

## BOOKBINDERS

110, 111

by James Collins

Five of us were driving a rental car at 9 o'clock at night through the back streets of South Philadelphia looking for the Bookbinders restaurant. The VP of engineering, VP of finance and the controller were sitting in the back while a marketing manager, Bob Green, was driving and I, the director of manufacturing engineering, was sitting in the shotgun position. The Marketing manager, who frequented this area, knew of the restaurant and claimed he could get us there directly. He couldn't. Two major rivers run through Philadelphia, the Delaware and the Schuylkill. At various times during the night we drove alongside both of these major thoroughfares. The longer we drove the more complaints we heard from the executives in the backseat. Finally George, VP of engineering, asked,

**"Bob, do you have any idea where you are, or where we are going?"**

**"I know it's on the West side of the Delaware which is right next to us and then we have to turn further west."**

**"Then just make a left turn at the next major intersection and we will try our luck in that area."**

Immediately I knew the VP and the driver had made a blunder. By no means was this a major thoroughfare. It was a side street through a residential and industrial area. The majority of buildings were two or three storey residences with storefronts underneath. After the first block, the storefronts had metal gates and a few parked cars. Two or three blocks further on, the gates were massive with no openings, and the few cars parked randomly, obviously abandoned, were up on blocks with the tires missing. There were no pedestrians to be seen anywhere. We were in a very dangerous area.

**"Guys, roll up all the windows and push down all the door locks. Bob, do not stop the car for any reason. Keep the car rolling. Slow down if you're coming up to a red light but stay way back and let us know if anyone gets in back of you."**

**"Collins what's your problem?"**

**"George, we are in as dangerous an area as I've ever seen in the South Bronx. We will not stop this car for any reason that includes, stoplights, red lights or stopped cars. We will drive around them on the other lane or I'm telling Bob to drive up on the sidewalk and go around that way."**

**"Collins I'm driving this car and I'm not about to do some of these things are you recommending?"**

**“Bob I’m warning you. If you try to slow down, I am going to stomp on your foot and maybe break the bones in that foot. I’ve been through experiences like this and you haven’t a clue what’s going on. We are in real danger here and if anybody comes up to the car, gun the engine even if you have to hit them. They will be armed and looking for victims. That’s why nobody is out on the street.”**

**The voices in the back seat rose. All were speaking at once and the general opinion from the back seat was that Collins was crazy or drunk. In fact one of the voices asked, “Did anyone sit next to him on the airplane and see how many drinks he had.” Another voice questioned, “Is he always this paranoid?” However, I heard the two buttons in the back click shut.**

**The arguments continued as we drove about four more blocks rolling through stoplights and stop signs until Bob said, “There are flashing red and blue lights up ahead. It looks like the police. Maybe we can get directions there. We all agree that was a very good idea and my stress level started to drop. Half a block away from the flashing lights my stress level jumped back up. This was not one or two police cars this was more than 40 police cars. Not a good sign.**

**“Under no conditions are you to stop.” The complaints and exasperated voices in the back rose immediately. “Just keep on driving at the speed limit or a little below it but do not stop.”**

**Over 100 men lined up across the wall from one end of the street to the other had their hands raised. The majority of these were African-Americans, while the 30 or so men with the submachine guns and the shotguns were mostly white. This was the infamous Rizzo Police Department in Philadelphia in 1980. They had a reputation for brutality and corruption. This was some kind of obvious major event and we did not want to be associated with it even in the slightest manner.**

**“If we stop here and witness something illegal caused by the police, tomorrow five New Hampshire businessmen will have been found shot to death in a confrontation with the guys up against the wall. The police will have arrived too late to save us.”**

**We kept on driving about another eight blocks. We came across a major intersection that Bob recognized. In ten minutes we were at Bookbinders. All had an enjoyable dinner and we returned to our hotel.**

**At 7 AM, I was standing at the elevator door waiting to go down for breakfast. I was on the second floor as I directed my secretary to place me at that level after I had been in two hotel fires. The rest of the team went up to the sixth floor. As the elevator doors opened, I saw my other four compatriots standing in the elevator. As I got in, one of them handed me an open newspaper and pointed to the first page.**

**MAJOR DRUG BUST IN SOUTHERN PHILADELPHIA FOUR DRUG DEALERS KILLED, NO POLICE INJURED.**

**The story went on to describe the fact that criminals converted an entire city block into a drug-dealing factory. It was one of the largest seizures of drugs in Philadelphia history. Four drug dealers had been killed in the confrontation but no police had been injured.**

**George said, “It appears to be lucky that we did not stop. We all wanted to thank you for your warning. But how did you know?”**

**“How did all of you not know?”**

**THE END**