

Orca Dan in the Sinnabar Café

Orca Dan in the Sinnabar Café surveyed the wreckage behind the handsome cherrywood bar and broke down and cried. Why couldn't he just forget about Hawaii?

A giant of a man, or a whale I should say, Orca Dan was a senior member of the surfer fraternity that hung out south of the Pompano pier that had been damaged by a hurricane the year before. When out of the water, laid back would describe Dan's more hyperactive moments, so the feat of opening a small business near the beach in his late adolescence at 46 years old was a minor miracle. Only with the help of his longtime girlfriend Jude, or Judy Jingles as everyone called her, had he been able to pull it off.

Jingles referred to the little clip-on bells Judy wore on a multi-colored belt that a girlfriend had made her about 159 years ago and she still wore, always replacing the shiny little bells so as not to lose her jingle, and that was a lot of maintenance, because they were constantly corroding from saltwater exposure. Jude could be found for hours on end admiring her man Dan's beautiful body as he performed his dance across the water when the waves visited Pompano Beach for a day or two every couple of weeks.

Serious surfers that happened by the spot at the end of SE 2nd Street where the Pompano crew gathered remarked that Dan should have moved to California or Hawaii a long time ago. Florida's surf consisted of nothing more than "wimp waves" except for the rare day before a major storm, hurricanes were the best, when something like what could be seen daily on the North Shore of Hawaii would finally hit Florida's wimp wave beaches. Orca Dan had ridden those North Shore waves years ago. He knew what he was missing, but he'd not go back to Hawaii. Though rusted with time, the heartache was still there.

Judy Jingles's tinkling bells announced her presence everywhere she went, and many mistook them for signs that her brain was dancing around in her skull, as if the tinkling you heard was in her head. But they didn't know her. She was tall and shapely all right, but no airhead by any stretch of the imagination. Her management of contracts, vendors, inspectors and the rest of the business prevention team at the City of Pompano Beach was the reason the new Sinnabar Café was able to open its doors without bankrupting Orca Dan. Professional beach bum and surfer dude Dan was investing in the business almost all of the small inheritance he'd received from his mom, having come up with the bright idea within months of her passing.

The Sinnabar Café had first opened as a Wine Bar two years before, and although it enjoyed a brief period of limited popularity and small losses, by the end of the second year it was regularly hemorrhaging major cash and the poor guy whose dream it had been was ready to get out. Judy wasn't convinced at first, but gradually she came around to the concept. She knew Dan would have a draw from the beach nearby, where he was idolized by the many of younger surfers and hangers on, and she was sick of her job as a personal trainer at the dingy dungeon of a gym on Atlantic Boulevard. Half of her time was spent trying to get customers to sign on to the high priced training packages when all that she wanted to do was to work with people to help them improve their lives.

The negotiation with Wayne Harvath, the humbled wine impresario, was long and excruciating, for Wayne that is. Dan was ready three times to close on the latest terms Wayne offered, but each time Judy had convinced him to hold out for something better. In the end, all they'd needed to open the Sinnabar Café Smoothie Palace were some industrial grade blenders and new menu signs. Two year old leather-upholstered couches, white framed glass tables and chairs, a beautiful cherry wood bar, and sheer white ghost-like drapes and wall hangings were all

included in the deal. Judy even got Wayne to throw in the five year website subscription and maintenance contract with GoDaddy, so all they had to do was change the menu online and they were up. They kept the name, Sinnabar Café, and saved money on signage. One of Dan's surfer buddies was good at social media marketing and got that piece moving as well to pull in the beach strays who didn't know Orca Dan or Judy Jingles.

It became a hangout, a smoothie bar during the day and a neighborhood bar at night. Judy had gotten Wayne Harvath's liquor license as part of the deal, not having to go through the exhaustive qualification process that had cost Wayne's wine bar so many months and so much money.

Situated under a parking garage that cast an afternoon shadow on the five or six commercial storefronts below, Wayne's Sinnabar Café had been in a difficult location from the start, and his unrealistic wishful thinking and too much drinking certainly hadn't helped. Now, however, even though most of the other commercial space around it was still vacant, the Sinnabar Café was buzzing with business every day from noon on.

For a while, Wayne would come in some evenings and marvel at all the people he'd been unable to attract. It bothered him. A lot. He was still suffocating under the mountain of debt he'd taken on to get his Sinnabar sinkhole open. Judy Jingles had refused to take on any debt as part of the transaction, and Wayne quickly ran through the cash he'd taken to get out from under the lease. It was less than 25% of what he'd invested in the furniture and fixtures when he'd remodeled the place. Orca Dan and Judy Jingles were living his dream, and he was seething inside. He'd gotten nasty with Judy one night and threatened her. It wasn't pretty, and, after physically removing drunken Wayne from the premises, Dan barred him from coming back.

One Saturday evening, Dan was out of town. He'd gone to Polk County, Florida, to his friend Stan's Safari Wilderness farm. He didn't go to see the zebras or giraffes or wildebeests, nor even the ring-tailed lemurs, advertised in their brochure as the farm's "polite prosimians who, like us, have tactile pads and fingernails." Dan was going because Stan's daughter was getting married, and they were doing it up right in the 13,000 square foot Safari Guest Lodge. It promised to be a big event.

"Come on up, brah, all that shit in Hawaii is over eons ago, man. You gotta see my Safari farm, I've put everything I've got into it, and I guarantee it'll be a good party. You'll love the band. Besides, Raylene wants to see you, and your old bud Zeke will be there as long as you promise not to kill him." Stan tried to make light. Orca Dan fell for it, even though it meant driving 200 miles on the busiest day of the week for the Sinnabar Café Smoothie Bar.

Raylene and Dan had spent an unforgettable summer on Sunset Beach on the North Shore of Hawaii. Dan, at 21, had been one of the hotter young surfers on the beach. Raylene's brother, Stan, had moved to Hawaii on a whim and invited them out from Florida to spend some time that summer, and shortly after arriving in June, they'd decided to stay.

Stan had to go to work every morning driving an ice cream truck all over the North Shore, and Raylene and Dan moved in off their sleeping bags onto Stan's luxurious water bed as soon as he left. Raylene was eighteen and a blond-haired, green-eyed beauty that drew stares from every guy who saw her, except Dan who was used to having her by his side. It was a really luxurious water bed, all summer long, for both of them.

Dan was pretty sure the water bed was even better than the beautiful waves he was catching most afternoons, though it was a close contest. The only afternoons he didn't spend on Sunset Beach were when he had to work the lunch shift washing dishes at the Dino-Miter Diner,

which wasn't that bad either, because Raylene was waiting tables. They spent every waking hour together that summer, and the sleeping ones, too. She was his first love, and he hers, and it was as beautiful and intense as only a first love can be. The waves and the waterbed were indelibly etched in his brain, the memory stubbornly resisting decay in the background of his life.

Orca Dan was nervous about seeing Raylene for the first time in 25 years, as nervous as any man with ice water in his veins can be. He had long ago forgiven her and Zeke for taking up together when he'd had to go back to Florida to deal with a letter from the draft board that had arrived in the mail. He ended up joining the Navy so as not to get shot to death in the jungles of Vietnam, and he almost got shot to death on the rivers of Vietnam. Meanwhile his best friend Zeke, who'd come out from Florida in August to visit Stan and him in Hawaii, had taken up with Raylene a couple of months after he left. Raylene had stayed behind to live with her brother and work for a year so she could pay resident tuition at the University of Hawaii. What was she gonna do, follow Dan back to Florida and then the Army or something? It didn't make sense, they both agreed.

Raylene did eventually go to the University of Hawaii to study nursing, but that fall when she'd called Dan to tell him about her relationship with Zeke, crying on the other end of a long distance telephone line, it had been one of the coldest days in Dan's life. He was in Norfolk, Virginia, and it was early December. She and Zeke had already been together a month when she called. For the three months since leaving Hawaii, Dan had held on to the thought of Raylene as the one good thing in his life as he went through the hell of basic training and then specialization as an underwater munitions expert. The day of that phone call was a cold day in Virginia and a colder day in hell for Dan. He froze emotionally and never completely thawed out. The feeling

that he was alone in the world was so strong that he stopped smoking that day, something that he'd wanted to do for months. He developed an inner strength that would rely on nobody but himself. Judy Jingles loved Orca Dan, but she never really reached him.

Raylene and Zeke got married a year later while Dan was in Southeast Asia. Not one to hold a grudge, Dan had long since forgiven Raylene and Zeke in his mind. It was natural, he knew, that the two of them got together. He'd had a special vibe with each of them, and they had to have had it with each other as well. No way Raylene wouldn't have been pursued all over the Hawaiian Islands once Dan left. But that didn't make it easy, and the wedding out at Stan's Safari Wilderness Farm was the first time Orca Dan had seen Raylene or Zeke since he'd left Hawaii 25 years before. Funny thing was, although he'd loved Raylene more intensely than any girl before or after, he probably missed Zeke's friendship more. They'd been beach rats together scurrying up and down the wide sands of Pompano Beach as early as he remembered, and when they'd gotten together in Hawaii, riding the big ones day after day had meant something special to both of them.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon when Dan arrived at the decked-out lodge on Stan's Safari Wilderness farm. Stan had set up a matrimonial arch covered with white hydrangeas, and his daughter's college roommate performed a credible version of Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You." Up front where the families were sitting, Dan could see Zeke and Raylene with their three sons in the second row behind Stan and his wife. Dan felt alone, socially naked, during the ceremony and was glad when it was over. As he made his way into the long hall where the reception would be held, Dan looked back and saw Zeke striding toward him.

"Hey, man, my man Dan. Goddammit, too long, brah, too long," and they embraced. They talked for half an hour straight about a lot of things, mainly Zeke talked and Dan listened,

so much history had come and gone. Zeke and Raylene had left Hawaii years ago and were living in Nashville. Besides climbing the ladder to charge nurse at Vanderbilt Medical Center, Raylene was traveling all over the world as a volunteer with “Doctors Without Borders” while Zeke held down the fort at home with the three kids. They didn’t talk about Hawaii.

When Dan saw Raylene, he felt like she was looking at him like a long, lost puppy dog. “Oh, Dan, here you are,” Raylene said as she studied him up and down and nodded approvingly. “Here is the man they call Orca Dan, that’s what Stan tells me. And that’s so apt, you really are a killer, Dan. Still riding the waves, what waves there are in south Florida I guess.” Dan forced a smile. Raylene had always been a girl going places, even at eighteen, and Dan hadn’t gone anywhere. He was still in Pompano Beach. He tried to tell her about the Sinnabar Café Smoothie Bar, but there were too many interruptions, and he finally just gave up.

Dan left the reception pretty early. The dancing had just started in earnest, and that feeling of social nakedness had crept back in around him. It was a long drive home to Pompano Beach, but there was no way he was going to accept Stan’s insistence that he spend the night at the nearby hotel where he had a block of rooms reserved for the wedding party and guests.

Orca Dan was happy to be alone, alone with himself and the road. As he sped along in the night, he realized that the image he’d had in his mind of eighteen-year old Raylene in her bikini on the North Shore of Hawaii was gone now forever. He was so happy he’d come up to Stan’s Safari Wilderness Farm and seen the 43-year old mother of three much worse for the wear. He thought about Jude. What a smart and beautiful woman she was, how lucky he was to have her.

About the same time that evening at the Sinnabar Café, the place was packed with a mix of 20- and 30-somethings slurping down Red Stripe beer. The white ghost-like drapes, originally

meant to provide some privacy to wine drinkers, provided an eerie and intriguing ambience once the furniture had been arranged to the liking of Judy Jingles. There were a number of older surfers in the crowd that evening, a group of Dan's friends that got together every Saturday night, when all of a sudden mayhem broke loose.

Dan wasn't at his usual spot at the door that night when Wayne Harvath walked in with an assault rifle under his raincoat. By the time Dan got home to Pompano Beach, there were police cars, a fire truck, and two ambulances blocking the road in the front of the Sinnabar Café. Dan parked in the middle of the street as close as he could get and pushed his way through the crowd. He saw Wayne Harvath handcuffed in the back of a squad car, and he hurried his steps.

When he told the police lieutenant in charge that he was the owner of the establishment, they let him inside the perimeter and into the café. There was blood everywhere behind the bar, and paramedics were standing over the body on the gurney, staring at each other, useless. Wayne had gone over the edge, driven by defeat, envy, and hate. Judy was the only one he'd shot, spraying her with a rain of bullets when she turned around to face the anger-contorted face. Dan's buddy Dickster had been late tackling Wayne when the washed-out wine bar impresario pulled out the semi-automatic he'd just bought down the road at the Fort Lauderdale Gun and Knife Show. Though Dickster's heroic actions saved the rest of the patrons in the crowded bar from a bloody massacre, he'd been too late to save Judy Jingles.

Orca Dan in the Sinnabar Café surveyed the wreckage behind the blood-spattered cherrywood bar and broke down and cried. He never told her how lucky he was to have her. He never even told her he loved her. Why couldn't he just forget about Hawaii?