



**"To fear is one thing. To let fear grab you by the tail and swing you around is another."** ~Katherine Paterson

## HEART OF DARKNESS BY-THE-SEA. . .

BY JOE VAN BLUNK



### THE NICKEL-PLATED APPRENTICE...

"The next thing I know I got two nickel-plated .45s jammed into my temples and I'm scared sightless!"

To look at him now—several decades after the above incident—you would think there wasn't much that could rattle Tony Deutsch. In his early fifties Tony is robust and ebullient. He is a Minotaur of a man. He spent much of his youth and prime young manhood as the owner/operator of a Body Shop out on Rt. 9. This work is at once brutish and creative. Basically you take a tortured, twisted, dented metal/fiberglass wreck and re-shape and restore it to original form: Heavy Metal Sumo Wrestling. Then you add the delicate yet toxic paints, polishes and waxes to the best of your feminine side ability. Ten or twenty years of this kind of work can turn you into a seething, wheezing, exhausted beast of a man...But not so with Tony Deutsch. He is very much alive and well and always, it seems, in the moment. I suspect what happened to him in the jungle of Venezuela over thirty years ago may have something to do with all of this.

Tony Deutsch is a son of Wildwood, New Jersey. He arrived on the Island full time in 1975. Before that he stayed there every summer from his infancy. He started to work as an adolescent. He continued to work non-stop from then up until now. Most of his employment in the first half of his life was with the then rapidly budding Morey Organization which now dominates the Boardwalk and other economic sectors of the Wildwoods by-the-Sea. In the early 1970s he was a teenage poolboy for the just built Ocean Holiday Motel, a Morey Brothers showcase at the time.

From there he rode the ever-rising Morey wave of expansion well into the next decade. He worked the Boardwalk rides and stands in various capacities summer after summer. He learned and understood the operation inside out. He was not afraid to get dirty or strain his lower back. He met his future wife there as well. Tony also forged a solid and trusting relationship with some of the original Morey family prin-

ciples, especially Will Morey Sr. According to Tony Will Morey Sr. was his mentor, rabbaï, life coach, Dutch Uncle and role model all rolled into one. Morey Sr. made Tony feel like a trusted and valued employee which spurred the young man on. And because of all of this he was selected to go on a somewhat adventurous business venture with the Moreys that would alter the course of his young life and bring him to the brink of a violent death in an exotic and corrupt Third World country in the hot house vortex of the Caribbean Sea.

### AMUSEMENT PARK MACHINATIONS...

Sometime in 1979 the Morey Organization got involved with several other amusement park operators from Europe and Canada. They had hatched a plan to take their collective acts on the road in November. It was down time winter. Why let the rides sit idle when it is always summer in the Tropics? We will bring it to them and they will come. We will not bring an army or build another petroleum plant. We will bring them a traveling amusement park complete with popcorn, pizza, Curley Fries, cotton candy and Lime Ricky's. What kind of people on the face of the earth could resist it?

The cost of the logistics of an overseas operation of this magnitude are significant, so much so that significant if not surreal profits might have been expected. And why not? Suffice it to say, the amusement park coalition must have been driven and motivated. And in the beginning, as is often the case, all went well.

### MAMBO MARACAIBO

19 year old Tony Deutsch was blown away by Maracaibo. It was a blast. And a wiggly one at that. There was an edge. It was unclear to him so it felt refreshing rather than ominous. It wasn't Puerto Rico (their first landfall) but Venezuela, an entirely different place. Perhaps it was the light and space of it all. Or the oppressive 3 digit heat. Maybe it was a little bit of Wanderlust or Innocents Abroad? There was the smell of jungle foliage in his nostrils. Wild bird calls and strange animal sounds were mixed in with diesel fumes and raw sewage. After a day or two Tony Deutsch had the feeling he wasn't on the Boardwalk anymore...On the material side he was making a decent buck while being holed-up in a good air-conditioned hotel with a meal tab and some other amenities all on the arm of the Morey Crew.

One of Tony's favorite recollections of his first days in Maracaibo was going up to the hotel roof-top to sun bathe. After stepping out onto the skillet roof he found a

bevy of beautiful young American women lounging about in bikinis. They glistened in oil from head to toe as they sautéed themselves in the equatorial oven-setting of 112 degrees.

"I thought I died and went to Heaven!"

Upon inquiry Tony found out that the women were the wives of some L.A. Dodgers doing some winter gig in Venezuela. Not standing a chance against millionaire professional athletes, he still got a big kick out of it all.

Another kick was provided by Will Morey Jr. Somewhere along the line Will Jr. decided to ship his Chevy Blazer down South America Way as well. Tony thought it was a great gas to tool around Maracaibo in a shiny new Blazer with New Jersey tags, the tags of course being the best part. In addition to all of the perks and kicks Tony Deutsch was a hard-working employee with serious responsibilities. He was respected by his peers and foreman and most importantly, Will Morey Sr. who was at the heart and soul of the operation. Barely out of his teens Tony Deutsch was told he had great mechanical chops by veteran Boardwalk hands. He was really feeling his oats. Then things started to change right under his feet and all around him. The Mambo was about to end and another very different dance was about to begin.

### UNDER THE VOLCANO FAIR GROUNDS

Back in 1979 Tony Deutsch was (as I have suggested and he has admitted) an Innocent Abroad. He did not know the Dark Side of Venezuela or the rest of South and Central America for that matter. First off there is the bloody boot print of the Conquistadors which will never go away. More than the land of Magical Realism it is the land of Black Magical Surrealism as well: steaming jungles, mutilated Indian ghosts, extreme wealth/crushing poverty, seething resentment, rabid generals, police chiefs and civil guardia sergeants, political vultures, vampire ceos, nightmare narco-terrorists...And sudden violent death at the hands of people who would give you a machete epidural for a Lime Ricky and a free ride on the Tram Car. It was all out there but yet to be seen. Or called upon. At least not by Tony Deutsch. But the slimy black worm was already beginning to hiss and turn just outside of the abandoned airport where the Colossus of the North had staked its amusement park claim.

It was a full-fledged North American/Western European Amusement Park. The coalition had set it up on an abandoned airport on the outskirts of Maracaibo. Some of the



Tony was operating the Enterprize ride that was taken from them in Nov. 1979.



Tony (center) with Hector, his interpreter and Jerry Daly, both roommates while in Maracaibo Venezuela, standing in front of the Enterprize ride.



**"One can pay back the loan of gold, but one dies forever in debt to those who are kind."** ~Malayan Proverb

## ... **TONY DEUTSCH** **AND THE ULTIMATE BOARDWALK RIDE**

featured rides were direct from the Wildwood Boards: The Pirate Ship, The Enterprise, and The Big Swings. There were refreshment stands as well. Can you imagine this wonderful hallucinatory flashing/whirling fever-dream in the middle of the Venezuelan jungle night?

According to Tony Deutsch everything went well at the Fair Grounds at first. It was a well-oiled machine at every level. There were other things that weren't going so well but they appeared to be minor nuisances with the locals. Someone in the upper echelon of the Coalition may have promised menial jobs to the locals. Promises or not, locals kept showing up for work telling Tony and others that they were sent by someone in the front office. But there were no jobs; there was no more work to do. This did not sit well with the job seekers. They shuffled back out the gate disappointed or seething.

Several days later a wild-eyed professor took center stage on a platform adjacent to the roller-coaster. He whipped-up the locals with some fiery oratory. The angry crowd grew bigger and stormed the grounds. Deutsch bolted for a pizza trailer. The crowd began lighting company mopeds on fire. "This is not good," said Tony to those with him in the trailer. As the chaos spread he looked to the entrance gate. It was about one-hundred yards away. He spotted some of his associates waving and yelling. If he made the run for it he might get shot, incinerated, or stomped to death. He took off as fast as he could and made it to the gate unscathed. They all piled into taxi cabs and fled back to the sanctuary of the hotel.

Badly shaken they all laid low for a couple of days. Tony Deutsch had the fear and could barely shake it. He was enraged as well. He had seen huge crowds before on the Boardwalk in high summer. They were shiny, happy people. The crowd at the Fair Grounds had clenched fists and rotten fangs. They were shouting with contorted mouths. It was a Latin American version of Day of the Locusts but not as empty as the original. His mantra to himself and his associates was: "I'm not going back. I'm not going back."

Four days of stalemate passed. Then word came down from the Coalition Big Boys: "We're packing up. We're leaving." They were throwing in the towel. They wanted to cut their losses and hold onto their assets which were the rides. The previous days of rage were out of sight but not out of mind. Tony and the rest of the crews made their reluctant way back to the Grounds to do the work they did so well. Hopefully it

would be for the last time, at least in this part of the world.

Early in the last morning of the Fairs' de-campment Tony Deutsch was disassembling and stowing away the Enterprise ride. There was a great deal of routine noise surrounding him. He was bent over struggling with a small sheet of diamond plate. Out of the usual din he heard several small trucks pull up and stop with a screech. Without turning or looking up he felt two nickel-plated .45s jammed into his temples. He let the plate down easy and rose up slowly with his hands in the air. The darkest part of a very strange trip was about to begin.

At single gunpoint Deutsch was taken to one of the capped Toyota pick-ups. He was guided into the bed with one of the managers, Jack Silar. There were about twelve hostages in the other vehicles.

As they caravanned down the midway he could see a big crowd of Fair workers walking towards them. The caravan jammed to a halt with automatic weapons coming out. The crowd stopped in its tracks. The men with guns got back in the trucks and drove out of the Grounds.

From this point on there is an endless stream of questions and speculation on the near paralyzed mind of Tony Deutsch. The inside of the truck is like a pizza oven. The fear has all of them parched, hoarse, silent. This was no Boardwalk ride that would end soon with laughter and a frozen coke. Discovering that he had left his passport behind as well Deutsch realized this was a ride out onto the edge of the abyss. This was the Ultimate ride that might very well be his last.

Somewhere along the rutted dirt road to nowhere the trucks stopped. Next to the road was a ditch in the jungle. His heart did a somersault. "This is it. They're gonna shoot me and throw me in that hole. They do it all the time. Unmarked uniforms, unmarked vehicles...There was no arrest, no headquarters...Just this...The end..." The trucks started up and bounced down the road.

The trucks pulled up to an unmarked building in the middle of the jungle. The building was quiet and empty. Deutsch and the rest were taken to a vacant room on the 2nd floor. No desks or fans. Not even an old calendar. There was a dead air-conditioner. They brought a man into the room and cuffed him. He was Caucasian but did not speak English. It was getting harder all the time.

After several others they brought Deutsch downstairs to another room for interrogation.

"Where are you from?"

"North Wildwood, New Jersey."

"What are you doing here?"

"Working the Fair Grounds."

They asked him another series of questions that frightened and irritated him. He started shouting about Black Hawk strikes and Navy Seal assaults desperately hoping they would think he was some kind of undercover military type. They laughed at his Rambo histrionics and sent him back upstairs.

### ENTER THE BOARDWALK LONE RANGER

Near dusk and a short time after Deutsch's interrogation something positive happened. A man from the Fair Group (not Morey's) showed up at the building. He spoke briefly with the captors then provided the hostages with cigarettes and sandwiches. Almost immediately Deutsch pounced on the man and implored him to contact Will Morey Sr. Deutsch knew without a doubt that Will Sr. would not leave Venezuela without them. It was his last best hope in the preceding 13 hours of agonizing terror and limbo.

A relatively short period of time elapsed following the strangers' departure and the arrival of Will Morey Sr. Tony Deutsch first saw him after being lined-up on the stairs to the first floor. Will Morey Sr. was with another man, the captors and some hostages. Will Sr. was counting money-American Cash Dollars-and handing it over to one of the captors. The captor then instructed one of his cohorts to release one of the hostages. Will Sr. did this several times over, freeing one individual after another. Tony Deutsch is profoundly relieved yet still a little insane. While going downstairs he reaches another almost comic conclusion which he keeps to himself: I gotta find a place to hide! They're gonna snatch Will Sr.! He's got all the money! This passed and he was released. One by one they were led to a van and driven away from their jungle prison. The long strange trip was over. Bouncing along in the black jungle night Tony Deutsch felt the light, once again, shining all over him.



Outside the office in Puerto Rico, Nov. 1979

"I remember like it was yesterday, I did not talk about it for all those years until the book came out [Morey's Wild Ride]. The reason was because I did not think people would believe it, because even when people read the book they still asked me, 'did this really happen?' Like it sounds too far fetched for some people to believe it. I just say 'yes, it did.'

I received some calls about my story the past 2 years, but I did not want to do any interviews. Afterwards I thought about it. I wanted to tell my story to The SUN before anyone else printed it and got it all wrong. And I am glad that before I die, I had the chance to tell my story, and tell what a great guy Will Sr. was and how he saved my life."

~TONY DEUTSCH



Joanne and Tony on their wedding day in April 1986



Tony, Joanne and Tony on vacation in Ocean City, MD