

One

Help...

The first time I saw Jim Morrison was in the summer of 1970. The Doors were playing at the Isle of Wight Festival, they were flying in from Miami despite the fact that Morrison was in the middle of a huge court case for public indecency, profanity and lewd and lascivious behaviour. I was fifteen – well just about to be. Morrison was twenty six.

The next time I saw him was in Paris, France. I met and spoke with him on a few occasions after that.

In a small bar at the back of rue something or other – there was a band playing: The Lizard Kings. A bunch of lads from East Germany and there he was; sometimes tapping on the bar and sometimes humming along under his breath. Occasionally a rich baritone came through in snatches and I knew it instantly, that could not be changed. The weight had gone and the face shape had changed, but it was Morrison alright. There were scars and the shape of the nose was wrong. It was the eyes that gave him away – they were slightly too close together and just that little bit too intense. The only trouble was he was supposed to be dead, and not old like me. I had a real problem with it because the records showed he died in July 1971; that he was buried around the corner in Pere Lachaise cemetery.

You see for as long as I could really remember, The Doors had been bubbling away at the back of my mind. From the time

when we were kids and our freedom was about camping out, smoking dope and challenging the teachers of the 1960s. I remember playing 'Light My Fire' and the day some blue pills, which were some joker's medication, were found in the toilets at school.

Now, that was a place like something out of the dark ages. A terrible place, a place where boys with any spark of inspiration had it crushed out of them. A place where the strive for mediocrity was paramount; a place to subjugate and disintegrate; a place for you to, 'learn your place,' become a small cog in the big wheel. The best days of your life – were they? Nostalgia certainly isn't what it used to be and memories are always mixed and jaundiced by re-evaluation. When I look back now, it's mostly in anger, but with an understanding of how my nihilism took root and began to grow.

In 1966 I discovered pirate radio, The Beach Boys and The Byrds. In 1967 I discovered The Doors and in 1969 Ten Years After. Magical times which I remember as probably far better than they actually were. Still, for me the festivals and the nights spent sleeping in the rain could not have been better. There was no responsibility and the crushing weight of adulthood had not flattened me. My mother let me be free; free to think and develop my own ideas, a simple thing, for which I shall be eternally grateful. I don't know if I was anywhere near the garden but I thought I was.

Once I was talking to two ex GIs, Vietnam vets, somewhere near Colchester they had done their time and were now taking a long walk to freedom through Europe, picking grapes and olives and then turning on and tuning out. It was bizarre, surreal even. There I was trudging along with my military sleeping bag and a friend, when around a corner in the path up to the festival site sat two naked guys. All their gear was covered by a sheet of polythene and they were sharing a pipe. I was soaked and miserable, but they were laughing, wet and stoned. They seemed not to care about their flaccid nudity, and neither did the many girls who passed, but I was still of an age when it really stunned me. Naked flesh, naked girl flesh, that was what I wanted to see

and as much of it as possible. Looking back now I must have seemed young and naïve, and as one guy pulled out a harp and began to play ‘Rollin’ and Tumblin’, the other sang. “I was smokin’ and drinkin’, stoned the whole night long.” It was like I had stepped through the gates of heaven to hear Muddy Waters play.

When the rain stopped they put on dry clothes but I was still wet. They laughed and I was miserable. Sometimes I wonder if I ever existed at all after that.

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“How long you been in Paris?” I asked as I approached the bar.

He shrugged and made hand signals as if he spoke no English; I could tell from his reflection in the mirror, behind the compact bar, that his eyes were alert and he was comprehending. I had found my ghost.

“I came to see Morrison’s grave,” I said. “Like all the tourists, I came too. I expect he’d be laughing his head off if he could see how people were reacting. Star quality, that’s what he had and he didn’t even know it.” I was looking for any glimmer of a reaction. “There was a girl,” I smiled as I talked, “well a woman really, who had tattoos all over her back. The first few lines of ‘People are Strange’ and two pictures of Morrison, one on each shoulder blade, and The Doors logo emblazoned across the small of her back. Amazing really, crazy but totally amazing, and you know what? She wasn’t even old enough to have seen him live. Told me she was thirty four – makes her birth 1972. How could she be so in love with a dead guy?” I was watching him. “You know all this tourist razzmatazz. Hey maybe he started a new religion after all? The religion of fame and we all come to worship at the altar? A July heist instead of the Easter one?”

The stranger nodded, recognised the word tourist, and I wondered how good an actor he might be. He grinned widely, but still remained silent. I tried again to draw him out into the open. I had a real feeling about this guy; call it a hunch, a

reporter's hunch. But this was more than that; there was a real pulling in my guts. Sometimes ideas came for no reason and then zap, they worked and I got a big story. I was getting that feeling again, a sort of soft nudge in the groin – a nudge of expectancy and I wasn't about to get laid.

I had nearly pieced the whole story together. I had the endings and I knew which one I was going to use, and now, like a bolt out of the blue, this. I hadn't expected it – I couldn't believe it. That's the thing about a story, it just arrives and sometimes it takes over – like some giant leviathan, until it consumes you.

“You know today there were a couple of German girls there and they had thrown some flowers on his grave, a bouquet marked The Lizard King – all red and gold. They were listening to ‘Light my Fire’ on the headset of an ipod. Each had one headphone and they told me that they came every year. They'd been coming for the last twenty years. It was like they came to worship. They were only thirty six, but celluloid allowed them to worship, post mortem so to speak.” I had a brief flashback of Jesus Christ on film and wondered if his philosophy or fame had made him. “One of them was crying and you want to know what the real irony is?” No reaction. “Robby Krieger wrote that song.” I was trying to anger my listener, goad him, incense him – it wasn't working. “Yeah, Jim added the funeral pyre verse and Ray Manzarek played the intro and solo, but it wasn't really a Morrison song – it was a Krieger song. Like all the really popular songs were. Morrison the poet, front man, the exhibitionist risk taker; the exhibitionist needed Krieger, and marketing man Manzarek needed them both. Well maybe Dorothy knew what the real answer was, she was smart and stayed in the background, but she was their first sponsor. She was the real powerhouse and she had that thing which a man can hold on to, she was supportive; she believed in her man and boy she wasn't disappointed.”

I stopped talking as the man ordered another drink; my goading was failing miserably. Either the guy genuinely didn't care or was just intrigued. There was no alcohol and no soft sweet coke, his drink was a fresh orange juice topped up with

soda water. I'd seen alcoholics take that drink.

Somehow I needed to spark a reaction. Suddenly it came to me; I opened a pack of gum and started to unwrap a stick. Jim Morrison detested chewing gum and all those that used it. I was real obvious, made it easy to see, just like I was a habitual masticator. I was hoping that the reaction I got would happen. Casually he placed his hand over mine and said one word, "Non."

The gum went into my pocket and at that moment I knew I was right. I'd found him. You see, people can change their faces, change their clothes, they can even change their habits, but it's the little things that stick, these are the things that give them away. I read somewhere, I can't remember where, that in France there was this murderer who was a wealthy socialite. Hey I'm wrong! It was the Lucan case. That was it, yes. Lucan liked a certain wine and they found this guy in the Philippines, or somewhere, who had died. Well this guy had no past, but he loved this one type of wine and he is supposed to have looked just like Lord Lucan. Now some people might say that's a bunch of bull, but I kinda hung onto that idea and when I started on this case, oh yeah, it's a case – the idea sorta came back. You know, like when you forget the name of someone or thing and then like hours later it just pops up. It's like the window froze and then suddenly it's back online. Where was I? Oh yeah.

"Well," I joked, "Is that what happens when you've got your kicks before the whole shithouse goes up in flames?"

There was no reply from the man, but his eyes lit up and I wondered once again how anyone could simply walk away from a massive fortune and fame. I know I couldn't, I'd be fickle, I'd change my mind and maybe be riddled with doubt and guilt.

What if you did something that gave you no way back? What then? Jim was one of those people who tested the boundaries. If he'd been a prisoner of war, he'd have continually been up at the wire, looking, testing for weaknesses. He'd have been part of the great escape. Seeing which way the lights fell and where the gaps were, fearless to the point of lunacy, or bouncing his endless ball – Hilt Morrison, 'the cooler king.'

I mean, John Densmore said he learnt a valuable lesson on greed from Jim; a lesson about Buick and the 'Light my Fire' ad. Morrison was all for purity and non-corruption and like he said, it was only money. There was a sort of band of brothers attitude in The Doors, and that emanated from Mr. Mojo Risin. The cake got cut four ways – simple, whatever each member did they got just a quarter. He wasn't like Brian Jones in The Stones, taking that bit extra because he was the leader, or the front man. It was never Jim Morrison and The Doors and he hated when anyone announced them as such to an audience. Together they simply were The Doors, though The Doors and their music were never simple. The whole thing was like a diamond and each point was covered by one man, each needed the other. That was what made them so good as a team.

So could someone just give it up, walk away and never look back? Maybe Morrison was the man who could, a Rimbaud of the rock world and anyway, there have been others since. What if he really was, sick of his stinky boots? If he didn't care about the money? If the only really important thing was freedom? Not just mock middle-class, leisure play freedom, but real freedom; freedom to step outside of the bars of the prison and why not? He knew that iron bars do not a prison make; the only real prison is in the mind. Jim Morrison was smart, real smart; he managed to reach conclusions that some of us take a lifetime to establish, and he was only twenty seven years old. That is frightening.

This was 1971 and things were changing, the whole damn world was in flux. Vietnam was still going and they'd been shooting presidents for years. Maybe he could just walk away. Maybe he needed to put down the torch and sit in the dark for a while, let someone else have a go at being the standard bearer.

This was still the sixties and would be until about 1973. That sounds crazy but the decade didn't really start on the 1st January 1960, you know, like the opening of a new day and the new wave of global optimism? 1962 – 1973, that was the decade, well that's what I always thought anyhow. Maybe, just maybe, this guy had the guts to do it. Had the guts to let go. After all, he'd been the

one that was the trailblazer, maybe he was already way out ahead, knew what television and fame could do. Even on the Ed Sullivan show he didn't capitulate; the wild and devil may care Rolling Stones did.

They altered their lyrics to avoid public outrage, but Jim didn't change his. Like Morrison said, it's only words. Maybe it is just a bunch of bullshit, but I had spent months piecing this together and suddenly, like a puzzle, all the pieces seemed to fall into place of their own free will. Yeah there were holes, great big ones, bloody great big ones, but the gaps were getting smaller and the sense was getting bigger. Morrison was more than Mr. Mojo Risin and I knew he was a very clever and highly observant man. A man who could start a religion, or commit a murder and if he did, he'd get away with it.

He smiled and I knew he understood. Understood the references to Morrison and the music. His attempt to stop me chewing gum, well I thought that proved it. He knew precisely what I was saying, and yet he was choosing to ignore me. His actions were speaking louder than words.

"Like Morrison?" I said nonchalantly.

He nodded and raised his glass as if giving a toast but still remained silent.

We talked for a long while, well I talked, gibbered really, and he listened – patiently. We drank, again that was mostly me, the band played and played and the crowd danced and finally I went to the toilet; had to, the imperative was too strong. When I came back, the man had gone and so had his glass. I checked the street outside, in both directions, he had vanished. It was like he had never been there.

I asked the barman about the man, he shrugged. Claimed he had no idea who he was, never seen him before, he said.

And me – I wondered what and who I had seen.

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At this point I ought to explain what I was doing in Paris and why I had gone to Morrison's grave in the first place. You see I

loved The Doors music; I thought for years that it had been well before its time. It was jazz and blues and rock and theatre and revolution and punk and goth and...well there were so many things I really loved about it. Then there were the influences that Morrison created in living form: Iggy Pop and the whole of the punk movement. Goths, the gothic and the dark side, that was something that my editor wanted me to explore.

Oh yeah, I was telling you how and why I was in this bar in the first place. But Iggy Pop, I mean he took narcotics on stage and antagonised the audience ten times worse than Morrison ever did. I remember he did some lewd exposing too. It was like the baton had been passed. And look at it now, James Newell Osterberg, topless but respected, respected because he broke the mould and pushed the boundaries. It seems like you can roll around in glass and chuck-up on stage, take heroin even, as long as you survive to tell the tale. Like everything becomes Ok in the end. Now his face is on advertising hoardings all over my home city, Christ, it's even on the back of buses. Take Oscar Wilde and his antics, if you don't believe me, and he's in Pere Lachaise too. Everything becomes acceptable if you wait long enough.

Anyway, as I was saying, I work for the *The Times* in London, well did work for the *The Times*; but I'd shouted my mouth off once too often and after I told the last editor to, "go eat shit", I was freelance again. The new editor, he liked what I'd done in the past and he gave me this assignment on Morrison. They didn't know where it would take me and neither did I, plus they didn't have to pay for a full time reporter and I was willing to push the boundaries – so here I was in this bar. And there it was, a bar behind Pere Lachaise cemetery. The end of an assignment which I thought would be fairly pedestrian. I couldn't have been more wrong.

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Perhaps I ought to go back to the beginning: the Isle of Wight. But I won't, I'll go back further. To when I got my first guitar.

It was my birthday and I was eleven, and I kept on about

getting a box. My elder brother had bought me a violin when I was seven or eight, but I didn't really get on with it. That guitar, well that was a different story. Night after night, day after day strumming Bobby Shafto. My friends, well, you'd call them fair weather friends, they took, 'the mickey,' and did other things instead. But me, I kept on practising, practising on those nylon strings until my fingers bled.

We lived in a small town in the suburbs, in a place where everyone thought they were more than they were. The word I'd use now would be snob, and boy they were snobs. My father thought the noise I made was dreadful and my brother, he was the really gifted musical one, he still played his Mozart and his Beethoven.

Oh yeah, where was I? The guitar, the brown thing that cost about £10 and which I had to fight to get, that guitar went everywhere with me. Except school, there the school masters were old and stuffy and I, well I was a rebel. At least I thought I was.

I remember there was this teacher, who thought he was really, 'cool' and he asked us all to bring an album of current music in. I arrived with a Ten Years After album, Ssh, I think it was. Anyway, he was going on about how he liked it. I understood where he was coming from when I did a stint of chalk and talk myself; and that makes me smile when I think about him now. Thing is, and this is the really weird bit, I can't even remember his name. But I know we had a lesson called social studies, in the late sixties – it was rubbish, total rubbish.

Anyhow I'm meandering around here. I remember taking that guitar and getting round a campfire with my mates; remember playing 'Light my Fire' badly. I think they laughed, but they couldn't do anything, or play anything. It was the summer of 1967 and the other big song in my memory was 'Mr. Tambourine Man' by The Byrds. I loved that jingly twelve string sound. Maybe the dates are wrong, but I do remember the times as hot summers which were long, full of school vacations and swimming. Radio Caroline, that I do remember, Stuart Henry too. Somebody told me he was dead, MS got him. I loved that

Scottish accent and the new sounds. I didn't know it at the time but the same twelve string sound comes at the start of 'Hotel California'; years later and the sound still hooks me now.

At the other end of the street from where I lived there were some boys and one had a twelve string, Ken Austen, that was his name: I remember that. And he could play; well I thought he could, because all I could do was strum. So I strummed out 'Light my Fire'; didn't know who the hell Robby Krieger was or Jim Morrison the singer. Four years later I did, and when he died, I had the whole weight of it fall in. It was after Hendrix and the school assembly, but that's another story.

Well as we're here I might as well tell it.

It was 1970 and we, that's me and a few friends, the fair weather ones, had gone to the festival on the island. I'd been there the year before when Bob Dylan was headlining and he had let the whole thing down. He finished his set in forty five minutes and then left. People were yelling and screaming and I had sat next to a fence made out of corrugated steel sheet and watched a guy roll a joint. When he passed it around I took a toke. That was the first time I'd ever tasted dope. That was one thing, and then there was this guy, you know, one of the bigger boys, he had a bright yellow tee shirt and across the chest, in bold bubble writing, orange and red and fancy: Fuck. Just the one word and he had hair so long it was halfway down his back; blond, well kind of blond. I expect he works in an office now or he's an accountant. I didn't contemplate that then, but now, with experience, I accept it. Hey, I'll even take a bet on it.

Something happened between 1976 and now, and well, things sort of lost their way, me included. I married young and then all the responsibilities piled in on me, kids, mortgage, and my mind died: died inside my head. All that promise, all that passion and flair and fight and being on the edge, well it just evaporated. I spent my time trying to pay the bills, listening to the crap being spoken at me and smiling. I even smiled back, grinned an inane grin so I could put bread on the table – make a life for my kids. I didn't even have the balls to be a drunk or a poet. Nope, I just gave in, rolled over and switched on the TV and watched. Like

Morrison said, I became a spectator. I watched while the actors delivered their play. The thing was, I had two great kids, though one of them I haven't seen in five years, his choice not mine. The crazy thing was, I loved them. Survival gene or procreation gene or something; Jesus Christ, I lost fifteen years of me and I messed up – messed up big time. Regrets, I've had few, as the old Sinatra song goes, but mine are not too few to mention; mine are God awful and huge. I married when I was young and stupid and we split up when I was older and wiser; that was the best day's work I ever did. At the time I went through hell, but I'd been through worse when I was younger; now I'm so much happier. What's the old adage? What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger? Hey, I'm a super hero.

Oh yeah, where was I? September 18th 1970 and Jimi Hendrix dies. I was in the last year of school. I had this reputation for being off the wall and I had this house master, who's dead now, well he liked my weird drive and energy. I think he hated the stuffy headteacher too, and man, was he stuffy; wanted us to wear stupid schoolboy caps, the type of thing boys wore in the 1930s and 40s.

So usually we had to take assembly, like the kids do now, to break the monotony of what was a mock religious gathering with hymns and such. Most of us hated it. The teachers did too, that's why they made us do them. So we got together and decided to do a tribute to Jimi.

For the opening we played 'Purple Haze'; that set some of the teachers' teeth on edge. Then there was the story of his life and finally a minute's silence. Man we got into trouble over that. You only did the silence on Remembrance Day, you know, the 11th of the 11th; but we did it for Jimi.

I'd like to think it was my idea, but perhaps it wasn't; anyhow, the shit hit the fan and my house master, well he supported me against the headteacher. That was something to behold and I never forgot it – it was great to watch, 'the system' breaking down right in front of my eyes. It doesn't seem to matter now, the guy's dead and they shut the school. Sometimes I wonder what pain that cost him after we had left, but man I

respected him, learnt from him and enjoyed it. He wasn't the only one, there were two Yorkshire men. One was ex-coal mines I think, and he was a great historian, and the other was English. It was no surprise to me that these two got me the highest grades. What is it the propaganda says? 'Nobody forgets a great teacher'? Well for once, maybe only the once though, I have to agree.

When I start to ramble like this you'll have to stop me or skip. I'm trying to get the context into place here. Trying to let you know what turned me on to Morrison and *The Doors*. *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley's brave new mescaline world.

Everything seemed to be in a state of flux. Europe had come out of two wars and Vietnam was happening and change was taking place. We grew our hair and wore colour and no shoes and beads like women and me, I did too. My father once joked; that I'd have to walk twenty paces behind or twenty paces in front if we were walking into town. I thought it was a joke, but like Steve Morrison, he was serious and he was military too. And yeah I'd had the enforced haircut when he was on leave. Morrison and I, we sort of have an affinity on that one.

Now here I was investigating, investigating whether he was really dead.

I'd spent months on the case, and everywhere I turned there were clues and each one led me up a blind alley. Too many people had trampled over the tracks, so I'd diverted a stream to see where they got out. Like James Fennimore Cooper and his last of the true Indians, I got down in the mud and sifted for clues. I had to think like him and absorb everything about the guy; what made him tick. It wasn't the women or the fame, the money or the booze, it was freedom. That was the thing he was seeking, like all the beat poets before him; like Dean Moriarty, he wanted to see the place and more – be in that place. Get further out west, out beyond the frontier before it choked us all. And when you're down in the dirt there are stones, but there are diamonds too. There were red herrings and twists and turns and then finally there was this bar and the stranger. DNA had come into the frame and I needed that to confirm what I was thinking, what I had discovered. No point in an exhumation order. Nearly

forty years had passed and Clara, Jim's mother, was dead. Andy, his brother, wouldn't do anything, neither would the family.

The graffiti had been washed away and I reckoned there'd be nothing left now. Like when they dug up Dylan Thomas in Wales to drop Caitlin in. The whole corpse had gone: no more Dylan. That was about forty years too.

The, 'True to his Spirit,' headstone had been placed with a great block of granite or marble, with a bronze plaque. A huge thing to hold him in, as if he were some vampire that might try to get out and roam the streets of Paris.

I'd taken nearly a year and the Morrisons were clammed up, the Coursos too. It didn't make sense. But I made allowances for family and the whole hype thing. They must have gone through hell, and they always had to take the blame. The horrid military man etc, etc, etc. Hey, my father was military and yeah he could be a real disciplinarian, but he loved me in his way. Well I think he did, hope he did, he just couldn't show it easily, maybe that was the Morrison problem. Or maybe I just got in the way. Anyhow, Steve Morrison put the stone there as if he had finally made peace with his first born.

It's just simple things don't make sense and me, well after all these years, I'd found out the truth. It was unsavoury, not the stuff of myth and legend and it didn't read like Romeo and Juliet, nor was it the stuff of giants. Morrison the myth melted into Morrison the man; so here I was – in Paris, in a bar, at the back of Pere Lachaise cemetery, listening to a bunch of kids – wondering again.