

6/10/20

~~Rose Brudno~~

JOSH GIPPIN, 33, TALKS WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER ROSE BRUDNO, 85, A BAR OWNER.

*Josh Gippin:* What were you doing in 1959?

*Rose Brudno:* I was disliking my husband intensely, and I was dumping him.

What I was really trying to do was find a way to support me and my three kids after I was divorced. So when I found this bar called the Zanzibar in Akron, I bought the place. When I took it over, the bar had all kinds of dirt and everything on the floor, but it was a corner bar in an important location, so I felt like it would be a good place for me to make a living.

I didn't realize it, but the nickname for the Zanzibar had been the "Bucket of Blood." And it earned that title—it was just a rough place. I got rid of the bouncer and I just told everybody, "If you're going to fight, you have to be able to back up

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your fight, because I'm not going to break it up." I really can't stand drunks. My theory is you lose on them anyway, so I eliminated drunks every chance I could. I just wanted a guy to cash his paycheck, buy a round of drinks, and then go home and take care of his family. That's how I operated.

The neighborhood was mostly rubber workers, who were one of the better unions, and they had a decent standard of living. A lot of them owned their own homes, they had good paychecks, and they could support having a drink or two. But I had some guys who were irresponsible with their money, and I knew they had families to support. So I would give them a twenty-dollar bill to party, and I just took their checks and put them in the safe.

*Josh:* So they would ask you to do that?

*Rose:* No, I just did it. Sure, they'd get mad—naturally. I mean, I'm doing a terrible thing: a guy works all week busting his butt, and someone has the audacity to take their money? They want to kill you. But then they would come in sheepishly later and get their paycheck and thank me. Because I was the only barkeep in town who would do that.

The Zanzibar was open from five thirty in the morning to two thirty in the morning—twenty-one hours. And I worked twelve-hour days.

*Josh:* How many customers are you going to get at five thirty in the morning?

*Rose:* Oh, lots, because at six o'clock they'd be coming off

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the graveyard shift, and they'd come in to eat breakfast. And at six o'clock in the morning we'd be singing and dancing and drinking and eating. Our cook, Lil, was the best in town. I brought my daughter Mindy's dinner every night from Lil's cooking.

You know, my dad had been an insurance man, but he had a heart condition, he was diabetic, and he was arthritic, so he couldn't work much. And when he did, he couldn't hold up. He got involved with the Unemployed Council, and he started helping unemployed workers when they were in trouble. Sometimes they would even stay at our house until they found a place to live and had the money to put up a month's rent to move.

And I had deep respect for that. I tried to organize a union in the bar. I said, "Hey, I'm not supposed to do this—I'm the enemy! You guys got to organize." But they wouldn't, so that's how I developed profit sharing. We took all the pennies from the bar, and by March we'd have about eight hundred, nine hundred dollars in the bank. Then we'd rent a big cottage for a month for the employees and their families to use for vacation in the summer.

We also had monthly meetings with all the barmaids about, *What is our role as a barmaid? When do we serve a drink, when do we deny a drink? How much respect do you give a guy, and when do you say, "You can't be here anymore"?*

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If a barmaid felt that she had to bar someone for stuff like making sexual innuendos, I never questioned it—I backed her all the way. I had the best barmaids in town. Other bar-keeps would try to buy my barmaids off by giving them a higher wage, but nobody left me. It was unheard of to have barmaids that worked for you ten, twelve years. But my barmaids never left.

*Josh:* I remember when I was thirteen years old, my girlfriend broke up with me and I was completely heartbroken—my eyes were swollen from crying. And you gave me a mop and a bucket and put me to work: "Start with the kitchen floors, and when you're done with those, come back, and I'll give you more." And it brought me down to earth. That's what it's always been like with you. You just told it like it was. People would say about you, "She's brazen and feisty and she won't take shit from people." *Crazy Rose*, they called you.

*Rose:* The guys used to say, "She's nuts!" you know. *[Laughs.]* But I experienced total support from the clientele.

Eventually the Zanzibar was designated for urban renewal, so I knew that it only had so much life left. And people were moving away from that area, and I was losing business. Plus, my back—just the stress of being on your feet all those hours. I had gotten so bad that my doctors said I had to quit. A couple of years later, it was emptied out. So that was that.

But you know, the period of the Zanzibar, those were the

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best years of my life. I had a wonderful relationship with the community at the bar; I knew their kids, I knew their parents. We had a ball.



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Rose Brudno passed away on June 29, 2011.