

SEPTEMBER 9th

By: Gus Dick Andros

I was sitting at the oblong table with other faculty members of the dance department at the High School of the Performing Arts. We were watching one contestant after another parade in front of us. You see this was a "Mr. Andros look alike contest." Almost all the participants received laughter for their costumes. Most wore a blue unitard. One girl had glued a wig to her chest and another one padded her tights with what looked like her laundry. I thought, "When I demonstrate these kids are never looking at the combinations, I'm showing" The faculty were even laughing, but I am sure that many were not pleased to be there judging this contest. In the history of the school a teacher had never been honored by the students. This had been their idea, and the faculty allowed it to keep peace.

I was a little embarrassed by this display and I knew some of the other teachers felt left out, for I was the newest teacher in the school. Bella Milinka was an original teacher and the rest had been there for years. This was my third year and deep down inside I knew jealousy would eventually cost me my job.

I didn't let any of that affect me because the students were having a great time. I felt "what will be will be." As the last contestant walked in, the kids stood up and cheered. It was Ronny DeVito dressed in a blue unitard. He had drawn hair on his smooth chest with an eyebrow pencil. He was dragging his left foot behind him. I had injured my foot many years before, and I limped when I walked. As he got in front of me I noticed that he had also drawn a red line across his neck with blood dripping down. The back of my head began to tingle and my pulse race; for a moment I relived that awful night when my own throat was cut and my blood gushed.

It was September 9th, 1976 an exciting day because I had an interview with the Board of Education. I dressed in my new suit, a white starched shirt, and a blue tie to match my eyes. I wanted to present myself in the best way I could. After I left the interview, I knew I had the job and felt very proud of myself. I went to the New York School of Ballet where I had been teaching since I came back from Israel in 1975. I taught my class, which finished at 8:00 p.m., and boarded the subway to get back to my apartment in Brooklyn. I was feeling very good about the day: not only did I get the teacher's position at the High School of the Performing Arts, but my class went very well.

Many times I had been assured that no one would ever approach me in the city because I was 6'1" tall, and I carried myself with a dancer's confidence. Traveling at night had never bothered me. On the way home I stopped at a small grocery store and picked up a quart of orange juice, a loaf of bread, and sliced roast beef for my dinner.

I was always careful when I entered my street, and if I saw a figure on the block I would walk over to the hospital across the street. This night there wasn't a soul on the street. The entrance to my building was set back from the sidewalk about 20 feet. Evergreen shrubs lined both sides of the walk. It was the nicest building on the street. I put my key in the lock, opened the door, and turned to go to the mail room when a big black man and a shorter light-skinned man 20 to 25 years old, who could have been Spanish, pushed open the door. I could have sworn that I had locked the door. They must have been hiding in the shrubs. They went directly to the elevator. I paused with my mail in my hands, waiting for them to go up.

"Do you want us to wait for you?" one of the boys said.

"No, I don't live upstairs." I answered.

The door shut, and I assumed that it went up. I knew in my heart they didn't belong in the building. Although the house was integrated, I had never seen them before, so I could not be sure if they had a reason to be in the building.

Instinct told me to run, but with my crippled foot I knew that a small child could out run me. Anyway I thought they had gone up in the elevator. I lived on the third floor and decided to take the stairs. The elevator door opened again, and one boy leaned out and asked, "Do you have the time?" Their demeanor couldn't have been more friendly.

As I looked at my watch, something inside me said, "This is going to cost me my watch." I answered, "It's 9:30."

"Thanks." The door shut again.

The super lived on the second floor next to the stairwell. I felt I should tell him that there were strangers in the building. I felt out of danger and climbed the stairs. As I approached the super's apartment the elevator door opened and the two men walked toward me. I knew now that I was going to be robbed.

"Let them have what they want and get it over with," I thought.

"Does William Brown live in this building?" and kept walking toward me. I tried to keep my back to the wall.

"I don't know, but this is the super's apartment. Let's ask him." As I raised my hand to knock on the door, one boy grabbed my hands and the other boy got behind me and pulled my head back. I yelled out for help in a voice that could be heard throughout the building. They ran and I thought they were scared away by my yelling.

I don't know why, but I continued to call out, "Help me! Help me!" I put my hand to my throat and felt blood.

"Those sons of bitches scratched me!"

"Help me! Help me!" I continued. I started up the stairs to get to my apartment, continuing to call out. As I got the third floor my Puerto Rican neighbor from across the hall met me.

"Man you've been cut," he said and his wife ran into her apartment and returned with a towel. She told me to put it on my throat.

"Let me get you to the hospital." There was urgency in his voice.

"Let me put my groceries in my apartment." I still had them in my arms. I was totally unaware of how badly my throat had been cut.

"No, let me keep them until you get back, Go with my husband. Go quick!" She took my bag and he took my arms and led me across the street to the hospital. He told me later that I fell a couple of times. Thank God he knew where the emergency entrance was. I had lived there for two years and didn't know. Once inside, a nurse took the towel and replace it with a large gauze bandage. By then the police were there and the emergency room was cleared.

Before I was put on the operating table the police officer said, "let me see." I removed the bandage and turned my neck and he fell back against the wall.

"Is it that bad?" He frighten me.

"No, I don't like the sight of blood," he said. What is he doing on the police force, I thought.

On the table, three doctors were standing over me. A very large male nurse held my hands in place with his strong black ones, while the doctors began their work. No one had even ask me my name. There wasn't time for me to give them any information. Over the loud speaker I could hear, "Doctor Mohammed, to the emergency room fast!" I heard that for the next two hours.

I guessed there were medical reasons for not putting me out, so I heard everything that was going on.

"I can find one end of the vein, but I can't find the other end."

"The neck muscle is cut but not severed."

I responded, "I'm a dancer and I need my neck to turn." I am sure the doctors didn't understand the importance of my neck being used in spotting.

The nurse began to ask me questions about my dancing. Every once in a while they would hit a nerve and my legs would jerk, and the nurse would say, "Man, I thought we were the only ones with rhythm but you sure got it." I wanted to laugh but I was afraid to move. He kept me talking with my head turned as far to the left as I could get it. Funny, I felt no pain except for the strained and uncomfortable position in which I had to hold my head.

Overhearing the doctors talk, I knew I was in deep trouble.

I asked, "Am I going to die?"

They said "No!" I wanted to believe them. I wasn't ready to die. I found out the next day that I wasn't expected to make it.

Although I never called my mother anything but "mother," I wanted my "mommy" and a telephone to tell everybody good-bye.

Pretty soon I was begging them to put me out, and they assured me they couldn't because my blood pressure had dropped so much. When I thought I couldn't take it one more second Doctor Mohammed arrived in time to sew me up. All of the inside work had been done by the interns. Doctor Mohammed didn't even ask the interns what had occurred, and they left when he arrived. He didn't even take my blood pressure.

My secretary, Gloria, lived in the same building and came to the hospital. They thought she was my wife and she gave them all the information. The doctor said they would release me to my wife if the police would see us home. Doctor Mohammed didn't know what the other doctors had done to save my life. After sewing up the outside he gave me a tetanus shot.

"Is this all you bled?" the doctor asked. I didn't know that all he saw was what was on the shirt.

"Yes," I answered. I didn't think to tell him about the towel and the two large gauze bandages

He wasn't going to let me leave the hospital in my bloody shirt. Gloria took my shirt and they gave me a green doctor's jacket to wear. I never saw the shirt because Gloria put it in a plastic bag. With the help of the police I got home.

Getting to bed that night was rough; I called everybody saying, "I'm standing in my kitchen and I am back from the hospital -- I just had my throat cut. I will tell you more later." Everyone wanted more information, but I wasn't ready to talk about it. The next day the police were there to find out what had happened. They gave me protection for the next week. The police believed the muggers thought they had killed me, and if they saw me on the street they would know I could identify them. I was encouraged to leave the neighborhood, so within a month I moved to Manhattan.

By the first day as a teacher all the students in the high school knew what had happened to me. I deliberately wore a high turtle neck sweater. The students couldn't take their eyes off my neck, so to get some order in the class, I pulled the sweater down and showed them the cut with the stitches still in it.

Now three years later, Ronny brought it all back -- I began to relax, and the tingling in the back of my head subsided and my racing pulse returned to normal. I couldn't help but think of the irony that I was knifed by a black man and a Latino. Yet it was Puerto Rican man that got me to the hospital and the black male nurse that kept me going during my ordeal. They saved my life and I owe them more than they will ever know.

Oh! by the way, Ronny DeVito won first place.