

Down Under



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A Good Story Begins with the Blues

I will not go down under the ground
'Cause somebody tells me that death's comin' round
An' I will not carry myself down to die
When I go to my grave my head will be high
Let me die in my footsteps
Before I go down, under and drown

- Dylan (with apologies)

White Water

Wiley Timmons woke early in the
Malibu dawn, a 16-year-old surfer
boy gazing out at the 6' waves rolling



out past the breakwater reef at Old Joes, the mysto-surfing spot just north of third

point at Surfrider beach. Standing next to his 7' Makaha short board, Wiley saw what looked like NIRVANA – an ocean of surfing adventure that lay at his feet. The glassy sea and powerful waves presented the thrill of big surf, all his own. It was early enough in the day that no beachcombers strolled on the Colony sands.

He suited up, waxed his board and paddled off into the powerful sea before the sleeping crowd of the 'Malibu Riviera' had crawled out of bed. He knew that a new day was dawning, not just in the ocean before him, but in the challenges he now faced, surfer boy against the world. 50 yards offshore he sat poised on his wave-riding board waiting for a chance to 'ride the wild surf'. That's when he saw the next set rolling in, another 20 yards out from his waiting zone.

Turning the nose of his surfboard out to sea, he doggedly paddled to get clear of the first wave coming his way. Then he saw the second wave rolling in and once again his tired arms dug into the water, stroke after stroke, advancing a couple of feet with each lunge of his arms into the sea.. He was breathing heavily as he covered the distance to the oncoming swell and with one last thrust of power into the water he crested the face of wave number two. As luck would have it, this was a set of three waves rolling in and Wiley caught sight of the next monster swell headed his way. With bulging eyes and a pounding heart, he made one last sprint to get clear of the set. He was scared, tired but determined not to get caught inside

and to push through the next wall of water he faced. When finally, the nose of his board pierced the lip of the wave, he knew he was free, now maybe 100 yards offshore but clear of the fearful force of Mother Ocean. At that moment, past the height of another 6' wave, Wiley felt the tug of the tide pulling him back into the powerful grip of the sea. He was going 'over the falls backwards', sucked into the wave, clutching his Makaha board for survival and plunging into the churning whitewater action. Instantly, the surfboard was ripped from his hands and he plummeted deeper.

Which way to the surface? How much breath do I have? In a panic, he opened his eyes underwater only to have his contact lenses washed out. Am I drowning, can I break free from down under this tumbling mass of whitewater? Relax young lad. Let the water carry you on. And with what little oxygen he had left Wiley crawled to the surface to pop his head free only to gasp a mouthful of sea spray and air. Wiley bobbed through the surf and half-drifted, half-swam his way back to shore. Back on the beach he found his new surfboard damaged and dinged from the tide pool rocks and in a moment of failure and defeat he ass-dragged his way back home. Not the conquering hero, but the waterlogged surfer boy dejected from his pounding.

South of the Border, Down Mexico Way

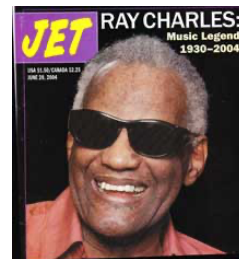
Fast forward a decade and Wiley, the Dharma Bum, sat with his guitar in a Tepic bus station waiting for transportation to San Blas, beach heaven, on Mexico's Pacific coast. Like all good stories, this one begins with the blues. Waiting for his connection, Wiley strummed and picked through his songbook – Sugar Babe, Winding Boy, Frankie and Johnny, Got the Blues and I Can't Be Satisfied. That's when a Mexican couple drifted by.

"You must be an American."

"How can you tell?"

"Well I like the sound of your music," the stranger chimed in. "Let me show you this one" and he sang a few verses of 'Unchain My Heart' a Ray Charles classic.

So unchain my heart, let me go my way
Unchain my heart, you worry me night and day
Why lead me through a life of misery
When you don't care a bag of beans for me
So unchain my heart oh! Please please set me free



Wiley dug the sound of his new friend's rhythmic playing, his palm beat on the soundboard of the guitar adding nice syncopation to the melody. He offered a comeback to this improvised show. "Stop me if you heard this one. God is Love. Love is blind. Ray Charles is blind. Ray Charles is God". His new friend laughed and properly introduced himself.

"Mucho gusto para conocer. I am Gregorio (Grego) Santillo and this is my

girlfriend Angelina. We are travelling on a holiday break and headed back to Mexico City. If you find your way to the capital here is my address on Cerrada de Torreon. Look me up if you have the time and we can play more music together.” Wiley stashed the address note into his travelling gear, thanked his new friend for the invite and sauntered off to make his bus trip to the beach.

As might be expected, a few weeks later Wiley’s aimless, vagabond wanderings landed him on a bus to Mexico City. Debarking the bus in the middle of the night he hailed a taxi to Cerrada de Torreon, in the neighborhood of Nueva Los Angeles. Fearless and foolish, he walked up to the apartment house address that Grego had left in his note. Wiley knocked on the numbered door and a petite, fair-skinned woman greeted him coldly in the night.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?”

“I am Wiley Timmons, an American, traveling in Mexico. Grego invited me to visit when we met up in Tepic.

“Oh. Come in, come in. Bring your things (backpack and guitar). Sit down while I make you some coffee and tell me about your trip”.

“Well,” said Wiley, “like all good stories, this one begins with the blues....”. He rambled on about his Mexico travels, beach camping in Guymas, sleeping with tarantulas, feasting on coconuts and lobster for \$5/day, dodging drug deals, living in palm frond palapa huts and running around with the beachbum crowd. A brief

stay with some ex-pat medical students in Guadalajara was a complete bust so why not head to Mexico City for more music madness with his new amigo Grego? It was late, he was tired and he ended his stories with his chance encounter with Grego and Angelina in Tepic and this new junket into Mexico City. And then it dawned on him to ask –

“What is your name and how do you know Grego?”

With an icy stare, his host replied. “My name is Belinda. He is my husband”. Right on cue, Gregorio walked into the room and glanced fiercely at Wiley as Belinda slammed the bathroom door behind her and began sobbing loudly. I’m a dead man now, Wiley mused. Mexican home wrecker, a stranger in the night, here in the capital city, with no alibi to wriggle out of my predicament. Like all good stories, this may end with the blues.

“Ain’t gonna tell you no story, Frankie, I ain’t gonna tell you no lie”
Says, “Albert passed ’bout an hour ago with a girl they call Alice Prye
He’s your man, and he’s doing you wrong.”

Frankie called Albert, Albert says "I don't hear."
"If you don't come to the woman you love, gonna haul you out of here"
You's my man and you done me wrong."

Fortunately, this psychodrama came to a merciful close. The love triangle between Grego and his amores (Belinda and Angelina) had been going on for years. This was just another episode of a Mexican soap opera here in the neighborhood of

Cerrada de Torreon. The evening melee was just a rite of passage and Wiley could now spend the night with his new acquaintances. In the weeks to follow, he was adopted into the Santillo family circle.



Grego and Angelina were graduate students in psychology and social work. He was also an artist who painted, performed puppet theater and sang his own original music. Grego was the oldest of 10 brothers and sisters. His father, as in so many broken homes, had long since fled to the States and as a partly employed house painter, sent back to his family a stipend of \$75 a month. Belinda, bless her soul, worked in Dr. Rocquet's Psychosynthesis clinic, the Albert Schweitzer Institute, where group therapy was guided with the use of indigenous psychedelic mushrooms and peyote harvested from the plants of the Sierra Madre mountains¹. Despite their hardy spirit, talents and intellect, here in the mid-1970s, the Santillo family and friends lived in a constant state of fear and paranoia.

Mexico City still lived in the shadow of the Tlateloco Square massacre of 1968 and the police state that had grown around daily life. During the 1960s, the

¹ <https://janinepsicologia.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/dr-salvado-roquet-a-prohibed-therapy/>

international climate of student protest had spread to the capital city where big money was building out the Olympic Games. The demands of students and political opposition came together for a rally in the central square. Under orders from the government of Dias Ordaz, the army commanded by Luis Echeverria surrounded 10,000 demonstrators on the night of October 2nd, 1968. A group of soldiers from the Mexican Army called "Battalion Olympia" fired ruthlessly into the unarmed students protesters and kept shooting at people who let the students take shelter inside their homes. Dozens of students died in that protest and hundreds of people were disappeared into the Mexican prison system for several years. Eight years after "La Noche Triste", the Sad Night of the Tlateloco Square massacre the repercussions of political repression still hovered over the city.

In the days that followed, Wiley followed Grego and Belinda through their daily lives. With Grego he toured city prisons where conversation and interviews were part of the research program. On weekends Grego performed Punch and Judy puppet theater and Wiley enjoyed the shows first as a spectator and later as a translator of the Punch and Judy scripts into English. In the evenings they played more blues into the late night hours. On an invitation from Belinda, Wiley joined a session of the Psychosynthesis experience² – a 24

² https://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/roquet_salvador/roquet_salvador.shtml

hour psychedelic therapy session,. He was the only gringo in a room of 30 tripping participants where crude multimedia depicted scenes of violence, sex, death and pornography, designed to shock and disturb the sensibilities of the average



patient while white- coated lab technicians took notes on sterile clipboards, observing and directing the mad house scene before them. Among the patients there were shouts, tears and laughter as medical staff , briefed on case histories, intervened with a personal photo, a family member, a dialogue or an interview about the patients past taking them down under their “hangups” into a guided tour of their own inner lives. At some point during the session Wiley was questioned about his own raison d’etre (who are you and what are you doing here?) to which he replied with a Socratic comeback line -

“Who was cooler Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer?”

and crawled off to sleep in a corner of the room.

With his travels coming to a close, Wiley thanked the Santillo family for their friendship and hospitality. He tucked away a new address in his wallet and told Grego he would search for his father in the Latino neighborhoods of Los Angeles. Backpack assembled, guitar in hand, Wiley took leave of his new found friends.

“We shall stay in touch – further on down the road. Que te vaya bien y adios,

amigos de mi corazon”.

Freedom Runner

Como maestro bilingue (a Spanish-English grade school teacher) Wiley later ventured into the

American Latino experience, working in a barrio



school in South Central Los Angeles in a neighborhood riddled with gang warfare, barred windows, street violence and god forbid, illegal immigrants. He taught in a community where the Crips burned the Jr High cafeteria to the ground, where immigrants lived in constant fear of deportation and where his class of 28 Latinos 4 Afro-American and one White girl looked to him as a safe harbor in a dangerous world. These street-hardened students were eager to learn and over the year he took them beyond the basics of reading, writing and ‘rithmetic and taught them History, Model Cities, Puppet Theater, Drama and folk-dancing (the Virginia Reel) which they performed in taffeta skirts and leather vests throughout the district. As that year came to an end, he arranged to take the 10 brightest students for a day trip to the beach only to have his plans cancelled by the school principal who told him – ‘take that trip and you’ll be fired. We don’t have insurance to cover these inner-city kids on a day trip to the beach”. He knew then that his job was to keep students in their chairs, “safe in the schoolroom” and down under the socio-economic forces that would keep them in their place. It was time to go.

Like all good stories...this one would end with the blues –

“Sometimes I think this world is just one big prison yard
Some of us are prisoners. The rest of us are guards”.

- Dylan (George Jackson)

Outside of the school room, Wiley tracked down Luis Santillo, Grego’s dad, and visited this drunk, impoverished and aged man, living in a flophouse apartment.

When he gave him a letter from Grego, he provided a lifeline between blood kin, separated by borders, lost in time and broken dreams. Luis just cried thinking of the family he had left behind.

After a year of inner city blues, Wiley headed back to the West side of town. No more the professional teacher, he was content to study auto mechanics and work as a pizza chef. One night, in the middle of his evening shift, Grego surprised him again when he walked into the restaurant - with a sinister character by his side.

“Mi amigo Wiley, I need some pizza and \$500 for my friend here. He’s a ‘coyote’ who smuggles illegals into the country. He brought me across the border, into the States, hidden down under the trunk of his car. And now I must pay for my freedom.”

Wiley sorted out the finances the next day and Grego, freed of his political and personal paranoia became his roommate for a spell. Grego and his father got

back together, for a reunion after the long separation of a decade and thousands of miles. Within a few months, Grego found housing and later Angelina, Belinda and Grego's son made the crossing into Los Estados Unidos.

As fate would have it, Wiley slipped into the menage-a-trois. He and Angelina dated while she found her own home. They wine and dined and danced to Santana's Samba de Sausalito. One afternoon they shopped for a



leather coat in LA's garment district. Wiley later wore this jacket to his brother's DC wedding and on a tour of the Carter White House, but that's a story for a different day.

Reverie

Years gone by and Wiley thinks often about his Mexican family and the hands across the border that brought their lives forward. He remembers the names of the barrio students who touched his life – Maria Gonzalez, Art



Flores, Lily Butler, Felix Santillan, Otelia Campos, Miguel Aceves, Frankie Rico and Ora Dean Mason the one White girl who came into his classroom early one morning frightened and alone to tell Mr. Timmons that Lily's brother had been shot dead in the street last night, after Wiley's Open House party at school. In the

rising and falling tides of Life, he remembers a near-drowning experience, surviving the pounding surf and struggling to the surface (from down under the waves) for just a breath of air. Last he heard, many years ago, Grego was teaching in the LA City Schools and performing puppet theater in the Latino communities he moved into. Wiley still strums his guitar and sometimes sings these lyrics loudly into the night – Like all good stories, this one ends with the blues.

If I had rubies and riches and crowns
I'd buy the whole world and change things around
I'd throw all the guns and the tanks in the sea
For they are mistakes of a past history

Let me drink from your water
Where the mountain streams flood
Let the smell of wild flowers flow free through my blood
let me sleep in your meadow, with the green grassy leaves
Let me walk down these highways with my brothers in peace
Let me die in my footsteps
Before I go down, under the ground

- Dylan (with no apologies)

A Tribute to the Master - Hip Replacement

Swami X has left the Beachhead
Has he left the public dais
from the park bench heights
where he discoursed,
admonished and exhorted
to his fool's court crowd,
the Venizens of the Beach?
Swami X needs a hip replacement?

Lord Buckley, Lenny Bruce,
Mort Sahl, Bill Cosby,
Richard Pryor (The Town Crier)
Milton Berle (thief of bad gags)
Jonathan Winters (Maude Fricket),
Henny Youngman, Jackie Mason,
Borscht Belt Barkers
George Carlin and The Florida Marlins
All need a hip replacement!
On walkers, on soap box,
on sidewalks, on streets,
help Swami X get back on
his feet!

We Venizens of the Beach
don't want a hip replacement

You Dig?
-Tim Weil

Any Questions? No? That's how you got Nixon – Swami X

By [freevenicebeachhead](#) on [September 6, 2015](#) • ([Leave a comment](#))

X Swami X

December 17, 1925-August 29, 2015

“Although crowds gathered once
if you just showed your face
Now babbling of fallen’ majesty
still, a heart that laughter made sweet
Now, a crowd will gather and not know
it walks the very street
whereon a soul once stood
to light the moment with mirth.”
Author uncertain...E. Markey (The Big Pollock)



“After Chez Les Vikings?” He grinned with his

hat on the back of his head. He Looked more like a Broadway character of the Nineties than the lovely painter that he was, and afterwards, when he had hanged himself, I liked to remember him as he was that night at the Dome. They say the seeds of what we do are in all of us, but it always seemed to me that in those who makes jokes in life, the seeds are covered with better soil and with a higher grade of manure”

- Ernest Hemingway
A Moveable Feast