

## Digger Dan, the Generic Man

Someone asked me the other day if Digger Dan was just a mythical figure. I got to thinking about that and finally decided that he wasn't. A mythical figure is someone bigger than life--not like the rest of us. Digger Dan sure isn't that. He's generic...a commoner just like the rest of us. Every since I met him at the dump in Nairobi, he has never let me alone. Always pestering me with things I don't understand. He's somewhere between the coyote trickster of Cheyenne mythology and the Arapaho wolf. He's seen every mean streak, every joy, all the way back to the beginning. He's known gut wrenching poverty. Even told me once he was at Buchenwald. Seems like he's always where you least expect him...generally where people need a little hope, a kind word, or some straight, nailed to the wall, talk. You know, one of those common sense types.

Old Dan didn't have much time to spare when I last saw him. I caught him the other day at the grocery store in Saguache over in the San Luis Valley. He had just got back from boxing some food stuffs in Kansas for an earth shattered village in the backcountry of Turkey. Today his old truck was loaded to the gills with potatoes some SLV farmers had given him for down-and-outers in Denver. When I asked him about his past he said something about the back of an ass being just as comfortable as the seat of a jet when you're helping out. I didn't pick up on what he meant.

"Trying to get into Masada on an ass with a little food is no different from trying to get into Ankara with a plane load," he said.

"Masada? What's happening there?" I said, a little embarrassed that I had missed something on the evening news.

"Not what's happening. What happened? That eastern Judean Desert can be the pits."

Old Dan could see I didn't have the foggiest idea of what he was talking about.

"Look Son! Let me put it this way. You don't think I'd be hauling myself around on an ass these days trying to deliver food to an archaeological dig on a little hill in the middle of the Judean Desert."

"Well no. Guess not," I said.

"Never heard of Jewish partisans holding the Romans off at Masada, huh? You talk about courage! They were real rebels, they were. I never made it. Couldn't get through the Roman lines. Guess you think I only been around in your times. I've seen it all. Never got my name in a history book. No sir. Just as well, cause those who do just don't seem to be around any more. Common people are the only ones who stay around to see it through and pick up the pieces. Let me tell you Son, when big shots and the government send in lots'a cabbage, all you get is the biggest crap game and con move they can conjure up. Conjure men, that's what they are. Why one good hand is worth a thousand of them kind. The works of a good hand last forever. Just like cards. A bad hands dead. Forget it and ask for another draw."

I guess I began to understand where Digger Dan was coming from...from way back and from all over. He's seen things that most of us only guess at. Said he'd never been anybody's man, just everybody's man.

"No sir! He said. I been hog-tied...even been in chains. Some even said I was a slave one time. But not me. My kind have always been free up here," he said, drilling his forefinger into his temple. "I hear all these up scale types in today's world trying to teach kids that the common man isn't good enough. They say you have to be more than a common man or woman to make it. Say you got to become somebody. Well you know I believe like Dick Gregory. You were born somebody and if you try to become somebody else that makes you two people. And you know where you'll get sent for thinking your two people."

Old Dan gave me a quick wink. "I still like to visit where I've been. Got to dig around a bit.

Give the archaeologists jitters some times, but figure what the heck. Always got to refresh my memory. Otherwise some fool will think I'm two people." He laughed, crawled into his truck and waived . "Only one kind of us kind," he yelled, as he left.

I watched his old pickup head for Villa Grove. I figured some bureaucrat would find a reason why old Dan couldn't just give his load of potatoes away--hoped he wouldn't get picked up in Denver for that old oil burner he was driving. Pickup, ass, jet--all the same. Guess you can put up with a little pollution if your a generic man trying to do what common men do best--helping neighbors.

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