Running From Beer Bottles And Rocks Essay, Research Paper

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Essay #1 Narration with Description

Running From Beer Bottles and Rocks

Americans have several different views on other countries. The people who seem to criticize these other cultures are mostly people who haven?t been to these countries and have the typical ?I?m better than you attitude.? Just because our country is one of the top military and political powers in the world, does not give us the clearance nor justify us thinking we should have special favors or unearned respect from the people in their own lands when we are the intruder. When those disrespectful Americans go to these societies they give our whole country a bad name. Just like Newton?s 2nd law, every action has an equal and opposite reaction, the product of our insolence is our rudeness thrown right back in our face. The only reason the locals in far off places that have been so unlucky to have encountered some of our nations immature residence continue to tolerate our presence is mostly due to our money and all the useless wooden bowls, chincy necklaces, and other over priced ethnic crafts that we oddly enough find interesting and will pay top dollar for. This attitude can be extremely dangerous shown to the wrong people.

It was Christmas day 1999 in Sigonella, Sicily, all the officers and members of the maintenance crew had the day off to celebrate and have a feeling of togetherness since we could not be with our families that year. We drank wine most of the day and told ?sea stories? of places we?ve been and what we?ve done. Most of these stories would not be something you would tell to your grandchildren or in some cases even to other sailors. After the sun went down, the crowd started to slowly leave their chicken bones, empty beer cans and wine glasses, and full ashtrays for the comfort of their quarters. Some of us younger sailors who thought we were invincible; Jason, Casey, Cal, and I wanted to experience the nightlife of Sicily. So with the help of the intoxicants we drank, we stupidly decided to go down to ?The Gut?, about 30 minuets outside the Naval Air Station.

The Gut was a moderate sized town that was legally called Catania. Because of the several blocks of legal whorehouses on one side of the main boulevard and the filthy bar scene on the adjacent side, everyone justifiably called it ?The Gut.? Of course the military called this the red light district. This meant military members were not allowed in this area due to the high risk of arrests and the hatred the Italians had for the Americans in that area. The four of us figured that would be a good place to acquire some more of these outrageous sea stories for ourselves. The closer we got to our destination, the more I saw tipped over trash cans and crooked steps leading up to cracked and rust stained mortar of the several hundred year old buildings. It felt like I was going back in time to an old Gangster movie.

We got to our destination, Waxie O?Conners, an Irish pub that seemed to produce more crime every night. As we walked in, our eyes burnt from the clouds of cigarette smoke. We became the tourists as uninviting eyes looked at us as though we were outcasts. Soon we came to a table in the middle of the most crowded part of the bar. Our waitress took our order with a disapproving look on her face. Apparently she understood English but would not lower herself to speak our language except to tell us how much lire we owed her. There were demeaning slangs about Americans written on the wall in the bathroom, suggesting that we weren?t welcome. Several hours went by as we ordered pitcher after pitcher of the finest dark lager in the house. The more we drank, the more obnoxious and brave we got.

Eventually we decided to venture out into the street and roam the alleyways in search of some danger or fun, whichever seemed more interesting at the time. These ancient cobblestone passageways stank of mildew and ammonia from the lack of a sufficient sewer system. As we stumbled through the maze of prostitution and broken beer bottles, we became amused at the completely different lifestyle these people lived in. I liked to take pictures of all the different countries I go to, so I thought photographs of this poverty and decay would be nice to have on film. I took pictures of everything from drunks passed out (or maybe dead) in puddles of their own urine, to sets of granite stairs that led to dimly lit shacks. We began to make fun of this post nuclear war looking place and talk in a condescending way toward people we saw moping and straggling around. None of us could understand their language so we ignorantly thought they could not understand what we were saying. Most of the girls working on the street were either local Italians or Africans that came over from across the Mediterranean Sea. We would say rude things to these prostitutes who would approach us expecting us to pay 30,000 to 50,000 lire for their services. It was a good thing they didn?t understand much of what we commented on, or the situation might have gotten a lot worse. Jason and Cal decided to go down a gloomy alley in search of some services from an Italian girl. Casey and I continued to aimlessly stray around the Gut.

One of the African Prostitutes approached Casey hoping for a little work as she rubbed against him trying to convince him to go inside one of the decaying buildings. I thought this would be a perfect Kodak? moment to add to the rest of my colorful pictures. As soon as the flash went off, this whore was no longer interested in Casey but instead diverted all her attention to me. I immediately regretted pressing the button on that camera. She closed the ten foot gap between us in under two seconds, reached for me with her long cheap press on nails and screamed with her broken English ?Why you snappa, Gimme da camera!? I put the camera away in the inside pocket of my jacket as she had a firm grip on my collar with one hand and the other raised ready to strike. Casey told me ?Jeb, break her grip and run. I?ll meet you at the van.? All I could concentrate on was calming her down and trying to explain that the picture was just for fun. She kept on repeating those same words ?Why you snappa?? Almost immediately eight or so more prostitutes came to her aid and tried to get my camera as they feebly tugged at my jacket. I then looked up to see a circle around me in the middle of the street with over fifty Italians staring at me. Suddenly I remembered that Sicily is the Mafia capitol of the world and I was in one of the most dangerous slums in Sicily. The fact that I aggravated everybody with my actions and my attitude did not give this mob a pleasant feeling for my health. I was still intent on keeping all the pictures I had taken so I reached in my pocket and opened up my camera so no light got in and ripped off the unused portion of the film. She snatched it out of my hands without delay and crushed it into the street with the heel of her scuffed and stained lime green pumps. All of the prostitutes slowly walked away cursing at us with such hate I was still worried that they might attack.

Casey and I struggled our way through the ring of angry onlookers. They pushed us and said phrases in Italian that I didn?t understand but knew they weren?t good. Once we got through the thicker part of the crowd, we began to scurry back to the van. About half a dozen men in their 40?s began to chase us down. They stopped their pursuit after a couple blocks though we continued to sprint past bars and other cesspools of prostitution towards our vehicle. We approached the van sweaty and out of breath. Casey got in the drivers seat and we began to drive looking for Jason and Cal.

Shortly after, we spotted them toddling down a side street passing a bottle of Bailey?s Irish Cream liquor to one another. I was opening the door to the van before we even came to a halt to let them in. I blurted a command at them instructing them to get into the van swiftly. They knew something negative had just happened so they didn?t question my need for them to be quick.. As we pulled away from the stop sign going on to the main boulevard, I heard a deafening smash on the passenger side of the van. It was a beer bottle thrown from a few of the same men that hunted us before. The van then accelerated out into the road that we must travel on to get back to the base. Only seconds later did a couple more bottles strike the van along with a couple of small objects, that I believed to be rocks. We suddenly found ourselves going through stoplights and not yielding to anyone who wanted to cross our path. None of us were in any condition to drive since we all drank that night. It wasn?t until we got out of Catania that I felt safe from all that had happened.

Now whenever I go to other countries, I don?t take pictures in mockery of places where people have no other choice but to live in. Even when I?m photographing a garden or famous landmark, I hesitate, wondering what the locals reaction will be. When you?re in another culture the best way to keep safe is not advertising you?re a tourist and accepting and complying with their local customs. I have been in the United States Navy since early 1997 and have acquired a book full of learning experiences. Sometimes you learn them the easy way and other times you unfortunately learn them the hard way. The ones you learn the hard way will always remind you not to mess up like that again for fear the same unwanted result will happen. One thing I will never do again is ridicule or scoff at the way other are forced to live.

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