

# ...AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

RAMESH NYBERG

**B**ack in the late 1980s, our government decided that military records and other government documents which become 50 years old can be "declassified."

In this spirit, I thought this New Year would be an appropriate time to tell you a story which has just turned 50 years old. It is a police story – and a rather typical one – which may be similar to many of the stories many of you could tell.

It was 1974 and the driver – we'll call him "Ram" which rhymes with "Tom" – was at the wheel of a 1968 Plymouth Satellite station wagon which was registered to his dad. Ram would tell you that this was one hell of an automobile: a 318 engine and rear facing third row seats. Ram learned to drive in that car and he loved it. One night, he was proud to have his buddies in the car with him; it was February of 1974 and Ram had his shiny new driver's license in his wallet. It had just been issued to him two weeks before. In the front passenger seat of the car was his friend, Robbie, and in the back sat Steve, the third member of what was very much a "Three Musketeers" combo. The trio was heading to a small old dock in a dark secluded brackish swamp which meandered through the wilderness before opening into Biscayne Bay. It was a popular spot for high schoolers to go drink which is exactly what these three friends were doing. They had a six-pack of Regal beer (which, at that time, cost a whopping 99 cents) and a bottle of cheap wine.

The ride from Ram's house to Robbie's wasn't far and the trip to the dock was only another ten minutes, at most, down a long stretch of Ludlam Road. It was about ten o'clock at night and Robbie and Steve decided that they would start on the beer during the trip. By the time they got to the middle section of Ludlam – which would take them to the two dirt roads leading to the dock – there were two empty beer cans on the floor of the Satellite. That section of Ludlam Road was flanked by a USDA testing site on the east side and an immense

# An Unredacted Story, aka "It's a Small World"



mango grove on the west. Further down was a Florida Power and Light station and no more than four houses. At that time of night, Ludlam was all but deserted and it was all too easy to ignore the 40 mph speed limit.

Steve had popped (yes, pop tops) a second one right at the time when Ram noticed a car behind them getting closer. With a glance in the rearview mirror, Ram made out the distinctive outline of a lightbar on the roof of the car. Ram fought a surge of panic. They were all 16, two years shy of the magic "18" mark when they could buy their own with impunity. He realized just then that he had been going well past the speed limit.

"Hey," Ram said to Robbie when he noticed the police car behind them, "there's a Metro cop behind us. Get rid of the beer cans."

Robbie stuffed one of the empties under the passenger seat, but also stupidly tossed a half full Regal out the window.

"Oh crap, Robbie. I didn't mean *that* way!"

Steve, who was usually the one to do dumb stuff, lamented from the back-seat, "Robbie, you dumbass!"

By this time, Ludlam's pavement ended and they had slowed to enter the dirt road leading to the dock. Seconds later, the red lights came on, illuminating the darkness around them. They were

almost at the dock by the time Ram slowed the Satellite to a stop on the rocky path.

"Shit. We're done now," Ram muttered.

The officer was by himself and turned on his spotlight to bathe them in harsh light. Then, he ordered them all out of the car and told them to line up against the back of the vehicle. One at a time, the blonde haired, bespectacled officer brought them over.

"Driver – take your license out and walk over here."

Ram walked toward the shape he could barely make out by the driver's side of the police car and handed the officer his driver's license. "Nyberg..." the officer read, shining his flashlight on the license. "Nyberg, you drive too fast."

"Ah, yes, I'm sorry, sir."

The officer, whose name was "Diefenbach," then sent Ram back and called Robbie over. After a few questions of Robbie, he called Steve, who, to put it nicely, was quite "large" for his age. Steve, in fact, had been put on a special diet by his parents, an effort which failed rather badly.

"Send over the heavyweight," Diefenbach ordered.

After talking to Steve, he addressed all three youngsters together.

"Now, there's no *shit* in this car, is there?"

"No, sir," came the reply in unison.

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They all knew that "shit" meant marijuana.

"And," Dieffenbach went on, "that wasn't a *beer can* I saw flyin' out of the window, was it?"

"No, sir!" was the response, again nearly in three-part harmony.

Officer Dieffenbach walked over to them and handed Ram his license back. "Okay, it's late. Y'all get outta here and go home. And, Mr. Nyberg, you slow down."

Ram did a silent *whew!* of gratitude. He was absolutely certain that his new license was going to be blemished by a speeding ticket, or worse – an arrest for being underage and having beer in the car. Officer Ed Dieffenbach clearly had bigger fish to fry and, though the trio of high school students didn't know it, such prizes were often caught in the area of those docks, bringing in large quantities of "shit" by boat. Dieffenbach and his colleagues were well acquainted with the area. As the old Steely Dan song said, "Throw back the little ones and pan fry the big ones."

The encounter became legend with the trio. Whenever Steve and Robbie saw Ram, they would smile and say, "Nyberg, you drive too fast!" And, of course, Ram and Robbie forever called Steve "The Heavyweight." As for Robbie, he thanked his lucky stars that his moronic move hadn't gotten them all in big trouble.

### Pre-epilogue – 1982

Officer Ramesh Nyberg was starting his third year in uniform and had just transferred from North Miami to South District, where he grew up. He now wore the brown uniform of the Metro Police. On his way out of roll call one afternoon, he went to the window to get his shotgun and handheld radio when he spotted a familiar face. The nametag on the officer's uniform shirt read "E. Dieffenbach."

"You probably don't remember me,"

Ram told him, "but you were the first police officer to ever pull me over."

"Yeah? Did I give you a ticket?"

Ram told him no and told him the story and how lucky they all had felt. Dieffenbach got a chuckle out of it.

"I kind of remember it," he said.

### Final Epilogue – 2023

Retired Police Officer Ramesh Nyberg is teaching at Coral Reef Senior High School which sits on Coral Reef Drive, the equivalent of Southwest 152nd Street. If you take 152nd east from the school, you cross US 1 and, in a few minutes, you reach its intersection with 67th Avenue which is known as Ludlam Road. At that spot, where all those nice expensive houses are today, there was once a dirt road which led down to a rickety dock, the frolicking spot of many high schoolers.

Ramesh was proctoring an AP exam and looked down the roster of students. One of the juniors was named Edward Dieffenbach, Jr. Ramesh asked him if he had any police officers in the family.

"Yes, my dad," the student answered. "He retired about ten years ago."

When you stick around one spot long enough, the experiences you had as a youngster find a way back to you. And, so do the people.

Happy New Year to all! **P&SN**

Ramesh Nyberg retired from law enforcement in November 2006 after 27 years of police work. He lives in Miami and teaches criminal justice at a local high school. He also teaches regional law enforcement courses through Training Force, USA. He enjoys getting feedback from readers and can be reached at [ramesh.nyberg@gmail.com](mailto:ramesh.nyberg@gmail.com). Also, Ram has written a book, *The Ten Must-Haves to Be a Great Detective*, which is available on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle eBook. You can find it by visiting <https://tinyurl.com/hwc2xajm>

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