

Crime Doesn't Pay

Harold Emert

1.

Call me Miguel Lemos, Private Eye...

Home location: Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro.

Country: Brazil

Continent: South America.

Is there anything more one must say?

Voluptuous, half-undressed beach girls in G-string bikinis, the famous Brazilian butt, envied by women--and men--all over the world.

A vibrant metropolis which never sleeps...the incessant samba beat, as "schools" of samba dancers and musicians rehearse for *Carnaval*.

Rap music from the favelas, where Black Orpheus once reigned. Drug traffickers, violence, invading military police called BOPE with pistols and rifles aimed high.

Supposedly the most beautiful city in the world, to which the Portuguese Royal family fled from Lisbon, to escape the invasion of Napoleon's armies.

They say that my native city, New York, has improved since the days of my youth when it resembled crime-ridden, unsafe and unpredictable Rio de Janeiro. ...or has it? Does anything in life really change besides technology? My story begins at the end of the Rio de Janeiro saga of Donald Small, an American crook who pulled off one of the biggest bank robberies in United States history, without hesitating, shot dead a bank guard, served a few years in jailuntil he managed a cinematic escape... climbing a wall and fleeing to... where else but Rio de Janeiro.

2.

It is June, 2003 and I am just across the road from Rio's Tom Jobim International airport with a whole bunch of reporters, photographers and observers watching a chartered Cessna jet seating fifteen persons awaiting... Donald Small to board. The other passengers include two FBI men, a Brazilian Policewoman in ordinary dress, two reporters and one journalist and photographer from an American sensationalist magazine and two reporters

from American news agencies. Suddenly Donald Small, 54, - whose real name is Charles Roberts - appears. He is on his way home to face the music. He is tall, Handsome, and sun-tanned, athletically built and waves to everyone as if he were a movie star instead of an escaped criminal being flown home to return to his jail cell.

But wait. A trash can's cover suddenly opens as if a ghost was departing the bin. Is someone about to murder Donald Small? No. Popping out of the trash can is a Brazilian paparazzi who was hiding in its depths, awaiting Senhor Small to pass by... American authorities are furious... But since they are not on their home territory, they can't make an arrest and the Brazilian photographer popping out the trash can gets the best shot of Mr. Small being deported. The picture will be printed on the first page of Brazil's leading newspapers, as well as publications all over the world, in an epoch prior to internet taking over journalism. Where do I, Private Eye Miguel Lemos (real name Harry Steven Blackstein), fit into all of this madness?

3.

My own story begins when as a young American classical musician, specifically an oboist (the double reed instrument which supposedly drives its players crazy), I arrive in Rio de Janeiro in 1973 to become first oboist in the *Orquestra Sinfônica Brasileira* (Brazilian Symphony Orchestra).

It was a wonderful job in those bad ole days: good music, lots of laughs, enduring (I imagined) friendships, lovely Brazilian and Latin Americans expats (female) many *festas*/parties and wonderful music with some of the greatest musicians of our time visiting Rio including Claudio Arrau, Chilean pianist, French flautist Jean Pierre Rampal, Italian tenor Pavarotti, Salvatore Accardo, Italian violinist... big names for their epoch, probably unknown by today's iPhone generation. Sometimes I couldn't believe that someone was paying me to live in a marvelous city to make music with great musicians and have a wonderful time.

As I relaxed on a Sunday--a traditional beach day for Cariocas-- from Saturday evening's taxing, sold-out concert at the Municipal Theater --I asked myself "what could be wrong with this life in this wonderful city?"

The answer - as I learned with years of experience - is and was: "everything is wrong with Rio de Janeiro and Brazil."

Tom Jobim, the distinguished bossa nova composer (who wrote "Gal from Ipanema") said the same about Rio and Brazil ("*tudo é uma merda mas ótimo*") but fled from a celebrity life in New York City to return home to Rio.

But getting back to my and Donald Small's story, I really loved my job in the Brazilian Symphony Orchestra as first oboist... although there were some

days I couldn't believe I was being paid to play music with such great musicians, there was a "small" problem": after getting paid my meager monthly salary, the money went as quickly as a woman's menstrual cycle.

4.

After consulting my father, a former New York City police detective who retired in relative comfort to sunny Florida, I considered two possibilities to resolving my financial problem: returning to my native New York and back to the blackboard jungle of teaching often dangerous, violent-prone kids in the local school system or opening a private eye's office to conduct investigations for the local English-speaking community, as suggested by my astute, worldly father.

After I bribed a local justice official on a dark street in Penha, Rio's north zone and received my private eye license, I opened my detective office in the Copacabana district using the consulting room of my wife Ana Maria, a full-time shrink. It took a while to get my new profession or sideline started up and going via daily ads in the local English-speaking newspaper (then called the Brazil Herald) but eventually customers began to trickle in. They were mostly foreign women whose husbands had gone or were going astray, seduced by the local sexpots, who were usually seeking foreign husbands and a new life abroad. Usually the betrayed wives - or even girlfriends - couldn't pay my fee... and the bed in my new office often came in handy to "pay the debt they owed me" for my meticulous work.

Awaiting clients, I would practice my oboe or when not practicing, twitted down pieces of cane to make reeds, an important and essential part of a double-reader's existence. (My wife often complained of course that the office was full of wood shredding and her neighbors complained of the squeaks of my trying out reeds).

5.

For my detective work, I charged a day rate, plus expenses, which I could always pad, or increase in order to improve my relatively low fees in order to be able to pay the bills which the musician's salary could never pay.

One day my life changed dramatically when not a cuckolded woman but a fellow male gringo with a Texan cowboy hat, boots and a big cigar knocked on my door. I was practicing the Mozart "Oboe Concerto in C major," which put my most faithful listener, my white poodle Ludwig, fast to sleep. I almost didn't

open up the door because I wished to complete the first movement of Mozart's masterpiece.

Unable to call my attention and stop my Mozart "performance", after more knocking on my office door, "Tex" shot the door down with his Colt .45.

"There was no need to shoot my door down, "I screamed at Tex, as I put my oboe back into its case after cleaning it thoroughly.

"I couldn't stand that noise I heard (my oboe playing) and thought it might be someone screaming for help behind the door", Tex answered, as he handed me a fifty dollar bill to repair what was left of the door.

Tex then sat down on my wife's couch for her patients being analyzed as I offered him a local soft drink called *Guaraná* light. He apologized again for his shooting down the door and proceeded to tell me his sad story, this brought tears to his - and my - eyes. His tears dripped onto his red bandana, which here moved from his neck.

His wife Meryl had fallen in love with another gringo called Billy Merker... who later turned out - after my investigation - to be Donald Small.

6.

Merker-Small (or Charles Roberts, Small's real name) as I later discovered, resided near the cobblestone streets and trolley cars of Santa Teresa and was wanted by the FBI and Interpol for - as previously noted - shooting to death a bank guard during an armed robbery in Seattle.

My instructions were first to follow Meryl and confirm she was really having an affair with Merker/Small/Roberts and then Tex warned me "I'll take care of the rest".

I shook hands with the Texan and agreed to a higher fee and higher expenses than I had ever received in my short undistinguished career. Tex handed me over five crisp hundred dollar bills.

My father was right: crime paid!

What worried me however was what Tex would do if I confirmed his suspicions that his wife was betraying him?

Following Meryl and not being caught in the act was easy because since I was a well-known oboe player - or I thought I was - in a city which revered soccer players and samba singers and dancers - I could travel wherever and whenever I wished without arousing suspicions. A musician always has rehearsals.

So during the next few days, whenever I didn't have concerts of Bach, Beethoven and Villa Lobos, I rode on the trolley car up to the cobblestone streets of quaint Santa Teresa, which in some ways with its rolling hills resembles San Francisco. The frequent trolley car excursions rested my mind and soul from a Maestro I couldn't stand, who appeared on the podium wearing awful-smelling perfume, and insisted that his young boyfriend awaiting him during the rehearsals and made Brahms and Beethoven sound like music for a gay ball.

(Excuse me: I'm not prejudiced against sexual preferences but Brahms is Brahms and Beethoven is Beethoven).

7.

One day I, with my oboe, music stand and musical scores was actually on the same trolley car as Meryl, Tex's wife, but fortunately she didn't seem to notice me. She got off the trolley at a colonial mansion surrounded by a high gate and to avoid arousing suspicion I departed at the next stop, with three young hoodlums following me, who probably were planning to steal my oboe. I literally ran back to Happy Mountain Street (Rua Monte Alegre) and when I got there, I heard three dachshunds barking in shrieks at the top of their lungs as they were literally locked up.

Nearby inside the doghouse (or kennel as the Brits call it or *Canil* in Portuguese), I witnessed the strangest and most exotic scene: Meryl and Small were completely naked making love inside the doghouse, or home forcibly abandoned by the dachshunds.

Taking out my camera armed with telescopic lens from my oboe case, I shot a sensational picture of this erotic scene as the couple reached their climax and were yelling and screaming in orgasms.

After shooting what would turn out to be a historical picture, my first thought was to get the hell out of Happy Mountain/Monte Alegre street before Small shot me ...I did, frantically hailing a yellow taxi. My second thought was to show my pornographic-like discovery to Tex.

But then I had another thought: I badly needed a new oboe and it cost 10,000 dollars or more. Running over to a nearby orelhão, or phone station (this was before the popular days of mobile phones), I called Henry Martins and we made an appointment to meet in thirty minutes on Rua Carioca near the Villa Lobos music school and across the street from *Casa do Choro* at a German-style.

8.

The local was right across the street from the Casa do Choro, or Choro music Auditorium and a delicious German-style restaurant once called Bar Adolf but changed for obvious reasons to Bar Luiz.

Henry has resided in Rio for the last 30 years and makes most of his dough digging up sensationalist stories work for tabloids in the USA and the UK. When I rushed in, he was already sipping a *chopp*, or cold draft beer. After our initial conversation about the present financial scandals in Brazil, we ordered two roast beef sandwiches with potato salad and discussed what to do with the pictures I showed Henry as his jaw dropped open and the potato salad fell to the floor.

He decided that since were dealing with the extraordinary peccadilloes of a wanted American criminal the National Enquirer might be interested. Taking out of his pocket the first mobile phone I had ever seen, Henry called the editor immediately and spoke in English but I could swear someone nearby overheard and understand the whole conversation. (I later proved to be right: it was an editor for Rio's *Meia Hora* sensationalist daily newspaper)

To make a long story shorter, the picture of Don Small and Meryl doing it - or shagging as the English say - in the doghouse made the front page of not only the National Enquirer but all the major British tabloids and other international publications.

What better way to call attention to the FBI and Interpol where Don Small, escaped American bank robber, was hiding: in Rio de Janeiro, of course, you fools.

9.

Tex, who reads the Brazil Herald (the local English-speaking newspaper) learned of the bad news - that he was being betrayed - too late, thank goodness. But by then the FBI and Interpol had found Small's Rio hideaway, arrested him and gotten the extradition papers from Brazilian authorities in record time.

Instead of coming after me - most likely to kill me - Tex instead was arrested in handcuffs by Brazilian police and as far as I know and pray is still behind bars.

Meanwhile the scene of Don Small which began this tale also ends it.

Postscript

As soon as Don Small was flown out of Rio, Meryl became an overnight national celebrity making Playboy magazine as a cover gal and earning a fortune. She also was given or "earned" her own nightly TV program of interviewing celebrities on a growing new network where she married the President. Oh yes, in between all these activities, she had a well-publicized, hot affair with a British fugitive who had fled to Rio after pulling off the Great Train Robbery. This fugitive, also has been exported or flown back to a British prison, where he subsequently died.

The latest update I heard on Tex was that he was extradited to Dallas, Texas, where he managed to bribe official (yes that occasionally happens in the USA) and is allowed to walk around the city freely, shooting and carrying his Colt .45 in local restaurants, movie houses and other public places.

As for my musical career, I received many proposals to appear in public – but not always to play Bach, Beethoven or Villa Lobos – but to display a picture show the shots of the couple Meryl and Don Small making love in the dog house.

I even appeared on the then most popular TV night program in Brazil, hosted by comedian Jô Soares and between relating tales of what really went on in the doghouse, managed to get invited to play a choro tune on my oboe. The ditty was appropriately called "*Naquele Tempo*", "In those good old days."

Back at the orchestra, the gay Maestro with the heavy perfume and toy boyfriend at rehearsals continued to taunt me. But since I had become famous from all my extra-musical activities, I became an untouchable celebrity. Although a "serious" violinist colleague in the orchestra told me "I feel like putting a bag over my head when I perform on the same stage as youhow could you a serious musician participate in such low life?"

Despite my "sins," everyone observed with the new super-expensive oboe I had purchased from France I was playing better than ever.

But I continue to insist "Crime Doesn't Pay."