

THE CHRONICLES OF A MADMAN

Chronicles Trivia

I'll mention the title first. I like how it sounds. I thought of it before hearing of DIARY OF A MADMAN by Guy de Maupassant or Ozzy Osbourne. Two decades before discovering Lu Xun, who named his first short story DIARY OF A MADMAN as a tribute to Gogol, who I've never read. Am I the only chronicler? I don't know.

Next, the dedication:

"To Linda Keeler, for teaching me how to write
To Harold Givens, for teaching me how to think"

Linda Keeler taught me Creative Writing in my sophomore year of high school. A fluke, really. I was taking Drafting, and Mr Shell said mine were some of the finest drawings he'd ever seen. But, he gave them all Cs because of how poorly I wrote my name. I knew my penmanship was forever doomed, but I couldn't let that trash my GPA, so I switched to the only one-semester course with an opening. Creative Writing.

I was the class's only sophomore, but being surrounded by upperclassmen was common for me. I wrote my butt off and moved classmates to tears. I'd later lose the plot for about 20 years, no pun intended, but that's not Ms Keeler's fault.

Harold Givens. Senior year in high school. English 4AP. My first exposure to the Socratic Method in action, and I was a Philosophy student before I met Mr Givens. Talk about a much-needed kick in the head. (Pick another part of the anatomy if you prefer. We're pretty casual here.)

I thought I'd finished writing my short story collection in 1987 or 1988. I knew two artists, so I gave each of them a copy.

One guy had a business where he and his team created drawings based on architectural blueprints, to line up investors for buildings yet to be built. "No, I definitely don't want to draw THIS cover, no."

The second guy was Christopher Dunne, who would later become president of the Florida Graphics Artists' Guild. He met me at the downtown branch of the Tampa (Florida) Public Library with three different hand-drawn covers. All black and white, stark, eye-grabbing. (Not literally -- ouch.) I'd love for people to judge my book by its cover, because it's better than the writing.

Dan Fox, Mike Galatin, QED Press of Ann Arbor. If you see any of these names, hide your wallet and run away. Back in the days when my anthology was but 75 pages, I submitted it to dozens of publishers and was dumb enough to be surprised by the rejections. These guys offered to "subsidy publish" it for the low low price of US\$650, initial run of 50 copies, no free Ginsu knives, and I was sufficiently stupid to take the bait.

"That's \$13 a book," said my business-minded best friend. "How much are you planning to

sell them for?"

"Shut up."

Yeah, I handled all writing suggestions that way. Which may help explain why I got so many rejection letters.

I had a mother who could sell coals to Newcastle, ice to Eskimos, or sand to Iraq. Which was good, because all QED's talk about getting my book into the hands of reviewers was bunk. Mom was a regular customer at Master Pizza, which her in-laws owned, so she sold my little book to a bunch of drunk Italian relatives for \$17.95 per copy. They woke up hung over the next morning, saw the screamy guy, and wondered what the heck they'd bought. Cha-ching!

Later, I returned to North Carolina. The Wilmington Morning-Star interviewed me for a "local author comes back home" story. The only place to respond to my press release. The last paragraph said that I was buying a house from my father, Jim Drake. Well, I think every redneck in Burgaw knows Jim Drake. They read the story and said, "Jim's boy wrote a book?" Then they bought a copy for \$12 -- I could afford to sell at a loss at this point -- got home, starting reading it, and wondered what the heck they'd bought. Cha-ching!

Once I'd recouped my initial \$650, I gave away the remaining copies. The one I gave my cousin, Clint a.k.a Two Dogs, is noteworthy because he tried to lend it to every hippie in Durham.

I also stumbled upon a project to start an English-language library in Georgia, formerly of the USSR, with donations. I threw in seven autographed copies of THE CHRONICLES, since my little anthology was more Fyodor Dostoevsky than Alice Munro or Stephen King back then. This happened when the Georgian president locked himself in his office and somebody was blowing up trains, so I don't know if my books ever arrived.

1990 or 1991, still in Wilmington, I made some phone calls and found a local copy shop that could do "perfect binding," which is how every paperback on your shelf was probably made. This is how we self-published before print-on-demand. 30 copies, only \$90, because I knew how to drive a very hard bargain in my days as a purchasing manager.

This print run featured a story that I had inadvertently cut from the 1988 run, "The Boatman's Getting Restless." It's the first story I ever wrote, the product of a 16-year-old mind. I'd also done some serious editing to the anthology, so in places the book was almost readable.

I was working at a place with hour-long lunch breaks, but I don't need that long to eat. So I visited bookstores and sold "local author" copies of THE CHRONICLES. A very pleasant way to spend a lunch hour. Still only 75 pages, but I was getting \$6 per copy, which was twice my cost. Then the bookstores resold them for \$10 per copy. I offered to buy back anything they couldn't sell, but that never happened. Maybe I forgot to give them my phone number...

Once I'd recouped my initial \$90 investment, I gave away the remaining copies. The one I gave to my cousin, Clint a.k.a. Two Dogs, is noteworthy because the other had fallen apart and he still had more hippies to loan it to.

2000 was my Hong Kong period. VIGILANTE JUSTICE, RISING FROM THE ASHES, AN AMERICAN REDNECK IN HONG KONG. But first, THE CHRONICLES tripled in size, and I improved the writing dramatically. This is when I "arrived."

I signed a contract with Wordbeams to publish THE CHRONICLES. A real publisher at last. Then Susan had to close the place before it crippled or killed her.

I quickly placed my book with Zumaya Publishing, where sales were steady but not spectacular, which tends to be the fate of the quality short story collection, especially when the author's too lazy to help with the marketing.

Really, I was. I published four books in one year, and in fact found two publishers for each book due to closures and such. So when THE CHRONICLES finally hit the virtual shelves with Zumaya, I felt like I'd run that marathon seven times already, in the same year, and I got quite lazy with my beloved anthology.

Much later, I felt I needed to get THE CHRONICLES out to a new audience, as a new book, and start all over again. I chose Books Unbound, hoping they'd accept it. What I didn't expect was for my editor, Karen Cunningham, to make me rethink the thing and get excited about it again. But that's what she did. In many ways, it really is a new book now. And the dreaded madman is reborn.

One way we can break up THE CHRONICLES OF A MADMAN is by time. There are the stories I wrote in the 1980s and the ones I wrote in 2000. ["In The Fullness of Time"](#) is the first of my 2000 works. I just woke up and wrote it before coffee one morning. Very similar to how I wrote the 1980s works.

In hindsight, I note how the narrator never seems to embrace Hong Kong. Yeah, I was like that. There's so little to embrace there, so instead I ventured into my past. Hong Kong is known for its capitalist culture and its nightlife. I'd gotten bored with capitalism before I left the US, and I've never cared about the nightlife of any city. I was born a philosopher and a serial monogamist.

The short story ends with a reference to an essay that predated it by 15 years. So, quite naturally, that essay appears next in the book. I wrote it maybe a week after Barry's suicide. Putting those two stories together really drives it home to me that I've revised the old stories well. They can stand up against the new ones.

"In The Fullness of Time" is, I think, an awful title for a story, but I couldn't think of anything else. Anyway, it's "new Madman." It's followed by "For Barry," and "The Boatman's Getting Restless," which are "teen Madman." One of your jobs as you read, if you care, is to guess which stories are which.