

Little_Jimmy_Dickens



Very Much As I Remember Him

It might have been in 1974 when I traveled from Athens, Greece to Madrid Spain to play in a tennis tournament. My wife Shelia came along and we found a nice hotel on the outskirts of the city. The tennis didn't go so well. I was eliminated in the first round of the tournament so

we decided to see as much of Madrid as we could before returning to Athens.

I had a 35mm camera and exposed a good deal of film as we walked the streets of Madrid. Of all the sights we experienced, I remember most the Museo Nacional del Prado. Early in the afternoon, we found ourselves at Plaza Mayor in the center of the city. I noticed a guitar shop and was drawn to it, having wanted to own a Spanish classical guitar for a long time. After trying several instruments, I settled on a beautiful Cedar/Rosewood instrument made by M.G. Contreras. The guitar and a carrying case were roughly \$200. Shelia and I had split all the cash we had which was \$200 each.

A few hours after purchasing the guitar, I needed to change camera lenses and asked Shelia to hold one. She put her pocket book on a wall where we were standing so she could handle the lens and, in a flash, a young man whizzed by and snatched her pocket book. Before I could react, he disappeared down a stairway into a subway station. In her pocket book were her \$200 and both of our passports. We were devastated. I flagged a nearby policeman and struggled to explain what happened, not having a command of Spanish and the policeman with no English. We spent a couple of hours at a precinct explaining what transpired to a police official. He took our personal information and wrote down our mailing address in Athens. He said that the pocket book would be found, but that it would be less the cash and passports.

It was getting late and we started to worry about how to get back to the hotel. I had just enough change left from the guitar purchase for bus fare. Traffic was bad and it was very dark by the time the bus made it well outside of the city, having made several stops. Then, at what I thought was just another stop, the driver made an announcement that I didn't understand, shut the bus down and left. It was the end of his duty day and we were still several miles from our destination. What to do?

We walked to the shoulder of a nearby highway and stuck our thumbs out, hoping some kind soul would pull over and give us a lift. We were

there only about 5 minutes when a late 60's Ford Fairlane pulled over. A clearly American gentleman got out and told us he would have to move some things from the back seat to the trunk to make room for us. We then climbed in the back seat and the car pulled out onto the highway. The driver asked us if we were planning to go to the Little Jimmy Dickens concert that evening. When I answered in the negative, he suggested that we should, because it was guaranteed to be most entertaining. Then he said, "By the way, I'm Mr. Dickens."

We explained everything to him, the tennis tournament, the guitar purchase, the stolen pocketbook, etc. He was born in Bolt, West Virginia. Shelia and I grew up in Beckley, West Virginia. He was kind enough to take us directly to our hotel, a gesture that I'll never forget. James Cecil Dickens passed away in 2015.

Postscript: I called Detachment 1, 6916th and my operations officer, Dave Cambridge, wired some \$\$ to us. Shelia and I caught a hop on a 747 from Torrejon Air Force Base back to Athens. About a month later, there was a package in the mail from the Madrid police. It contained Shelia's pocketbook and everything that was in it less the \$\$ and passports.

~~~ \* ~~~