

The Greatest Story Never Told

Stories from the Black experience to help you live your best life.



Hello Beloved,

Your money or your life!

I said, your money or your life!

Will you give me a minute? **I'm thinking!**

This is an old Jack Benny joke from back in the day.

I retell it because if this week's newsletter had a name, it'd be...

Your Medal or Your Life!

And it wouldn't be a joke either.

In **Part 3, of The Poet, the Frog, and the People's Champ**, you'll see what I mean.

If you've not read **Parts 1 and 2**... you'll want to do so before reading Part 3. You can get to them by clicking on the links below.

[The Poet, the Frog and the People's Champ, Part 1](#)

[The Poet, the Frog and the People's Champ, Part 2](#)

If you have read Parts 1 and 2, keep reading.

As you'll see, the hero of our story **had to think** about what to do too.



Love

“ After Ronnie and I left the restaurant, we heard footsteps running in the rain behind us.

Wait. Wait.

It was the **waitress** and the **white boy** who sat next to me at the counter. They were waving menus.

Mr. Clay, may we have your **autograph**?

They stood there, dripping wet and panting... the rain coming down in sheets.

Please!

The boy in the Manual High sweater handed me a piece of red crayon.

I scribbled Cassius Clay, 1960 on both.

Lynch Mob

Then... we heard a rough voice.

Hey, Olympic! You still trying to get a milkshake?

The voice came from the gang of motorcycle riders who were coming out of the restaurant and into the parking lot.

They were all climbing on their Harley's.

Frog, with one arm around his big girlfriend, looked over to where we were and said...

I got your milkshake Olympic.

The gang cracked up. They screamed, howled... and imitated Frog's obscene gesture.

Frog helped his girl onto the back of his bike and leaned over to Kentucky Slim... apparently giving him instructions.

Then, with an exaggerated gunning of their motors, they took off.

They thundered past us in a single file... cursing, threatening, and whooping.

Your Medal or Your Life

We started our motors but sat still... our eyes on the gang.

Suddenly... Kentucky **broke from the pack**, circled around, and drove back toward us.

One hand was held up like a signal that he didn't drop until he was about five feet from me.

Ronnie moved his bike around and in between me and Kentucky.

Clay!

I could hear Slim's melancholy, nasal voice as he looked over Ronnie's shoulder.

I tried to save y'all. But you done **made Frog mad**.

I said nothing. I just waited for the real message... the settlement terms.

Frog **wanted to lynch you** right there in the restaurant, Slim confided, almost congenial.

But I said, no sir. Let them go back to where they belong.

They can give you **a little souvenir** or something.

I understood exactly what he wanted.

And I remember feeling tight and warm, as though the bell had rung for a round.

We fresh out of souvenirs, Ronnie said.

He was cleaning his teeth with a toothpick... as if the restaurant had actually served us the hamburgers.

Slim pointed to my neck. Frog **wants that medal** and ribbon for his girl.

Just a little souvenir... and then you can go on about your business.

He waited.

So... what do y'all say?

We Choose the Medal

Slim, Ronnie said evenly. Go tell Frog we'll **give it to his mother.**

Slim's mouth fell open... a bewildered, unbelieving look in his eyes.

He brushed Ronnie aside to give me a reprieve.

Clay... it's your medal, not his. What do you say?

See you later Slim, I said.

I gunned my bike, my face flushed and furious.

Slim gunned his Harley, shook a prophetic finger at me, and raged...

Frog's **gonna kill you niggas** for that.

He took off... screaming over his shoulder.

You wait... you black bastards... you wait.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

By then, I knew we had already waited too long.

A good many young blacks had **already been caught** in white neighborhoods by this same gang.

They'd been **beaten** and **chain whipped**... some almost fatally.

If a drowning man's life flashes before him when he goes down for the last time... **I was about to go under too.**

All the years of sweat and struggle I poured into becoming a champion flashed before me.

I realized that everything I wanted might go **down the drain**, or be indefinitely delayed, unless I submitted to Frog's souvenir hunt.

Even if I was lucky enough to survive... a knockdown, drag-out fight with Frog's gang might leave me too scarred and injured to continue as a fighter.

My gold medal had **lost its gleam** in the mayor's office and restaurant.

But **every ounce** of my blood and marrow rebelled against paying it out as ransom.

First Professional Bout

The rain was cold and soaked my sweater down to my bones.

But what **made me shiver most** was the awareness that in a few days, my first professional fight was scheduled right here in Louisville.

I was fighting Tony Hunsicker, a **seasoned puncher** who was also a police chief in Virginia.

If I entered the ring with fresh cuts and scars, Hunsicker would **open them back up.**

A True Friend

Ronnie, listening to Frog's big bike as it circled the block, sensed what was going through my mind.

You got too much going on for you to get messed up now, he said.

My heart went out to him.

I'll go on and **make them follow me.**

You get on down the other way, you hear? Go on now.

The Plan

He would have shoved off in Frog's direction... but I gripped his handlebars.

I had a plan.

My guess was they expected me to head straight for the Black neighborhood.

But my plan was to get to the **Jefferson County Bridge**... a dividing line between Kentucky and Indiana.

I could cross to the Indiana side, run parallel with the river for a few miles... and **then come back into Louisville** over another bridge.

The Great Escape

With Ronnie right behind me, I cut across a vacant lot.

Then we shot up a side street and down an alley.

We wove through every intricate passageway I could find until the sound of the big Harleys **died out**.

We drove with our heads down, our bikes straining against the wind and rain.

We hardly said a word. There was no need to talk.

I was **thankful** Ronnie was by my side.

I had gym buddies who were far better fighters by ring rules.

But Ronnie was **a demon** by street rules.

He had a knack of making all his brawls seem like life-or-death choices.

And so far, faced with those alternatives, most of his opponents **had chosen life** without a fight.

I felt **relieved** when I finally got within sight of the Jefferson County bridge.

The rain had slackened, and I decided **it was safe** to come out of the passageways and hit the bridge from Main Street.

Caught!

It turned out to be a **huge mistake**.

No sooner had I hit the street when I heard a wild, far away scream.

There they is!

There they is!

There's the niggas!

It was a woman's high-pitched cry.

And it was followed by Frog's bellowing voice.

You black bastards!

We got your ass now!



We'll put a bookmark here beloved... and pick back up on our story next week.

But just know this.

It's a fearsome thing to fall into the hands of a lynch mob.

To find out what happened in the **Battle on the Jefferson County Bridge**, join us next Sunday for **Part 4** of **The Poet, the Frog and the People's Champ**.

Are You a Sharer?

*It ain't no fun if the homies can't have none.
~ Snoop Dog*

If you are and **would like to share** "**The Poet, the Frog, and the People's Champ**" **with a friend**, you can by clicking on the link below and copying and pasting the URL.

[The Poet, the Frog, and the People's Champ](#)

Once again, thank you for taking this journey with your fellow readers.

It's just one lesson from the greatest story never told.

If you have a story of your own that you'd like to share, send it to me at the email address below. I'd love to hear it.

Or, if you have comments, expressions, or feedback... feel free to hit me up at b.johnson@ethnicexpressions.com

Until next time,

Brian

