

I KNOW WHAT KIND OF BAR THAT IS

by Gus Dick Andros

"Cuz, this is a gay bar!" I remember saying to Theo.

"What makes you think so?" he smiled.

"It doesn't take a genius to know that the only female in this place is the waitress. There must be at least a hundred men in here." Having come out as a gay man in the last year, I had been to a couple of gay bars with my gay friends in San Francisco.

"Would you believe I am here for that one waitress?" He said with a big smile, "I'm dating her."

"You're kidding me." It wasn't unlike Theo to joke with me. "You could have told me where we were going."

"Listen, you're from the big city and I didn't think anything would shock you."

"It doesn't shock me, you asshole. For a moment I thought my cousin was gay." I laughed.

We ordered another beer and began to catch up on our lives since I left Oklahoma City for San Francisco. Theo was three weeks older than I and we were like brothers. We were about eleven, when our fathers thought that we should be more athletic and sent us to the YMCA. The Theo I remembered didn't even want to change in the men's room at the "Y," and had a difficult time swimming in the nude.

We talked until the bar closed and Theo's date was ready to leave. The three of us then went out to have something to eat, and I waited in the car while Theo did "whatever" with his date.

When he climbed into the driver's seat, the first thing he said was, "Betty thinks you're gay. I told her to go f--k herself."

"You did what? I hope you didn't break up because of me." I didn't know what to think. Should I tell him the truth or should I lie? I knew he would believe me no matter what I said.

"No I just screwed her and it's no big deal." This was a side of Theo that I didn't know. After all, a war had transpired and both of us had been in the service since we were kids and went to the Saturday matinees together.

I felt I had to tell someone in the family and who could be more trusted than Theo. I turned to him, looked him straight in the eyes and said, "You know she is right; I am gay." I paused to see his reactions. There was none, so I continued, "That doesn't bother you?"

"Listen Cuz, We've been through too much together to let something like that disturb me." He threw his arms around me and showed me the warmth that came from the Antonio side of the family. Theo seemed to accept what I said without asking a lot of questions. I think that is what made us such good friends.

I finally moved to New York City where I led a more gay life, not having to shield my sexual preference. In San Francisco in the late forties people may know you were a homosexual, but it was not talked about. The dance world in New York City was more accepting of the gay community, although many male dancers aren't gay. No one seemed to care. Victor, my roommate was straight and we slept in the same bed and there was never a problem. It was not uncommon for Victor and I to go to Greenwich Village together and part company. Victor going to a straight bar and me going to a gay one. Although, the bar scenes was never my preference, I had been in many gay bars in the last year.

After I had settled in New York, I went home for another visit. Plato was away playing pro football and Dee was in college. Mother had invited everyone home for a large family Sunday dinner. Saturday night mother was working late and I decided to go home with her. I dressed up so mother's co-workers would think I was successful. I walked the couple of miles to her work place. I was early and Theo's gay bar was around the corner in the Skirvin Tower the nicest hotel in the city. I thought I would have a beer and then meet her. It didn't enter my mind that I would see anyone I would know, and if I did what difference would it make, if they were there also.

The place was crowded but I elbowed my way to the bar, got my beer and before I could find a place to park my body an old school chum called me over to his table. I think he was more surprised to see me there than I was to see him, he was one of the more effeminate boys in school. He introduced me to all his friends and we joked and discussed who we thought was gay in high school. There was a red headed guy with bluer eyes than mine sitting next to me, maybe a year or two younger, that caught my attention. He was impressed with the fact that I was a dancer from New York City. He looked so vulnerable and he made my ego hit new heights. The young man's name was Jim. I pressed my knee tight against his, to let him know I was interested and he returned the pressure. I knew that we would get together in the future.

We had a few beers and were laughing at each other jokes, when suddenly police were coming in all the doors. Having lived in San Francisco and recently from New York City I thought I had seen it all. I didn't know what was going on. This bar was in the best hotel in Oklahoma City; the fact that it was a gay bar didn't enter my head. A raid of a gay bar where I had come from was almost unheard of.

I think because I was dressed in a suit and tie, one policeman stopped at our table and questioned me, "Where are you from?"

"New York City." I was confused, but I had nothing to worry about after all I had done nothing.

"Let me see some identification." He commanded, and without question I reached in my pocket, pulled out my wallet, and offered it to him.

He snatched it out of my hand and looked through it and said, "Everything in this wallet shows you live in San Francisco. Are you from New York or San Francisco?"

"I recently moved to New York from San Francisco and I'm here in Oklahoma City to visit my family." I answered innocently

"**Andros?** Are you any kin to Plato and Nick Andros?"

"Yes, Plato is my brother and Nick is my Uncle." I thought that alone would be reason to leave me alone.

"I'm sure they'll be pleased to get you out of jail." he said sarcastically

My heart leaped to my throat, "Jail? What have I done?"

"We'll find out at headquarters." My head was spinning. I couldn't believe this could be happening to me.

We were searched before we was put in the squad car. What on earth could they be looking for? I guess they were looking for a weapon, but I wouldn't of have one. In fact, everybody in the bar was searched and taken to the station house. I felt sick at my stomach, and thought, "What would mother say." I knew being in jail would be the last place she would think to look for me.

I was also trying to think of some way of getting out of this mess. I was dressed in a suit and tie with gold cuff links and looking very unlike the others. I was so nervous that when they asked for my valuables I gave them my wallet, watch and ring forgetting that I had on my wrist the only expensive jewelry I owned.

I had to wait until I was called to be photographed and fingerprinted, when I walked into the room I recognized the officer doing these proceedings as someone I had known in high school. I asked him if he would call my mother and let her know where I was. We were not friends in school, but we did graduate the same year. I couldn't

understand why he acted like he didn't know me, but did tell me I could be kept for seventy two hours without making a phone call. (So much for the movies).

Because of the late hour I was put in a cell with four other men, none from the bar. I wasn't given a mattress or blanket just a steel slab. I took off my jacket to use as a pillow and noticed the cuff links, I quickly put the jacket back on. The other guys in the cell were sleeping or too out of it to have noticed. I worked the cuff links off my shirt and slipped them into my pocket; I was hoping I would get out of jail with them. .

I don't think I shut my eyes for the rest of the night. I was afraid--I knew mother, who had faith in me, would be worried sick when I didn't come home. I hoped that she would call the police to find out if there had been an accident. If the family found out I was in gay bar what could I do?, They already thought of me as strange. If anybody would have asked I would never denied my homosexuality. I see no reason to announce it. I decided to worry about that later. No matter how many times I turned, I couldn't find a comfortable position that allowed me to rest.

In the morning when they brought us food, which was watered down oatmeal and coffee in a metal cup.

The officer announced to my cell-mates, "We picked up over a hundred faggots last night so guard your family jewels." He was chuckling to himself.

"Send a couple in here. We could use a little head." The guy across from me said. I realized that they didn't think of me as one of those so called "faggots" nor have I ever thought of myself as a faggot, gay, yes--faggot no!

I gave my food to a derelict, who hadn't eaten in days. The other men gobbled their food. They seemed to be at home with this situation. Except for the derelict the other men were about my age. They seemed to have some education, and were not as clean as I would have liked, but the odor of an open toilet made you understand why they didn't feel the need to be clean.

The man on the upper bunk asked, "What did they get you for?"

I looked up, "Are you talking to me?"

"Sure! Are you one of those faggots that the cop was talking about?"

Having heard what could happen to someone like me, I bragged, "Hell no, I stole a car. What's your crime?"

"Me, I'm overstayed my leave about four months." Everyone laughed.

One of the other guys was too drugged to know where he was, but the other saw me as a companion. He was in for petty larceny, and looked up to me because he thought I was in for grand larceny. I must say that I felt superior to the other men. I knew I was innocent and they seemed to be proud of their crimes

I had to thank the army for having me share the toilet with hundreds of other guys. Watching someone sit on the john without a seat is not a pretty sight. I could pee, but I would have exploded before I would have sat my bare bottom on that bare porcelain.

My cell-mates fell asleep after breakfast, and I could hear some one crying in the next cell. I was sure it was Jim.. I asked in a whispers, "Is that you Jim?"

"Dick?"

"Yeah, it's me. Don't worry we didn't do anything we'll be out here soon." I tried to comfort him.

"The guys in here say they can keep us until court on Monday."

"If I get out first I'll call your family. I'm sure my mother called the police when I didn't come home last night." Hoping that no one could see I held his hand through the bars to reassure us both. As the time passed I wasn't so sure I believed my mother would call. I was giving up hope, when the cell door opened and there stood an officer.

"Which one of you is Nick's nephew?"

" I am." I said hoping I was on my way to freedom, but instead I was put in the "bull" pen with dozens of others, including the redhead, Jim, and the others from the bar. We sat silently or were speaking softly to a friend. By now I think most of us were over the shock of being in jail, realizing there was nothing we could do.

It was four or five in the afternoon when they came for me. Theo's father "Jimmy the Greek" and Plato were there to get me out. I wasn't concerned what they thought, because I felt I hadn't done anything wrong. I was released after they had me plead guilty to vagrancy.

"How can I plead guilty to something I didn't do?" I resented the fact that I wasn't given a choice. If I had been in New York I would have stayed a fought it in the courts.

"Just shut up! Jimmy had your record destroyed." Plato assured me.

"How can I have a record if I didn't do anything?"

"You smart ass, you're not in New York any more, so just keep that big mouth of yours shut." Plato meant business.

"How did Jimmy get them to destroy my record?"

"Never underestimate, "The Greek."

As we were leaving the courthouse I saw a guy that looked just like Jim. "Are you Jim Smith's brother?" I asked

"Yes! Is he all right?" He seemed concerned.

"Yeah! He's waiting for you. I'm glad I saw you. He's worried about what you may think and a little scared."

"He's my brother, I'm here to help him." I thought that was the kind of love I had always wanted from my brothers.

"Get your ass moving." Plato shouted from the door.

When we got home the family was waiting dinner for me. Mother was saying, "I can't believe you could be arrested. Plato and Dee yes, but not you, and at the Skirvin Tower Hotel. I thought it was the nicest hotel in the city. Maybe we should sue them for false arrest.

"Mom! Just forget it. It's all over now." I didn't want her to get involved.

As I walked by my sister-in-law, she kissed me and whispered, "I know what kind of bar that is." My face turned bright red.

Nothing was said during or after our meal about my being arrested, but the next morning the telephone rang and mother answered it, "It's for you. He said his name is Jim."