

Jeffrey P. Frye: The Bank Blogger

Interviewed by u.v. ray (2013)

After robbing 7 banks across South Carolina you hot-tailed it in a Grand-Am with the FBI in pursuit before it all ended in a 3 hour stand-off with you in a motel, surrounded by FBI agents and police marksmen. It's like something you'd expect from Nicholas Cage. Has your life always panned out like a movie?

Like so many things in my life during that crazy period, the Grand-Am that was recovered at the motel I had the standoff in wasn't mine. I had liberated it from a guy who for weeks had been offering me material support while I ran around and acted like a Bank Robbing terrorist. I had been paying him several hundred dollars a day to rent me motel rooms and run errands for me (go to Wal Mart, get me Chinese take-out, and visit the dopeman) because the FBI was trying to do an intervention on me. My thoughts were that if I paid him more than Crimestoppers would, that he wouldn't turn in The Golden Goose. But this wasn't Oceans 11 and there truly was no honor among thieves (at least on his part because I held up my end). One night I had a brick of \$10,000 in hundreds stashed in the ceiling of the motel room we were in and when I sneaked out to go pick up some food at the Waffle House next door (because I wanted some fresh air), he went into the bundle and cuffed a few sea notes.

Confucius once said that, "No one screams louder than the thief that's been stolen from" and I can tell you that Mr. Confucius sure said a mouthful when he said that. But so did 2Pac Shakur in the song, "Hail Mary" when he said, "I'm not a killer, but don't push me."

When I discovered what he'd done, I walked up to him under the guise of handing him the food he ordered and I head butted him and knocked him out and relieved him of his All Star Breakfast (which I later ate) and his car and I left him resting peacefully on a high thread count sheet in a suite at the Hampton Inn. It was probably the only violent

thing I did during that period, but he'd earned his rest, as well as the right to forfeit his breakfast.

My life has always been somewhat pulp fiction. As a criminal, as in most other things, I was and am nothing special. My life has always been marked with extreme highs and lows. I'm a Pisces, and while the astrological sign for Pisces is the Yin and the Yang, it would also seem to represent bi-polar disorder. So on some level, I'm a victim of the stars.

Yeah, the Confucius quote is funny. I know someone who did a stretch for attempted murder because his friend stole the money that he'd stolen. I take it being a victim of the stars didn't stand up in court?

You sure got that right. The American court system can trace its roots thru English Common Law straight to the Magna Carta that was authored in 1215. The American federal court system, as in most court systems, is predicated on plea bargaining. If every defendant decided to seek a trial instead of pleading guilty, the courts would be backed up for years. So the prosecutors deal, and both sides use their leverage to acquire the best possible deal they can for their side.

One of the problems with robbing seven Banks without a mask is that you strip your lawyer of all leverage in this process. Every time my lawyer used to come to see me he looked like a tire that had just had the air let out of it. I'd tell him, "Chin up, Bill. It's going to be okay." He'd shake it head and say, "I just wish there was something I could do to help you."

I had known my prosecutor for years before all this happened and it would be an accurate assessment to say that we had history. He's a nice enough guy, but he was ambitious and had just become a federal prosecutor when the gift of my very public prosecution fell squarely in his lap. I had a high profile case and not a leg to stand on, and as such he was not inclined to make any deals. I never even attempted to deny what I did, but I did take

exception to the fact that there was no violence in my case and he was seeking a LIFE sentence for me.

And he seemed really mad.

During one of my outings to court I told the five U.S. Marshals that always escorted me: "Wanna have some fun?" One of the marshals was named Dennis and I've known him for years. When I asked this he said, "We've been waiting for you to do...something, Jeff." So as we were leaving the defense table after the hearing had concluded, I shuffled over to the U.S. Attorney's table with my legs in shackles and my hands cuffed and chained to my waist with a black box over the middle of the handcuffs, and I said to the prosecutor sitting there, "Can I ask you something sir?" He turned his head up to look at me and replied, "Sure. What?" I asked, "Was some of your money in one of those Banks I robbed, because you sure seem pissed off." The marshals laughed and he flushed red and said, "Everybody's sick of your bullshit, Jeff."

"Okay then. I guess just load the wagon and I'll pull it as far as I can."

So far I'm still pulling this wagon like four fresh mules.

You relate events that precipitated your incarceration in One Crazy Day. I thought it was something of a thrill-ride of a read. It's coming soon on Murder Slim Press, of course. So how did your collaboration with MSP come about?

In order to understand how my relationship with Murder Slim Press came about you first have to understand how I communicate with the outside world from federal prison. As federal prisoners, we have email access that we pay .05 a minute for, but it is monitored and we do not have any type of internet access. Our email is run by a company called Corrlinks and in order for us to be able to email somebody, that person must first accept

our "Request" to email with them that Corrlinks sends them after I enter their email address into the computer.

One day late in 2011 I was in the United States Penitentiary in Lewisburg, sitting in an ugly cell while eating a beautiful plate of spaghetti, when I decided that I wanted to become a writer. In the Free World I had previously worked for attorneys writing briefs that had done everything from inspire legislation to free a wrongfully convicted murderer, but up till then that had been my only stab at writing. I had gotten my hands on the freelance writer's Bible called WRITER'S MARKET that lists the names and email addresses of every publisher in the world as well as the editor's names and what type of prose they purchase. As I sat out on the tier at Lewisburg I perused this book and chose a publication that I thought might be receptive to my style of writing, but I knew that it was going to be a long shot because I didn't have a style of writing at that point. Up 'til then, all I'd really done is write girls. The other problem I was facing was that as a convict I lack credibility on any front, but especially for a publisher to take a chance on me. But I decided to take a shot and I sent a Corrlinks request to Murder Slim Press.

They immediately accepted and sent me their submission guidelines for their literary magazine *The Savage Kick*, and they asked me if I would write something about being in prison. I hammered out PRISON PROSE in 20 minutes or so and sent it to them via email that night. I woke up to an email the next morning telling me that they had decided to purchase the piece and that the story would be published in the sixth edition of *The Savage Kick*. I was officially published. Just like that.

What followed was a weekly correspondence with one of the owners of Murder Slim named Steve Hussy. After a few months of us kicking it like Wayne Rooney, in a stroke of genius he created *The Bank Robber's Blog* on their website. I do weekly posts to the blog about my life back here and while it was originally created to be a marketing vehicle, and it's still that, it has taken on a life of its own. I have a blast doing it and it makes me happy to think that I'm entertaining people all over the world and making them laugh. And I know that this is going to sound a little cheesy coming from a Bank Robber, but

doing the blog and making people all over the world laugh makes me feel like I'm giving something back to the world after doing nothing but taking from it for many many years. I'm grateful to Murder Slim Press for taking a chance on me and for having faith and being patient with me as my avocation becomes my vocation.

Yeah, the Bank Blogger page was how I first read you. I was hooked. I'm not sure you were always on the take. You were once willing to give a kidney to a seriously ill child. But there's a dark and light side to all of us. You and I privately spoke about the psychology of how close any of us are to cracking. All it takes is a certain series of events in our life to break the strongest of men. Do you think the danger lies in the fact that so many people remain ignorant to the fact or, even worse, believe themselves impervious?

I think that a lot of people are pre-programmed with a view that the world is black and white, while the truth is that a large portion of life is made up of varying shades of gray. Everybody eventually becomes a hypocrite at some point in their lives.

I was raised in a two parent household with no abuse and plenty of love and given a sound character base. I was taught to respect people as well as several other values that all upstanding people share. But what I wasn't taught about is mental illness, addiction, and especially genetics. These were things that just weren't talked about in my house, along with several other real subjects that are part of life and that make up the experience of being a normal human. These weren't talked about because they were considered unpleasant.

I've come to understand that prison is a very subjective term and that everybody's got their own cell no matter where they live. I presently live on a piece of dirt that's surrounded by numerous gun towers and I'm considered one of the most dangerous criminals in the United States of America. That premise is complete rubbish. I just lost control and got a huge case of the "Fuck its" and I...cracked. In the end, on some level, all

life and all success is about self-control. And when you toss in issues of mental illness or of chemical imbalances it makes things a tad tricky sometimes. I may not be able to unbreak my broken glass, but I feel like I've patched it up right nicely in the last five years. And I'm not done patching.

I've always thought we're all trapped in some prison, yes. To the outside world we're all just papering over the cracks in our psyche. But I want to ask you something I am always asking myself. Everybody's so full of shit. Why is everybody so full of shit, Jeff? What are they frightened of?

Good question, u.v. In a nutshell, I think people are afraid of "The truth." I know that that is a completely broad statement and totally subjective, so I'll tell you what I mean by this. I think that most people just want to live their lives in their comfortable little psychological pink houses that they've created for themselves while turning a blind eye to certain realities. They prefer to be full of shit, yet they love to beat their chests about their honesty. But to me there's only one reality, and in the end, it doesn't really matter whether or not you recognize it because your recognition or perception of it won't change the Truth.

Governments and institutions rely on this premise. They create idyllic little bubbles and false realities for the masses and spoon feed them. Look at the Royals. I'm really going out on a limb when I say this now, but a perfect example of this is how governments treat reports of UFOs. They create a well-crafted lie that usually incorporates fragments of the truth (like all good lies do) and they spin it to the public to convince them that what they saw in the night sky was a weather balloon and not a titanium craft that hovered 30 feet off the ground sucking cows up out of a field. People go for it because who really wants to think of their cows being sucked up by aliens? Certainly not me. But nobody creates false truths better than religions do. Lies and half-truths are cornerstones of dogma. But allow me to now flip like a Russian gymnast and say that governments, religions and dogma are not necessarily bad things sometimes, because left to their own devices and

thinking, people will just rape, kill, and rob each other most of the time. The whole predator and prey thing.

You and I have discussed feelings of alienation and isolation – and I've heard that from many writers. In the movie The Medusa Touch the character John Morlar says, "the human race is inherently evil, we discover what powers the sun and make bombs with it." There are myriad contributing factors why these feelings germinate within an individual and many such people become drug addicts and writers. You mentioned writing helps you work these feelings out. Is writing a cry in the dark? Does it help because it offers those of us who are socially maladjusted a sense of communication with the world?

I like the Morlar quote and I agree with it completely, but I also think there's a yang to that yin. I think most of us are like diamonds in the rough and have different facets, some of which are shinier than others. Some of us just need a bit more polish.

I also think that you hit it on the head when you said writing offers a way for people to get in touch with inner feelings and express these in the written word in a way that they might not ever have been able to in spoken word. The world of writing and publishing has completely changed in the last 10 years because of this and the ability to write and receive instant gratification for it. Blogs, eBooks, and eZines are the spawn of chat rooms from a couple of decades ago where people not only learned that they could express themselves through writing, but where they learned that this more impersonal form of communication could be quite personal and reach people instantaneously in distant places. I think this evolution is cool because it brings new talent to the forefront of publishing who might otherwise never have been discovered.

On a personal level, I believe writing is incredibly good therapy. Pens and paper are much cheaper than dope. Every time I blog about Stinky quoting Sun Tzu during a riot, or about being locked in a cell thinking about somebody I love and will probably never

see again, I figure that I'm cheating a therapist out of \$75.00. And although I play to the crowd a lot of times in my writing, the truth of the matter is that when the FBI dragged me in here some 4 1/2 years ago I was a morally bankrupt piece of shit with a sewn up wrist and a broken heart who'd lost all hope. I'm not that guy anymore. Writing has allowed me to heal and to share the good part of me with the world. My mother died in 2012 without speaking to me for the last 12 years of her life because she couldn't deal with the fact that I became a criminal. When I learned that she'd died I wrote her a letter and had my sister read it to her body and put it in her casket to be buried with her. Then I blogged about it (See DANCING WITH THE STARS in the November 2011 posts on my blog at murderslim.com). When I get to missing her, I write my sister about it. I've learned that I have the potential for incredible self-violence inside of me. But I've also learned that a way to vent my "Crazy" is...by writing. However, I don't think I'm unique in this regard.

People tend to overlook the importance writing plays in our lives. Everything we've ever learned, we've learned by reading something that somebody wrote down (and then potentially spoke to someone). It's the same for a person's beliefs; whether they believe in God or the devil, somebody wrote the text you study.

Right now, I write to entertain. I live in an absolute pig pen right now. Writing allows me to put lipstick on the pig though and turn readers into pork lovers. I think that's pretty cool and I highly recommend that people try their hand at writing. I'm nothing special and if I can do it, I think that with a bit of polish anybody can. You may not consider yourself the brightest bulb on the string, but it doesn't mean you can't shine.

So, aside from One Crazy Day, which is your own entertaining take on your life as a fugitive and your subsequent arrest, you've got a couple of other books coming out on Murder Slim; short stories and a book of as yet unseen vignettes that will be in the same style as your Bank Blogger posts. Your Blog style reminds me of Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo journalism, particularly his book Generation of Swine. He's

amusing but at the same time uses his writing to attack the establishment. Do you see art as a valid method of attacking the powers that be? Do you enjoy having a pop at the authorities? From our private conversations I'd say you seem to believe in the justice system.

That's correct u.v, I presently have three books completed for Murder Slim Press. The first one is called BANK BLOGGER and it will drop within the next 90 days or so. It's a book of unpublished stories and blog posts and it includes a cool story about a convict that was brutally murdered at USP Lewisburg back in 1990 and that still haunts the prison 'til this day. Unfortunately, I encountered this not too friendly entity one night in the stairwell of B Block when I was in the cell block working as an orderly. This encounter prompted me to do some research with some old timers that had been there for years and some of the hacks that were there that night. The result of my research is the story titled THE GHOST OF FROSTY MCDONALD. Another cool thing about BANK BLOGGER is that there's pictures of some of my friends and family that I blog about, along with some pictures of me, my former lawyer, my cats I had there, and a couple of hot girls.

The second book I have coming out is called ONE CRAZY DAY and it's about a day that I hit the lottery 15 minutes after I hit a Bank. It's got crime, sex, the FBI chasing me, Vietnamese people who eat dogs, and a girl named Big Shonda who's so black that the oil light comes on when she gets out of the car.

The third book that I have in the can for MSP is a collection of short stories called BANK ROBBER: STORIES FROM THE LIFE. It includes a story titled A GANGSTA CHRISTMAS TALE that tells the story of how I met my best friend and angel Sister Margo on a snowy Christmas Eve at a train station in Chicago many years ago. You can presently see a picture of her on my blog at murderslim.com by clicking on The Bank Robber's Blog and going to the May 18, 2013 post.

As to the second part of your question, I don't ever write with the thought or intention of flipping off the justice system or the Federal Bureau of Prisons. A lot of people who are in my shoes and have the platform and/or access with the media that I do probably would...but I'm just not that guy. The bureau of prisons didn't run around looking for me, I ran around looking for them until I found them and they put me in one of their prisons. Or to phrase it another way, I put me here...not them.

I write because I have a passion for it and I write to entertain the world, and to hopefully sell books. Writing is allowing me to become a better man and to do a bunch of cool stuff and meet a bunch of cool people. Which is nice, because I don't get out much these days. I'm into looking ahead and doing positive things, not living in the past and being negative or grinding any axes. In my blog posts I try not to swat at the hornet's nest and piss off the people who feed me, but sometimes they're just too ripe of a target not to hit.

Oh yeah, you robbed a bank and then won substantial amounts on the lottery straight after... Twice! Is there any justice in the world? (Don't answer that, Jeff; it's a rhetorical question.) But you must have some lucky stars in the sky somewhere. Alright, Jeff, let's finish off with a question you've been asked many times but I don't think I've seen an answer to... Why didn't you just wear a fucking mask?

I didn't want the FBI to have to work too hard... Or my lawyer.