

Writing for Christ

Making Shapely Fiction - Jerome Stern

Trauma Lesson 7/6/2019

Write a story that starts with a traumatic event, while showing the true character of the person while moving forward showing how it happened and reacted or handled it.

Jeremiah Stillings

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"Thrift Store Camera"

The trail leading through Canaima National Park, Venezuela was already overgrown with the rainforests summer foliage. Wet, deep green, leaves of extraordinary size were deftly chopped away by our guide as we pushed forward towards Angel Falls... He was cussing, even I could tell that, about the state of disarray his beloved country left his park and how his job was miserable leading tourists to see the falls.

The trail suddenly gave way to a fifty foot clearing with paths cut in all directions. "Rest," he called back. We all stood in the open area wondering how much further it would be that we needed rest. A shrill whistle was heard and suddenly, no less than 14 men emerged from all angles of the cut paths. They were armed, dressed in motocross boots, jeans, light windbreakers with brand names, and of course, motorcycle helmets. I stood there, fuming mad, I spent 3 years saving enough money to travel here to film the world's tallest waterfall and cliffs that Disney portrayed in the movie Up. The shouting started, "Don't move," thick accented english, well rehearsed, enough to be understood, over and over.

Our group stood still as the custom's officers local dangers briefing played in our heads, "Most times they leave you alive...just do as they ask." They took our gear, our phones, our cameras, and indeed, did leave us in one piece. They did not want our wallets or identities. As I looked around, heads and eyes were lowered like scared sheep, not I, I was mad. I am determined to film Angel Falls, and no gang of thieves would stop me.

Hijacking is one risk we were all well briefed on, but no one really expected it to happen, especially since the tour guide was pretty well known. We all walked back along the long trail, now well cut, back to the bus stop. Heads hung low in either replays of fear, or disappointment for standing still, yet all were happy to be alive. The bus driver was nice enough to tell us that the falls were not even in that direction as he laughed at the story.

Once we were back in Santa Elena de Uairen, I started to look for a way to replace my stolen Canon Rebel T7i. One local said to check the thrift shop called Cosas Perdidas, I have no idea what that translates to, as I open the bead curtain to a time machine and step inside.

They had every type of old technology ever invented. They had a 1930's Vinten 35mm motion film camera. Kodak 110 panoramas, never used. Polaroid cameras with no flash bulbs left, they had two HI-8 DV camcorders but the batteries from that era were long since shot.

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I settled on buying a Beta Camcorder, which is like VHS in the states, the old Nickel Metal Hydride batteries have a 30 year life and I figured they would still work. The tape was in the tray and looked to be in good shape. I think the thieves left our money for a reason, they wanted us to buy new gear and stimulate their economy. The cost was 6,000 Bolivar, or about 600 US Dollars. They would sell this camera for 2 dollars at a thrift shop in the states. I did not care at this point and I was determined to film Angel Falls. On the way out of the time machine, I asked the same informant how to get to the falls safely. His answer was rough and with blunt truth --- No Guide.

At 6 am I awoke ready to film, I then looked for a clue to where the falls lay. The answer was amazing. The thieves all travel out in the am and the heavy wet dew leaves the well trodden path just about muddy, all I had to do was follow with caution. "This trail feels right," I said as my foot slipped the 4th time, water makes mud and were getting closer. I sure wish my new camera was lighter and did not have a sticker that said "Warning Heavy 22 LBS" just under the battery pack.

By 10:20, I was filming the scene from where Disney's Up landed the house on the left cliff and the balloons started popping. Gorgeous, yet hard to focus, The falls were mostly in the clouds and the mist that bellowed out of the 900 foot falls was so thick I was blinking 50 times a minute, almost like I was underwater. I had to retreat as the camera lens was one big dew drop. I stood there four hundred foot away panning left, right, and up and up. I could not see anything really, the 98% humidity, the plunging water's mist, and the sun's glare just about kept my eyes closed. The camera will though. It will be my proof!

The rest of the trip was just one long custom's line with all my bags searched four times. When I plugged in the Beta camcorder to my TV, my jaw dropped. The 1970's school bus, yellow with rust and peeling roller paint, had three men at the front. One driving, two yelling, pointing their 9 MM guns first at the driver then at the passengers. They wore red and white motocross boots, heavy brown pants, windbreakers of light color with dress shirts beneath, but no helmets this time.

The passengers were all white tourists, some sat stone still, terrified, some cried, the lady with the purple hair was praying and hailing Mary. The camera jostled as the middle man shot the driver dead, the bus, already on a narrow road veered left. The camera floated catching the lady with the purple hairs screams, the two gunmen, fell forward into the windshield. The

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branches broke through the glass as the bus fell, making skewers of them, passing all the way from the front of the bus to mid way as the branches finally broke leaving meat on sticks that did not even resemble a man. A man wearing the odd outfit of a business suit passed the lense with his legs over his head, his mouth gasping for air that he could not find. The muscular young man in fancy clothes, hugging his petite girlfriend as they bounced like a human ball off the windows, then the seats, then out the huge gaping hole in the roof where the bus used to have an AC unit. Not even a single scream as they past the lens so fast they could have been shot from a cannon.

The camera was still filming the green bus seat when the dark red blood rushed past, then dirt chunks, then tree limbs and leaves, an arm, a backpack. The camera was still on as it was jostled face up. Angel Falls was in it's lens, red blood cliffs, roaring water louder then the screams I should have heard, barely even noticeable as the worst largest waterfall as the mist covered the lens.

Blue screen, I hit stop and leapt up, pacing, sweating, heart exploding, screaming out loud , God! "Who are those people? I mean where are they? I mean are they alive?" God's reply was so cold I question his sense of humor with me at times...

"They are actors, in Puerto Rico, filming their next movie. Your camera was not the first one stolen."

I screamed back, "Where is the proof of my trip, the proof I did it?" Who will ever believe me now?" God's reply was even colder.

"Beta tapes have write protect tabs." Not everything you see is truth, you should have bought the bible from when the spanish landed there in the 14th Century, it was in that thrift shop, but it is write protected also, that could have been the truth you could have shared that is believable."