

The event was *NARNIA*, produced by Branden Powers and Nicholas "Nick Nak" Luckinbill. LIFE called it a neo-Woodstock, which is the kind of comparison **you cannot buy.**

ON THE COVER
JACK & JACKIE
A PHOTOBOOTH STRIP
FORTY YEARS OLD

VS

ON PAGE TWENTY
A GRAVEL PIT
THREE A.M.
TEN THOUSAND KIDS

THE COVER — AUGUST 1995



THE TEARSHEET — PAGES 20-21


LIFE GOES TO...

A Full Moon Rave

THE WORD is associated with madness—not far off. A rave is an underground party attended by people in their teens and twenties who dance all night under the stars or inside warehouses. The biggest annual rave in the U.S.—last year's drew 10,000 people to a gravel pit on an Indian reservation near San Diego—is called Narnia. On August 26, Global Underworld Network will host the fourth one. "We grew up in the '80s, when it was 'I' and 'me' and screw you and the planet," says organizer Branden Powers, 23. "The '90s is about 'us,' loving each other."

It's three a.m., and there's a party going on. Do you know where your teenagers are?

Woodstock '94 had happened the summer before — the twenty-fifth anniversary of the original, which ran in 1969, **which happens to be the year I was born.** LIFE ran this the following August.

THREE AUGUSTS — TWENTY-SIX YEARS

1969
THE ORIGINAL
AND ME

1994
WOODSTOCK '94
TWENTY-FIFTH

1995
LIFE PICKS
A GRAVEL PIT

PHOTOGRAPHY · LYNN JOHNSON
TEXT · CLAUDIA GLENN DOWLING
PRODUCED BY · BRANDEN POWERS · NICK NAK LUCKINBILL
HOST · GLOBAL UNDERWORLD NETWORK

LIFE GOES TO… A FULL MOON RAVE

THAT IS THE ACTUAL HEADLINE · WE DID NOT WRITE IT

THEY COULD HAVE PICKED ANY FESTIVAL OR RAVE IN THE COUNTRY.
THEY PICKED NARNIA. IN LITTLE SAN DIEGO.

NARNIA

WHAT A NATIONAL MAGAZINE REPORTED



Here is what a national magazine reported about a party thrown by **my former business partners.**

Ten thousand people. A gravel pit on a reservation, not subject to California patrolling — *a sentence doing a lot of quiet work.*

A forty-man security force named **Harmonius Fist.**

Twenty dollars at the gate and a pat-down.

House rules: no alcohol, no nitrous oxide, no red meat, no bad vibes. *Mud and love are permitted.*

And this, which I would like carved into something: **"One injury has been reported: incense in an eye."**

THE TEARSHEET PAGE 22



AT THE GATE PER HEAD

NARNIA · ADMISSION	
GATE	$20.00
PAT-DOWN	INCLUDED
GLASS BOTTLES	TAKEN
ALCOHOL	TAKEN
NITROUS TANKS	TAKEN
ADMIT ONE	TWELVE HOURS

THE FORCE FORTY MEN

HARMONIUS FIST

HIRED BY THE ORGANIZERS PATTING DOWN TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE

THE POSTER GLOBAL UNDERWORLD



TWELVE HOURS TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE TOTAL INJURIES REPORTED	**ONE. INCENSE IN AN EYE.** CARVED INTO SOMETHING, AS REQUESTED.

THEY LEASED A GRAVEL PIT THE STATE CAN'T PATROL. THAT ISN'T A LOOPHOLE. THAT'S JUST READING.

FREE AT LAST

THEN A TIRED KID RUINED IT

Branden was twenty-five and gave LIFE **the quote of his life.**

> *"We grew up in the '80s, when it was 'I' and 'me' and screw you and the planet. The '90s is about 'us,' loving each other."*
>
> BRANDEN POWERS, 25 · LIFE, PAGE 20

Nick is the stepgrandson of Lucille Ball. I'm including that because it's true *and because I enjoy it.*

> *Somebody told the reporter, "We promise never to grow up and drive Jeep Cherokees."*
>
> UNATTRIBUTED · LIFE, PAGE 22 · STILL HOLDING UP

THE TEARSHEET — PAGE 24


The deejay keeps them dancing until the sun comes up—or until the police shut them down.

WE'RE HERE together, under the moon," organizer Nicholas Luckinbill (stepgrandson of Lucille Ball) says at midnight. "Blessings and love." There it's back to the real point of the gathering: the music. Don't divide it into techno, house, ambient or trance—as long as the sounds are synthesized and rhythmic, it's all rave music. The deejay works two to four turntables (yes, vinyl), spending up a trick, slowing another, flipping discs and switching grooves, controlling the mood. Lights, too. Words flash on a screen: "Exodus." "Children." "Future."

"Dance is a metaphor for being very free with people," says one kid, who has been boogying nonstop, facing the stage, for hours. "It's an escape." His friend nods. "Turn all that negative energy into positive. Dancing is so healing."

As the moon goes down and the sun comes up, the latest popular deejay, called simply Dmitry, plays an old Tears for Fears song interval with Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech. The kids all chant along. "Free at last, free at last." Daylight means that after 12 hours the party's over. One injury has been reported. "It's 6... enough of that love stuff," says a tired kid. "These faces look like Where I get house. It's a hot shower. All these people had one big party, and now they have to face reality." ☐

The crowds come to dance to star-power deejays above. L.A. radio jock Jason Bently. When the moon is high and the lights flash, even a gravel pit can be transformed.

24

By sunrise the DJ was playing Tears for Fears cut with the **I Have a Dream** speech, and ten thousand people were chanting *free at last.*

Then a tired kid said, **"O.K., enough of that love stuff."**

MIDNIGHT — 3 A.M. — MOON DOWN — SUN UP — +12 HRS

THE FLYER — SUNRISE SIDE



DEEJAY ON PAGE 24: JASON BENTLY, L.A. RADIO
"EVEN A GRAVEL PIT CAN BE TRANSFORMED"

WHO WAS ON IT — GLOBAL CEREMONIAL HEALERS

COSMIC LOVE ALLIANCE	PHILOSOPHER · SHAMAN	SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA	THE REST OF EARTH
SUPER DJ DMITRY OF DEEE-LITE	TERENCE MCKENNA	DOC MARTIN MARK E. QUARK JON BISHOP	YAGI · JAPAN MATZ · SWEDEN RAJA · SPAIN

TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE CHANTING FREE AT LAST IN A GRAVEL PIT.

TEARS FOR FEARS · CUT WITH MARTIN LUTHER KING · AT SUNRISE

"O.K., ENOUGH OF THAT LOVE STUFF," SAYS A TIRED KID.

I WAS IN IT

IN THAT WAY, AND ONLY THAT WAY

I had nothing to do with producing NARNIA. I was there, and **I danced until the sun came up,** and that was the whole of my contribution.

My history with NARNIA runs through Branden and Nick. *We did five large events together before any of this.*

I'm putting the article in here because I'm proud of them and because it's objectively cool. They earned that recognition ten times over, **and so did the San Diego scene.**

And fine — it's a little cool for me too. I helped build the events, the brand and the reputation that made a national magazine think San Diego was worth the flight.

In that way, I was in it.

TOGETHER, BEFORE — FIVE LARGE EVENTS

1	2	3	4	5

BRANDEN · NICK · ME
THEN THEY KEPT GOING WITHOUT ME.

THE CONTRIBUTION — ITEMIZED

PRODUCED IT	NO
BOOKED IT	NO
PROMOTED IT	NO
WAS THERE	YES
DANCED TILL SUNRISE	YES
BUILT THE SCENE FIRST	ALSO YES

THE FLYER FILE — PRESALE LOCATIONS



I remember it coming out. I was deep in the PSM years, **chasing record deals and losing them.**

I'd retired from the party business. Branden and Nick never did — *they're still building events and clubs today.*

What I didn't know, standing there in 1995 holding a magazine, was that six years later Branden would talk me into one more. **That press is what gave him the leverage.**

1995 — LIFE RUNS IT · I'M AT PSM

→ SIX YEARS OF NOT DOING THIS

2001 — ONE MORE · HE HAD THE LEVERAGE

THEY EARNED THAT RECOGNITION TEN TIMES OVER. AND SO DID THE SAN DIEGO SCENE.

BRANDEN POWERS · NICK NAK LUCKINBILL · STILL BUILDING TODAY

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS DOESN'T ALWAYS STAY IN VEGAS.

LAS VEGAS

FRESH START · PEARL WHITE · NEEDS TIRES

EVERYTHING I OWNED STACKED BEHIND MY HEAD



1987 BMW 635CSI · PEARL WHITE · METICULOUSLY RESTORED

I WASN'T SELLING IT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

TIRES · NOT NEW

December 27th, 2000. I'm driving my 1987 BMW 635csi — pearl white, meticulously restored.

I'm not a car guy by any means. My dad was in the car business, so I switched used cars as often as some people switch shoes. But that car was **my baby.** I wasn't selling it under any circumstances.

Here's where I was. The Dot-Com bubble had popped and taken everything I owned with it — money, possessions, *the whole file.* What survived was the BMW and whatever I could cram into the BMW, which turned out to be exactly as much as fits in a BMW.

WHAT SURVIVED — FULL AUDIT

MONEY	GONE
POSSESSIONS	GONE
THE 3D COMPANY	GONE
THE BMW	PRESENT
CONTENTS OF SAME	PRESENT
EVERYTHING ELSE	SEE ABOVE

THE ASSET — SOLE

MODEL	635CSI
YEAR	1987
FINISH	PEARL WHITE
CONDITION	RESTORED
TIRES	UNAFFORDABLE
SALE CONSIDERED	HOUR ONE
SALE EXECUTED	NEVER

I SPENT THE FIRST HOUR OF THAT DRIVE DOING THE MATH ON SELLING IT.

THE CAR I WAS NOT SELLING UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

SAN DIEGO — MILE 0
BARSTOW — MILE 175
BAKER — MILE 237
PRIMM — THE RIDGE
LAS VEGAS — MILE 332

INTERSTATE 15 · NORTHBOUND · DARK BY BAKER

SLOWEST DRIVE TO VEGAS I HAVE EVER MADE

SO: LAS VEGAS. FRESH START. LOADED TO THE ROOF.

PAPER

NOTE THE WORD PAPER

How I got there. I'd sold my first lead generation company, taken the money, and put it into a 3D software startup. Early '98 to 2000. **Two years of pure rocket fuel.**

We got written up on *FuckedCompany.com*.

FuckedCompany was where the internet went to watch venture-funded startups die in public. We made the list **without ever taking venture money.** We flamed out on our own dime. There's something almost artisanal about that.

What I got instead was a crash course in 3D software, internet marketing, and the actual physics of a startup, which is that it goes up faster than you can believe and comes down faster than that.

THE LISTING — CIRCA 2000

FUCKEDCOMPANY.COM	DEAD POOL
COMPANY	3D SOFTWARE
STATUS	FLAMED OUT
VENTURE CAPITAL TAKEN	$0
BURNED	OUR OWN
CLASSIFICATION	ARTISANAL

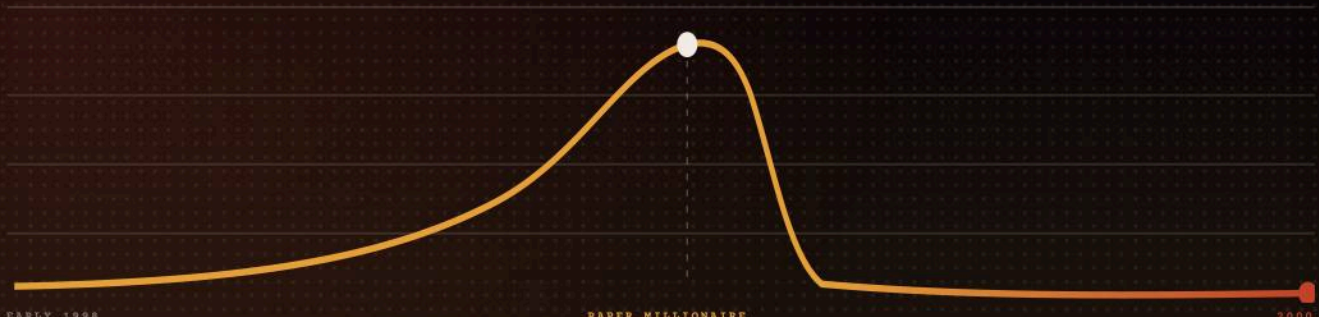
$5,000,000

DECLINED

OUR CEO TURNED IT DOWN
I'VE HAD A QUARTER CENTURY TO MAKE PEACE WITH THAT CALL AND I'M NOT THERE YET

WE FLAMED OUT ON OUR OWN DIME

A QUARTER CENTURY AND I'M NOT THERE YET



I WAS A PAPER MILLIONAIRE. NOTE THE WORD PAPER.

TWO YEARS UP · CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN TWO YEARS DOWN

PAPER DOES A LOT OF THINGS. ONE OF THEM IS BURN.

THIRTY ONE

AND LIVING WITH MY PARENTS

I was thirty-one and living with my parents.

Yes. Through the entire nightclub and entertainment career. Every flyer, every door, every sold-out room — and then home to a house where **my mother did my laundry and cooked my meals** until I was thirty-one years old.

I'm a mama's boy. I'm perfectly fine with it. *Anyone who'd like to make something of that is welcome to compare decades with me.*

From my freshman year in high school on, my parents didn't have a lot of money. We had a house full of unconditional love. My little brother stayed into his thirties too. That's common in ethnic families and nobody at our dinner table thought it was strange.

THE HOUSEHOLD — STANDING ARRANGEMENT

LAUNDRY	MOM
MEALS	MOM
RENT	$0
MONEY IN THE HOUSE	NOT A LOT
LOVE IN THE HOUSE	UNCONDITIONAL
LITTLE BROTHER	ALSO THIRTIES
TROUBLE AVOIDED	CONSIDERABLE

> *"Anyone who'd like to make something of that is welcome to compare decades with me."*
>
> STANDING OFFER · STILL OPEN

ADDRESS ONE

THE CLUB

FLYERS · DOORS · SOLD-OUT ROOMS
OUT UNTIL THE ROOM EMPTIED
THE ENTIRE CAREER

ADDRESS TWO

THE KITCHEN

LAUNDRY DONE · PLATE COVERED
LIGHT STILL ON AT 4 A.M.
EVERY SINGLE NIGHT

IF I HADN'T BEEN UNDER MY PARENTS' ROOF, I'D HAVE FOUND CONSIDERABLY MORE TROUBLE.

EVERY FLYER · EVERY DOOR · EVERY SOLD-OUT ROOM

AND THEN HOME TO A HOUSE WHERE MY MOTHER DID MY LAUNDRY

BEACHFRONT

HE PITCHED IT EXACTLY THAT WAY

In 2000, Branden Powers had been in Vegas about six months and was in love with the place.

I called and told him the 3D company had crashed and burned. He said:

> *"Move to Vegas! You can sleep on a blow-up mattress on the living room floor of my one-bedroom apartment."*
>
> THAT'S THE OFFER · THAT'S THE ENTIRE OFFER

And he pitched it like it was **beachfront.**

Then he couldn't stop — opportunities everywhere, businesses we could start, how easy it was to get a job out there. *And not one word about throwing parties.*

THE PROPERTY — EXCLUSIVE LISTING

LIVING ROOM FLOOR

1BR · LAS VEGAS, NV · AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY · ONE OCCUPANT

SLEEPING SURFACE	INFLATABLE
FURNISHING	NONE
BEDROOM ACCESS	NOT INCLUDED
LEASE TERM	HANDSHAKE
VIEWS	THE CEILING
PROXIMITY TO BEACH	270 MILES
PITCHED AS	BEACHFRONT
PRICE	**$0 / MONTH**

THAT'S THE OFFER. THAT'S THE ENTIRE OFFER.

NOT ONE WORD ABOUT THROWING PARTIES

I MADE A MENTAL NOTE OF WHAT A MATURE AND SENSIBLE MAN MY FRIEND HAD BECOME.

HE KNEW I DIDN'T WANT TO THROW PARTIES AGAIN · I NOTICED THAT · I APPRECIATED THAT

01 GET TO VEGAS

02 GET A JOB

03 FIGURE OUT MY NEXT MOVES

THE PLAN WAS SIMPLE. THE PLAN WAS ALSO THE LAST SIMPLE THING.

THE RIDGE

IT'S DECEMBER · IT'S COLD · IT'S GETTING DARK

So there I am on the 15 freeway out of San Diego, Las Vegas bound. Thirty-one years old, everything I own stacked behind my head, driving toward a blow-up mattress *with real enthusiasm.*

Past Baker, starting the climb to the ridge before Primm, **the world went white.** Complete white-out, ice sheeted across the freeway. Cars and trucks pulled over on both shoulders — some stuck, some just finished trying.

My BMW needed new tires. I could not afford new tires. So I was threading a rear-wheel-drive German coupe over an iced mountain pass on rubber that had already *filed its retirement paperwork.*

Slowest drive to Vegas I have ever made. Up that ridge and down the other side took a lifetime.

CONDITIONS — THE PASS

VISIBILITY	WHITE-OUT
SURFACE	SHEET ICE
TIRES	RETIRED
DRIVE	REAR WHEEL
SHOULDERS	FULL BOTH SIDES
CARGO	EVERYTHING I OWN
CO-PILOT	GOD

RUBBER THAT HAD ALREADY FILED ITS RETIREMENT PAPERWORK

HALF OF IT SLIDING · THE OTHER HALF NEGOTIATING WITH GOD

HALF OF IT SLIDING, THE OTHER HALF NEGOTIATING WITH GOD.

SOME STUCK · SOME JUST FINISHED TRYING

PULLING INTO BRANDEN'S COMPLEX THE GREATEST RELIEF OF MY ADULT LIFE

NEW CITY. CLEAN SLATE.

EVERYTHING I OWNED IN ONE CAR
AND A BED THAT CAME WITH A PLUG

I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE LOW PART.

GO BIG OR GO HOME

THE NEXT DAY BRANDEN GAVE ME THE TOUR

I'd been to Vegas dozens of times. This was not that. **This was a reconnaissance report.** Who owns what, who's fighting with who, which door you use, which door you absolutely do not use.

The man had been doing homework for six months and was *dying to present it.*

Back at the apartment we got down to opportunities.

We seriously considered starting an **Elvis Pedicab business.**

THE TOUR — FIELD INTELLIGENCE

01	WHO OWNS WHAT
02	WHO IS FIGHTING WITH WHO
03	WHICH DOOR YOU USE
04	WHICH DOOR YOU ABSOLUTELY DO NOT USE

ELVIS PEDICABS

PROPOSAL 001 · THE ONLY PROPOSAL

CONCEPT	PEDAL TOURISTS UP AND DOWN THE STRIP
EQUIPMENT	PEDICABS, BOUGHT OR RENTED
WARDROBE	ELVIS. FULL ELVIS.
NUMBERS RUN	YES
COSTUMES DISCUSSED	AT LENGTH
PERMITS DISCUSSED	ALSO AT LENGTH
PRINCIPAL RISK (A)	CAPITAL
PRINCIPAL RISK (B)	DYING
STATUS	**TABLED**

We thought it might actually work *if we stayed alive and got the equipment.*

We had no money and no realistic shot at an investor who wanted in on **sweaty Elvises,** so we tabled it.

But understand — at the bottom of my life, flat broke, thirty-one, sleeping on an air mattress, my business pipeline had *exactly one item in it.*

THE PIPELINE — COMPLETE

01	ELVIS ON A BICYCLE

AND THE ITEM WAS ELVIS ON A BICYCLE.

WHICH DOOR YOU USE · WHICH DOOR YOU ABSOLUTELY DO NOT USE

WE DISCUSSED COSTUMES · WE DISCUSSED PERMITS ·

SUNGLASSES

INDOORS · IN A DARK CLUB · AT NIGHT

Broke or not, we went out **every single night.**

Branden had spent six months shaking hands with every club owner and promoter in town, so we were comped almost everywhere. Two guys with no money drinking for free in the most expensive city in America. *Networking, we called it.*

This is when Branden decided to become **my fashion designer.**

It was ridiculous. I did it immediately. There is at least one photograph. There are probably more and I've made my peace with that too.



EXHIBIT A · THE PRESCRIPTION, FILLED
THERE IS AT LEAST ONE PHOTOGRAPH · THERE ARE PROBABLY MORE

THE CONSULTATION — UNSOLICITED

PRACTITIONER — B. POWERS

DIAGNOSIS

PATIENT HAS BECOME TOO MUCH OF A COMPUTER NERD

PRESCRIPTION

SUNGLASSES. AT NIGHT.

INDOORS · YES
IN A DARK CLUB · YES
AT NIGHT · YES
PATIENT COMPLIANCE · IMMEDIATE

His diagnosis was that I had become too much of a computer nerd. His prescription was that I start wearing sunglasses at night.

Indoors. In a dark club. At night.

A month of this. Out every night, home at sunrise. *I learned that's what sunglasses are for. Sunrise.*

My job prospects were not going well, which — and I say this with the benefit of hindsight — **tracks.**

10 PM	2 AM	6 AM	11 AM
OUT THE DOOR	STILL NETWORKING	SUN CLEARS THE MOUNTAINS	JOB INTERVIEW THEORETICALLY

IT'S HARD TO BE A STRONG CANDIDATE WHEN YOU'RE ARRIVING HOME AS THE SUN CLEARS THE MOUNTAINS.

TWO GUYS WITH NO MONEY DRINKING FOR FREE

I LEARNED THAT'S WHAT SUNGLASSES ARE FOR. SUNRISE.

BEGRUDGINGLY

FOR THE RECORD · BEGRUDGINGLY

Then one night it came full circle.

Branden and I looked at each other and decided to do the one thing on earth **we were most qualified to do.**

Throw a party.

I agreed begrudgingly. For the record: **begrudgingly.** I had retired. I had announced my retirement. I had driven through a blizzard to get away from this exact profession, and a month later I was back in the party biz because it was the only skill I had that Vegas was buying.

He never did say the word *"parties"* on that phone call. Not once. **Smart man.**

NOTICE — AMENDED

ANNOUNCED RETIREMENT

FROM THE PARTY BUSINESS

RESCINDED

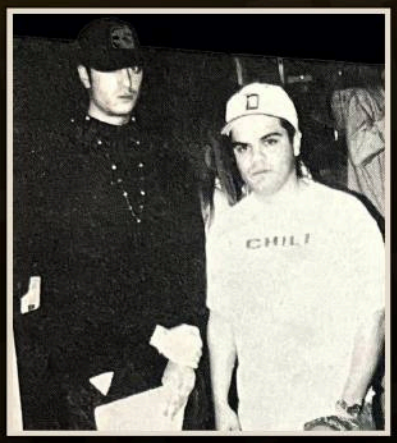
DURATION OF RETIREMENT · ONE MONTH
DISTANCE DRIVEN TO ESCAPE IT · 332 MILES
WEATHER ENCOUNTERED · BLIZZARD

I HAD DRIVEN THROUGH A BLIZZARD TO GET AWAY FROM THIS PROFESSION

HE NEVER DID SAY THE WORD ON THAT PHONE CALL. NOT ONCE.

IT WAS THE ONLY SKILL I HAD THAT VEGAS WAS BUYING.

MEETINGS STARTED · VENUES · POTENTIAL INVESTORS · PROMOTION PARTNERS



FROM THE STACK · TEN YEARS, TWO CITIES

Between us, Branden and I had flyer portfolios going back **a decade.**

That's the thing about this business — *the proof is physical.*

THE PORTFOLIOS — TEN YEARS

- SAN DIEGO — 1991-1994
- SAN DIEGO — 1994-1997
- SAN DIEGO — 1997-1999
- SAN DIEGO — 1999-2000
- ON THE TABLE — ALL OF IT

YOU PUT THE STACK ON THE TABLE AND PEOPLE STOP ASKING QUESTIONS.

NINETY THOUSAND

YOU PROBABLY WON'T MAKE THIS BACK FOR A WHILE

It didn't take long to find an investor for our nightclubs.

Our business plan was unusual, and **the unusual part was the honesty.**

We proposed three back-to-back monthly events with over-the-top themes. And we asked the investor to *be prepared to lose money on all three.*

In Las Vegas entertainment you go big or go home. We needed a prime location on the Strip on a prime night. We were bootstrapping ourselves to the bone — and asking him for thirty thousand dollars per party, times three.

THE ASK — ARITHMETIC

PER PARTY	$30,000
PARTIES	THREE
LOCATION	PRIME, THE STRIP
NIGHT	PRIME
EXPECTED RETURN, SOON	NONE
OUR OWN CAPITAL	BOOTSTRAPPED TO THE BONE
THE ASK	**$90,000**

WHAT EVERY OTHER PITCH SAID

YOU'LL MAKE YOUR MONEY BACK

PROJECTIONS
UPSIDE
CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATES

WHAT WE SAID

BE PREPARED TO LOSE MONEY ON ALL THREE

NO PROJECTIONS
NO UPSIDE PROMISED
THE UNUSUAL PART WAS THE HONESTY

What he'd get was **a brand.** Three spectacles that put a new name on the map in Vegas, and he'd be part of that name going forward.

We'd run this model countless times in San Diego. *We knew exactly how it worked.*

WHAT HE'D GET — THE RETURN

SPECTACLES	THREE
A NEW NAME IN VEGAS	HIS TOO
MODEL, PREVIOUSLY RUN	COUNTLESS TIMES

HE WAS GAME.

FIFTEEN HUNDRED

STRANGERS · IN SIXTY DAYS

Two full months to organize and promote.

We got **Friday night at Utopia** on the Strip. Capacity 1,800 to 2,000. At twenty to twenty-five a ticket we needed about fifteen hundred through the door *just to cover the budget.*

Anything past that was gas in the tank and food on the table.

THE ROOM — UTOPIA

CAPACITY	1,800 - 2,000
TICKET	$20 - $25
BREAK-EVEN DOOR	~1,500



SO, THE FULL PICTURE GOING INTO IT.

NO MONEY · NO JOB · NINETY THOUSAND OF SOMEBODY ELSE'S

$200 A WEEK
UNEMPLOYMENT
OUR ENTIRE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

$90,000 OF HIS
SOMEBODY ELSE'S MONEY
ON THE LINE

1,500 STRANGERS
TO FIND AND MOVE
IN SIXTY DAYS

THE GUEST LIST — THE HARD CAP

SEATS WE COULD COMP	A COUPLE HUNDRED
PEOPLE WITH A REASON	EVERYONE

And a guest list we'd have to hold to a couple hundred people, **in a town where everyone you meet has a reason they should be on it.**

THAT LAST ONE WAS GOING TO BE A PROBLEM.

WORKER BEES

HERE WAS OUR ACTUAL PROBLEM

Everyone we met in Vegas was loaded, *or doing a convincing impression of loaded.*

Back in San Diego we weren't rich either, but we were pulling six figures in cash and **our names opened doors by themselves.** In Vegas our names opened nothing.

What we had was two flyer portfolios. People could flip through them and confirm, yes, these guys threw good parties in San Diego. Great. *Neither of us had a single ounce of influence in Vegas.*

THE ASSETS — COMPLETE

FLYER PORTFOLIOS	TWO
YEARS OF PROOF	A DECADE
LOCAL STANDING	NONE
DOORS OUR NAMES OPEN	ZERO
CAPITAL	ZERO

EVERYONE WE MET WAS LOADED, OR DOING A CONVINCING IMPRESSION

OUR NAMES OPENED NOTHING

WHERE WE CAME FROM

SAN DIEGO

CASH	SIX FIGURES
OUR NAMES	OPENED DOORS
EFFORT REQUIRED	BY THEMSELVES

WHERE WE WERE

LAS VEGAS

CASH	NONE
OUR NAMES	OPENED NOTHING
INFLUENCE	NOT ONE OUNCE

TO GET THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS TO MOVE AND SHAKE, WE NEEDED TO RADIATE CONFIDENCE WE DID NOT POSSESS.

THE PORTFOLIOS PROVED THE PAST · THEY PROVED NOTHING ABOUT NEVADA

BRANDEN HAD A GENIUS IDEA. WHICH WAS ONE OF MY OLD IDEAS FROM NEW DESTINY.

THREE COMPANIES

NONE OF THEM EXISTED · ALL OF THEM HAD TASTE

BERLIN — EXHIBIT 01



THREE GIRLS
PARTY PROMOTERS
ENORMOUSLY WELL CONNECTED

DOES NOT EXIST

NEW YORK CITY — EXHIBIT 02



TWO TRUST FUND KIDS
DID SOMETHING UNSPEAKABLE
TO A WAREHOUSE ONCE

DOES NOT EXIST

UNITED KINGDOM — EXHIBIT 03



A GAY FASHIONISTA
IMPECCABLE TASTE
FREQUENTLY SPOTTED

DOES NOT EXIST

We invented three production companies.

The story was that these three outfits were making a serious investment in the Las Vegas club scene and had hired Branden and me as **their production arm and envoy on the ground.**

And in 2001, you could do that. The internet was something you had. *It was not yet something that had you.*

THE ARRANGEMENT — AS TOLD

OUR EMPLOYERS	THREE
THEIR INVESTMENT	SERIOUS
OUR TITLE	PRODUCTION ARM
ALSO	ENVOY ON THE GROUND
VERIFICATION AVAILABLE	NONE
VERIFICATION ATTEMPTED	ALSO NONE

NOBODY PULLED OUT A PHONE AT THE BAR AND STARTED FACT-CHECKING A GERMAN PROMOTIONS COLLECTIVE.

2001 · THE LAST YEAR THIS WAS POSSIBLE

WE WEREN'T BROKE. WE WERE STAFF.

NONE OF THEM EXISTED. ALL OF THEM HAD TASTE.

NOBODY FACT-CHECKED A GERMAN PROMOTIONS COLLECTIVE

BEING THEM

THEN WE HAD TO ACTUALLY BE THEM

Then we had to actually *be* them. Every night. For two months. **Without contradicting ourselves.**

We built out personas for all three and worked the rooms telling stories — what the Berlin girls had pulled off last summer, what the trust fund kids did to a warehouse in New York, where the Rhinestone Cowboy had been spotted and what he'd been wearing.

THE CONTINUITY PROBLEM — SIXTY NIGHTS

NIGHTS IN CHARACTER	SIXTY
EMPLOYERS TO KEEP STRAIGHT	THREE
BACKSTORIES	THREE
CITIES CLAIMED	BERLIN, NEW YORK, LONDON
SCRIPT	NONE
REHEARSAL	NONE
CONTRADICTIONS PERMITTED	ZERO

PERSONA ONE · BERLIN

PINK BANANA PRODUCTIONS

THE STORY WE TOLD

What the Berlin girls had pulled off last summer.

PERSONA TWO · NEW YORK

MILLION $ BABIES

THE STORY WE TOLD

What the trust fund kids did to a warehouse.

PERSONA THREE · UK

THE RHINESTONE COWBOY

THE STORY WE TOLD

Where he'd been spotted, and what he'd been wearing.

AND EVERY STORY LANDED IN THE SAME PLACE.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE A SPECTACLE · SOMETHING YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN IN THIS CITY · DO NOT MISS THE POWDER ROOM

People loved it. It worked. **It worked embarrassingly well.**

It also meant that two guys splitting a one-bedroom apartment with an air mattress on the floor spent sixty days being asked, *with real interest,* what our international employers were like to work for.

> *"They're wonderful. Very demanding. You know how it is."*
>
> DELIVERED NIGHTLY · FOR SIXTY CONSECUTIVE DAYS

LOOK AT THE FLYERS. ALL THREE ARE PRINTED RIGHT ON THEM.

EVERY NIGHT · FOR TWO MONTHS · WITHOUT CONTRADICTING OURSELVES

IT WORKED EMBARRASSINGLY WELL

THE RUSE IN INK

AND WE HANDED IT OUT BY THE THOUSANDS

THROWN OUT OF EVERY CASINO IN TOWN WITH A NIGHTCLUB IN IT

We put the ruse in ink **and handed it out by the thousands.**

We spent a full month plastering Las Vegas and San Diego.

We got thrown out of every casino in town that had a nightclub in it, *multiple times each,* for passing out flyers.

It became a routine.



PINK BANANA (BERLIN) · RHINESTONE COWBOY (UK)
MILLION DOLLAR BABIES (NYC) · PRINTED LINE ONE

MULTIPLE TIMES EACH

STEP ONE	STEP TWO	STEP THREE	STEP FOUR
WALK IN	WORK FAST	GET ESCORTED OUT	GO NEXT DOOR

THE COVERAGE	ONE MONTH
CITIES PLASTERED	TWO
CASINOS WORKED	EVERY ONE
EJECTIONS	MULTIPLE, EACH
DETERRENT EFFECT	NONE OBSERVED

Every single flyer we handed out carried the names of three companies that did not exist, printed at the top, **in colour, by a professional printer.**

Nobody ever asked. Not once in two months. *The ink was the proof.*

WALK IN, WORK FAST, GET ESCORTED OUT,
GO NEXT DOOR.

FIVE HUNDRED

PRESCRIPTION PILL BOTTLES FILLED WITH M&MS

One night we handed out five hundred flyers inside a nightclub that were **prescription pill bottles filled with M&Ms,** party details printed on the label.

Five hundred of them. In 2001. In a Las Vegas nightclub.

Try that today and you'll be explaining yourself to three separate agencies.



SUPERSTAR POWDER LINEPASS · UTOPIA
3765 S. LAS VEGAS BLVD.

HANDED OUT
INSIDE ONE CLUB
IN ONE NIGHT

500 PILL BOTTLES.

FILLED WITH M&MS · PARTY DETAILS PRINTED ON THE LABEL
NOBODY STOPPED US · NOBODY EVEN SLOWED DOWN

THE ARSENAL — EVERYTHING WE RAN

01 HUGE POSTERS, EVERYWHERE

02 PILL BOTTLES FILLED WITH M&MS

03 FLYERS SHAPED LIKE POCKET MAKEUP MIRRORS

04 A PHOTOSHOOT WITH THE CITY'S MOST POPULAR SOCIALITES

We ran huge posters. We themed everything — the event was called The Powder Room, so we made flyers that looked like **pocket makeup mirrors.**

We hired a photoshoot with the most popular socialites in town and put their faces on the artwork, which solved two problems at once, because now *the most popular socialites in town had a personal interest in the flyer.*

WE HELD NOTHING BACK. NOT ONE THING.

PARTY DETAILS PRINTED ON THE LABEL

TRY THAT TODAY AND YOU'LL BE EXPLAINING YOURSELF TO THREE AGENCIES

THE LOCALS

WE ALSO DID THE ESSENTIAL PART

We also did the essential part: **we made friends with the locals.**

Steve Davidovici — **Stevie D.** — helped us land Utopia and had a stake in us not failing. We brought in **Ryan Doherty** to promote and fill the room.

Those two had serious juice building. They weren't quite the nightclub legends they are now — *they were getting started* — but they were part of the reason it worked.

You can be the cleverest outsider in Nevada and still not know which phone call matters.

WHAT THE RUSE COULD NOT BUY AT ANY PRICE

A ROOM ON THE STRIP	A LOCAL GOT IT
A FULL ROOM	A LOCAL FILLED IT
WHICH PHONE CALL MATTERS	UNKNOWABLE
UNLESS	YOU LIVE THERE

THE VENUE

STEVIE D.

STEVE DAVIDOVICI
HELPED US LAND UTOPIA
HAD A STAKE IN US NOT FAILING

THE ROOM

RYAN DOHERTY

BROUGHT IN TO PROMOTE
AND FILL THE ROOM
JUICE ALREADY BUILDING

THEY KNEW.

STEVE DAVIDOVICI · RYAN DOHERTY · THE TWO PHONE CALLS THAT MATTERED

AND IT WORKED. THE BRAND LANDED. THE TOWN BOUGHT IT.

WE BUILT THE WHOLE THING ON A LIE ABOUT WHO WE WORKED FOR.
WHICH WAS FINE, RIGHT UP UNTIL THE PART WHERE SOMEBODY STARTED LYING ABOUT US.

YOU CAN BE THE CLEVEREST OUTSIDER IN NEVADA

AND STILL NOT KNOW WHICH PHONE CALL MATTERS

NAKED PIZZA

NOBODY IN THAT ROOM THOUGHT A THING WAS HAPPENING

We were promoting back and forth between San Diego and Vegas the whole time. Friends drove out for weekends to help. **That one-bedroom apartment had more foot traffic than the clubs.**

One weekend Branden told his friend **Beth** from San Diego she could stay with us instead of paying for a hotel. She was a dancer, in a cash crunch, and had come to Vegas to make an extra three thousand dollars over a weekend at a local club.

Beth arrived. I met her for the first time.

A few minutes later she walked out of the bathroom completely naked and sat down on the floor.

Context for the floor: we had no furniture. A fold-out chair and a computer desk where I did research on my desktop. That was the apartment. The naked person was, at that moment, **the second-most-comfortable seating arrangement in the unit.**

FURNISHINGS — COMPLETE LIST

FOLD-OUT CHAIR	ONE
COMPUTER DESK	ONE
COUCH	NONE
TABLE	NONE
EVERYTHING ELSE	NONE
2ND-BEST SEAT	SEE STORY

HER WEEKEND — THE TARGET

TO CLEAR	$3,000
LICENSE	STILL ACTIVE
WARM-UP	STARTED NOW

BRANDEN AND I LOOKED AT EACH OTHER. JUST A LOOK. DECADES OF FRIENDSHIP COMPRESSED INTO ONE GLANCE.

SHE OFFERED TO PUT CLOTHES ON IF IT BOTHERED US

> *"I hope you don't mind. I need to start getting comfortable being naked."*
>
> BETH · AND SHE MEANT IT PRACTICALLY

She explained she wasn't normally a stripper in San Diego — she'd danced in Vegas before and kept her license active, *just in case*. The just-in-case had arrived. Three grand in a weekend, and the warm-up started now.

We said no problem at all, and then said we wished *we* could make three thousand dollars this weekend.

That was not a joke. **That was two men doing honest math out loud.**

Beth was a genuinely cool human being and a complete free spirit. She promoted the event for us in both cities and brought her girlfriends in to promote too, which was worth more to us than anything.

She also just liked being naked in our apartment.



ILLUSTRATION · NOT A PHOTOGRAPH
THE MOST SURPRISING SHIFT OF HIS CAREER

So every single time we ordered pizza, **we asked her to get the door and pay the guy.**

Every time. We never got tired of it. Those drivers got the most surprising shift of their careers and we tipped like the broke men we were, *which is to say, poorly.*

EVERY SINGLE TIME.

DOOR ANSWERED BY BETH · DRIVER PAID BY BETH
TIP QUALITY · COMMENSURATE WITH OUR MEANS

One afternoon we were sitting around the apartment. Beth was, of course, naked.

Branden picked up a paintbrush and started tickling her with it. **No paint. Just the brush.** No reason. Not art, not a statement, not a plan. It was for the purpose of being ticklish, and Beth liked being tickled.

THE OBJECT — EXHIBIT

IMPLEMENT	ONE PAINTBRUSH
PAINT	NONE
INTENT	NONE
CONSEQUENCE	FOUR YEARS OUT

ONE AFTERNOON
NO REASON
NO PAINT
JUST THE BRUSH

FAST FORWARD TO 2005.

THAT AFTERNOON IS ONE OF THE PIVOTAL MOMENTS IN THE CREATION OF RICK BLISS.
THAT BRUSH, THAT APARTMENT, THAT NOTHING-AFTERNOON WAS THE SEED INSPIRATION FOR MY ARTWORK.

I HAD NO IDEA AT THE TIME. WE WERE JUST BROKE, BORED, AND ONE OF US HAD A PAINTBRUSH.

MORE FOOT TRAFFIC THAN THE CLUBS

NOT ART · NOT A STATEMENT · NOT A PLAN

THAT DUDE TALKS

NIGHT OF THE POWDER ROOM

The line started early.

Local celebrities turned out. **Teller** — of Penn & Teller — was there.

That dude talks.

Outside, we had stilt walkers, fire breathers, jugglers and magicians working the line, which meant **the line itself became an attraction** and started pulling people off the Strip.

THE AMENITIES — AS ADVERTISED

HAIR & MAKEUP	STAFFED
COSTUME FITTING	FLAMBOYANT
VAMPIRE KISSING BOOTH	ONE OF EACH
NECK, SUCKED BY	BOTH
TRAPEZE TEAM	FULL, OVERHEAD
PERFORMANCE ART	EVERYWHERE

THE QUEUE WAS THE ADVERTISEMENT

THE QUEUE WAS THE ADVERTISEMENT.

STILT WALKERS · FIRE BREATHERS · JUGGLERS · MAGICIANS · WORKING THE LINE

BEFORE YOU GOT IN

OUTSIDE

STILT WALKERS · FIRE BREATHERS
JUGGLERS · MAGICIANS
PULLING PEOPLE OFF THE STRIP

ONCE YOU WERE IN

INSIDE

YOUR HAIR DONE · YOUR FACE DONE
PUT IN A COSTUME
AND YOU FELL FOR IT COMPLETELY

WE TREATED GROWN ADULTS LIKE LITTLE KIDS

Inside, it came apart in the best way. We had people whose entire job was to do your makeup, do your hair, and put you in a flamboyant costume. *We treated grown adults like little kids and they fell for it completely.*

There was a vampire kissing booth. A guy vampire and a girl vampire. They would suck your neck. **That was the amenity.**

Nobody who had ever set foot in Utopia had seen anything remotely like it. And the DJ lineup matched the room.

TWO MONTHS — OF INVENTING GERMANS

EMPLOYERS INVENTED	THREE
NIGHTS IN CHARACTER	SIXTY
RESULT	SEE BELOW

TWO MONTHS OF INVENTING GERMANS HAD PRODUCED THE BEST NIGHT THAT CLUB HAD EVER HAD.

NINETEEN HUNDRED

THE VIBE WAS OFF THE CHARTS

The vibe was **off the charts.**

We were already promoting the second event — *Night of the Living Dolls* — and the feedback coming off the floor said we'd do even better next time. The plan was working exactly as designed.

The night wound down, the ticket booth closed, and I started paying out the DJs and staff.



ALREADY IN PRINT · NIGHT OF THE LIVING DOLLS
FRIDAY, APRIL 27TH, 2001 · UTOPIA, LAS VEGAS

THE DOOR	NIGHT ONE
GUEST LIST, TARGET	200
GUEST LIST, ACTUAL	NORTH OF 350
CAUSE	FIRST EVENT · WE GOT LOOSE
FINAL COUNT	**1,900+**

Final count: **a little over 1,900 people.**

That included a guest list north of 350. We'd wanted to hold it at 200. First event, we got loose. We'd tighten it next go-around, obviously, *assuming there was one.*

I'M VERY GLAD I STARTED PAYING PEOPLE EARLY.

THE DJS AND THE STAFF · PAID, IN HAND, BEFORE ANY OF IT STARTED

BECAUSE THAT'S WHEN I LOOKED UP AND SAW BRANDEN IN WHAT WAS CLEARLY A HEATED ARGUMENT WITH OUR INVESTOR.

THE PLAN WAS WORKING EXACTLY AS DESIGNED
I'M VERY GLAD I STARTED PAYING PEOPLE EARLY

AD NAUSEAM

PRECISELY THE THING WE TOLD HIM TO EXPECT

The investor and his brother came into the club office **screaming at the top of their lungs.**

The investor was upset that we came up short.

I was baffled. Genuinely baffled. We had discussed this specific outcome numerous times. Repeatedly. **Ad nauseam.** It was the central feature of the pitch — *be prepared to lose money on all three.* He had agreed. He had agreed enthusiastically.

We were five, maybe six thousand short of the total budget. And Branden had gone **five thousand over** the agreed number.

Which, I want to say for the record, is *good.* That's a good day. I have watched Branden go twenty thousand over on an event. Five is practically restraint.

NIGHT ONE — THE BOOKS

COMMITMENT, PER PARTY	$30,000
EVENTS COMMITTED	THREE
OVER BUDGET	$5,000
SHORT TO PERFORMERS	$5–6,000
BRANDEN & ME, PAID	$0
EXPECTED PROFIT	NONE. WE SAID SO.

HISTORICAL RANGE — BRANDEN, OVER

THIS EVENT	$5,000
OBSERVED MAXIMUM	$20,000
CLASSIFICATION	RESTRAINT

THE CENTRAL FEATURE
OF THE PITCH
AGREED, OUT LOUD
ENTHUSIASTICALLY

BE PREPARED TO LOSE MONEY ON ALL THREE.

DISCUSSED NUMEROUS TIMES · REPEATEDLY · AD NAUSEAM
AND THEN HE CAME INTO THE OFFICE SCREAMING ABOUT IT

**KEEPING US ON BUDGET WAS MY JOB.
KEEPING BRANDEN ON BUDGET
IS NOT A JOB, IT'S A WEATHER CONDITION.**

WE HAD DISCUSSED THIS SPECIFIC OUTCOME. REPEATEDLY.

HE HAD AGREED. HE HAD AGREED ENTHUSIASTICALLY.

ONE LIVE TIGER

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT I MEAN

Look at the flyer and you'll see we were promoting the Rhinestone Cowboy's **Heavy Petting Zoo.**

That was a room full of pillows where people would pet you like an animal. Performance art, and — *let's be adults* — possibly of some practical use to anyone rolling on X.

Branden booked a tiger for it.

A tiger. An actual tiger. He wanted it upstairs in that area of the club. A flippin' huge, dangerous animal. *With a trainer, of course, because we're professionals.*

THE LINE ITEMS — APPROVALS

VENUE	APPROVED
TRAPEZE TEAM	APPROVED
VAMPIRE BOOTH	APPROVED
HEAVY PETTING ZOO	APPROVED
ONE (1) LIVE TIGER	DENIED

IN PRINT — EXHIBIT



FROM THE FLYER · LINE FOUR

WE WERE NOT HAVING A LIVE TIGER AT THE CLUB. SORRY BUT NOT SORRY.

ONE OF THE LINE ITEMS TAKING US OVER BUDGET · SO I CUT IT

The Following Week · At A Different Event

THAT SAME TIGER KILLED HIS TRAINER.

A FLIPPIN' HUGE, DANGEROUS ANIMAL

WITH A TRAINER, OF COURSE, BECAUSE WE'RE PROFESSIONALS

THIS WAS THE PLAN

WE WERE BUILDING THREE IMAGINARY BRANDS

So: back to our screaming investor and his brother.

We had just made back almost his entire investment on night one. **Over thirty-five thousand dollars,** first event, out of a plan that explicitly told him to expect nothing.

Instead of being happy about the room, or the production, or the money that came back, he was furious that we went five thousand over and finished five or six short.

Which is, within a rounding error, precisely the thing we told him to expect.

NIGHT ONE — THE ACCOUNTING

RETURNED TO HIM	$35,000+
OVER BUDGET	$5,000
SHORT	$5–6,000
BRANDEN, PAID	$0
ME, PAID	$0
PROFIT FORECAST	NONE, STATED

WHAT CAME BACK

A ROOM GOING OFF AND THE MONEY RETURNED

OVER $35,000 · NIGHT ONE
OUT OF A PLAN THAT PROMISED NOTHING

WHAT HE DID ABOUT IT

CAME INTO THE OFFICE SCREAMING

ABOUT FIVE OVER
AND FIVE OR SIX SHORT

And it's not as though Branden and I were getting paid. We made nothing on that event, which, by the way, *sucked.* We were both completely stoked anyway, because the club was going off and the vibe was exactly right.

He'd committed to three events. He had agreed, out loud, that he'd be fine not making money on them. **We weren't making money either.**

WHAT WE WERE BUILDING INSTEAD OF MONEY

A REPUTATION	ONE
IMAGINARY BRANDS	THREE
CASH TAKEN HOME	ZERO

THIS WAS THE PLAN.

HE HAD AGREED, OUT LOUD, THAT HE'D BE FINE NOT MAKING MONEY ON THEM

WE WERE IN THE OFFICE TWENTY, MAYBE THIRTY MINUTES.
THE PARTY WAS STILL GOING WHEN WE WALKED IN.

RUMORS

THAT'S ALL IT TOOK

The whole time they were arguing with Branden, I just kept paying out the staff.

I didn't look up. I worked through the stack while it went on around me.

Until the investor's brother told me to stop.

I did not stop. I paid the staff. They got their money and left.

THE OFFICE — IN ORDER

01	THEY ARGUE WITH BRANDEN
02	I KEEP PAYING OUT THE STAFF
03	HIS BROTHER TELLS ME TO STOP
04	I DO NOT STOP
05	THE STAFF ARE PAID. THEY LEAVE.
06	HE SHOWS ME A GUN IN HIS BELT
07	I STOP DOING ANYTHING

I DIDN'T LOOK UP. I WORKED THROUGH THE STACK.

HE TOOK EVERYTHING. THE WHOLE NIGHT.

THEN HE SHOWED ME A GUN IN HIS BELT

OK. TAKE THE MONEY.

He took everything. **The whole night.**

Some of the staff saw that happen and told others that *someone in the office was flashing a gun around.*

WHAT LEFT THE OFFICE — ACCOUNTED

PAID	THE DJS AND THE STAFF
TAKEN	EVERYTHING ELSE

AS SOON AS THAT STARTED TO SPREAD, THE GOOD VIBES WERE GONE.

THAT'S ALL IT TOOK

TWENTY, THIRTY MINUTES

We were in that office twenty, thirty minutes.

That's all it took.

We still owed about five, six thousand dollars to the performance artists. That included two DJs who were, at that exact moment, *still playing*.

STILL OUTSTANDING	AT WALK-OUT
PERFORMANCE ARTISTS	$5-6,000
DJS INCLUDED	TWO
DJ STATUS	STILL PLAYING
CASH ON HAND	NONE

TWO DJS WHO WERE, AT THAT EXACT MOMENT, STILL PLAYING

TWENTY MINUTES EARLIER — NOT A PROBLEM	TWENTY MINUTES LATER — EVERY PROBLEM
THE DJS: A HANDSHAKE	THE DJS: UNPAID, MID-SET
PAYMENT DATE: AGREED LATER	PAYMENT DATE: NO STANDING TO ASK
OTHER INVESTORS: A LINE OF THEM	OTHER INVESTORS: NOBODY
BUY-OUT: IN A SNAP	BUY-OUT: GONE

Twenty minutes earlier that would not have been a problem. We had a great relationship with those DJs. They'd have taken a handshake and a future date of payment. **We had a line of investors who would buy out our current investors in a snap.**

SAME FACTS	DIFFERENT ROOM
AMOUNT OWED	UNCHANGED
EVERYTHING ELSE	CHANGED

TWENTY MINUTES EARLIER THAT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN A PROBLEM

WE WALKED OUT WITH NOTHING, AND THE CLUB SEEMED LIKE A DIFFERENT BUILDING.

THE WORD

NOBODY WAITS FOR THE REST OF THE SENTENCE

One performance artist — and I'll call him a lunatic because that is the clinical term — had used that half hour to go to every other performer in the venue and tell them to stop working, because **nobody was getting paid.** I'm guessing he heard Branden and the investor arguing.

Then he escalated the lies, when someone came out of the office saying *they've got guns in there.* No context. Just the word gun, and the lunatic ran with it.

THE CHAIN — TRUE TO FALSE, IN FIVE STEPS

01	HIS BROTHER SHOWS ME A GUN IN HIS BELT	TRUE · HAPPENED
02	STAFF SEE IT, AND SAY SOMEONE IN THE OFFICE WAS FLASHING A GUN AROUND	TRUE · NO CONTEXT
03	IT REACHES THE FLOOR AS "THEY'VE GOT GUNS IN THERE"	DISTORTED
04	PERFORMERS ARE TOLD TO STOP WORKING — NOBODY IS GETTING PAID	FALSE
05	PARTYGOERS ARE TOLD WE ARE CON ARTISTS WHO SHOVED GUNS IN THEIR FACES	FALSE · AND IT WORKED

GUN

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT THE REST OF THE SENTENCE WAS

He recruited the performers to go tell the partygoers that Branden and I were con artists, that we had refused to pay anyone, and that we had shoved guns in their faces.

He didn't need to be right to kill the good vibes and goodwill the party had going.

Picture being in a nightclub and hearing the word gun. *Nobody waits for the rest of the sentence.*

People started leaving in droves. He was deliberately shutting down the party, and he was good at it.

NO REASONING — I TRIED, BRIEFLY

—	WHILE PEOPLE FILED OUT	SCREAMING
—	WHILE WE CLOSED THE NIGHT DOWN	SCREAMING
—	HOURS LATER, AS WE PULLED OUT OF THE LOT	STILL SCREAMING

THERE WAS NO REASONING WITH HIM.
THE ONLY THING HE COULD DO WAS SCREAM AT FULL VOLUME.

HE DIDN'T NEED TO BE RIGHT TO KILL IT

HE WAS STILL SCREAMING HOURS LATER AS WE PULLED OUT OF THE LOT

HALF AN HOUR

THAT'S HOW LONG IT TOOK TO LOSE ALL OF IT

Two months of work. A room that had gone off like nothing that club had ever seen. Every ounce of goodwill we had built in that town.

Gone inside of half an hour, *over money that had been in my hand twenty minutes before.*

The next club, the plans we had — **all of it went down with it.**

It came out later that our investor had problems going on that we were never let in on.

WHAT IT COST	INSIDE HALF AN HOUR
TWO MONTHS OF WORK	GONE
THE BEST NIGHT THAT CLUB HAD HAD	GONE
EVERY OUNCE OF GOODWILL	GONE
THE NEXT CLUB	GONE
THE PLANS WE HAD	GONE

THE AMOUNT	AT THE CENTER OF IT
SHORT BY	$5–6,000

OVER MONEY THAT HAD BEEN IN MY HAND TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE

PROBLEMS WE WERE NEVER LET IN ON

THE INVESTOR

In the end I felt sorry for the guy. Months later we found out he had taken his own life. He'd been carrying gambling and relationship troubles that took a toll on him.

THAT'S VERY SAD.

VEGAS OOPS

EVERY FLYER WAS PROMOTING THE NEXT ONE

The flyers were still in the apartment.

Boxes of them by the front door, where we'd set them down on the way back in. **Nobody moved them. Nobody was going to.**

Every Powder Room flyer we handed out that night was already promoting the next one.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DOLLS. FRIDAY, APRIL 27TH. "JOIN OVER 2,000 MANIACS."

SUPA DJ DMITRY · LADY BUNNY · AMANDA LEPORE · SOPHIA LAMAR
JIMMY JAMES · BILLY BEYOND · SASHA



PRINTED · DISTRIBUTED · NEVER HELD



ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE · NOTHING IS FORBIDDEN

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, NOTHING IS FORBIDDEN.

THE LINE THAT RAN ACROSS EVERY ONE OF THEM

EVENT ONE
THE POWDER ROOM
MARCH 30 · HELD
THE BEST NIGHT THAT CLUB EVER HAD

EVENT TWO
NIGHT OF THE LIVING DOLLS
APRIL 27 · NEVER HAPPENED

EVENT THREE
UNNAMED
NEVER SCHEDULED
NEVER HAPPENED

Three events. That was the deal. That was the whole pitch, the whole plan, **the entire reason we ate the loss on the first one.**

Those flyers went into thousands of hands on the best night that club ever had, and every single one of them is an advertisement for something that *doesn't exist.*

THE DEAL — AS STRUCK

EVENTS PROMISED · THREE
EVENTS HELD · ONE
THE OTHER TWO · NEVER HAPPENED

BEST-PROMOTED EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF LAS VEGAS.
ZERO ATTENDANCE.

NOBODY MOVED THEM. NOBODY WAS GOING TO.

AN ADVERTISEMENT FOR SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T EXIST

A LEG IN THE SINK

I DON'T KNOW WHAT WOKE ME

The mood at the apartment was solemn, *and it stayed that way.*

My buddy **Rage** came and hung out with me the week after. We made the best of it, which mostly meant being quiet in the same room.

Branden had a girlfriend and started spending most nights at her place.

Four months in Las Vegas.

A few weeks later I landed part-time work with a printer, delivering flyers to casinos, clubs and promoters around town.

It paid cash. I needed cash. **I took it with both hands.**

CURRENT POSITION — MONTH FOUR

EVENTS REMAINING	NONE
REPUTATION IN VEGAS	SPENT
ROOMMATE, PRESENT	RARELY
BED	INFLATABLE
WORK	FLYERS, CASH
COMPANY	RAGE, THAT WEEK

THE BLOW-UP MATTRESS HAD OFFICIALLY STOPPED BEING A FUNNY STORY ABOUT A FRESH START AND BECOME A MATTRESS ON A FLOOR.

FOUR MONTHS IN LAS VEGAS

One Sunday, about two in the afternoon.

I'd left a club at 8 a.m. and I was trying to sleep, which I'm bad at when the sun is up. I was drifting in and out on my lovely air mattress when **something woke me.**

I don't know what it was. *I just know I was thirsty.*

So I got up, took a few steps toward the kitchen for water, and saw **a human leg coming through the window and stepping into the kitchen sink.**

I yelled **"HEY!"**

He startled, dropped off the sill, and took off down the stairs.



ILLUSTRATION · NOT A PHOTOGRAPH
SUNDAY, TWO IN THE AFTERNOON

And I started running for Branden's room, **because Branden had a shotgun in there.**

Then I stopped dead in the hallway.

So I made a decision. **I left too.**

I got outside and started yelling for my neighbor to call the police.

THE HALLWAY · DECISION, -1.5 SECONDS

WHAT IF THAT GUY WASN'T ALONE. WHAT IF SOMEONE CAME IN BEFORE HIM AND IS ALREADY IN HERE. WHAT IF HE'S IN BRANDEN'S ROOM RIGHT NOW — ALREADY GOT THE SHOTGUN — AND THE ONLY THING LEFT TO DO IS WAIT FOR ME TO WALK THROUGH THAT DOOR.

OPTION A	OPTION B — SELECTED
KEEP RUNNING TOWARD THE ONLY GUN IN THE APARTMENT	LEAVE. IMMEDIATELY. BY THE FRONT DOOR.

OUTCOME — VERIFIED AFTER

INTRUDERS	ONE, ALONE
TIMING	CAUGHT MID-ENTRY
POLICE	NEIGHBOR CALLED
WORSE ENDINGS AVAILABLE	A DOZEN

He was alone. I'd caught him at the exact moment he was coming through.

That's luck, and I'll take it.

THAT ONE HAD A DOZEN WORSE ENDINGS AVAILABLE. AND THEN IT GOT HOT.

SLEEPING WHEN THE SUN IS UP JUST ISN'T NORMAL FOR ME

I CAUGHT HIM AT THE EXACT MOMENT HE WAS COMING THROUGH

THE ASSET

HIGHER BILL · WORTH IT

After that I kept the windows locked and the AC running whenever I was home. **Higher bill. Worth it.**

I was paying Branden for half the rent, even though he was there *less than half the time.* The lease had a couple months left and I couldn't carry that apartment alone, so I'd started looking for a room to rent somewhere.

To cover rent and the utility bill that month, **I pawned my computer.**

THE APARTMENT — CONTENTS

AIR MATTRESS	ONE
FOLD-OUT CHAIR	ONE
ROOMMATE, PRESENT	RARELY
RENT PAID BY ME	HALF
DESKTOP COMPUTER	LAST ASSET
RESALE VALUE, EVERYTHING ELSE	NONE

PAWN TICKET

ONE DESKTOP COMPUTER

REDEEMED · NEVER

THE LAST OBJECT IN THAT APARTMENT WITH ANY RESALE VALUE, AND THE ONLY THING IN MY LIFE AT THAT POINT THAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS AN ASSET.

PURPOSE OF SALE · RENT AND THE UTILITY BILL
PROCEEDS · CASH, IN HAND

I pawned it, got the cash, **and handed the cash to Branden.**

TRANSFER — STEP ONE OF FOUR

FROM	THE PAWN SHOP
TO	BRANDEN

I PAWNED IT, GOT THE CASH, AND HANDED THE CASH TO BRANDEN.

WINDOWS LOCKED · AC RUNNING · HIGHER BILL · WORTH IT

THE ONLY THING IN MY LIFE THAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS AN ASSET

PLAYING BLACKJACK

I WANT TO WALK THROUGH THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY

About a week later, a Friday, I came home from delivering flyers and **the power was out.**

I called Branden.

BRANDEN	*"Oh shit. I forgot to pay the utility bill."*
ME	Fine. Annoying. Pay it tomorrow.
BRANDEN	*"Well... I kinda lost the money."*
ME	Lost it how.
BRANDEN	**"PLAYING BLACKJACK."**

CHAIN OF CUSTODY — ONE DESKTOP COMPUTER

1	MY COMPUTER → THE PAWN SHOP
2	THE PAWN SHOP'S MONEY → BRANDEN
3	BRANDEN'S HANDS → A BLACKJACK TABLE
4	THE BLACKJACK TABLE → KEPT IT

FINAL DISPOSITION — VERIFIED

—	RECOVERED · NOTHING

I WANT TO WALK THROUGH THE CHAIN OF CUSTODY ON THOSE FUNDS.

FOUR TRANSFERS · ONE DIRECTION · NO RETURNS

MY COMPUTER WENT INTO A PAWN SHOP.
THE PAWN SHOP'S MONEY WENT TO BRANDEN.
THE BLACKJACK TABLE KEPT IT.

120 DEGREES

EACH DAY HOTTER THAN THE ONE BEFORE IT

He said he could cover it by Monday. Great. That left Friday night, Saturday and Sunday in a Las Vegas apartment with **no electricity and no air conditioning.**

Each day hotter than the one before it. By Sunday night it was *north of 120 degrees inside that apartment.*

I could not sleep in that. **Nobody could sleep in that.**

INSIDE THE APARTMENT — SUNDAY NIGHT



NIGHT ONE	NIGHT TWO	NIGHT THREE
FRIDAY	**SATURDAY**	**SUNDAY**
POWER OUT HOT	HOTTER THAN FRIDAY	NORTH OF 120 DEGREES INSIDE

I opened every window. I did not care anymore. Let him come back. **There was nothing left in there to steal except my life,** and at that temperature I wasn't sure I was going to be able to hold onto that anyway.

Crime-ridden neighborhood, windows wide open, *and I had fully made my peace.*

And the air mattress — I swear to you — the air *inside the mattress* was hotter than the air in the room. **I was lying on a bag of hot air.**

RISK ASSESSMENT — SUNDAY, 2 A.M.

WINDOWS	WIDE OPEN
NEIGHBORHOOD	CRIME-RIDDEN
WORTH STEALING	NOTHING
PEACE MADE WITH IT	FULLY

I WAS AT MY WITS' END.
THEN I HAD A GENIUS IDEA.

NOTHING LEFT IN THERE TO STEAL EXCEPT MY LIFE

THE AIR INSIDE THE MATTRESS WAS HOTTER THAN THE AIR IN THE ROOM

THE BATHTUB

THEN I HAD A GENIUS IDEA

THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION THIS FELT LIKE BRILLIANCE

WHAT IF I FILLED THE BATHTUB WITH COLD WATER AND SLEPT IN THE BATH.

SO THAT'S WHAT I DID.

And here's what I learned: the instant you reach **REM sleep in a bathtub,** your butt slides, your head goes under, and you wake up choking on bathwater.

All night. Over and over.

Lying there between rounds genuinely wondering whether it is possible to drown in your own bathtub, and arriving at the answer *probably,* and nobody would even be surprised.

THE NIGHT — AS LOGGED

WATER	COLD
SLEEP ACHIEVED	BRIEFLY, REPEATEDLY
SLEEP INTERRUPTED BY	DROWNING
ROUNDS	ALL NIGHT
VERDICT ON DROWNING	PROBABLY POSSIBLE

ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE
SLIDE	SUBMERGE	CHOKE	SIT UP	RESET

RETURN TO STEP ONE · REPEAT UNTIL MONDAY

THIS WAS NOT ONE OF THOSE CALGON-TAKE-ME-AWAY BATHS.

ONE OF THE WORST WEEKENDS OF MY LIFE · AND I WILL BE CARRYING IT TO THE END

ALL I KNEW BY MONDAY MORNING WAS THAT SOMETHING HAD TO CHANGE, AND FAST.

AT THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION, THIS FELT LIKE BRILLIANCE
NOT ONE OF THOSE CALGON-TAKE-ME-AWAY BATHS

DARREN

THE FLYER DELIVERIES WERE STEADY, AT LEAST

The flyer deliveries were steady, at least.

Darren owned the printing company. **Genuinely good guy.** Any time I asked for more work he found me more work, and he always paid cash.

Darren printed for most of the clubs in Vegas. Sometimes he'd take payment in barter from club owners, *which in that town could mean almost anything.*

THE ARRANGEMENT	STANDING
WORK REQUESTED	WHENEVER I ASKED
WORK FOUND	EVERY TIME
PAYMENT	ALWAYS CASH
HIS CLIENTS	MOST CLUBS IN VEGAS
HIS PAYMENT, SOMETIMES	BARTER
WHAT BARTER MEANT	ALMOST ANYTHING



PRESS SHEET · COLOR BAR

HE PRINTED FOR MOST OF THE CLUBS IN TOWN

WHAT IT WAS	HONESTLY
A BOSS	NEVER FELT LIKE ONE
A FRIEND	YES
EVERY DOLLAR	GRATEFUL FOR IT

He liked to party and he was fun to be around. We hung out a lot. **He never once made me feel like I was working for him.**

He might have done a little too many drugs at one point. *It never showed up in anything between us.*

ANY TIME I ASKED FOR MORE WORK HE FOUND ME MORE WORK

HE NEVER ONCE MADE ME FEEL LIKE I WAS WORKING FOR HIM

I WAS GRATEFUL FOR EVERY DOLLAR OF THAT CASH WORK.

PUSH IT

THE THING THAT REALLY HURT WAS THE BMW

That beautiful 1987 635csi was getting old and **I was punishing it,** running deliveries all over the valley. Then out of nowhere the air conditioning quit.

In Las Vegas. *Getting hotter by the day.*

BMW repairs are not cheap and I am not a man who fixes cars.

CABIN TEMPERATURE — SEALED METAL BOX



MY ENTIRE SKILL SET — COMPLETE

PUT GAS IN IT	YES
PUT WATER IN IT	YES
EVERYTHING ELSE	CALL AAA
IF AAA UNAVAILABLE	FINISHED

WHAT MY FATHER DID

FIXED WRECKS

TOOK SMASHED-UP TOTALED CARS
AND MADE THEM LOOK BRAND NEW

WHAT I CAN DO

GAS. WATER.

THAT WAS MY ENTIRE SKILL SET
CONSIDERING WHO RAISED ME, OBJECTIVELY HILARIOUS

I'm not a car guy. I knew how to put gas in it and water in it. **That was my entire skill set.** If it broke, I called AAA or I was finished.

Which, considering who raised me, is *objectively hilarious.*

INHERITANCE — PARTIAL

HIS SKILL	TOTAL
MINE	NONE

BMW REPAIRS ARE NOT CHEAP
AND I AM NOT A MAN WHO FIXES CARS.

RUNNING DELIVERIES ALL OVER THE VALLEY

I KNEW HOW TO PUT GAS IN IT AND WATER IN IT

SHE STEERS, I PUSH

IF YOUR FATHER RESTORED WRECKS, YOU KNOW

My dad fixed smashed-up totaled cars and made them look brand new. Mechanically, the cars I drove were **a crap shoot.** Not the kind I wanted on a hot summer day in Vegas.

I got my high school cars from him. Those cars looked incredible, and I lost count of how many times they died in the middle of the road.

Several of those times were on dates.

So picture it. First date. Intersection. Car stalls. And now I have to get out and **push my own car while my date sits inside.**

And then I have to ask her not to help, because she tried once and it somehow made the whole thing worse.

THE CARS	AS SUPPLIED
APPEARANCE	INCREDIBLE
BODYWORK	FLAWLESS
MECHANICALLY	A CRAP SHOOT
DEATHS, MID-ROAD	LOST COUNT
OF THOSE, ON DATES	SEVERAL

ASSISTANCE	DECLINED
SHE OFFERED	ONCE
RESULT	SOMEHOW WORSE

HER JOB
SHE STEERS

MY JOB
I PUSH

EVERYONE ELSE
HONKS AND YELLS

PEOPLE ASK WHAT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF AN ENGINE IS LET ME SAVE YOU THE RESEARCH

ALL OF THEM. EVERY SINGLE ONE.

THE SMALLEST BROKEN PART IN THERE CAN END YOUR DAY

IF YOUR FATHER RESTORED WRECKS, YOU KNOW — THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THOSE CARS

**SO THE ARRANGEMENT BECAME: SHE STEERS, I PUSH,
AND THE ENTIRE INTERSECTION YELLS AT US THE WHOLE WAY TO THE CURB.**

THOSE CARS LOOKED INCREDIBLE

THE ENTIRE INTERSECTION HONKS AND YELLS AT US THE WHOLE WAY TO THE CURB

TRIPLE DIGITS

AND IN BETWEEN, I WENT TO JOB INTERVIEWS

For over a month I ran deliveries in **triple digit heat with no AC,** and in between I went to job interviews.

Arriving at a job interview after driving across Las Vegas in a sealed metal box, and then presenting yourself as a man who is *not currently a puddle* — that took real skill and genuine advance planning.

I got good at it.

THE ROUTINE — OVER A MONTH

DELIVERIES	ALL DAY
CABIN	SEALED METAL BOX
OUTSIDE	TRIPLE DIGITS
INTERVIEWS	IN BETWEEN
PRESENTED AS	NOT A PUDDLE

UNDOCUMENTED PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY

ARRIVING AT AN INTERVIEW, ACROSS LAS VEGAS, WITH NO AIR CONDITIONING, AND NOT BEING A PUDDLE.

REQUIRED · REAL SKILL AND GENUINE ADVANCE PLANNING
STATUS · IT SHOULD BE ON A RÉSUMÉ SOMEWHERE

SUMMER 2001
LANDED A GREAT JOB

THEN
THINGS STARTED TO CLIMB

MOVED OUT
A ROOM IN A GREAT HOUSE

FIRST MONTH
HEAD DOWN WORKED

By the summer of 2001 I finally landed a great job and **things started to climb.**

I moved out of the apartment. Found a room in a great house with an owner about my age, cool guy, we'd hang out now and then.

FIRST MONTH — NEW JOB

HEAD	DOWN
CLUBS VISITED	ZERO

FIRST MONTH AT THE NEW JOB I PUT MY HEAD DOWN AND WORKED.
DIDN'T GO OUT TO THE CLUBS ONCE.

DRIVING ACROSS LAS VEGAS IN A SEALED METAL BOX

PRESENTING YOURSELF AS A MAN WHO IS NOT CURRENTLY A PUDDLE

THIRTY YARDS

DARREN'S OFFICE IS LIT UP AT THE FAR END

Then I started hearing things about Darren. My boss who I did print deliveries for.

Word going around town was that he was **acting really weird.** I hadn't seen or talked to him in a little over a month.

I called him because he still owed me a few hundred dollars for the last run of work. I wasn't worried about it — *Darren was good for it.* He was the kind of guy who'd go out of his way to help you.

WHAT I KNEW — GOING IN

LAST CONTACT	A MONTH+
WORD AROUND TOWN	ACTING WEIRD
OWED TO ME	A FEW HUNDRED
CONCERN LEVEL	NONE
WHAT BRANDEN KNEW	EVERYTHING
WHAT BRANDEN SAID	NOTHING

THE PHONE CALL — BEFORE I WENT

BRANDEN: Have you seen Darren lately?

ME: I'm about to swing by the warehouse to pick up my money.

BRANDEN: *[laughs] Call me afterward. Let me know what you thought.*

ME: What I thought about *what?*

He wouldn't say. I pressed him a few times. **He was being coy, and he would not tell me.**

On my lunch break I drove over to Darren's warehouse office.

THE FRONT	I ASKED	THEY POINTED	THE WAREHOUSE
A FEW PEOPLE I'D NEVER SEEN	IS DARREN AROUND?	TOWARD THE WAREHOUSE	WINDOWLESS AND DARK

DARREN'S OFFICE IS LIT UP AT THE FAR END.
MAYBE THIRTY YARDS AWAY.

HE WAS BEING COY, AND HE WOULD NOT TELL ME

IT'S NOON · THE WAREHOUSE IS WINDOWLESS AND IT'S DARK

THE AIR CHANGED

ONLY A FEW STEPS IN

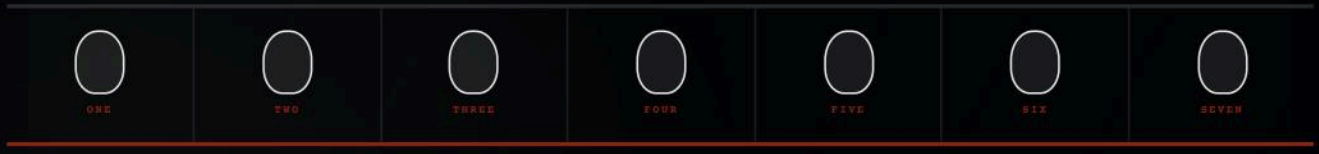
Only a few steps in, **the air changed.**

I don't know if it was a smell or some kind of thickness. *I just knew the area was different.*

I'm slowly walking towards the lighter office. About halfway down, to my right, I saw them. **Six, seven people huddled around a couch and a table in the dark.** They hadn't been there when I walked in — or they had, and I just hadn't seen them.

WHAT WAS THERE — HALFWAY DOWN

PEOPLE	SIX, SEVEN
ARRANGEMENT	A COUCH, A TABLE
LIGHT	NONE
PRESENT WHEN I WALKED IN	UNKNOWN
NOTICED BY ME	ONLY NOW



THEY ALL TURNED AND LOOKED AT ME AT THE SAME TIME · IN A CREEPY SEQUENCE

They startled me. I think I stopped walking. Or maybe I didn't. *I genuinely don't know.*

Everything went in slow motion. They were staring at me in a piercing way and **the only thing I wanted on earth was for them to stop looking at me.**

THEN — THE SLOW MOTION ENDED

WHAT LANDED	LIKE A TON OF BRICKS
EVIDENCE ATTACHED	NONE

THE FEELING ARRIVED FULLY FORMED

THOSE PEOPLE ARE EVIL.

I'M NOT DRESSING THAT UP.
I HAVE NEVER HAD A THOUGHT LIKE IT BEFORE OR SINCE.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS A SMELL OR SOME KIND OF THICKNESS

I HAVE NEVER HAD A THOUGHT LIKE IT BEFORE OR SINCE

I AM JESUS

HE SAYS IT FLAT OUT

And while it was still landing, I walked into Darren's well-lit office, and **Darren came up and hugged me.**

So I'm standing there hugging my friend, trying to work out what's different about him, with *Branden's little unexplained smirk* sitting in the back of my head.

He's bouncing — concept to concept to concept — and every single one of them loops back to a number sequence. **He keeps coming back to these numbers.**

IN THE OFFICE — WHAT I COULD SEE

LAST SEEN	OVER A MONTH
GREETING	A HUG
SPEECH	A HUNDRED MILES AN HOUR
SUBJECT	A NUMBER SEQUENCE
RETURNS TO IT	EVERY TIME
MY BUSINESS THERE	THE MONEY

CONCEPT TO CONCEPT TO CONCEPT

EVERY SINGLE ONE LOOPS BACK TO A NUMBER SEQUENCE

FIRST READ

HE'S ON SOMETHING. SPEED OR COKE.

FINE · I'VE SEEN DARREN LIKE THAT A DOZEN TIMES

WHAT IT ACTUALLY WAS

SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY

I TRY TO GET A WORD IN · I TELL HIM I'M HERE FOR THE MONEY
HE SAYS OK · AND GOES STRAIGHT BACK INTO THE NUMBERS

FINALLY I ASK HIM WHAT ALL OF IT MEANS

“I figured out that I am Jesus.”

I giggled.

Then I asked him about ten different ways to clarify what he was telling me. *Jesus like Jesus? Metaphorically? What are we saying here, Darren?*

THE GIGGLE — ON THE RECORD

DURATION	A SECOND
STATUS	THE LAST COMFORTABLE SOUND

I WANT TO BE HONEST ABOUT THE GIGGLE, BECAUSE IT WAS THE LAST COMFORTABLE SOUND I MADE IN THAT BUILDING.

DO YOU SEE IT?

NOT SOMETHING TO GIGGLE ABOUT

And as that back-and-forth went on, **the creepy people started coming in.**

One at a time. Filing into the office. Standing there. *Listening.*

And the looks on their faces told me this was not something to giggle about.

He went back to the number sequence. **Wrote it out on paper. Held it up.**

THE ROOM — FILLING

ARRIVING	ONE AT A TIME
DOING	STANDING. LISTENING.
FACES	NOT GIGGLING
DARREN'S TONE	SHIFTED
THE SEQUENCE	ON PAPER, HELD UP

A MINUTE EARLIER

ASKING ME TO BELIEVE HIM

A FRIEND TELLING YOU SOMETHING STRANGE

NOW

TELLING ME TO BELIEVE HIM

AND THE ROOM HAD FILLED UP BEHIND HIM

DO YOU SEE IT? DO YOU SEE IT? DO YOU SEE IT?

THEN SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE CREEPY BUNCH STARTED ASKING ME THE SAME THING

Right about then — and I mean the exact moment I became convinced these people were going to chop me up and eat me — I said: **"Look, I'm bad at math."**

I was trying to lighten the vibe and shift the topic. *"I just came here to pick up the money you owe me. I can come back if you like."*

The joke did not land. I want that on the record. The *I'm bad at math* bit went over like a bowling ball.

These people were spiraling out of control and I was **nervous as fuck.** I thought they were about to kill me.

STATE OF MIND — MEASURED HONESTLY

THEM	SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL
ME	NERVOUS AS FUCK
WHAT I THOUGHT	THEY WERE ABOUT TO KILL ME

I WAS MORE SCARED IN THAT OFFICE THAN AT ANY POINT DURING THE LA RIOTS OR IN MEXICAN PRISON.

ONE AT A TIME · FILING INTO THE OFFICE · STANDING THERE · LISTENING

THE JOKE DID NOT LAND. I WANT THAT ON THE RECORD.

CLEAN SLATES

BUT THE SECOND HALF DID LAND. I KNEW IT WOULD.

I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN

Because mentioning the money — and then *offering to come back for it* — was going to stick in Darren's craw.

I was implying he didn't have to pay me if he didn't have it.

One of Darren's pet peeves, maybe the biggest one, was owing money. His, or anybody's. *He liked clean slates.*

WHAT I KNEW ABOUT HIM — FROM YEARS

BIGGEST PET PEEVE	OWING MONEY
WHOSE DEBT	HIS, OR ANYBODY'S
PREFERENCE	CLEAN SLATES
LEVER AVAILABLE TO ME	EXACTLY ONE

I ONCE WATCHED THE MAN OBSESS OVER OWING SOMEBODY TWENTY DOLLARS

PAID ME TO DRIVE IT ACROSS TOWN	$20
THE TWENTY HE ACTUALLY OWED	$20
TOTAL SPENT TO CLEAR A $20 DEBT	**$40**

BECAUSE IT WAS BOTHERING HIM.

FORTY DOLLARS, TO CLEAR TWENTY

So the instant those words left my mouth, **I knew exactly what was going to happen.**

He paid me. Right then. *On the spot.*

THE SHIFT — IMMEDIATE

PAYMENT	ON THE SPOT
THE ENERGY	SHIFTED

HE PAID ME. RIGHT THEN. ON THE SPOT.
THAT SHIFTED THE ENERGY.

A HELPER AT HEART

NOW THAT THERE WAS COMMERCE

He whipped out his wallet right there in front of the creepy bunch — who had started to disperse, *now that there was commerce* — and paid me the couple hundred he owed me.

And then he went straight back to the number sequence.

I spoke up. I'm on my lunch break. I need to get back to the office.

I hugged Darren. And I got the heck out of there **as fast as a man can move without technically running.**

THE EXIT — IN ORDER

WALLET	OUT
PAID	A COUPLE HUNDRED
THE CROWD	DISPERSED
DARREN	BACK TO THE NUMBERS
ME	GONE

AS FAST AS A MAN CAN MOVE WITHOUT TECHNICALLY RUNNING

THE PHONE CALL — A FEW MILES LATER

PULLED OVER	CAUGHT MY BREATH
CALLED BRANDEN	CHEWED HIS ASS OUT
WHAT HE KNEW	THE ENTIRE TIME

HE KNEW THE ENTIRE TIME

Branden knew. He knew the entire time, and he sent me in there with a laugh and a *call me after and let me know what you think.*

I walked straight into evil and crazy all rolled into one, and **my friend had a front-row seat booked for the phone call.**

DARREN

The updates on Darren after that were not good. I heard he got put into a psychiatric hospital.

I hope he got the help he needed.

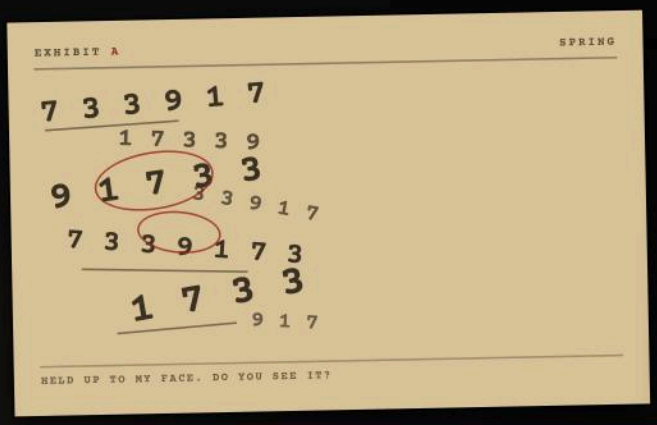
DARREN WAS A HELPER AT HEART.

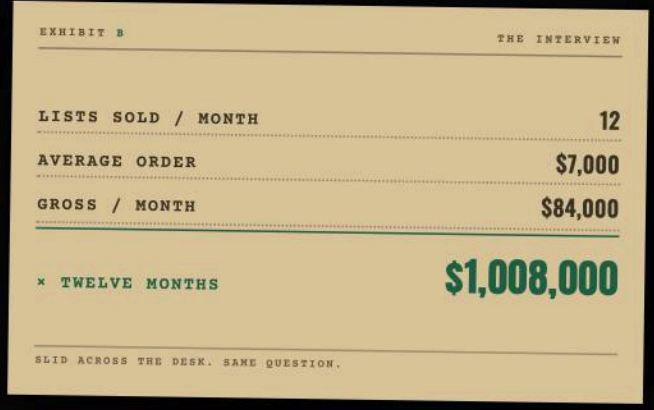
JOHN ENGLISH

NUMBERS ON A PIECE OF PAPER

Here's something about 2001 I didn't notice at the time.

Two different men in Las Vegas sat me down that year, wrote a sequence of numbers on a piece of paper, and asked me if I could see it.





ONE OF THEM THOUGHT HE WAS JESUS.

THE OTHER ONE WAS MY NEW BOSS

The other one was my new boss — and I want to be clear that with **John English**, I could see it perfectly.

I COULD SEE IT PERFECTLY.

COMMISSION ONLY

NOBODY PAYS YOU TO WARM UP A CHAIR

My job was panning out great. **Commission-only**, which is a polite way of saying nobody pays you to warm up a chair. I was busting my hump and picking up clients fast.

EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION — LAS VEGAS, NV — 2001

POSITION	SELLING LISTS OF NAMES AND ADDRESSES
COMPENSATION	COMMISSION ONLY
OPENINGS	ONE
OTHER APPLICANTS	NONE
PROJECTED	$1,000,000 PER YEAR
PREVIOUS OFFICE	SEDAN. NO AIR CONDITIONING.

ACCEPTED

John was very well connected in Vegas. Four decades in sports betting and gaming, real innovations, the kind of career that ends with the Sports Betting Community Hall of Fame.

SPORTS BETTING COMMUNITY HALL OF FAME

JOHN ENGLISH

INDUCTED 2024 · POSTHUMOUSLY · FOUR DECADES

When he hired me he was rebuilding after a big financial tumble. So was I. Two guys on the way back up, one of us with considerably more to come back from.

I remember the interview vividly. Numbers on paper. A million dollars a year selling lists of names and addresses to catalog companies. That was his thing.

I needed a job badly, nobody else was in the running, and he only wanted one person for the position.

I TOOK IT.

ONE OPENING · ONE APPLICANT · NO SALARY

At minimum it meant I'd stop delivering flyers in a car with no air conditioning, which at that point in my life qualified as a corner office.

A CORNER OFFICE.

John English was famous for **one sentence**.



IF YOU'RE OVER A CERTAIN AGE, YOU JUST READ THAT IN A SPECIFIC FONT.

THAT COPY

NOT COPY LIKE IT

You saw the envelope. The Prize Patrol, the oversized check, the balloons, a camera crew ambushing a stranger's front door at **eight in the morning**.

01	02	03	04
THE PRIZE PATROL	THE OVERSIZED CHECK	THE BALLOONS	A CAMERA CREW

ARRIVAL — 08:00 LOCATION — A STRANGER'S FRONT DOOR NOTICE — NONE

PRIZE DEPARTMENT
PAY ON PRESENTATION

No. 0000001
Date — — — —

PAY TO THE ORDER OF

$1,000,000.00

ONE MILLION AND 00/100 Dollars

NON-NEGOTIABLE · SPECIMEN

MEMO ALREADY WON

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

⑆ 000000000 ⑆ 0000000000 ⑈ 0001

My grandmother kept hers.

A lot of grandmothers kept theirs.

John wrote that copy. **Not copy like it. That copy.**

BEST COPYWRITER I EVER SAT ACROSS A TABLE FROM.

I learned more from him in a year than from every course I've bought since.

THE CHILI BOOK — LAS VEGAS

NOT COPY LIKE IT — THAT COPY

THE LISTS

WE NEVER SAID WHERE ANYONE STAYED

The names and addresses I sold were recent registrations at hotels and casinos around Las Vegas. **We never said where anyone stayed.**

GUEST REGISTRATION — RECORD OF SALE

LAS VEGAS, NV

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY / STATE / ZIP

PROPERTY — WITHHELD

CHECKED IN — SOMEWHERE IN TOWN

My clients were:

01	02	03	04	05
LAND'S END	L.L. Bean	J. CREW	WILLIAMS-SONOMA	CABELA'S

EVERY SMALLER CATALOG COMPANY BEHIND THEM

ALL THE LONG-DISTANCE PHONE COMPANIES

I could see a **real book of business** in this.

MON · TUE · WED · THU · FRI | NEXT MONTH · NEXT QUARTER · NEXT YEAR · FURTHER

WHERE THE VIEW USED TO STOP

WHERE IT REACHED AFTER

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A YEAR, I COULD SEE FURTHER OUT THAN FRIDAY.

PROPERTY — WITHHELD · CITY — LAS VEGAS, NEVADA · NO. 05

LUCKY WANG

MOVIN' ON UP TO THE DELUXE APARTMENT

By the start of Q3 I was making decent money.

Money left over at the end of the month. A girlfriend. We moved in together. I was *movin' on up* to the deluxe apartment, and after the summer I'd had, a working thermostat felt like a yacht.

01	02	03	04
MONEY LEFT OVER	A GIRLFRIEND	WE MOVED IN TOGETHER	A WORKING THERMOSTAT
THE DELUXE APARTMENT	PREVIOUS RESIDENCE — A FLOOR		FELT LIKE A YACHT

AND THEN

BRANDEN CALLED.

NO PREAMBLE · NO WARNING · NO CHANCE I'D SAY NO

We were going to open an after-hours club.

Not just any after-hours club.

WE WERE GOING AFTER DRAI'S.

THE BLOCK

SAME BLOCK TWO BUILDINGS DOWN

If you don't know: **Drai's After Hours** is an institution. It was then, it is now, it has been the number one after-hours club in Las Vegas since the day it opened.



We found a location two buildings down. Same block. Older hotel on East Flamingo, across from Bally's, tucked between The Westin and Drai's.

ABOVE	HOTEL ROOMS, STILL A HOTEL	—
FIRST FLOOR	THE ENTIRE FLOOR OF ROOMS, OURS TO CONVERT	ALL OF IT
BASEMENT	**TEN THOUSAND SQUARE FEET**	THE CLUB

The way you become number one is you compete with number one. And the way you beat number one isn't by being better.

BETTER IS A LOSING ARGUMENT. DIFFERENT IS A CONVERSATION.

LATE AUGUST · EARLY SEPTEMBER · ONE INVESTOR · $1,000,000

GREEN LIGHT

READ THE PLAN LOVED THE CONCEPT

Late August, early September — **green light**.

THE DEAL	LAS VEGAS, NV — SEPT. 2001
INVESTOR	CONNECTED TO JOHN ENGLISH
READ	OUR BUSINESS PLAN
REACTION	LOVED THE CONCEPT
COMMITTED	$1,000,000

We were going to build:

LUCKY WANG'S

PUSSYCAT LOUNGE

EAST FLAMINGO ROAD · DOORS AT MIDNIGHT · DIM SUM AT FOUR

I WILL DEFEND THAT NAME UNTIL I DIE.

THE CHARACTER

ONCE AGAIN, WE INVENTED A PERSON

And yes. Once again, we invented a person.

I'd like to tell you we learned something from the three imaginary European production companies. We did not. We looked at that experience and concluded our one mistake had been **insufficient commitment**.

THE LUCKY WANG PERSONA	CASTING SHEET — 2001
AGE	FORTY
STANDING	ULTRA-SUCCESSFUL
TYPE	A PLAYBOY JET-SETTER
AIR	MYSTERIOUS
WEALTH	RICH BEYOND EXPLANATION
EXISTS	NO

~~PINK BANANA~~ · ~~RHINESTONE COWBOYS~~ · ~~MILLION DOLLAR~~ — THREE COMPANIES, ALSO IMAGINARY

LESSON TAKEN: COMMIT HARDER

The plan was to hire an actor, shoot him with celebrities and business titans, and paper the entry hallway with the evidence. **Forrest Gump movie rules.**



NO. 01 NO. 02 NO. 03 NO. 04 NO. 05

THE ENTRY HALLWAY — CELEBRITIES AND BUSINESS TITANS

ACTOR NOT CAST · PHOTOGRAPHS NOT TAKEN

You'd walk in and learn who Lucky Wang was one photograph at a time, and by the time you reached the room you'd have built his entire legend yourself and we wouldn't have had to say a word.

HE DID NOT EXIST.

PERSONA — COMPLETE PERSON — NONE NO. 04

BASEMENT LEVEL · 10,000 SQ FT · OLD-SCHOOL VEGAS · DIM SUM AT FOUR

THE ROOM

PLUSH BOOTHS A CLAMSHELL STAGE

Inside, **old-school Vegas**. Plush booths. A clamshell stage.



Food, because people who've been drinking since midnight need something to absorb it. Dim Sum. Waitresses in old-school Vegas outfits pushing carts through a nightclub at four in the morning.

4:00 AM
SERVICE CONTINUES

01 STILL DRINKING

02 CARTS ROLLING

03 STAGE LIT

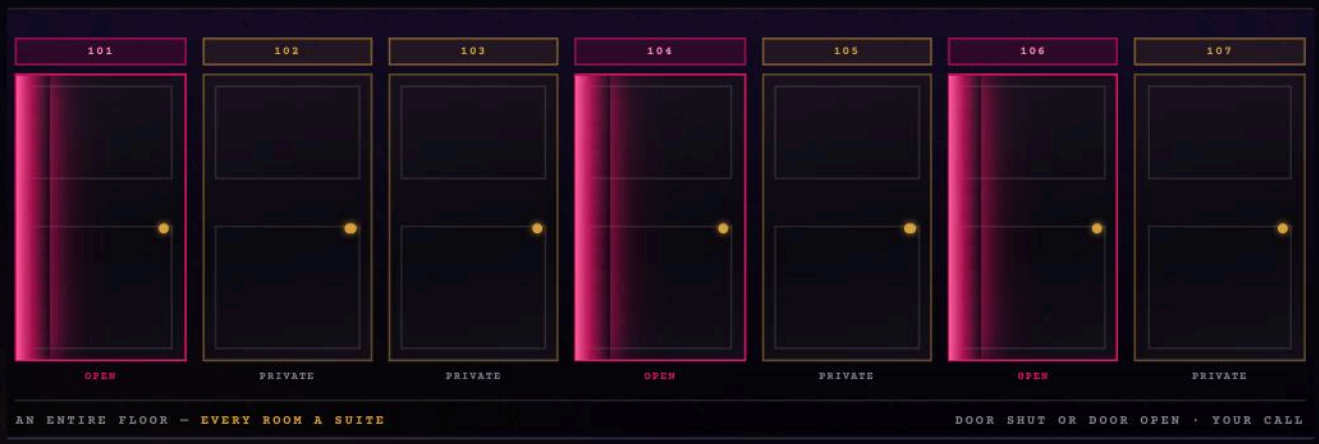
THAT WAS THE VIBE. THAT WAS THE WHOLE VIBE.

FIRST FLOOR · THEMED VIP SUITES · YOUR OWN WAIT STAFF · BOTTLE SERVICE

UPSTAIRS

STAIRS OR ELEVATOR

Upstairs — stairs or elevator — an entire floor of hotel rooms converted into **themed VIP suites**. Think the Madonna Inn, if the Madonna Inn had bottle service.



AN ENTIRE FLOOR — EVERY ROOM A SUITE

DOOR SHUT OR DOOR OPEN · YOUR CALL

You rented one. It came with your own wait staff. Close the door and keep it private, or leave it open and **let the party come to you**.

✓ WE HAD THE MONEY

✓ WE HAD THE BASEMENT

✓ WE HAD THE NAME

THREE OF THE FOUR THINGS YOU NEED — AND ONE CLOCK

WE HAD ABOUT TWO WEEKS WITH A GREEN LIGHT.

SUITES — 101 TO 107 SERVICE — YOURS NO. 06



01 **THE CLAMSHELL STAGE**

02 **PLUSH BOOTHS**

03 **DIM SUM CARTS**

04 **VIP SUITES UPSTAIRS**

05 **FRIENDS OF LUCKY WANG**

EVERY ELEMENT ABOVE IS **FROM THE PLAN** · THE MAN ON THE WALL DID NOT EXIST · NEITHER DID THE ROOM

I WILL DEFEND THAT NAME **UNTIL I DIE.**

I WAS CERTAIN

WITHIN A MONTH OF PITCHING, WE HAD THE INVESTOR

Within a month of pitching, we had the investor.

The plan was to make **millions per quarter**. We were ecstatic. I was certain.

THE DEAL	THE PLAN	THE FEELING
SIGNED	MILLIONS PER QUARTER	CERTAIN

EVERYTHING ABOVE WAS TRUE ON THE TENTH

Then September 11th.

I don't have anything to add about that day that matters. Thousands of families lost people. What happened to me was small, and I knew it was small while it was happening.

But it happened, so here it is.

GHOST TOWN

WE HEARD IT ON THE RADIO

My girlfriend and I had decided not to put a TV in the deluxe apartment. *Very sophisticated of us.*

So we heard it on the radio, and then spent the day in a bar down the street watching it on somebody else's television.





IN THE WEEKS AFTER, LAS VEGAS BECAME A GHOST TOWN.

TWO WEEKS

NOT MOST OF THEM ALL OF THEM

Over the next two weeks I got a cancellation or a pause from **one hundred percent** of my catalog clients.

01	02	03	04	05
~~LAND'S END~~	~~L.L. Bean~~	~~J. CREW~~	~~WILLIAMS-SONOMA~~	~~CABELA'S~~
CANCELLED	PAUSED	CANCELLED	PAUSED	CANCELLED

EVERY SMALLER CATALOG COMPANY BEHIND THEM — **THE SAME**

100%

Not most of them. **All of them.**

And the investor pulled the brakes on Lucky Wang's to see what the city was going to do.

I went from an income to no income. More overhead than I'd ever carried and a girlfriend I'd just moved in with.

> *There was a rumor going around all that fall that the New Year's Eve crowd on the Strip was going to get hit with a biological attack.*
>
> NOBODY KNEW ANYTHING — EVERYBODY REPEATED IT

SQUARE ONE. AGAIN. WITH FURNITURE THIS TIME.

CLIENTS — NONE · INCOME — NONE · NO. 04

DO WHAT YOU KNOW

NO MONEY, NO TOURISTS, ONE PHONE NUMBER

So I did the only thing left, which was start something with **no money in a city with no tourists**.

Earlier that year I met an email marketer in Vegas who could generate leads out of thin air. I had a friend in Pre-Paid Legal who needed them.

LEADS COST ME	I SOLD THEM FOR	WHICH LEFT
$4.50	**$6.50-$8**	**$2-$3.50**
PER LEAD	PER LEAD	PER LEAD

WITHIN WEEKS — OVER FIVE THOUSAND A WEEK

THAT CHANGED MY ECONOMIC SITUATION

All I had that September was a phone number for a man who knew email marketing. I turned that into a business and a **cash cow**.

LEADSPRING → LEADS TO WEALTH, INC.

THE START OF MY NEW COMPANY

FIRST YEAR	EVERY YEAR AFTER	2007
$1.3 MILLION	DOUBLED	SOLD

NOTHING I EVER PLANNED WORKED THAT WELL. NOTHING.

AFTER

THE LAST NIGHTCLUB I EVER CHASED

The following year I was in New York for a convention, and there was still smoke or steam coming out of the ground where the towers had been.

Years later I went to the memorial and the museum. If you get the chance, go.

That was the last nightclub I ever chased.

I went back to the thing I actually knew how to do — **lead generation** — and that's a different story, and a better one.

We never built Lucky Wang's. Twenty-five years later I still think it would have worked.

HE BUILT	HE BUILT	HE BUILT
THE GOLDEN TIKI	EVIL PIE	PACHI-PACHI

BRANDEN STAYED IN VEGAS — ALL OF THEM ARE SUCCESSFUL

I still love that town. My dad and my brother are both out there.

VIVA LAS VEGAS

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA — 2001 · END OF THE VEGAS CHAPTERS · NO. 06

PAINT

I WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH IT



MIXING & MATCHING — SAN DIEGO

My father owned an auto body and paint shop in San Diego for **forty-seven years**.

I wanted nothing to do with it.

That's the standard-issue response, I know. Every son looks at his father's trade and decides he'll be doing something else, thanks.

Mine happened to involve mixing and matching color for a living, which I watched him do for my entire childhood without once thinking *this is going to matter*.



THE DECK HE WORKED FROM — MIX, MATCH, REPEAT

FORTY-SEVEN YEARS OF IT

I HAVE SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE RUNNING FROM PAINT. PAINT HAS SPENT MY WHOLE LIFE CATCHING ME.

TRADE — HIS · INHERITANCE — UNREQUESTED · SAN DIEGO

BED SHEETS

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK PAINT UNDER BLACK LIGHT

In the late eighties and through the nineties I promoted nightclubs, concerts and records. Ten-plus years of it.

I'd rent some boring-looking restaurant for a night and have to turn it into somewhere people would pay to be.

The solution was murals painted on **bed sheets**, in glow-in-the-dark paint, draped over the walls under black light. Hang them and the room transforms into something amazing.



A RENTED ROOM, DRAPED

RECONSTRUCTION · ILLUSTRATION, NOT A PHOTOGRAPH



NO ORIGINAL SURVIVES

PAINTED TO MATCH THE WALL BEHIND HER

Murals cost money and take time, and sometimes I needed one by Thursday. So one night I picked up the brush myself.

PICASSO HAD PARIS. I HAD BED SHEETS IN NIGHTCLUBS.

MEDIUM — COTTON · LIGHTING — 365 NANOMETERS · BUDGET — NONE

RESEARCH

I THOUGHT I WAS DOING PRODUCTION

Then I started body-painting the go-go dancers to match the murals behind them — **same colors, same shapes**.



THE WALL AND THE PERFORMER, MIXED FROM THE SAME BUCKET

BLACK LIGHT DOES THE REST

SO WHEN THEY MOVED IN FRONT OF THE WALL, IT LOOKED LIKE THE PAINTING HAD STOOD UP.

PART PRODUCTION TRICK · PART ACCIDENTAL PERFORMANCE ART

Those murals went up and came down every week, lasted a few months and went in the trash. **Not one of them survived.** It never occurred to me that they should.

CATALOGUE OF WORKS, 1988–1999

EXTANT — NONE

It wasn't until 2004 that I painted anything just because I wanted to.

I THOUGHT I WAS DOING PRODUCTION. I WAS DOING RESEARCH.

RUN LENGTH — ONE WEEKEND

DISPOSAL — DUMPSTER

NO. 03

BENCHED

NOT FIRED **BENCHED**

In 2005 my business partners benched me.

Not fired. **Benched.** Two tech kids barely out of college, running the back end of the company I'd co-founded, sat me down and suggested I take three months off. *Suggested* the way a judge suggests community service.



THE COMPANY THEY THREW ME OUT OF — **LEADS TO WEALTH, INC.**

LEADSPRING · DAIS · 2002–2007

The reason was flattering and insulting in exactly equal parts: I was bringing in more business than they could onboard. I was the bottleneck?



DIAGNOSIS — **THE BOTTLENECK**

PRESCRIBED REMEDY — REMOVE IT FROM THE BUILDING

I WAS MAKING MORE MONEY THAN EVER, AND I HAD BEEN **SENTENCED TO LEISURE.**

STATUS — **ON LEAVE**

DURATION — 90 DAYS

CONSENT — NOT SOUGHT

BAD AT VACATION

MONEY IN THE BANK NOTHING ON THE CALENDAR

Two weeks is my ceiling. After two weeks a hotel room stops being a vacation and becomes **a small apartment you're renting badly**. And I was doing it alone, which turns a trip into an expensive walk.

ATTEMPT ONE	ATTEMPT TWO	ATTEMPT THREE
Vegas	New York	Home

CEILING REACHED EACH TIME AT FOURTEEN DAYS

So: a grown man, money in the bank, nothing on the calendar, and a television.

WHICH IS HOW I ENDED UP WATCHING

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT

SEGMENT — THE KEEP A BREAST FOUNDATION · PLASTER CASTS, PAINTED BY ARTISTS, AUCTIONED OFF

LOW ESTIMATE	HIGH ESTIMATE	MATERIAL
$20,000	$40,000	*For plaster.*

I SAT UP — NOT BECAUSE OF THE PLASTER. BECAUSE OF THE NUMBER.

THE BODY IS THE BRUSH

WHAT IF YOU SKIPPED THE MOLD?

Then the real thought arrived. **What if you skipped the mold?**

THEIR METHOD	PLASTER
01	CAST THE BODY IN PLASTER
02	HAND THE CAST TO AN ARTIST
03	PAINT THE CAST
04	AUCTION THE OBJECT

THE WORK IS THE MOLD

MINE	NO PLASTER
01	PAINT THE BODY — ABSTRACT, STRAIGHT ONTO SKIN
02	PRESS THE BODY TO CANVAS
03	LIFT

THE WORK IS THE PRESS

THE BODY ISN'T THE SUBJECT. THE BODY IS THE BRUSH.

ONE PRESS · ONE CANVAS · NEVER REPEATABLE

AND I'D ALREADY BEEN DOING IT FOR A DECADE UNDER A BLACK LIGHT WITHOUT NOTICING.

THE MATH

THIS IS WHAT I DO INSTEAD OF HOBBIES

I got a pen and paper. *This is what I do instead of hobbies.*

Playboy was paying top models somewhere between a hundred and three hundred thousand to take their clothes off. I couldn't beat that in cash. But I could beat it in meaning — **a million-dollar tax-deductible donation to a charity of her choosing**.

COULD THIS RAISE $1 MILLION FOR CHARITY?	ONE EVENING, 2005	
THE PARTNER	CARMEN ELECTRA. PAMELA ANDERSON.	Fan base
PLASTER CAST CLEARED	TWENTY TO FORTY THOUSAND	$20–40k
SO AN ORIGINAL MUST CLEAR	MADE WITH AN ACTUAL HUMAN BEING	$10–30k
TARGET		$1,000,000



THE PITCH, PRINTED

ROUTE ONE
1,000 prints at $1,000

OR

ROUTE TWO
2,000 prints at $500

MODEL CONVENTIONS

SAME MILLION EITHER WAY

AND PRINTS DON'T STOP — THE CATALOG KEEPS GIVING

ON PAPER IT WAS BEAUTIFUL.

INSTRUMENT — A LEGAL PAD

DURATION — ONE EVENING

NO. 07

ONE SMALL GAP

I HAD NEVER DONE THIS NOT ONCE

I had never done this. **Not once.**

I'm not an artist. I'd painted murals in my own clubs because hiring somebody was expensive, and I'd painted dancers because it looked good under a light. **That's not a portfolio. That's a landlord.**

SO THAT NIGHT I TESTED THE CONCEPT ON THE ONLY MODEL AVAILABLE ON SHORT NOTICE

ME.

HANDS · ARMS · PRESSED TO CANVAS



THE TECHNIQUE, APPROXIMATELY · ILLUSTRATION, NOT A PHOTOGRAPH · SUBJECT — THE ARTIST

Pressed to canvas with the *total confidence of a man who has no idea what he's doing.*

THE RESULTS WERE THE KIND OF THING SOMEBODY TAPES TO A REFRIGERATOR AND THEN QUIETLY THROWS AWAY.

I NEEDED A MODEL.

TEST — FAILED · DISPOSAL — IMMEDIATE · NO. 08

THE CHILI BOOK — SAN DIEGO · THE ONLY MODEL AVAILABLE

CRAIGSLIST

WHAT ANY RESPECTABLE CEO ON A MANDATED SABBATICAL DOES

So I did what any respectable CEO on a mandated sabbatical does. I posted an ad.

SAN DIEGO > GIGS > CREATIVE — 2005

Models wanted — abstract painting project

Hourly rate. No experience necessary. Bring nothing.

REPLIES — DOZENS · INTERVIEW LOCATION — MY OFFICE · EXPLANATION OFFERED — NONE

And since I was supposed to be on vacation and had nowhere else to be, I interviewed a number of them at my office.

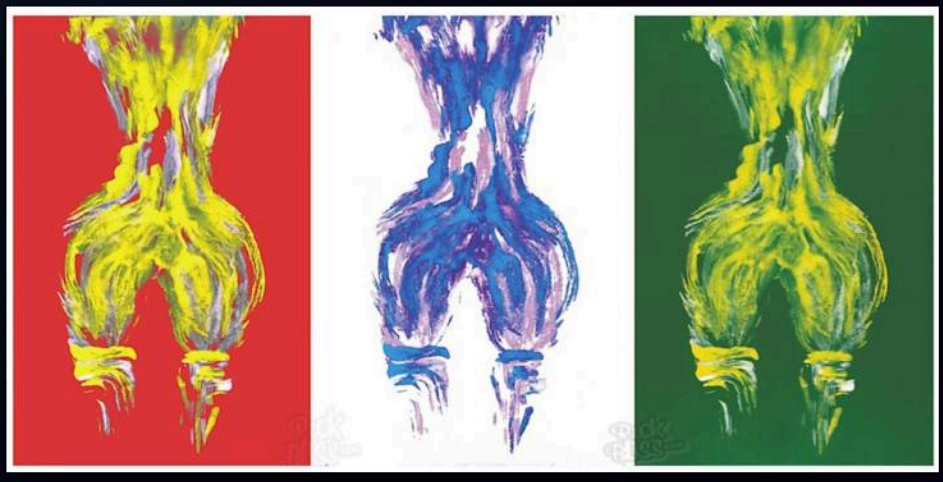
My office. At the lead generation company. **The one with my business partners in it.**

Picture it from their side: the guy they exiled for being too productive is back in the building, not working, taking a steady rotation of meetings with young women, and offering no explanation whatsoever.

They did not think I'd found my calling.

THEY THOUGHT I WAS A PERVERT.

THEN I SHOWED THEM THE WORK



ART OF THE BODY — ONE PRESS, THREE COLORWAYS · RICK BLISS

I won't say they apologized. I'll say the most skeptical one in the room looked at the work for a while and admitted **somebody would probably buy that**.

STEP ONE, DONE.
NOW WHAT?

APOLOGY — NOT OFFERED · NOT REQUESTED EITHER · NO. 09

TWO ARTISTS

WHO MADE ME AND ONLY ONE WAS ABOUT ART

Two artists made me, and only one of them was about art.

Gerhard Richter taught me what a painting could be. I've been looking at his work since the late eighties and still don't entirely understand it, which I'm told is the point.

Mark Kostabi taught me something I could use on Monday. Kostabi outsources the painting and sells the hype. He'd tell people not to buy his art and watch it sell harder. The Guns N' Roses *Use Your Illusion* cover is a Kostabi, and Kostabi didn't paint it. **He signed it.**

GERHARD RICHTER · GERMAN · B. 1932

WHAT A PAINTING COULD BE

Oil. Photograph. Squeegee.

LOOKING SINCE — THE LATE EIGHTIES
COMPREHENSION — PARTIAL
REPORTEDLY — THAT IS THE POINT

LESSON — ART

STILL UNSOLVED

MARK KOSTABI · AMERICAN · B. 1960

SOMETHING I COULD USE ON MONDAY

Idea. Assistants. Signature.

TELLS YOU NOT TO BUY IT
IT SELLS HARDER
USE YOUR ILLUSION — HIS COVER

LESSON — MARKETING

HE SIGNED IT

ONE OF THEM TAUGHT ME ART. THE OTHER TAUGHT ME MARKETING.

BOTH LESSONS ARRIVED · ONLY ONE WAS URGENT

GUESS WHICH ONE I NEEDED FIRST.

TUITION — NONE PAID

NEITHER MAN AWARE

LOS ANGELES

THE NAME, AND THE BEARD

I HAD THOUGHT ABOUT THIS THERE WAS A PLAN

I wanted to sell the work online under a pseudonym, because I knew I'd eventually write business books under my real name and I didn't want the two lives touching.

So: **Rick Bliss.** I'd love to tell you about the soul-searching. The truth is the .com was available. It also helped that there was already a famous name in Southwest art called Gilbert Ortega, and I had no interest in spending my second career as the other one.

AVAILABILITY — ONE EVENING, 2005	REGISTRAR LOOKUP
rickbliss.com	AVAILABLE
gilbertortega	TAKEN — SOUTHWEST ART
gilortega.net	RESERVED FOR THE OTHER LIFE

But a fake name wasn't enough for me.

I was also going to wear a ZZ Top beard. An enormous one. In every photograph, forever, so nobody could ever connect the painter to the guy running the lead company.

I want you to understand that I was serious. I had thought about this. **There was a plan, and the plan had a beard in it.**

FIG. 1



SPECIFICATION — ONE (1) BEARD
COVERAGE — CLAVICLE, MINIMUM
DURATION — EVERY PHOTOGRAPH, FOREVER
PURPOSE — TWO LIVES, NO CONTACT

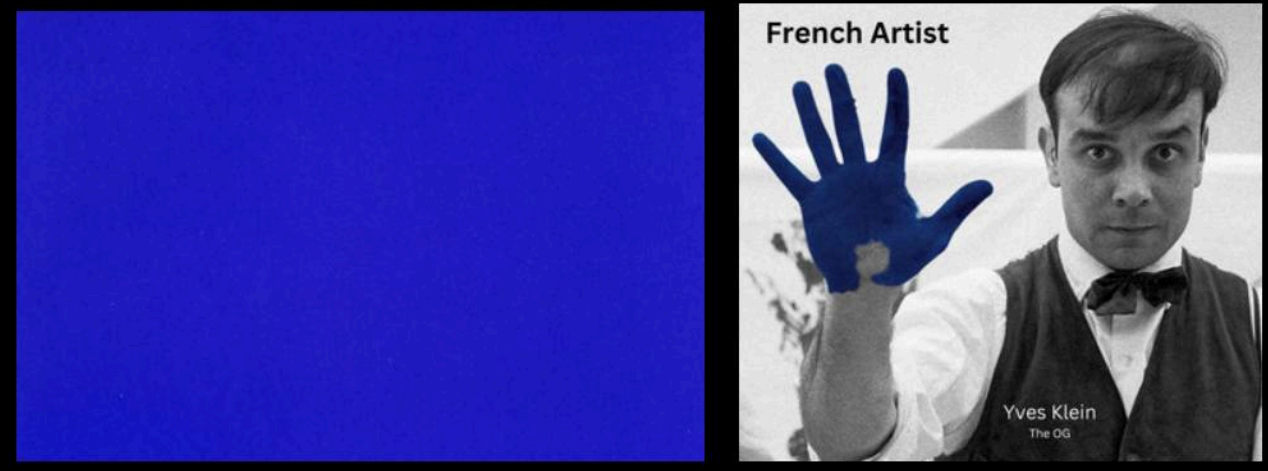
MY WIFE GETS CALLED MRS. BLISS AT EVENTS NOW. SHE THINKS IT'S CUTE. SO DO I.

THE FRENCHMAN

A THING MOST PEOPLE DO BEFORE

Then I did some research, which — in fairness to myself — is a thing most people do *before*.

Body stamping was invented around 1960 by a French artist named **Yves Klein**. Klein's pieces sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars. That gold-painted woman in *Goldfinger* traces back to him.



INTERNATIONAL KLEIN BLUE

1960 · PARIS

THE COLOR HE MADE, AND THE METHOD HE MADE WITH IT

I ARRIVED IN 2005

SO I HAD NOT HAD AN ORIGINAL IDEA.

I'D HAD A FRENCH ONE, FORTY-FIVE YEARS LATE.

I CHOSE TO FIND THAT

ENCOURAGING.

THE INVITATION

I SAID YES AND THEN GOT SCARED THE CORRECT ORDER

A year goes by. I'm still painting.

My friend Mike produced live and silent auctions for charity events. He asked if I'd sell my work at one. My knee-jerk reaction was shock. I said yes, and then got scared, **which I believe is the correct order.**

I told him I'd never sold a piece of art in my life. He said that was fine.

MIKE REQUESTS THE PLEASURE

Would you sell your work at *one of my auctions?*

HE SAID THAT WAS FINE

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED — NONE

PIECES SOLD TO DATE — ZERO

RSVP — YES, THEN PANIC

THEN HE ASKED WHETHER I'D EVER BEEN TO THE PLAYBOY MANSION.

ANSWER — NO

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION — SEVERAL

NO. 04

HOW IT WORKED

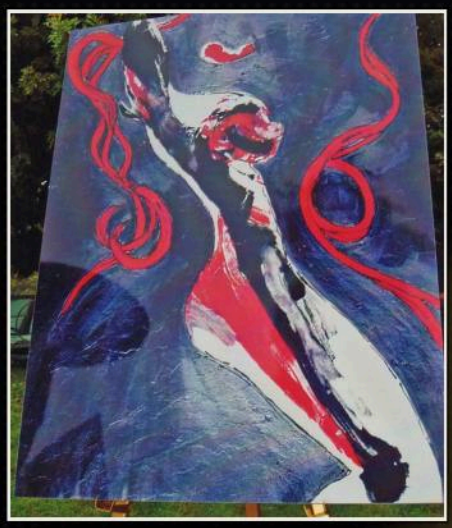
THE BUYER GETS ART THE CAUSE GETS MONEY

Your piece goes up with a reserve price. You keep the reserve. Everything above it goes to the charity. The buyer gets art, the cause gets money, and **the artist doesn't have to starve to prove he's sincere.**

I brought two mounted prints. Not originals — I didn't feel ready to bring originals, which tells you exactly where my head was.



THE SILENT AUCTION — POOLSIDE, HOLMBY HILLS



ONE OF MINE, ON ITS EASEL

PRINT ONE	PRINT TWO	CLEARED, AFTER COSTS
$1,200	$1,800	Nothing

By the end of the night both had sold. My reserve was a few hundred each. After materials and mounting I'd cleared approximately nothing.

I HAVE NEVER IN MY LIFE BEEN SO HAPPY ABOUT NOTHING.

PIECES BROUGHT — TWO · PIECES SOLD — TWO · NO. 05

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

TWO GROWN MEN ONE QUESTION

Here's the part of that night I still can't get over.

I'm standing around at the Playboy Mansion and I run into **Grant King.**

Grant was my business partner at the Atlas clubs. Grant is the guy who told me to paint the go-go dancers. Not a metaphor. Not some mentor moment. He said paint the dancers, so I painted the dancers — and twenty years later that's the entire technique I just sold two pieces of artwork with.

I'm standing there thinking, hang on. That's strange.

So I pull out my phone and call **Branden Powers.** My partner from the Vegas years and before. The reason the idea of pressing paint onto a canvas with a person ever entered my head in the first place.

I want to tell him I'm at The Playboy Mansion. Neither of us can hear a thing. My end is a party. His end is a party. Two grown men screaming at each other, *"Can you hear me now?"* like the dang TV commercial.

CALL IN PROGRESS — SIGNAL — PRESENT · COMPREHENSION — NONE

"WHERE?"

"THE PLAYBOY MANSION."

"WHAT?"

"I'M AT THE PLAYBOY MANSION!"

WE'RE BOTH AT THE SAME PARTY. BOTH OF US, OUR FIRST TIME THERE, EVER.

NOW LOOK AT WHO THOSE TWO MEN ARE

I MAY BE THE ONLY PERSON WHO FINDS THAT REMARKABLE

EXHIBIT ONE

GRANT KING

PUT THE BRUSH IN MY HAND

ATLAS CLUBS · "PAINT THE DANCERS"

EXHIBIT TWO

BRANDEN POWERS

PUT THE IDEA IN MY HEAD

THE VEGAS YEARS, AND BEFORE

Grant put the brush in my hand. Branden put the idea in my head. Neither one was trying to build an artist. **Neither one has the faintest idea he did it.**

And both of them were attached to the first night that artist ever sold anything. And of all places.



THE SAME NIGHT — ART OF THE BODY, CARRIED THROUGH A GARDEN · HOLMBY HILLS

I'm aware I may be the only person alive who finds that remarkable.

I FIND IT REMARKABLE ANYWAY.

THE DOTS LINE UP

AND ALMOST EVERYBODY IS MOVING TOO FAST TO LOOK

I don't know whether that's God, or the universe, or arithmetic. What I know is that the dots line up, and almost everybody is moving too fast to look at them. Catch one — actually see the pattern while you're still standing inside it — and **the whole thing stops feeling random.**



DOTS ON THE SHEET — COUNTLESS · DOTS ANYONE SLOWED DOWN FOR — FOUR · DRAWN AFTERWARDS

That night, an idea I'd only ever felt through painting turned into *something I could feel in every way*.

A SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE IDEA

I AM THE PAINTER WHO WANTS TO BE ANONYMOUS

A few months later Mike came back with a significantly worse idea.

Paint live. At the Mansion. While the piece is auctioned out from under you. And the buyer gets a bonus: **a private session at their own home afterward.**

01	PAINT LIVE	IN FRONT OF EVERYONE
02	AT THE MANSION	HOLMBY HILLS
03	WHILE IT'S AUCTIONED	OUT FROM UNDER ME
04	THEN A PRIVATE SESSION	AT THE BUYER'S HOUSE

MY KNEE-JERK THIS TIME WAS NO. ABSOLUTELY NOT. I AM THE PAINTER WHO WANTS TO BE ANONYMOUS.

POSITION HELD — APPROXIMATELY NINE MINUTES

Then he told me the rest. It was a celebrity charity poker night hosted by Kim Kardashian, and *Hugh Hefner would be watching me work*.

TWO THINGS DIED THAT WEEK

ONE OF THEM WAS THE BEARD

I spent a few days trying to picture myself painting live, in front of that room, *wearing a giant fake beard.*

01 **~~THE BEARD~~** NEVER GREW · NEVER WILL

02 **~~THE SECRET~~** COMING OUT IN PUBLIC

The other was the idea that I could keep doing this in secret. If I was going to stand up there, **I was coming out as Rick Bliss in public.**

I'D BE A TOTAL PUSSY IF I DIDN'T STEP UP.

THE ACTUAL ARGUMENT · ARRIVED LAST · WON

So I practiced. I invited people into my studio and painted in front of them *until an audience stopped being the problem*.

THE JACKET

ART PRICING IS NOT A RATIONAL MARKET

THE LIVE PIECE, SOLD WHILE I WAS STILL PAINTING IT
MY PRINTS WERE GOINGFOR **ABOUT THE SAME**

$2,400

Which I found strange, and still do — my prints were going for about the sameasmyfirstoriginal.I don't have a tidy explanation for that. **Art pricing is not a rational market, and anyonewhotellsyouotherwiseis selling you something.**





THE PRESS, AND WHAT CAME OFF IT — ONE PASS, NO SECOND TRY

PAINT STILL WET

Afterward I went backstage to clean up. My model stayed out front, her back still covered in wet paint.

Somebody walked her over to meet Hefner. He put his arm around her for a photo.

Then he looked at his white jacket.

I like to think I *indirectly* painted Hugh Hefner at the Playboy Mansion.

HE HAD TO GO CHANGE JACKETS.

NO. 11

WHAT I DID NOT DO

THE WHOLE THING WAS BUILT ON IT

~~PITCH KIM KARDASHIAN~~

OPPORTUNITY — PRESENT · EXECUTION — NONE

~~PITCH ANY CELEBRITY, ANY NIGHT~~

THE MILLION DOLLAR PLAN — NEVER ONCE RAISED

~~LOOK UP~~

HAULING CANVASES · MIXING PAINT · PREPPING A MODEL

I did not pitch any celebrity, that night or any other night, on the Million Dollar Plan — **the entire reason any of this existed.** I was too busy hauling canvases, mixing paint and prepping a model to execute the one piece of strategy the whole thing was built on.

I've thought about that a lot. You can spend years getting yourself into the room and then *spend the whole night working instead of looking up*.

ROOM — ENTERED · PLAN — LEFT IN THE CAR · NO. 12

TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE

AND ONE VERY ABSORBENT BIKINI

I've been back to the Mansion half a dozen times since. Painted live all over the country.

Sold hundreds of pieces for charity.

ROOM, YEAR ONE
10,000 people

SILENT AUCTION
10 prints in, 10 out

YEAR TWO, THE ASK
Paint it live

The biggest night was The Margarita Ball in Dallas. Ten thousand people, black tie. Year one I had ten prints in the silent auction and sold ten prints.

Year two they asked me to paint live — and only because **Michael Godard**, who painted live at that event every year and is known as the "Rock Star of the Art World," couldn't make it.



PAINTING LIVE WHILE IT IS AUCTIONED

I had ultra short notice, but I did it *because I knew what to expect from the event.*

ONE VERY ABSORBENT BIKINI

I LEARNED THIS IN FRONT OF TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE

They booked the model, who was **Pilar Lastra**, a former Playmate who was on *Deal or No Deal* at the time. One of the sweetest, smartest, most down-to-earth people you'll ever meet.

She was also contractually barred by NBC from any nudity. The only bikini she owned was made of a thick, absorbent material, and considerably more generous in coverage than I had planned for.

WHAT I HAD PLANNED FOR — FIG. A



EDGES — CLEAN

PAINT TRANSFERS.
THE PRINT IS A PRINT.

WHAT TURNED UP — FIG. B



EDGES — BLOBBY

PAINT GETS ABSORBED.
THE PRINT IS A RUMOR.

Now. Paint applied to absorbent fabric does not transfer and imprint well. Paint applied to absorbent fabric gets absorbed and looks a little blobby in the transfer process.

I learned this in front of ten thousand people. The finished stamps came out — and I'm being kind to myself here — just okay.

I HAVE NEVER PREPARED HARDER FOR ANYTHING SINCE.

FABRIC — THICK · COVERAGE — GENEROUS · NO. 14

SIXTH AVENUE

THE BEST CREATIVE SPACE I'VE EVER HAD

In 2010 I opened a gallery on 6th Avenue in San Diego's Gaslamp, a block from the Hard Rock. **For a few years it was the best creative space I've ever had.**



THE WALL, WHILE THERE WAS A WALL — GASLAMP, SAN DIEGO

ART OF THE BODY

2010	A FEW YEARS	THEN	AFTER
GALLERY OPENS	THE BUILDING SELLS	THE LEASE VANISHES	A STORAGE UNIT

Then the building sold. The lease vanished. My studio went into storage.

IT STAYED THERE FAR TOO LONG.

TODAY

THE PLAN HAS NEVER ONCE BEEN WHAT HAPPENED

I'm an artist. Fiber art. Abstract painting. Sculpture. Art of the Body will come back at some point. **I have a studio again and I'm back making artwork.**



ART OF THE BODY — THE WORK THAT CAME OUT OF A BEDSHEET RICK BLISS

None of that was the plan. The plan was a million dollars for charity and a fake beard. **The plan has never once been what happened.**

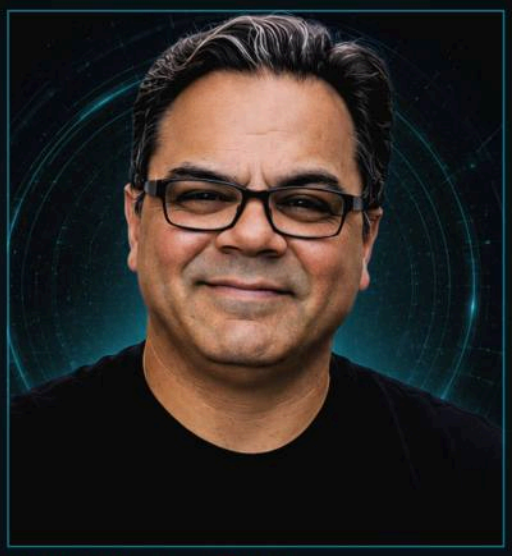
My father mixed and matched paint for forty-seven years and I wanted nothing to do with it.

IT TURNS OUT YOU DON'T GET TO PICK. OR DO YOU?

JAMUL, CALIFORNIA · 1982 — PRESENT

I NEVER PUT THE FLYER DOWN.

The first thing hip hop ever handed me was a flyer. I noted, several chapters back, that I'd come back to that. This is me coming back to it.



GIL ORTEGA · "CHILI"
THE CHIEF RAINMAKER · SAN DIEGO

THIRTY YEARS, ONE METHOD

GIVE VALUE. SELL RESULTS. DELIVER. REPEAT. COMPOUND.

Gil Ortega grew up on a farm in Jamul, California — thirty minutes and roughly one entire culture from downtown San Diego. In 1982 he was learning to breakdance on a flattened cardboard box in a driveway, in a town where nobody else was breakdancing.

Then Mike Arias moved in from LA with the mixtapes and the flyers, and the flyers were the part that stuck. Real ones, from real house parties, with lettering you could stare at for an hour.

He has been making them ever since. On paper first, with a borrowed copier and too much spray mount. Then on websites. Then in email. Then in whatever the machines are doing this year. The format kept changing every few years and the job never changed once: put something in front of people that makes them show up.

BY THE EARLY NINETIES HE WAS THE LEADING HIP HOP PROMOTER IN SAN DIEGO.

He co-founded the city's chapter of the Universal Zulu Nation with his business partner Darryl "Flick" Blount. The rooms in this book are his rooms. So are the flyers, the photographs, the six buses, the balloon, and the one night that came close enough to the news to still be funny only in hindsight.

He started his first company — CHILI Sportswear & Surfwear — his senior year of high school, and has not held a regular job since. Two lead-generation companies followed. He built both and sold both; the second one passed fifty million a year after he left.

Thirty-plus years of lead generation, affiliate marketing and performance-based models came out of that. Scaled to $2M+/month. Exited seven figures. Every bit of it is the same trade he learned in a hallway at the Sports Arena: find the people, give them a reason, make the room worth standing in.

TODAY HE RUNS PROFIT WORLDWIDE, INC. OUT OF SAN DIEGO.

There he operates as **The Chief Rainmaker**, a fractional CMO who installs AI-powered acquisition systems for companies that would rather have results than activity. His book *Give Value. Sell Results.* is about what happens to a market when production gets cheap.

He also makes art under the name **Rick Bliss** — fiber work, abstract painting, sculpture. Same instinct as the flyers. Put a thing in a room and find out whether it moves anybody.

He is better at catching trout than at chess, and he knows exactly why: he is strong on direction and weak on seeing three moves ahead. Most of this book is what that looks like from the inside.

01
FLATTENED BOX, JAMUL DRIVEWAY

02
CHILI PRODUCTIONS, SAN DIEGO

03
PROFIT WORLDWIDE, STILL AT IT

EVERYTHING IN HERE HAPPENED. THE FLYERS ARE THE RECEIPTS.

THE ART
RICKBLISS.COM
FIBER · PAINT · SCULPTURE

THE REST OF IT
GILORTEGA.NET
STORIES · BOOKS · TRAVELS

THE DAY JOB
CHIEFRAINMAKER.COM
GIVE VALUE · SELL RESULTS



CHILI

PRODUCTIONS

EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001

SAN DIEGO 1985 – 2001 LAS VEGAS

CHILI PRODUCTIONS



I've said for years that online marketers are simply passing out flyers the way I did as a kid, except now we call them *banner ads*.

GIL ORTEGA AKA CHILI AKA RICK BLISS

MEMOIR · EVENTS FROM 1985 TO 2001
A COLLECTION OF STORIES AND TIMELINES WITH EVENTS

GilOrtega.net